



REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Language, Linguistics & Criticism*

Narrating future economies in Saudi Arabia: A discourse-historical analysis of identity, modernity, and risk

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ABSTRACT

This article develops a discourse-historical account of how Saudi Arabia's transition from an oil-centered economy to a set of future-oriented economic imaginaries that can be studied as institutional discourse. Rather than treating future economies as self-evident policy objects, the article argues that they are narrated through historically situated claims about national identity, modernity, and risk. Drawing on the Discourse-Historical Approach, critical policy discourse studies, sociotechnical imaginaries, and cultural political economy, the article proposes an Identity-Modernity-Risk Narrative Model for analyzing official Saudi institutional texts related to Vision 2030 and associated transformation programs. The article is conceptual and methodological: it does not claim to report the results of a finalized corpus analysis, but it provides a rigorous framework for future empirical work using a curated corpus of Vision 2030 documents, national transformation materials, sovereign investment communication, and future-economy project texts. The central argument is that future-economy discourse makes transformation intelligible by anchoring it in national continuity, desirable by framing it as innovation and global competitiveness, and urgent by representing oil dependency, inaction, and global technological competition as manageable risks. The article contributes to discourse studies by linking DHA strategies, argumentative topoi, and future-oriented policy narratives in one model. It also contributes to Saudi Vision 2030 research by showing that economic transformation is not only institutional and material, but also narrative, linguistic, and historically legitimized.

KEYWORDS: Saudi Vision 2030, future economies, Discourse-Historical Approach, identity, modernity, risk, institutional discourse, economic transformation

Research Journal in Advanced Humanities

Volume 7, Issue 2, 2026

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 25 April 2026

Accepted: 05 May 2026

Published: 04 June 2026

HOW TO CITE

Sa'di, R. A., Khasawneh, A. J., Ismail, S. M., & Koka, N. A. (2026). Narrating future economies in Saudi Arabia: A discourse-historical analysis of identity, modernity, and risk. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.58256/46t3eh22>



Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global, an imprint of Royallite Publishers Limited

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1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia's economic transformation is often discussed through the language of diversification, investment, mega-projects, knowledge economy, digitalization, entrepreneurship, and quality of life. These terms are not merely descriptive. They organize a political and social vision for the future. They tell citizens, institutions, investors, and international audiences what kind of economy is being built, who is expected to participate in it, what risks must be overcome, and why transformation should be understood as necessary, credible, and nationally grounded. In this sense, future economies are not only created through budgets, infrastructure, regulation, and investment; they are also narrated.

This article examines that narrative dimension. It is based on the proposal titled *Narrating Future Economies in Saudi Arabia: Discourse-Historical Analysis of Identity, Modernity, and Risk*, which identifies a need to study how Saudi institutions discursively construct the transition from an oil-based economy toward future-oriented economic models. The article turns that proposal into a full conceptual and methodological research article. It argues that official discourse surrounding Saudi future economies does three things at once. First, it constructs a national subject capable of authoring the future rather than merely adapting to it. Second, it frames modernity as an institutional promise expressed through innovation, technology, investment, sustainability, and competitiveness. Third, it manages risk by presenting oil dependency, global competition, technological lag, and economic uncertainty as challenges that can be governed through strategic planning and coordinated institutional action.

This article uses the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) because DHA is particularly suitable for studying institutional texts that connect present political action with historical identity and future legitimacy. DHA does not treat discourse as language detached from social history. It asks how texts draw on prior narratives, how they name social actors, how they attribute qualities to those actors, what arguments justify action, whose viewpoint is foregrounded, and how certainty, urgency, or caution is intensified or mitigated (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). These concerns are directly relevant to Vision 2030 discourse because the future economy is not simply a technical category; it is a socially organized object that must be made believable, morally acceptable, historically continuous, and institutionally actionable.

Saudi Vision 2030 provides a rich context for this kind of analysis. The official Vision 2030 document identifies three broad pillars: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). These pillars do more than structure policy objectives. They also provide a narrative grammar through which national identity, economic opportunity, institutional accountability, and social modernization are connected. The Vision 2030 annual reports and related program documents continue this narrative work by presenting progress, targets, achievements, and challenges in ways that invite public trust and future-oriented participation (Saudi Vision 2030, 2025; National Transformation Program, 2021). At the same time, public investment communication and future-economy project discourse extend this grammar into investment, tourism, entertainment, digital economy, sustainability, and urban development (Public Investment Fund, 2025).

