



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge

Knowledge for All

GULF RESEARCH MEETING

16th Gulf Research Meeting

21 - 23 July 2026 - University of Cambridge

Workshop No. 2

Digital Media, Strategic Communication, and Soft Power in the Gulf: Public Diplomacy in a Transforming Region

Workshop Schedule

Workshop Directors

Dr. Mohammad Abuljadail
King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

Dr. Guo Ke
Shanghai International Studies University

First Workshop Day - Wednesday, 22 July 2026

08:15 - 08:30 – Welcome coffee and tea

08:30 - 09:00 – Introduction of workshop and participants

Session 1: Reframing Digital Diplomacy in the Gulf

09:00 - 09:45 – Paper 1: Where Tradition Meets Digital Modernity: Public and Digital Diplomacy in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

Author: Banu Akdenizli

Discussant: Anima Puri

09:45 - 10:30 – Paper 2: Role of Emerging Technologies in Shaping Communication Strategies in the Gulf

Authors: Ritika Sharon, Nitin Agarwala*

Discussant: Bahtiar Mohamad

10:30 - 10:45 – Coffee and tea break

10:45 - 11:30 – Paper 3: Soft Power in Algorithmic Times: Digital Media and Public Diplomacy in the Gulf

Author: Anima Puri

Discussant: Mahdi Yousefi

11:30 - 12:15 – Paper 4: Communicating under Constraint: Gulf States' Digital Public Diplomacy during Global Sports Events

Author: Djamil Kerrouche

Discussant: Sriyansh Mohanty

12:15 - 13:00 – Paper 5: Strategic Crisis Communication and Digital Diplomacy in the Gulf: Comparing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as Soft Power Actors

Authors: Bahtiar Mohamad, Talhat Alhaiou, Raji Ridwan Adetunji

Discussant: Banu Akdenizli

13:00 - 15:00– Lunch break (lunch served at King's College)

Session 2: National Branding and International Engagement

15:00 - 15:45 – Paper 6: Potential Partnerships and Opportunities to Enhance National Branding through Social Media Influencers in the GCC

Authors: Hajar Mahfoodh, Zainab Mahfoodh, S Hameed Shubbar

Discussant: Peiqin Chen

15:45 - 16:30 – Paper 7: Digital Diplomacy and National Branding: A Comparative Study of GCC Countries' Official Weibo Accounts in China

Author: Peiqin Chen

Discussant: Hajar Mahfoodh

16:30 - 16:45 – Coffee and tea break

16:45 - 17:30 – Paper 8: China-Gulf Digital Diplomacy: How Social Media Platforms Facilitate Mutual Image-Building

Author: Mahdi Yousefi

Discussant: Ritika Sharon

17:30 - 18:15 – Paper 9: Smart Cities as Digital Public Spheres: Social Media, Citizenship, and Policy Learning in Dubai and Kuwait

Author: Azin Moalej

Discussant: Yushu Zhu

End of First Workshop Day

Evening Free

Second Workshop Day - Thursday, 23 July 2026

08:45 - 09:00 – Welcome coffee and tea

Session 3: AI, Platforms, and Digital Representations

09:00 - 09:45 – Paper 10: Algorithmic Representations of Societal Culture: A Comparative Analysis of Generative AI Narratives and Social Life in Saudi Arabia

Author: Khalid Al-Mansour, Shatha Al-Mutairi

Discussant: Soumaya Berjeb

09:45 - 10:30 – Paper 11: Beyond Techno-Nationalism: Social Representations of China's High-Tech Brands in Arab Social Media

Authors: Guo Ke, Zhou Hui, Zhang Lian

Discussant: Khalid Al-Mansour

10:30 - 11:15 – Paper 12: Soft Power from the Sky: Gulf Airlines' Digital Communication Strategies and the Public Diplomacy of GCC States

Author: Yushu Zhu

Discussant: Azin Moalej

11:15 - 11:30 – Coffee and tea break

11:30 - 12:15 – Paper 13: The Image of Saudi Arabia as a Tourist Destination among British Nationals

Authors: Wiam ID Boumsoud, Suleiman Yacoob

Discussant: Nehal Ahmed

12:15 - 13:00 – Paper 14: The Role of New Digital Media Formats in Promoting the Economic and Socio-Cultural Characteristics of the GCC: Podcasts as a Soft Power Strategy Tool

Author: Soumaya Berjeb

Discussant: Peiqin Chen

13:00 - 14:15 – Lunch break (lunch is served from 13:00 till 14:00 at the workshop venue)

Session 4: Narratives, Public Opinion, and Geopolitics

14:15-15:00 – Paper 15: Shaping Public Opinion: Redefinition Through Social Media and Cinema

Author: Nehal Ahmed

Discussant: Wiam ID Boumsoud

15:00-15:45 – Paper 16: Contextualising the Gulf's Diplomatic Communication Strategy in an Era of US-China Competition

Author: Sriyansh Mohanty

Discussant: Djamil Kerrouche

15:45 - 16:15 – Concluding Roundtable

Toward an Edited Volume: Shared Research Agenda and Publication Plans

Discussion of cross-cutting themes, edited volume/publication plans, possible thematic sections, chapter development timeline, and next steps.

Questionnaire

End of Second and Final Workshop Day

19:00 Farewell Dinner at King's College

Not in attendance

Paper 17: The Discursive Treatment of the Economic Consequences of the Red Sea Events in Yemeni and Gulf Digital Journalistic Discourse within the Framework of Soft Power Strategy

Author: Abdu Alakooa