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Reporting Saudi Economic Developments in Middle East TV News Media

Maha Abdullah Shaher[1], Ahmed Farouk Radwan[2]

[1]University of Sharjah, UAE. Email: U23103968@sharjah.ac.ae

[2]University of Sharjah, UAE. Email: aradwan@sharjah.ac.ae

Correspondence: Maha Abdullah Shaher, University of Sharjah, UAE. Email: U23103968@sharjah.ac.ae

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Abstract

This study has analyzed the way in which the Saudi economic developments are reflected in the Middle Eastern and international television news media. The study employed a qualitative thematic content analysis of thirty TV news programs aired in 2023-2025 on Arab and international TV stations. The results indicated that there is a high level of thematic convergence and that coverage is mainly organized in the manner of economic diversification, innovation and technology, global partnerships, and sustainability initiatives linked to Vision 2030. The Saudi authorities and governmental organizations are always presented as the key players of the change, and western allies and voices of experts support discourses of credibility and globalization. The overall narrative tone is very positive and future-oriented, which is marked by strategic optimism and fewer critical attitudes, especially in the Arab media. International broadcasts offer more context in terms of analysis and mostly stick with affirmative framing. The study concludes that television news is one of the primary discursive resources of economic legitimacy and nation branding, which align well with the strategic communication objectives of Saudi Arabia. The findings are important to the study of media and communication because they reveal the contribution of the television news in informing economic narratives in large-scale national transformation agendas.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, vision 2030, media framing, content analysis, TV news, Middle East media

1. Introduction

The economic trajectory in Saudi Arabia has also been marked by great multidimensional and rapid change under the strategic blueprint of Vision 2030, which is a national strategy designed to reduce oil reliance, increase the involvement of the private sector, and ensure innovation, investment, and sustainable growth (Almakaty, 2024). Vision 2030 is not only a collection of economic reforms but also an attempt to rebrand Saudi Arabia in terms of how the country can be seen by foreign countries as new narratives of diversification, technological progress, and collaborations with other countries. Media coverage in this regard is one of the central processes by which developments in the economy are framed in order to communicate them to the domestic and external audience.

Television news media is still one of the most powerful sources of spreading economic information and shaping public discourse. Television, as a leading news outlet, has the potential to frame economic events, and this impacts how citizens and worldwide viewers understand complex policy programs and national policies (Safori et al., 2024). Over the years, investigations in the media and communication studies have revealed that news framing, or selective presentation of facts, themes and narrative frames, is the key factor in determining how the population understands the economy, how it views policy effectiveness, and the general socio-economic beliefs (Berk, 2025; Cobo, 2025). Television news can therefore not simply reflect the information, but it constructs narrative structures that are used to direct the audience's understanding.

The relevance of examining Middle East and international media coverage is explained by the fact that two different geopolitical, cultural, and institutional circumstances influence the manner in which Saudi economic developments are reported. Comparative comparisons indicate that the media discourse differs regionally and depends on varied editorial priorities, audience expectations, and political relations, which can result in nuanced differences in the emphasis on economic diversification, human rights, or technological innovation (Almakaty, 2024). However, although international media representations of Vision 2030 have been given some scholarly attention, there is limited research evidence, particularly on television news reports, specifically on the comparison of various networks between the Arab and international channels.

Although the importance of media framing has been acknowledged in determining economic discourse, there exists a research gap in terms of thorough thematic analysis, which will conduct systematic research on television news reporting

of Saudi economic transformation in relation to various networks and settings. The literature in this area is biased in either examining international print media or analysing the national media markets, creating a gap in cross-network thematic studies of TV news (Almakaty, 2024).

This study aims to examine how Saudi economic developments are exemplified and structured in Middle Eastern and international television news in the timeframe of 2023 and 2025. It recognizes the significant themes in TV coverage of Saudi economic transformations, like diversification and sustainability. The research also enquires how significant actors and partnerships are represented in the narratives of TV news. Moreover, it compares narrative attitudes and framing patterns throughout various television networks, like Al Jazeera, BBC, and CNN, and how such networks structure public awareness of Saudi Arabia's economic transformation.

