

**SAUDI ARABIAN MEN'S FASHION TRANSFORMATION: TSAUB, GHUTRA AND BISHT
TOWARDS VISION 2030****Sultan Alam Koto, Febri Priyoyudanto**

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Abstract

Implementation of the Saudi Vision 2030 strategic agenda has triggered significant socio-cultural transformations, driving a reconfiguration of national identity that is manifested in the evolution of men's fashion aesthetics. This study addresses a lacuna in existing literature, which tends to position traditional clothing as static cultural artifacts, with the objective of comprehensively analyzing the transformation of design, function, and symbolic meaning of three primary garment elements: *thobe*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht*. Employing a qualitative approach through a systematic literature review of historical sources, policy documents, and contemporary studies, this research maps the evolution of these garments from the pre-modern era to the present. The findings indicate that these three elements have undergone a fundamental paradigm shift: the *thobe* has transformed from a utilitarian desert garment into a symbol of urban professionalism; the *Ghutra* has evolved from a physical protector into an attribute of hyper-nationalism and youth stylistic expression; while the *Bisht* has experienced democratization from a symbol of elite exclusivity to an inclusive instrument of cultural diplomacy (soft power). This study concludes that modernization in Saudi Arabia does not erode tradition but rather effects a cultural recontextualization, wherein fashion functions as a dynamic medium in the negotiation of a national identity that is adaptive to global demands.

Keywords: Saudi men's traditional clothing; Vision 2030; Cultural transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The socio-cultural transformations unfolding in Saudi Arabia since the announcement of Vision 2030 have opened a new chapter in societal dynamics, including the manner in which men express their identity through clothing. The structural and cultural shifts catalyzed by this modernization have had impacts that are visible not only in the economic or political sectors but also in the realms of self-expression, lifestyle, and the aesthetic preferences of urban society (Elsamadicy & Mahmoud, 2021). Policies emphasizing economic diversification and the strengthening of the cultural sector have created new spaces for the fashion industry to develop dynamically and connect with global trends. Consequently, traditional forms of male attire, such as the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht*, are being reimaged to align with the contemporary context.

The modernity evolving in Saudi Arabia represents more than the mere adoption of new values; rather, it constitutes a process of identity negotiation between tradition, conservatism, and globalization. Drawing on the findings of Theeb Mohammed Aldossry (2024) in the article "Saudi National Day: Conservatism Versus Modernity in the Light of Saudi Vision 2030," the construction of national identity in the Vision 2030 era demonstrates a concerted state effort to synthesize cultural heritage and Islamic values with more open, modern aspirations. The study illustrates how shifts in social regulations, the reinforcement of national symbols, and public celebrations such as Saudi National Day serve as mechanisms for the state to cultivate a more modern, dynamic, and proactive image of Saudi Arabia. These dynamics subsequently influence the aesthetics of dress, as fashion now functions as a representation of public identity shaped by the trajectory of modernity outlined in Vision 2030 (Winarni & Permana, 2022).

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Amidst these changes, the younger Saudi generation plays a pivotal role in accelerating the transformation of sartorial styles. A study by Al-Saggaf and O'Donnell (2018) demonstrates that social media serves as an arena where Saudi youth formulate new identities through fashion choices that synthesize religious, modern, and global elements. Digital platforms enable them to explore styles, observe international trends, and visually present themselves; consequently, daily attire is no longer merely a marker of modesty, but also a medium for negotiating self-image. This phenomenon reveals that Saudi men's clothing is shifting from traditional expressions toward a more hybrid form, paralleling the cultural transformation that drives the negotiation between local identity and the demands of modernity within the context of Vision 2030 (Khalife, 2023).

The *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* constitute the three primary elements of traditional Saudi male attire, representing the social and cultural identity of the society (Alhazmi, 2019). The *Tsaub* is a long white or beige robe worn daily, while the *Ghutra* is a square cloth worn on the head, typically secured with an *agal*, as described in Brill's (2020) study on Arab headwear. The *Bisht*, conversely, is an outer cloak in black or brown utilized for official events or significant celebrations (Alhazmi, 2019). Generally, these three elements function not only as bodily protection but also as symbols of status, prestige, and adherence to norms of propriety (Arab News, 2023). In the traditional context, the usage of these garments adhered to customary rules and social structures that were more rigid than those observed today (Alhazmi, 2019).