The contribution of this article is not to measure whether Vision 2030 has achieved particular economic targets, nor does it treat institutional discourse as a substitute for policy analysis. Instead, it asks how future economies become speakable and legitimate as national projects. The article therefore treats future-economy discourse as a site where identity, modernity, and risk are negotiated. In doing so, it connects Saudi Vision 2030 studies with critical discourse analysis, discourse-historical research, cultural political economy, and the sociology of expectations.

2. Research Problem

The research problem addressed in this article concerns a conceptual and analytical gap. In public policy, business communication, and institutional reporting, the expression *future economy* often appears as if its meaning were obvious. It is associated with digital transformation, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, tourism, innovation, entrepreneurship, logistics, advanced manufacturing, entertainment, and global investment. Yet the discursive assumptions beneath this expression remain under-examined. What kind of identity is imagined when a society is asked to become a future economy? What forms of modernity are represented as desirable or necessary? What risks are named, implied, minimized, or transformed into opportunities?

This problem matters because future-oriented economic discourse is not neutral. It does not merely

describe economic change after the fact. It helps organize how change is understood before, during, and after implementation. When institutional texts speak about diversification, competitiveness, opportunity, empowerment, innovation, and investment, they also create expectations about citizens, young people, workers, investors, government institutions, and global partners. They frame who belongs to the future, who is responsible for making it happen, and what kinds of action count as progress. This is why economic transformation must be analyzed not only as an economic or policy process, but also as a discourse process.

Existing research on Saudi Vision 2030 has examined economic diversification, rentier-state transition, public investment, state capacity, national transformation, and policy reform (Hertog, 2010; Hvidt, 2013; Ulrichsen, 2016; Kinnimont, 2017; Krane, 2019). Other studies have approached Vision 2030 as a discursive object, especially through critical discourse analysis and corpus-assisted methods (Alqahtani, 2024; Mohammad & Alshahrani, 2019). However, there remains limited work that systematically connects Saudi future-economy discourse to a discourse-historical model of identity, modernity, and risk. The result is that the language of future economies is often treated either as policy communication or as economic branding, while its historical, argumentative, and risk-managing structure receives less attention.

The present article addresses this gap by developing a model that links three dimensions. Identity explains how the discourse constructs social actors and national continuity. Modernity explains how transformation is framed as progress, innovation, competitiveness, and institutional renewal. Risk explains why the future economy is represented as necessary, urgent, and governable. By bringing these dimensions together, the article offers a framework for studying how Saudi institutional discourse makes future economies appear credible, socially acceptable, and historically anchored.

3. Research Questions

The article is guided by five research questions that translate the study's concern with identity, modernity, and risk into an analyzable discourse-historical framework:

1. How do Saudi institutional texts construct the transition from an oil-centered economy to future economies?
2. What identity categories are used to position Saudi Arabia, citizens, youth, institutions, investors, workers, and global partners within future-economy discourse?
3. How are modernity, innovation, competitiveness, sustainability, technological transformation, and knowledge-economy language framed in relation to Saudi Vision 2030?
4. What risk narratives appear in the discourse, and how are oil dependency, uncertainty, global competition, technological lag, employability pressure, and social transition linguistically managed?
5. What argumentative topoi and discourse strategies are used to legitimize future economies as necessary, credible, nationally grounded, and socially desirable?

These questions are framed for conceptual and methodological development. They do not presuppose a completed empirical corpus in this article. Instead, they define the analytical pathway that future empirical research can apply to a curated corpus of official Vision 2030 documents, national program materials, sovereign investment communication, and future-economy project texts.

4. Significance and Contribution

The significance of this article lies in its attempt to move the study of Saudi economic transformation beyond a purely policy-economic vocabulary. Diversification and future-oriented investment are material processes, but they are also made meaningful through institutional language. This article therefore contributes to discourse studies by showing how future economies can be examined as narratives rather than only as sectors, projects, or targets.

The first contribution is theoretical. The article combines the Discourse-Historical Approach with the frameworks of sociotechnical and economic imaginaries. DHA provides tools for analyzing nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification or mitigation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2015). Sociotechnical imaginaries explain how societies imagine collectively held futures of science, technology, economy, and social order (Jasanoff & Kim, 2009; Jasanoff, 2015). Cultural political economy explains how

economic imaginaries become selective representations of possible economic worlds (Jessop, 2004; Sum & Jessop, 2013). The article brings these approaches together in an Identity-Modernity-Risk Narrative Model.

The second contribution is methodological. The article offers a corpus-aware DHA design that can guide future empirical analysis. Rather than claiming to have completed a large-scale corpus study without providing a corpus, it proposes a transparent pathway for corpus selection, keywording, concordance checks, qualitative coding, intertextual mapping, and argumentative analysis. This responds to the need for studies that combine interpretive depth with methodological transparency.