2. Material Studied and Contextual Background

2.1 Media Sample

This section outlines the media sample and its selection criteria in order to define the empirical scope of the study prior to the discussion of the theoretical framework. This paper analyses media reporting of Saudi economic news by a purposive sample of major Arab and international news channels. Television news is still a strong channel of influencing people in the Middle East to have general information about economic problems, which proves to be a good platform for studying how economic reforms and Vision 2030 are being implemented. The sample covers both state-affiliated and independent programs and makes them diverse in editorial views, geographic coverage, and target audience.

The choice of Arab TV stations, including the Asharq Business in collaboration with Bloomberg and Al Jazeera Arabic, is raised by the fact that both channels have strong connections to the economic and political backgrounds of the region. The economic activities in Saudi Arabia are regularly reported in these networks, presenting regional attitudes to the reforms, investments, and government policies. These shows play a significant role in promoting the vision of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which is a strategic plan to ensure economic diversification, sustainability in energy and internationalization.

Moreover, Arab news media such as Sky News Arabia, and international media CNN, and BBC offer useful external insights into economic transformation in Saudi Arabia. Their inclusion allows comparing the perceived understanding of Saudi economic reforms by foreign media and gaining a deeper insight into how the global audience views the Kingdom as the country transitions towards pushing an oil-based economy into a more diversified and sustainable one. The sample includes a period between 2023 and 2025, which uses the timeframe due to its coincidence with the accelerated enactment of Vision 2030. Major reforms, huge investment initiatives and international relations during this period have elicited increased media coverage, thus an ideal moment to capture the steady trends of media reporting on the Saudi economic shift.

2.2 Units of Analysis

Individual television news episodes, which are covered with a significant amount of Saudi economic developments, are the primary units of analysis in this study. A total of 30 episodes (N = 30) were chosen to be analysed. The episodes are individual broadcast segments or programs where the Saudi Arabian economy, economic policies, or various development-related programs are a main topic. Selection of episodes was made on clean inclusion criteria to promote uniformity of the sample across episodes.

First, every episode had to center on Saudi economic developments, not just mention economic topics. Second, the coverage had to cover substantive economic matters, including policy reforms, investment policies, and infrastructure development and international economic collaboration. Third, the episodes needed to be aired within the stipulated time of 2023-2025 to be sure that the analysis would capture the most current and pertinent coverage in Saudi Arabia in the context of increased economic change. Economic issues that were addressed in the selected episodes capture the core issues in the economic reform agenda of Saudi Arabia. These are investment projects, diversification of the economy, economic diplomacy, technological innovations and sustainability projects.

These issues closely align with the objective of the Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, which seeks to make the nation less reliant on oil and diversify the economy to non-oil industries, which include technology, tourism, entertainment, and renewable energy. The thematic analysis carried out on each episode entailed the tone and framing of each episode, as well as an analysis of the context in which these economic problems were presented. This involved analyzing the manner in which economic issues were incorporated within broader news agendas, the citation of experts and officials, and the relevance of economic issues in terms of the general broadcast. The emphasis on complete episodes as the unit of study enables the study to gain a better insight into the way economic developments are conveyed to the audience, taking into consideration the content and the form of the news.

2.3 Contextual Background

2.3.1 Saudi Arabia's Economic Reforms and Vision 2030

Vision 2030 is a strategic map or a blueprint that enables the economic transformation of Saudi Arabia so that the nation becomes

less dependent on oil revenues to support its economic activities and make the country more competitive globally and sustainable. Vision 2030 has seen far-reaching restructuring in many sectors such as investment policy, infrastructure, tourism, technology and sustainable development. Since the Kingdom aims to diversify its economy, the media has been central to the way it presents such changes as part of a larger, national change (Snoussi, 2024; Albarran, 2023). Arab News (2025) outlines how more media investment in the region is transforming the Saudi Arabian media sphere to suit its wider economic ambitions, which is in line with Vision 2030. Another interesting step in the reforms of Saudi Arabia is the establishment of the mega-projects that are aimed at changing the economic orientation of the country, as the share of non-oil industries increases.

Projects such as the Neom mega-city, the Red Sea Project and the Saudi Green Initiative are the projects that are introduced as core aspects to the economic diversification strategy of the Kingdom. These large-scale plans will spur expansion in tourism, renewable energy, technological innovation, and entertainment, minimizing reliance on oil exports (Muyidi, 2025; Almakaty, 2024). These projects are defined as the future of media and will greatly contribute to the image of Saudi Arabia in the future, as well as ways in which the media determines the economic transformation of Saudi Arabia and how the Kingdom transforms into a diversified and global economy.