Historically, the *Tsaub* possessed a simpler form with a straight cut and minimal variation, as its function was oriented toward comfort in the desert climate (Alhazmi, 2019). The use of light and loose materials was considered ideal for coping with extreme heat. Similarly, the *Ghutra* functioned primarily as protection against dust and sunlight; thus, motifs and colors lacked significant variation (Brill, 2020). Research by Alzahrani (2023) indicates that the *Bisht* is empirically worn by state officials and prominent figures, suggesting an association between the *Bisht* and social status within Arab cultural practice. During that period, the functional and symbolic values of traditional clothing were far more dominant than aspects of aesthetics or personal stylistic expression visible in the current generation (Alhazmi, 2019). Entering the modern era, particularly following Vision 2030, the *tsaub* has undergone a distinct transformation in terms of design and usage preferences (Saudi Fashion Commission, 2023). Variations in cuts have begun to evolve, including modern touches such as new collar styles, length adjustments, and a more diverse selection of fabrics. Colors that were previously monotonic are now available in additional options such as grey or soft blue, particularly among the youth (Saudi Fashion Commission, 2024).

The *Tsaub* is no longer merely a functional garment; it also reflects a more flexible urban lifestyle (Financial Times, 2024). This shift indicates that Saudi society has begun to blend traditional imagery with contemporary aesthetic needs without abandoning its deep rooted cultural identity (Saudi Fashion Commission, 2023). The *Ghutra* has also undergone significant changes in its usage patterns and social significance. Historically, *Ghutra* motifs were largely limited to plain white or the red and white checkered patterns synonymous with the Gulf region (Brill, 2020). Today, preferences regarding color and styling have become more diverse, aligning with global trends and the personal styles of the younger generation (Vogue Arabia, 2022). The method of folding the *Ghutra* has evolved into a new aesthetic symbol rather than a mere functional practice as in the past, with social media playing a major role in the dissemination of these styles (Saudi Fashion Commission, 2024). Nevertheless, this element is maintained as a crucial part of Saudi identity, particularly at official events and formal gatherings (Financial Times, 2024).

The *Bisht* retains its position as a symbol of formality, yet its usage has expanded and is no longer confined to elite circles. In the past, the *Bisht* was closely associated with leadership, authority, and social status, rendering its use exclusive (Arab News, 2023). In the modern era, particularly during national celebrations or major events such as graduations and weddings, the *Bisht* has begun to be worn by the general public as a form of homage to tradition. Changes in materials and stitching quality have also made the *Bisht* more accessible (Arab News, 2023). Although its form has not undergone major modification, the significance of its usage is more open and inclusive, reflecting a blend of traditional pride and more modern cultural expression within Saudi society (Saudi Fashion Commission, 2023; Aloraini, 2024).

Previous studies indicate that traditional Saudi male attire, specifically the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht*, possesses social, symbolic, and historical functions that continue to undergo transformation. Alhazmi (2019) asserts that these three elements represent the cultural identity and social structure of Saudi society, while Brill (2020) reveals that the evolution of the *Ghutra* demonstrates a shift from a protective function toward aesthetic expression. Reports from the Saudi Fashion Commission (2023; 2024) further indicate that modernization, the industrialization of fashion, and Vision 2030 policies have accelerated changes in design and preferences for traditional clothing, whereas Arab News (2023) documents how the *Bisht* is now used more broadly and inclusively than in the past. Based on these findings, this study formulates a research problem regarding how the changes in the Saudi *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* have unfolded from the modern period to the Vision 2030 era, as well as what factors influence the shifts in their design, function, and cultural meaning. Correspondingly, this study aims to analyze the transformation of this traditional attire and to identify the social, political, economic, and cultural factors, as well as developments in the fashion industry, that influence the changes in design, function, and cultural meaning inherent in the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* in contemporary Saudi society (Al Dossary, 2023).