The third contribution is contextual. Saudi Vision 2030 has generated an extensive volume of institutional communication, annual reporting, program documentation, and project discourse. Much of this discourse describes future economic sectors, but its linguistic structure remains underexplored. By focusing on identity, modernity, and risk, this article shows how future-economy discourse connects national belonging, technological progress, and economic uncertainty in ways that support institutional legitimacy.

The fourth contribution is practical. Institutions communicating economic transformation need language that is precise, trustworthy, and accessible. A discourse-historical analysis can help identify whether future-economy communication is clear or vague, inclusive or exclusionary, accountable or promotional, historically grounded or detached from social context. The article therefore has implications for public communication, strategic planning, policy explanation, and stakeholder engagement.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Saudi Vision 2030 and Economic Transformation

Saudi Vision 2030 emerged in a context shaped by long-standing debates about rentier-state dependency, oil-based political economy, diversification, and state-led development. Classic rentier-state theory emphasized how oil revenues could reshape state-society relations by reducing taxation pressures and supporting allocation-based governance (Beblawi, 1987; Luciani, 1987; Mahdavy, 1970). Later work complicated this picture by showing that Gulf states are not static rentier systems, but adaptive institutional formations that combine distribution, investment, bureaucratic reform, and global positioning (Gray, 2011; Hertog, 2010; Ulrichsen, 2016). Saudi Vision 2030 can be conceptualized within this broader literature as an attempt to reconfigure the relationship between state, economy, citizens, investment, and future opportunity.

The official Vision 2030 document frames transformation through the language of national strength, ambition, opportunity, investment, government effectiveness, and social vitality (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Its annual reports then translate that broad narrative into performance, progress, and institutional accountability (Saudi Vision 2030, 2025). From a discourse perspective, this matters because the Vision does not merely define policy objectives. It names a future national subject: a society that is vibrant, an economy that is thriving, and a nation that is ambitious. The political economy of diversification therefore becomes narratively linked to identity, agency, and institutional capacity.

Economic studies of Vision 2030 often focus on targets, diversification, labor markets, private-sector development, sovereign investment, fiscal reform, and mega-projects. Such studies are essential because transformation is materially constrained by finance, human capital, infrastructure, governance, and global market conditions (Hvidt, 2013; Kinninmont, 2017; Krane, 2019). However, policy discourse also performs work that economic indicators alone cannot capture. It explains why transformation matters, who should support it, how uncertainty should be interpreted, and how change is connected to national continuity rather than social rupture. This is the space in which discourse analysis can contribute.

5.2 Future Economies and Institutional Imaginaries

The concept of future economies belongs to a wider field of future-oriented institutional imaginaries. Futures are not simply predictions of what will happen; they are cultural and political resources that organize present action (Adam & Groves, 2007; Appadurai, 2013; Beckert, 2016; Mische, 2009). Institutions invest in the future not only through infrastructure and finance, but also through language: forecasts, scenarios, visions, strategies, pathways, targets, and promises. These discursive genres make future action plausible and socially coordinate expectations.

The sociology of expectations has shown that projected futures can influence present behavior by

attracting investment, organizing research, legitimizing policy decisions, and shaping stakeholder alignment (Borup et al., 2006; Brown & Michael, 2003). Sociotechnical imaginaries extend this insight by showing how collective visions of science and technology are tied to ideas of social order and national possibility (Jasanoff, 2015; Jasanoff & Kim, 2009). Future economies in Saudi institutional discourse can therefore be studied as economic imaginaries: selective representations of what the economy should become, what technologies should matter, what risks should be managed, and what citizens and institutions should do.

This does not mean that future-economy discourse is artificial or merely rhetorical. All institutional futures require narration. Even the most material projects must be explained, justified, sequenced, and evaluated. The question is not whether discourse is present, but how it works. Does the discourse frame future economies as technological inevitability, national destiny, market opportunity, social responsibility, or risk management? Does it position citizens as beneficiaries, workers, entrepreneurs, innovators, or co-producers? Does it explain uncertainty transparently, or does it convert risk into optimistic slogans? These are discourse-historical questions.