2.3.2 Saudi Arabia's Regional and Global Positioning

The economic reforms in Saudi Arabia come with a more assertive foreign policy as well. Regional and international positioning of the Kingdom has developed in an attempt to enhance its economic presence in markets other than oil. The role of Saudi Arabia in the global economy has changed due to the large-scale investments, international relations between countries, and the cross-border agreements (Almakaty, 2024). The increasing geopolitical impact of the Kingdom is also described by the media reporting on Saudi economic affairs. The presence of U.S. and Saudi cooperation and Saudi-Chinese ones in media coverage highlight the fact that the Kingdom is now placing itself at the core of international relations and economy (Snoussi, 2024). With the help of strategic alliances, Saudi Arabia has been in a position to capitalize on the benefits of its geopolitical relationships in a bid to increase its economic competitiveness as well as solicit investment in the same manner.

2.3.3 The Media Environment in the Middle East

The media environment in the Middle East is a critical factor that influences the discourse of the economic reforms in Saudi Arabia. The media landscape is innovative in the area, a combination of state-controlled, privately owned and transnational media networks. Television is still the leading news platform, particularly in the Gulf, where the extensive transmission of economic and political stories is now made possible through satellite broadcasting (Albarran, 2023). State-owned and semi-state media sources, including Al Ekhbariya and Asharq, in the case of Saudi Arabia, are also inclined to highlight the positive effects of Vision 2030 by offering a nationalistic and progressive portrayal of the economic transformations in the Kingdom.

However, international broadcasters, e.g. CNN and BBC, provide a more skeptical and insightful viewpoint, emphasizing both possibilities and the obstacles of the Saudi Arabian economic transformation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Özden, 2024). The Middle East media are typically possessed by a system of state intervention and regulatory control; that is, economic reform reporting is normally in accordance with its overall national development agenda. The international media also report on potential risks, such as the financial sustainability of mega-projects and human rights and political freedom concerns in the area, along with other economic achievements (Snoussi, 2024; Salamon, 2024).

2.4 Analytical Framework

The paper adopts three theoretical perspectives to discuss the Saudi economic trends in television news, and these theories are interconnected. First, the framing theory (Entman, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993) describes the manner in which the media structure and rank information to influence the public perception of the occurrences, and this is critical to the analysis of the framing of the Saudi economic changes. Second, the political economy of media (Salamon, 2024) concentrates on the services provided by factors of structure, such as ownership and political interests in news production and agenda-setting, especially in the state-influenced media system, as in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the economic communication perspective (Boumans et al., 2023) investigates the communication of economic information to the population, emphasizing the way media stories simplify and turn complex economic problems into information that readers can digest and act upon.

The combined use of these viewpoints helps to better demonstrate the manner the media presents Saudi economic reforms. The framing theory assists in viewing the narrative structure of these stories, and the political economy angle examines the influence of media ownership and political interests in determining what is sensitized. This is illustrated through the economic communication viewpoint, where complex economic issues are brought down to others who are more familiar and easy to follow and intervene with.

3. Methods and Techniques

3.1 Research Design

This research has been conducted using a qualitative thematic content analysis of thirty episodes to review in an orderly manner how Saudi economic developments are presented in the news of Middle Eastern and international media houses (shown in Table 1). The qualitative content analysis is generally considered to be an effective method to interpret the patterns of meaning in the textual media, especially when the objective is not to quantify the features that can be observed but to reveal the hidden themes and framing strategies (Schreier, 2018). In the case of thematic content analysis, specifically, it is possible to identify and interpret conceptual categories that have emerged due to media texts and provide analytical insights beyond surface description into narrative construction and ideological representation (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Table 1. List of Television News Episodes Included in the Study