Based on the review of previous research, a research gap can be identified regarding traditional Saudi clothing as a symbol of cultural and religious identity; existing studies are generally descriptive and historical, focusing on a single type of garment or a specific time period (Alhazmi, 2019). Referencing the study by Brill (2020), the majority of existing research tends to position the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* merely as static cultural artifacts, without deeply examining the dynamics of their transformation within the context of modernization and contemporary state policy. This condition indicates a scarcity of studies that comprehensively link the changes in design, function, and cultural meaning of these three garments with the national agenda of Vision 2030, particularly in relation to globalization, the development of the fashion industry, the creative economy, and shifting social values in contemporary Saudi society. Thus, a research gap exists in understanding how the interaction between state policy, fashion industry development, and social and cultural changes simultaneously shapes the transformation of traditional Saudi male attire from the modern period to the Vision 2030 era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach, as the transformations observed in the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* cannot be adequately elucidated solely through numerical data or statistical figures. The phenomenon of traditional sartorial evolution is inextricably linked to symbolic values, cultural identity, and the social dynamics evolving within Saudi society. Through a qualitative perspective, this study investigates the underlying meanings behind these changes and understands how society reinterprets its traditional attire in the modern era. The literature review method was selected as the primary technique for this study. Through this method, the researcher explores various relevant written sources, including journal articles, books, research reports, and historical documents, to trace the trajectory of changes in Saudi male attire over time. A literature review also enables the researcher to compare perspectives from various authors, thereby ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the shifts in traditional clothing. This research utilizes a cultural studies approach.

Research data sources are categorized into policy documents, historical studies, and contemporary analyses. Primary data regarding policy and industrial trends refer to official reports from the Saudi Fashion Commission (2023; 2024) as well as Vision 2030 policy documents. For historical analysis and material culture, this study utilizes the work of Alhazmi (2019) regarding traditional clothing identity and the study by Brill (2020) on Arab headwear. Meanwhile, contemporary social dynamics and public perception are analyzed through the studies of Aloraini (2024), Bettine and Ozdemir (2024), and Al Dossary (2023). Supporting data also includes coverage from credible international media such as the Financial Times (2024), Vogue Arabia (2022), and Arab News (2023) to capture current lifestyle trend phenomena. All sources were obtained from reputable databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar.

The data collection process was conducted through a systematic literature search. Each discovered source was examined for credibility and subsequently selected based on its relevance to the topic of changes in traditional Saudi male clothing. Subsequently, the researcher extracted critical information from each document, such as historical explanations, changes in garment forms, and the social factors influencing these transformations.

Once data was collected, the analysis phase was conducted by grouping information based on specific themes. Thematic coding was used to map various significant issues such as changes in the social function of attire, the influence of modernization, and the reinterpretation of cultural symbols. Grouping based on periodization was also performed so that changes in clothing could be observed more clearly over time.

The final stage of analysis employs a narrative approach that synthesizes findings from various sources into a cohesive and comprehensible analysis. Through narrative analysis, this research illustrates how the Tsaub, Ghutra, and Bisht undergo transformation not merely as clothing, but as representations of Saudi societal identity that shift alongside the influx of modernity, Vision 2030 policies, and other social dynamics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of the Tsaub: Utilitarian Adaptation toward Urban Aesthetics

The evolution of the Saudi male *Tsaub* from the modern period to the Vision 2030 era demonstrates a dynamic of adaptation between tradition and the demands of a rapidly developing urban lifestyle. In the early modern era, the *Tsaub* was maintained in a very simple form, characterized by a straight cut, dominant white color, and the use of lightweight materials to suit desert climate conditions. Its primary function was not merely to cover the body but also to serve as a symbol of modesty and the cultural identity of Saudi society that has been rooted for centuries (Alhazmi, 2019). These characteristics reflect a traditional social structure where clothing emphasized utilitarian values and religious norms over aesthetic aspects.