5.3 Discourse and Policy Legitimation

Policy discourse constructs problems, solutions, actors, responsibilities, and futures (Bacchi, 2009; Fischer, 2003; Stone, 2012). It does not simply communicate policy after experts have made decisions; it participates in making policy intelligible. Critical discourse analysis has long shown that institutional language shapes social meaning by naturalizing certain assumptions, foregrounding certain actors, and backgrounding others (Fairclough, 1992, 2003; van Dijk, 1993; van Leeuwen, 2008). In policy communication, such processes are central to legitimation. Van Leeuwen (2007) identifies several modes of legitimation, including authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis. Future-economy discourse often uses these modes simultaneously. It may authorize transformation through national leadership and institutional strategy, morally evaluate it as responsibility toward future generations, rationalize it through competitiveness and diversification, and narrate it through stories of national ambition and renewal. These processes are not unique to Saudi Arabia, but the Saudi case is distinctive because economic transformation is linked to national identity, state modernization, global positioning, and post-oil risk management in one highly visible policy narrative.

Discursive institutionalism is also relevant because it emphasizes the role of ideas and discourse in institutional change (Schmidt, 2008, 2010). Transformation becomes durable when it is not only administratively implemented but also communicatively coordinated. A future economy must be explained to ministries, investors, workers, universities, local communities, and international audiences. Discourse therefore becomes part of institutional capacity: it aligns actors, clarifies priorities, reduces ambiguity, and produces consent.

5.4 Identity and National Transformation

National transformation discourse often depends on identity work. Anderson (1983) famously described nations as imagined communities, not because they are unreal, but because they are socially constructed through shared narratives, symbols, and forms of communication. Hall (1997) and Taylor (2004) similarly show that identity and social imaginaries shape how people understand collective life. In the context of future economies, identity discourse answers a basic question: who are we becoming as the economy changes?

Saudi Vision 2030 discourse frequently connects future-oriented modernization to national continuity. It does not present transformation as a departure from Saudi identity, but as a reactivation of national potential. This is significant because modernization discourses can create anxiety when they appear to oppose tradition, religion, heritage, or social continuity. Identity discourse can reduce such tension by presenting the future economy as both new and nationally rooted.

Identity also concerns social roles. Citizens may be positioned as workers, entrepreneurs, innovators, learners, consumers, tourists, volunteers, or participants in an ambitious nation. Youth may be positioned as carriers of future skill and energy. Institutions may be positioned as enablers. Global partners may be positioned as collaborators in investment, knowledge transfer, or competitiveness. DHA is useful here because nomination strategies show how actors are named, while predication strategies show what qualities are attached to them.

5.5 Modernity and Innovation Discourse

Modernity in future-economy discourse is rarely a single idea. It may appear as technological modernization,

institutional modernization, urban modernization, cultural modernization, environmental modernization, or educational modernization. The language of innovation, entrepreneurship, digital transformation, smart cities, artificial intelligence, sustainability, logistics, tourism, entertainment, and investment constructs a modernity that is simultaneously economic and cultural.

Giddens (1990, 1991) describes modernity as a condition of reflexive change, institutional reorganization, and future-oriented self-formation. Bauman (2000) emphasizes mobility, uncertainty, and liquidity in late-modern life. Latour (1993) challenges simple narratives of modernity by showing how the modern world depends on hybrid relations between nature, technology, society, and politics. These theoretical approaches help us understand why future-economy discourse must continually narrate modernity as both desirable and manageable.

In Saudi institutional discourse, modernity is often framed through capability. It is not merely a foreign model to be copied; it is represented as a national capacity to compete, innovate, invest, and produce. This matters because future economies require more than adopting technologies. They require institutional narratives that make technology meaningful, align skills with labor markets, and make new sectors appear coherent within national strategy.

5.6 Risk and Uncertainty Discourse

Risk is central to future-economy discourse because the future is never fully knowable. Beck (1992) argues that modern societies are increasingly organized around the identification, distribution, and management of risks. Giddens (1991) similarly links modernity to reflexive risk management. Douglas (1992) emphasizes that risk is culturally and morally organized. In policy discourse, risks are not simply technical facts; they are framed, prioritized, and assigned to actors.

In Saudi future-economy discourse, several risks can be named or implied: dependency on oil revenues, exposure to global economic volatility, technological lag, youth employability pressure, environmental constraints, weak productivity, and global competition for investment. The discourse of transformation manages these risks by turning them into reasons for action. Oil dependency becomes a topos of necessity. Global competition becomes a topos of competitiveness. Technological change becomes a topos of modernization. Youth employability becomes a topos of responsibility. Sustainability becomes a topos of future protection.