No.	Program / Channel	Episode Title	Broadcast Date
1	Aswaq Asharq, Asharq Business with Bloomberg	Humane Launches 'Alam,' the First Fully Developed Arabic AI Model in Saudi Arabia	14 Aug 2025
2	Aswaq Asharq, Asharq Business with Bloomberg	Saudi Arabia Opens Property Ownership to Foreigners – Here are the Details	09 Jul 2025
3	Aswaq Asharq, Asharq Business with Bloomberg	Saudi Arabia Emerges as a Major Investor in Electric Car Racing	22 Jan 2024
4	Aswaq Asharq, Asharq Business with Bloomberg	How is Saudi Arabia Preparing to Host Expo 2030 in Riyadh?	03 Dec 2023
5	Aswaq Asharq, Asharq Business with Bloomberg	Saudi Minister Of Industry To Asharq: We Aim to Provide the Necessary Infrastructure for Investors	07 Dec 2023
6	Aswaq Asharq, Asharq Business with Bloomberg	Bloomberg: Saudi Arabia Seeks to Expand Its Influence in the Film Industry with $2 Billion in Investments	22 Feb 2023
7	Business with Lubna, Sky News Arabia	Trump in the Gulf: Strategic Deals and Partnerships	13 May 2025
8	Business with Lubna, Sky News Arabia	A Single Visa to Travel Across all Gulf Countries	14 May 2024
9	Business with Lubna, Sky News Arabia	Gulf Sovereign Wealth Funds: A Global Investment Power	10 Jul 2024
10	Business with Lubna, Sky News Arabia	Saudi Arabia: Trillion-Dollar Projects Shaping the Path of the Economy	15 Jul 2024
11	Business with Lubna, Sky News Arabia	OPEC+ Decision Came as a Surprise To Oil Markets	03 Jun 2024
12	Business with Lubna, Sky News Arabia	The Global Investment Landscape is Changing, and the UAE Leads the Way	10 Jul 2024
13	"Economic news reporting segments within general news bulletins", Al Jazeera Arabic	What Were the Key Messages in President Trump's Speech at the Saudi-U.S. Investment Forum?	13 May 2025
14	"Economic news reporting segments within general news bulletins" , Al Jazeera Arabic	Saudi Arabia and the United States Sign the Largest Defense Sales Deal in History, Worth $142 Billion	14 May 2025
15	"Economic news reporting segments within general news bulletins", Al Jazeera Arabic	Saudi–Syrian Investment Forum Strengthens Bilateral Economic Cooperation	24 Jul 2025
16	"Economic news reporting segments within general news bulletins", Al Jazeera Arabic	Saudi Arabia to Host the 2026 Gulf Cup and Rebrand the Gulf Football Federation	27 Dec 2024
17	"Economic news reporting segments within general news bulletins", Al Jazeera Arabic	OPEC+ Extends Oil Production Cuts to Stabilize Markets	05 Jun 2023
18	"Economic news reporting segments within general news bulletins", Al Jazeera Arabic	China And Arab States Sign $10 Billion Investment Deals In Riyadh	13 Jun 2023
19	Marketplace Middle East, CNN Business	From Wall Street to Riyadh: Investors Confront Rising Rates and Seek Gulf Opportunities	02 Nov 2025
20	Marketplace Middle East, CNN Business	IHG CEO on the Middle East's Tourism Boom	09 Dec 2024
21	Marketplace Middle East, CNN Business	How AI is Shaping The Future of Business in the Middle East	08 Oct 2024
22	Marketplace Middle East, CNN Business	CNN Explores Saudi Arabia's Tourism Diversification	09 Aug 2024
23	Marketplace Middle East, CNN Business	Saudi Arabia's Ambitions to Become a Global Sporting Hub	01 Sep 2023
24	Marketplace Middle East, CNN Business	The Middle East's Growing Investment in the Global Space Industry	06 Jul 2023
25	Talking Business, BBC	Saudi Arabia Announces $2.66 Billion Incentives Program to Boost Industrial Sector	16 Jan 2025
26	Talking Business, BBC	Exploring the Desert Secrets of a Lost Nabataean World	25 Apr 2025
27	Talking Business, BBC	US Signs $142bn Arms Deal with Saudi Arabia	13 May 2025
28	Talking Business, BBC	Donald Trump Arrives in Saudi Arabia for First Major Trip of Second Term	13 May 2025
29	Talking Business, BBC	Neom – Can Saudi Arabia Afford the Futuristic Eco-City?	01 Jun 2024
30	Talking Business, BBC	How Saudi Arabia Bought into Golf	10 Jun 2023

Table 1 lists all 30 television news episodes selected for thematic analysis, including program names, episode titles, and broadcast dates.