Entering fashion developments in the early 21st century, the *Tsaub* began to undergo design diversification alongside increasing access to the global textile industry. This change was driven by the emergence of societal preferences for more varied materials such as premium cotton, lightweight polyester, and modern fiber blends that provide greater comfort within the urban context (Saudi Fashion Commission, 2023). This transformation intensified as the younger generation demonstrated significant interest in the *Tsaub* featuring slim fit cuts, new collars, and neater stitching to present a professional and modern image. This indicates that the *Tsaub* is no longer viewed solely as functional clothing but rather as part of a representation of lifestyle and a visual identity that continues to evolve.

In the Vision 2030 era, the *Tsaub* has experienced a more progressive developmental leap in line with the government agenda to strengthen the creative economy and the national fashion industry. Cultural policies within Vision 2030 encourage the emergence of local Saudi designers who subsequently introduced new color variations such as soft grey, light blue, and modern beige which are widely used by the urban younger generation (Saudi Fashion Commission, 2024). This transformation is clearly visible in the proliferation of *Tsaub* variations displayed in fashion events, cultural festivals, and public campaigns carrying themes of modernity and national identity. This phenomenon demonstrates how the *Tsaub* has become a symbol of negotiation between tradition and globalization, combining new aesthetic elements without eliminating its historical value.

In the social context, changes in the *Tsaub* are also influenced by shifts in public perception regarding formal attire and self representation. Research on the perception of professional clothing in Saudi Arabia, although focused on the medical context, indicates a societal tendency to associate more modern clothing with professionalism and credibility (Aloraini, 2024). This trend in perception also impacts how society interprets the *Tsaub* as part of official appearance within the professional sphere and public space. Furthermore, international media coverage such as the Financial Times confirms that Saudi male dress codes are now more flexible compared to a decade

ago, signaling social changes that provide space for design innovation without abandoning cultural identity (Financial Times, 2024).

Overall, the evolution of the *Tsaub* from the modern period to Vision 2030 reveals a consistent trajectory of renewal between cultural heritage and modernity. If in the pre modern era the *Tsaub* was oriented toward function and simplicity, it has now become a medium of self expression representing social class, professionalism, creativity, and cultural affiliation. This transformation did not emerge abruptly but is rather the result of the interaction of various factors such as urbanization, cultural policy, the globalization of fashion, and the role of social media in accelerating the dissemination of fashion trends. Thus, the *Tsaub* serves as a tangible example of how traditional clothing can continue to evolve without losing its historical significance (Alhazmy, 2019).

Dynamics of the *Ghutra*: Shift from Protective Function to Symbol of National Identity

The transformation of the *Ghutra* from the modern period to Vision 2030 demonstrates significant changes in how Saudi society interprets this element of headwear. In the early stages of modernity, the *Ghutra* functioned primarily as practical protection against heat, sand, and desert climate conditions, with color choices still limited to white as well as the red and white motifs common in the Gulf region (Brill, 2020). In this phase, the use of the *Ghutra* still followed the tradition of Bedouin simplicity, both in form, function, and method of wear, while the *Agal* cord remained a reflection of the social structure and deep rooted conservative values (Alhazmi, 2019). Thus, the *Ghutra* during that period was represented as a functional attribute related to ecological needs and the social role of Saudi men.

Entering the modern era, the flow of visual media began to bring new influence to the aesthetic development of the *Ghutra*. Various styles of wear emerged alongside increasing societal exposure to global trends, especially in urban centers such as Riyadh and Jeddah. Neater folding styles for formal requirements, up to casual appearances popular among the younger generation, indicate that the *Ghutra* has become a medium of identity expression that is more dynamic. This change is inseparable from the role of public figures, regional celebrities, and digital influencers who introduced variations in usage so that the *Ghutra* increasingly appears as part of self image and modern lifestyle (Vogue Arabia, 2022). Consequently, the meaning of the *Ghutra* shifts from a protective function toward a symbol of personal style connected to contemporary visual culture.