The rationale to consider thematic analysis is based on its flexibility and suitability in comparative analysis of the media. It supports both inductive and deductive coding, which allows combining theoretically informed categories with emergent

topics in the data (Nowell et al., 2017; Paapa & Kambona, 2025). Against the background of the multifaceted socio-economic discourses about Vision 2030 and the changes in policies, the thematic analysis would help to understand subtle and overt frames used by broadcasters. Since media framing is an interpretive process, thematic content analysis should be used instead of strictly quantitative content analysis because it allows studying the topic of tone, representation of actors, and focus on narratives in televised discourse holistically (Delliou, 2025).

3.2 Coding Procedure

The coding process was conducted in a multi-stage process that included an initial stage of development of a preliminary coding framework, which is founded on both available literature and initial analysis of the corpus. Themes Four major categories of coding were developed, (1) thematic foci (e.g., economic diversification, innovation, investment), (2) key actors and partnerships (e.g., government officials, private sector representatives), (3) narrative tone (e.g., positive, neutral, critical), and (4) specific framing devices (e.g., economic success, partnership narratives). These codes were created to address both the substantive and discursive trends that might be important to the analytical goals of the study (Van Zyl et al., 2021).

The refinement of codes during the analysis was done via an iterative method. Preliminary coding of a sample of episodes made it possible to identify other sub-themes and to reformulate the vague categories in order to enhance clarity and relevance. These refinements were made in later rounds of coding, in order to make sure that the framework was responsive to emergent patterns but still tied to the conceptual priorities of the study. Reflective notes and memos were kept during the coding in order to record interpretive choices and enable consistency.

3.3 Reliability and Rigor

To ensure transparency of coding, detailed codebooks were prepared, with definitions and sample excerpts provided for each category. The iterative aspect of coding enhanced the thematic saturation, in which further coding identified fewer new themes, meaning that the dataset was sufficiently covered. Furthermore, cross-channel consistency was verified by comparative analysis, and all the themes identified in a network had a meaning to be compared to those identified in the other outlets. Team discussions and peer reflexive debriefs were done regularly to reduce the influence of personal bias and strengthen analytical credibility (McGlacken, 2023).

4. Results

4.1 Dominant Economic Themes

The thematic analysis of the episodes showed that there was a consistent set of dominant economic themes that influenced the portrayal of the economic transformation in Saudi Arabia. In Middle Eastern and international broadcasters, four interconnected themes were most evident, namely economic diversification, innovation and technology, global partnerships and diplomacy, and sustainability associated with mega-projects.

4.1.1 Economic Diversification

The most widespread theme all around the channels was the economic diversification. The economic agenda in Saudi Arabia was consistently reported as a strategic move to break the oil reliance and move to a multi-sector economy. Episodes on industrial development, mining, tourism, entertainment, sports and creative industries and how diversification is a need in the economy and a national strategy as outlined in the vision 2030 (Abuljadayel, 2024). Narratives of diversification were usually associated with jobs creation, development of the private sector, and financial sustainability, and the Middle Eastern channels focused on state-centered planning and international marketplaces on market trust and investor attractions.

4.1.2 Innovation and Technology

The second prevailing theme was innovation and technology, especially with regards to artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, space industries, and high-tech manufacturing. Episodes about the development of AI, independent data systems, and high-tech industries portrayed Saudi Arabia as an emerging technological center instead of a technology consumer. The role of technological advancement was frequently placed as a source of competitiveness and productivity, which supported the discourse of the future-oriented economy (Alzoubi, Hamid & Ahmad, 2025). This was a recurring theme in both Arab and Western media, but in the international media, more often marked innovation in terms of global competition and regulatory issues.

4.1.3 Global Partnerships and Economic Diplomacy

A third theme found was global alliances and economic diplomacy. One of the aspects that were often covered was the growing web of strategic partnership that Saudi Arabia had with the United States, China, Europe and neighboring countries. The large-scale investment conferences, military-economic interdependencies, the activities of sovereign wealth funds, and multinational partnerships were presented as facts of Saudi Arabia repositioning itself in the world economic system (Martin, Nair & Parasie, 2024). These alliances were described as win-win aspects with an economic

and diplomatic aspect involved in them. Channels with Middle East viewership were more focused on leadership and Middle Eastern stability, whereas the international media gave more coverage on the geopolitical implications.

4.1.4 Sustainability and Mega-Projects

Lastly, the sustainability and mega-projects became a key thematic pillar, especially when it comes to Expo 2030, NEOM, tourism growth, and green projects. The concept of sustainability was presented as an environmental promise and a marketing tactic, where mega-projects were viewed as the symbol of modernization and planning as a long-term promise. International media at times initiated a more careful or critical view of the issue of feasibility, environmental impact, and social implications, whereas Arab channels to a large extent accepted the celebratory and future-oriented narratives. These themes acted together in a sense that they formed a story of a comprehensive economic transformation that was based on Vision 2030 (Ilmi & Zawawi, 2024).

4.2 Representation of Key Actors

It was also shown in the analysis that there are obvious trends in the representation of major players in the economic transformation of Saudi Arabia. Three actors prevalent in the dataset included coverage such as Saudi leadership and institutions, international partners and economic experts and elites.

4.2.1 Saudi Leaderships and State Institutions

The Saudi leaderships and the state organizations were always to be the main instigators of economic transformation. The top officials, such as representatives of royal leadership, ministers and heads of state-owned companies, were being promoted as visionaries and architects of reform. State agencies like the Public Investment Fund, ministries and regulatory bodies were presented as effective, proactive and the driver of policy implementation. The positive and affirming tone was dominant in Middle Eastern channels, and focused on leadership foresight and national development. This framing was mostly reflected in international outlets, although some also added more analytical elements since they put leadership choices into a broader economic or political context.

4.2.2 International Partners

The second group of significantly important actors was international partners. Partners and beneficiaries of Saudi Arabian transformation were represented by the foreign governments, multinational corporations, global investors and international organizations (Albarran, 2023). These actors were covered as endorsing the economic course of Saudi Arabia by making investment-related commitments, joint ventures, and strategic agreements. Collaboration with the United States, China, and European institutions were often used as one of the indicators of international confidence and economic inclusion. Whereas the Middle Eastern media focused on diplomatic victory and coexistence, the Western media tended to put the cooperation in the context of geopolitical strategy, determination of risk, and international market environment.

4.2.3 Economic Experts

Economic elites, analysts and economists were rather supportive and often influential in the formation of narratives. These actors made commentary, review and technical clarification, which in most cases reinforced overriding themes of diversification, innovation, and sustainability. Experts were typically displayed as powerful and authoritative and policy and investment practices were accorded credibility. In Arab media, the voices of experts mostly complied with the state discourse and supported opportunity and growth. Conversely, foreign media outlets tended to incorporate pundits with more balanced or critical commentaries, especially on macro-level projects, financial sustainability, and economic insecurity in the world.

Overall, the portrayal of actors within the television news media created a coherent discourse where Saudi leadership seems to be the driving force of change with the help of international relations and confirmed by expert commentary. This arrangement helped to create a consistent and compelling description of the changing economic identity of Saudi Arabia.

4.3 Narrative Tone and Framing

In the analyzed television news episodes, the Saudi economic developments were framed in a rather positive and future-oriented manner. Economic reform, investment, and policy initiatives were systematically brought out as futuristic reactions to economic globalization with the focus on the opportunity, growth, and modernization. This presentation fits into the known conceptions of how media choose and highlight specific elements of reality to offer logical accounts of development (Entman, 1993; Berk, 2025).

One of the most notable characteristics of the coverage was strategic optimism wherein the obstacles in the economy were either understated or repackaged as temporary hurdles on a larger course of success. The stories featured the long-term advantages of diversification, innovation, and global interaction, often presenting Vision 2030 projects as the unavoidable and sustainable ones. They supported such optimism with the help of positive words, signs of success, and authoritative sources, which helped to develop a feeling of economic momentum and national pride (Boumans et al., 2023). Meanwhile,

there were restricted critical views. Although there are also instances where some international broadcasters did consider issues on project viability, economic uncertainty in the global economy, or even implementation schedules, they were still secondary to reframing that is dominated by positive frames. Open criticism or prolonged counter-story was uncommon, especially in Middle East reporting. In general, the tone of the narrative throughout stories was more reassuring and continuative in supporting an otherwise unchallenged image of the economic transformation in Saudi Arabia.