This shift in the meaning of clothing did not occur in a vacuum but is rooted in the transformation of the state political narrative. As analyzed by Alhussein (2019), the emergence of the phenomenon of hyper nationalism or the Saudi First narrative has shifted state legitimacy from a purely religious basis toward a pride in national identity that is more secular. Within this framework, the meaning of the *Ghutra* and *Tsaub* is reconstructed no longer merely as markers of religious piety, but as visual symbols of citizen loyalty to the new narrative of the kingdom. This is evident in the Saudi National Day celebration, where Aldossry (2024) highlights how the massive use of traditional attributes by the younger generation marks the success of the state in transforming the initial resistance of conservatives into broad acceptance, making traditional attire a bridge that unites traditional values with the modern aspirations of Vision 2030.



Gambar 1: Source by alhannah.com

The cultural reform brought by Vision 2030 increasingly enriches the meaning of the *Ghutra* in the life of Saudi society. The Fashion Commission report indicates that the *Ghutra* is now elevated as an essential component of national cultural heritage, not only used as a complement to daily attire but also featured in official state activities, cultural festivals, and identity based diplomacy initiatives (Saudi Fashion Commission, 2023; 2024). Concurrently, innovations in materials and colors have begun to be accommodated without eliminating traditional patterns, reflecting state efforts to combine historical values with the aesthetic needs of modern society. The relaxation of national dress norms in Saudi Arabia has opened broader space for personal style exploration, so that the current use of the *Ghutra* demonstrates greater flexibility compared to dress practices in the previous decade (Financial Times, 2024).

At the social level, changes in public perception regarding masculinity, professionalism, and self image also exert significant influence on the position of the *Ghutra* in daily life. In the workplace, for example, the *Ghutra* is no longer merely a traditional attribute but has also become part of a professional appearance considered to support credibility and a modern impression, consistent with the findings of Aloraini (2024) which indicate a shift in appearance preferences in the medical work environment. Urbanization development, increased global interaction, and the growth of a new professional class make the *Ghutra* a symbol that blends cultural heritage with the social aspirations of contemporary society. The change in the function and meaning of the *Bisht* throughout the modern era up to the Vision 2030 policies demonstrates that this traditional cloak is no longer understood solely as ceremonial attire but is increasingly projected as a visual symbol of prestige, cultural heritage, and Saudi Arabian national identity (Waheed, 2024).

Evolution of the Bisht: From Elite Exclusivity to a Symbol of Diplomacy and Cultural Prestige

The development of the function and meaning of the *Bisht* from the modern era to the implementation of Vision 2030 policies demonstrates a significant conceptual shift, where this traditional attire is no longer interpreted solely as a ceremonial attribute but is increasingly constructed as a visual symbol of prestige, the sustainability of cultural heritage, and a manifestation of Saudi Arabian national identity within the contemporary social context (Aloraini, 2024).



Gambar 2: Source by Wikipedia.com

In the pre modern era through the early modern century, the *Bisht* was worn primarily by religious figures, tribal leaders, and influential figures, with colors tending to be limited to black, dark brown, beige, or white palettes aligned with the preferences of the Gulf society at that time (Brill, 2020). In this phase, the *Bisht* remained embedded in norms of simplicity and traditional social hierarchy, so that its usage was strictly bound to specific moments and established social structures (Alhazmi, 2019).

Entering the modern period, the expansion of visual media and global connectivity began to shift how society views the *Bisht*. Although not worn daily like the *Tsaub* and *Ghutra*, the *Bisht*

began to be curated as a status marker at professional and public events. Its style of usage also faced revitalization, particularly when public figures, celebrities, and digital creators introduced it within the narrative of contemporary lifestyle, including as a symbol of masculine elegance at weddings, significant meetings, and international forums (Vogue Arabia, 2022). Social media also encouraged the regeneration of the *Bisht* image, making it not only formal attire but also part of the self presentation strategy of the urban generation.