4.4 Cross-Channel Patterns

The comparative analysis of the Arab and international television news presentation of Saudi economic developments indicated convergence and divergence in the news presentation. Both groups had a wide agreement in the choice of the prevailing themes such as economic diversification, innovation, global partnerships, and sustainability. This thematic overlap implies a common understanding of the Vision 2030 as the main organizing concept that establishes the interpretation of Saudi Arabia economic path (Almakaty, 2024). Nevertheless, significant differences were observed in the focus on stories and the style of framing. The Arab media platforms were always more affirmative and unifying in the theme of leadership vision, national success and stability in the region. The further developments of institutional competency and advancement were frequently predetermined by coverage and expressed in terms of bigger trends within Saudi and regional media systems formed due to the influence of political economy forces and narrative of development (Albarran, 2023; Salamon, 2024). Contrarily, the international media tended to bring into the scope a more analytical register, to contextualize the economic developments in the world markets, geopolitical factors and the economic performance in comparison.

Although there was a difference, the international outlets did not often move far away on the positive framing. Critical views were often put as analytical rather than antagonistic observations.

Table 2. Summary of Cross-Channel Patterns

Aspect	Arab Television News	International Television News
Dominant Themes	Economic diversification, innovation, global partnerships, sustainability	Economic diversification, innovation, global partnerships, sustainability
Organizing Framework	Vision 2030 as a central national development narrative	Vision 2030 as a reference point within global economic context
Narrative Tone	Predominantly affirmative and cohesive	Generally positive with analytical nuance
Framing Style	Emphasis on leadership vision, national achievement, and regional stability	Contextual framing linked to global markets and geopolitics
Representation of Progress	Framed as steady, planned, and institutionally driven	Framed as significant but evaluated within comparative economic performance
Critical Perspectives	Largely absent or implicit	Present but limited and analytical rather than oppositional
Overall Narrative Orientation	Nation-building and developmental	Global integration and economic positioning

As shown in Table 2, cross-channel patterns suggest that although Arab and international broadcasters are dissimilar in terms of tone and contextualization depth, both are adding to an overall similar narrative of Saudi Arabia as an increasingly influential and outward-looking economic player.

5. Discussion

The results of this study show the active framing of economic transformation in Saudi Arabia through approaches of television news media to present the country as a unified, prospective, and planned process. Based on the concept of framing, the Arab and international coverage is selective in focusing on the economic diversification, technological development, and globalization, whereas the coverage of uncertainty or a structural contestation is marginalized (Ghanem, 2022; Almakaty, 2025). By undertaking thematic concentration through repetition of the initiatives of Vision 2030, sovereign wealth investment, and mega-projects, television news creates a predominant frame of interpretation, making economic reform inevitable and mandatory. Such framing simplifies the process of transforming the economy into simple stories of progress, and makes people think that they understand what is going on by creating continuity and repetition.

Structural and contextual aspects of the media ecosystem can explain the prevalence of positive and future-oriented narratives. Within media systems that are affected by the state, editorial interests are usually in line with the national development agenda, which promotes stability-related and supportive reporting (Albarran, 2023; Salamon, 2024). In addition, the dependence on elite sources, including government officials and institutional actors, can help to reproduce the optimistic frames since they have a strong interest in the success of reforms. Politically, media houses can also be driven by a political economy motive of promoting stories that enhance economic confidence and appeal to foreign investors (Salamon, 2024; Boumans et al., 2023). Besides, the strategic communication of the Vision 2030 also offers a clear and interesting narrative that can be readily embraced by the regional and international media, which restricts the availability of alternative or critical frames (Almakaty, 2024).

Television news can also be used as a tool of economic legitimacy and nation branding, to make Saudi Arabia a reliable and powerful economic force in the world. New policy efforts are always framed by media discourses in terms of symbols of modernization, including the Expo 2030, Neom, international sporting events, and cultural industries, thus transforming economic transformation into familiar signifiers of nation building (Ilmi & Zawawi, 2024). Sovereign wealth funds, especially the Public Investment Fund, are presented not only as an instrument of finance but also as a tool of soft power and international signaling (Martin, Nair & Parasie, 2024). This coverage makes economic reporting in line with the wider nation-branding goals, which strengthens investor confidence and global legitimacy.

Another interpretive finding is that TV news are very consistent with Vision 2030 goals. Throughout the episodes, Vision 2030 is performed as the main organizing discourse by which the economic developments are explained. Instead of competing narratives, media reporting has continually been able to blend policy reforms, technology change, culture building, and international relations into one big account of long-term planning and strategic continuity (Almakaty, 2024; Almakaty, 2025). This correspondence signifies a strong relationship between the state communication factors and those of the media coverage as the television news emphasizes national course on both national and international audiences.

This narrative construction is focused on the role of elite sourcing and partnerships. The government ministries, the leaders of sovereign wealth funds, the royal families, and the international investors control the media discourse and distribute the tone and the orientation of the economic reporting (Abbas et al., 2025; Abuljadayel, 2024). The frequent appearance of top ministers and the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reinforces the leadership-focused discourses of reform and modernization, and the international political and business leaders are external legitimizers of the economic course in Saudi Arabia (Alzoubi et al., 2025; Hadian Rasanani, 2024). Such dependence on elite sources is more credible but at the same time restrictive to discursive plurality by imposing restrictions on alternative or grassroots viewpoints.

Using these findings in the context of the current media and communication literature, the consistency of the findings is evident in the literature that focuses on the importance of the state-aligned media in agenda-setting in the context of development. Like other studies of Saudi strategic communication, the coverage is that of a moderated and globally recognizable discourse, with a national pride and global legitimacy (Ghanem, 2022). Although critical frames regarding environmental sustainability, labor, or social impact are presented by international sources (particularly CNN and BBC) in some cases, they are buried under the overarching frames of progress and opportunity (Ilmi & Zawawi, 2024). In general, the article has revealed how the television news can serve as a communicative and strategic agent, creating economic meaning, justifying reform, and balancing the changing image of Saudi Arabia in the world.

When these findings are placed in broader global academic debates, it is possible to trace similarities with the studies on media framing in other state-led developmental realities. Research on emergent economies has also revealed the media systems often function as tools of economic legitimation, highlighting the growth narratives and silencing opposition or critique of the system (Chigbu, Makapela & Umejesi, 2025). Similar trends have been noted in nations that have large-scale modernization agendas, as media framing is paired with national branding and investment attraction policies (Al-Obaidi, 2025). This study thus adds to the wider discourse in the global media and communication studies by showing how economic discourse is not only made locally but also entrenched in transnational discourses of development, competitiveness, and globalization (Berk, 2025; Cobo et al., 2025). It supports the argument that media framing exists on the border between the national interests and the global economic communication standards (Entman, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

6. Conclusion

This study has used a thematic analysis of thirty news episodes in the Middle East and global television news media to explore how Saudi economic developments are portrayed in them. As the results demonstrate, the channel coverage is organized around the core themes, such as economic diversification, innovations and technology, international relations, and sustainability related to mega-projects, with the Vision 2030 serving as the foundational interpretative framework. The Saudi leadership and state institutions are set to stand as the biggest drivers of change, whereas the elite institutional sources, foreign actors and professional opinions dominate legitimization of reform discourses and support images of competence, stability, and development.

Theoretically, this research can contribute to the media and communication research through strengthening the applicability of the framing theory and the political economy views to explain economic news coverage in the context of development drive. It illustrates how television news does not just work as a channel of information, but also as a discursive space, where national economic agendas are made legitimate and normalized. The study brings new insights to the current research on economic communication and nation branding by illustrating the overlap between state goals and media discourses, demonstrating how the large-scale agendas of reform are framed into coherent and convincing media discourses.

Practically, the results have significant implications to economic journalism. The fact that elite sourcing and positive framing are the most prominent highlights the importance of journalists striking the right balance between allowing access to credible voices and including more varying views. Improving the level of analysis, contextual comparison and

investigation can help intensify the credibility and social worth of economic reporting especially comparing complex reforms and mega-projects.

There are a number of limitations associated with this study. First, the research is based on a purposive sample of thirty television news episodes that, although relevant to the in-depth interpretation of the qualitative nature, might not be comprehensive enough to depict the diversity of media coverage on a broadcaster-wide basis or even on a time basis. Second, the analysis is based solely on the television news and does not include the audience reception or social media discourse, which is becoming important in the formation of public understanding and can cause different interpretations of the same narratives. Third, the qualitative thematic design is more concerned with depth and contextual richness as compared to generalizability and as such, restricts the possibility of extending the findings to the larger population beyond the sample selected. Moreover, the dependency on publicly funded broadcasts could exclude editorial procedures that drive the production of content. Future studies may overcome these limitations by extending the data over time, using mixed methods, and comparing television stories to digital, print, and audience-focused studies to have a more detailed picture of economic framing and the effect of media.

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Author contributions

Maha Shaher was responsible for the study design, data analysis, and drafting the manuscript. She also conducted the data collection and interpretation. The author reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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