Gambar 3: Source by dohanews.co

With the advent of Vision 2030, opportunities for the reimagination of heritage attire have opened widely. Saudi Fashion Commission reports (2023, 2024) note that the *Bisht* is now promoted as a heritage icon in cultural festivals, creative diplomacy programs, and international exhibitions. In the last decade, the emergence of young Saudi designers has further enriched the interpretation of the *Bisht* through the exploration of lighter materials and more modern embroidery techniques, without abandoning the classic form of loose cuts and distinctive zari embroidery decoration. On the other hand, the relaxation of dress regulations in public spaces has expanded possibilities for society to adopt the *Bisht* as a formal clothing choice that is adaptive while simultaneously representing the authenticity of cultural identity (Financial Times, 2024).

Socially, the transformation of the *Bisht* is also inseparable from changes in how Saudi society perceives professionalism and public presence. The shift in perception regarding appearance and credibility in the modern work environment, as alluded to in the study by Aloraini (2024), asserts that formal attire is now understood as part of a broader self representation. This reinforces the position of the *Bisht* as attire that presents prestige, authority, and elegance within the professional context, both domestically and in international representation.

Analysis of Driving Factors and Cultural Recontextualization within the Vision 2030 Framework

Overall, the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* reflect the process of adaptation of traditional Saudi male clothing which relates not only to aesthetic changes but also represents a broader social transformation in Saudi society from the 20th century into the Vision 2030 era. Modernization in this context does not proceed as a process of eliminating tradition, but rather as a mechanism of cultural recontextualization, wherein heritage elements remain maintained yet are reinterpreted to align with social dynamics, cultural policies, and the construction of contemporary national identity (Alhazmi, 2019).

In this context, the *Tsaub* has experienced a significant functional shift from utilitarian clothing designed to adapt to desert environmental conditions into modern attire that represents the urban and professional lifestyle of Saudi society. This transformation is reflected in changing preferences for lighter and higher quality materials, neater and more structured cuts, as well as an aesthetic that tends to be minimalist while still upholding values of modesty and Arab cultural identity (Aloraini, 2024).

These three elements simultaneously demonstrate that changes in Saudi male clothing cannot be separated from the dynamics of urbanization, the globalization of fashion, national economic changes, the development of digital media, and Vision 2030 cultural policies that

encourage a redefinition of national identity that is more open, progressive, and aligned with the position of Saudi Arabia as a global actor. Modern adaptation in traditional clothing elements such as the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* does not immediately fade their fundamental values, but rather strengthens the existence of such heritage through design innovations aligned with contemporary public tastes. This phenomenon proves that Saudi male clothing has evolved from mere relics of the past into dynamic instruments that play a role in constructing national identity, communicating social values, and serving as symbols of cultural resilience amidst the flow of modernity (Al Mutairi, 2021).

The transformation of the design, function, and cultural meaning of the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* occurs alongside the acceleration of social modernization in Saudi Arabia in the early 21st century. Changes in societal life patterns, particularly due to rapidly developing urbanization, have influenced how Saudi men select and utilize their clothing. Communities that previously resided in traditional settings have now shifted to urban spaces that demand higher mobility, professional appearance, and comfort in dressing to support daily activities (Alhussein, 2020).

The flow of globalization provides a major influence on changes in the aesthetic orientation of Saudi society. Increasingly broad exposure to international trends through digital media, electronic commerce, influencers, and networks of international designers has caused the visual preferences of Saudi men to develop far more diversely than before (Khorshid, 2019).

In the modern context, the *Ghutra*, initially known for its plain white color or red and white motifs, has now undergone reinterpretation through various variations in wearing methods and folding techniques. Its usage has also expanded to semi formal attire in urban environments, thereby functioning not only as a symbol of traditional identity but also as a medium of personal expression aligned with the aesthetic preferences of the younger generation. This transformation indicates that globalization and modernization do not erase cultural meaning, but rather add a new dimension of expressiveness to these heritage elements (Allksago, 2025). Besides globalization factors, ideological dimensions and state policies also provide strong encouragement for the transformation of these three traditional clothing elements. Through the Vision 2030 framework, the Saudi government actively positions cultural heritage as an important instrument in nation branding strategies, so that traditional clothing acquires new legitimacy as a representation of national identity (Saudi Ministry of Culture, 2021).

The function of the *Bisht* has now undergone a significant transformation, shifting from mere ceremonial attire for the elite into a vital instrument of diplomacy in state events, cultural festivals, and international forums such as the G20 Summit. This evolution reinforces the position of the *Bisht* as a cultural icon representing a blend of the state ambition for modernity with a strong commitment to maintaining traditional roots on the global stage (Waheed, 2024).

On the other hand, advancements in textile technology contribute significantly to the evolution of the design and function of the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht*. The utilization of materials such as high quality cotton, microfiber, and modern technological linen enables the creation of a *Tsaub* that is lighter, easier to maintain, and suitable for the distinctive hot climate of the Gulf region (Al Qahtani, 2018).



Gambar 4: Source by altelal.com

Innovations in dyeing techniques also open possibilities for the use of new colors that were previously less accepted in formal contexts, but are now beginning to be adopted in public spaces. Increasingly efficient production technology allows the *Ghutra* and *Bisht* to be produced with good quality and more affordable prices, so that their usage expands to various layers of society without losing their symbolic or aesthetic values.

Economic Dynamics, Generational Identity, and Global Cultural Interaction

Economic growth and the emergence of a new middle class in Saudi Arabia play an important role in shifting societal fashion preferences. Increased purchasing power provides space for consumers to choose clothing with better material quality, more modern designs, and broader access to local and international brands (Al Harthi, 2022). Bettine and Ozdemir (2024) elucidate that the phenomenon of cultural globalization has revitalized the position of the *Tsaub* and other traditional attributes into modern lifestyle entities possessing strategic economic significance. According to their analysis, high consumer attention toward outlets providing the *Bisht* triggers enthusiasm in both local and global markets, while also opening business expansion channels for artisans. Furthermore, they highlight the flexibility of the *Ghutra*, which is now visualized through creative aesthetic interpretations such as the adoption of football team colors or visual modifications on mascots, asserting the ability of traditional elements to transform into inclusive global consumption products without abandoning their roots of national identity.

Changes in how society views personal identity, particularly the Saudi younger generation, also influence the evolutionary direction of these three garments. For the group growing up in the global digital era, clothing is no longer limited by traditional functions but becomes a medium to project self image, visual style, and aspirations of modernity (Mahmoud, 2021). The *Tsaub* begins to be understood as an attribute of urban lifestyle that is increasingly inclusive, visible from its widespread use in various modern public spaces. Meanwhile, the *Ghutra* takes a strategic position as a visual symbol of national identity, whereas the *Bisht* maintains its exclusivity as a sign of highest honor worn only during social moments considered valuable, such as weddings or official celebration events. This shift in perception asserts that traditional clothing is now increasingly adaptive and capable of moving fluidly within various social contexts as an effective instrument of cultural diplomacy (Izzah & Apipudin, 2024).

Cross country cultural interaction through population mobility, tourism, and international economic relations further enriches the aesthetic transformation of these three garments. Style influences from the Gulf region, Turkey, and Western formal wear provide inspiration for modern *Tsaub* designs, for example through slimmer cuts and semi European collars that have been popular since the mid 2010s (Hassan, 2020). Innovations in modern *Tsaub* design, which adopt global style influences such as slimmer cuts and contemporary collar details, do not fade its traditional character. Conversely, this aesthetic adaptation actually strengthens the relevance of the attire in various cultural environments and reinforces national identity through the integration of dynamic modern elements. This phenomenon proves that traditional clothing continues to function actively as a symbol of cultural continuity through a cross cultural dialogue process that occurs continuously (Al Mutairi, 2021).

On the other hand, the rise of the local creative industry causes the transformation of Saudi male attire to develop more progressively than before. Saudi designers attempt to combine classic forms with contemporary approaches relevant to the global market (Al Dossary, 2023). These efforts are visible in *Ghutra* variations with new wearing techniques popularized by the generation of young designers, as well as the exploration of the *Bisht* with modern colors such as midnight blue, charcoal black, and desert gold. Such innovations reinforce the position of traditional Saudi attire within the international fashion space without obscuring its cultural identity.

Soft Power Diplomacy Strategies, Digital Media, and Future Industry Challenges

Furthermore, the use of the *Bisht* on the international stage is a manifestation of a more sophisticated foreign policy strategy. Chaziza and Lutmar (2025) define this approach as niche

diplomacy, where Saudi Arabia strategically utilizes unique cultural assets and sports diplomacy to project its global influence as a middle power. The iconic moment of draping the *Bisht* on Lionel Messi, as well as the integration of local attire in global sports events, is not merely a ceremonial gesture, but a calculation of soft power to shed the rigid image of the past and rebrand Saudi Arabia as a modern state yet one that remains deeply rooted in its heritage.

Social media also serves as a major force in formulating new meanings and trends related to traditional clothing. Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X become visual media for society to display national identity through dressing styles (Yamani, 2022). The phenomenon of using traditional clothing such as the *Ghutra* has now developed into a cultural trend spreading in society through international media spotlights during major sports events. The involvement of public figures and renowned athletes as cultural ambassadors possesses crucial influence in boosting the popularity of the *Bisht* in the eyes of the world. The peak occurred during the 2022 World Cup moment, where the presentation of the *Bisht* by Emir Tamim Al Thani to an iconic figure like Lionel Messi reinforced the position of the attire as a symbol of highest honor (*sharaf*) and leadership authority (*muruwa*) in the context of modern diplomacy (Bettine & Ozdemir, 2024).



Gambar 5: Source by tempo.com

When viewed comprehensively, these various factors indicate that the changes occurring in the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* constitute a multidimensional process triggered by social modernization, globalization flows, Vision 2030 cultural policies, textile technology advancements, economic dynamics, generational identity transformation, international cultural exchange, the development of the creative industry, and the influence of digital media. These three garments do not merely maintain their historical value but also transform to align with aesthetic tastes, functional needs, and the symbolic meaning of contemporary Saudi society. Thus, the evolution of their design and interpretation strengthens the role of Saudi male attire as a cultural identity that continues to live and remains relevant in the modern context (Alhazmi, 2019; Alorabi, 2020).

However, the sustainability of this fashion transformation faces structural challenges in the real sector. Although market demand for modern designs is increasing, Debes (2020) notes that the local garment manufacturing sector still struggles with technical challenges and high competition from imported products. In order for the *Tsaub* and *Ghutra* to truly become pillars of the creative economy in accordance with Vision 2030, it requires not only design innovation but also the strengthening of domestic textile industrial capacity to meet international quality standards and absorb local labor effectively.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that the objective of understanding and analyzing the transformation of the *Tsaub*, *Ghutra*, and *Bisht* within the cultural journey of Saudi Arabia toward the Vision 2030 era has been accomplished through a comprehensive literature review regarding their historical, social, and aesthetic developments. Study results indicate that these three sartorial elements have undergone changes visible not only in form and design but also in the manner by which society interprets them in daily life. Modernization, rapid urbanization, exposure to global trends, and state cultural policies have been proven to drive the emergence of new interpretations regarding traditional Saudi male attire. The *Tsaub*, which formerly functioned primarily as utilitarian attire, now occupies a new space as a marker of professionalism and urban lifestyle. The *Ghutra* has evolved from a head protector into a symbol of national visual identity maintained and

simultaneously enriched by the younger generation; while the *Bisht* has shifted from a symbol of exclusive authority into a representation of cultural prestige utilized more broadly in formal events, celebrations, and cultural diplomacy. Thus, this research has successfully elucidated how social, political, economic, textile technology, digital media, and generational identity dynamics play a role in reconstructing the function, symbolic value, and cultural relevance of such traditional attire in the contemporary era. These findings simultaneously open opportunities for future research based on field observation that can deepen understanding regarding the usage practices of such attire across various societal layers and further trace the contribution of local designers and the Saudi fashion industry in shaping the developmental direction of traditional clothing in the future.

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