Risk discourse can legitimize action, but it can also hide complexity if uncertainty is oversimplified. A careful discourse-historical analysis must therefore ask how risks are represented. Are they named explicitly? Are they transformed into opportunities? Are they attached to responsible institutions? Are citizens invited into risk management, or only positioned as beneficiaries of policy? These questions matter because risk language can produce trust when it is transparent, but can produce skepticism when it becomes vague or purely promotional.

6. Theoretical Framework

This article is grounded in the Discourse-Historical Approach, supported by sociotechnical imaginaries and cultural political economy. DHA provides the main analytical grammar. It treats discourse as historically situated language use and examines how texts draw on past narratives, institutional contexts, intertextual references, and social power relations (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). DHA is especially useful for national transformation discourse because such discourse almost always links past, present, and future. It explains what has been inherited, what must be changed, and what should be achieved.

The framework uses five DHA strategies. Nomination examines how social actors, institutions, sectors, risks, and futures are named. Predication examines what qualities are attributed to those actors or objects. Argumentation examines the topoi or warrants through which action is justified. Perspectivization examines whose viewpoint is foregrounded and how institutional authority is positioned. Intensification and mitigation examine how certainty, urgency, scale, promise, and risk are strengthened or softened.

To connect DHA with future-economy discourse, the article adopts the concept of imaginaries. Sociotechnical imaginaries refer to collectively held visions of desirable futures that are connected to science, technology, social order, and institutional legitimacy (Jasanoff, 2015; Jasanoff & Kim, 2009). Economic imaginaries refer to selective interpretations of the economy that organize what is visible, possible, and actionable (Jessop, 2004; Sum & Jessop, 2013). Future economies in Saudi institutional discourse can be understood

as both sociotechnical and economic imaginaries: they imagine technology, investment, labor, culture, state capacity, and national identity together.

The framework therefore defines future-economy discourse as a historically situated institutional narrative that legitimizes economic transformation by connecting identity, modernity, and risk. Identity anchors the future in national continuity and social participation. Modernity frames transformation as innovation, competitiveness, knowledge economy, sustainability, and institutional renewal. Risk makes transformation urgent by presenting inaction, oil dependency, global competition, and technological lag as challenges requiring coordinated action.

This theoretical combination avoids two common reductions. The first reduction treats Vision 2030 discourse as simple promotional language. The second treats economic transformation as purely material and therefore outside discourse. The article rejects both. Institutional discourse can be promotional, but it can also be strategic, interpretive, accountable, and historically meaningful. Economic transformation is material, but its legitimacy and social uptake are mediated through language.

7. Methodology

This article uses a conceptual discourse-historical methodology supported by a proposed corpus-assisted design. It does not claim to report a finalized empirical corpus analysis. No complete dataset was provided for coding, and therefore no frequency counts, keyword lists, concordance results, or quantified patterns are reported as findings. Instead, the article develops a rigorous research design and analytical model that can be applied to a curated corpus in future empirical work.

The proposed corpus would include official Saudi institutional texts that explicitly construct economic transformation and future-oriented sectors. A suitable corpus would include the original Saudi Vision 2030 document, Vision 2030 annual reports, National Transformation Program documents, Public Investment Fund reports and strategic communication, Ministry of Economy and Planning materials, and selected official project texts related to NEOM, Qiddiya, Red Sea Global, Diriyah, digital transformation, tourism, sustainability, investment, and innovation. Arabic and English versions should be collected when available because translation itself may shape how future-economy discourse is represented for domestic and international audiences.

The proposed inclusion criteria are as follows. First, documents must be official or institutionally authorized. Second, they must refer to economic transformation, diversification, innovation, investment, technology, sustainability, or national future. Third, they must be publicly accessible and dateable. Fourth, they must contain narrative, explanatory, or evaluative language rather than only numerical tables. Exclusion criteria would include unofficial commentary, social media posts not issued by institutional accounts, journalistic paraphrases, and documents whose relationship to future economies is only incidental.

The analytical procedure would proceed in five stages. Stage one would involve corpus construction and metadata documentation: institution, date, document type, language, intended audience, and strategic theme. Stage two would use light corpus techniques, such as keywording, collocation, and concordance, to identify recurrent expressions related to future, economy, ambition, investment, innovation, competitiveness, sustainability, risk, youth, citizen, global, opportunity, and transformation. Stage three would involve DHA coding of nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification or mitigation. Stage four would map codes onto the Identity-Modernity-Risk model. Stage five would interpret the findings historically and intertextually in relation to Vision 2030 and related transformation programs.

Validation in such a qualitative design would not depend on statistical representativeness alone. It would require transparent corpus criteria, consistent coding definitions, peer review of sample coding, comparison across document types, and attention to deviant cases. Where possible, bilingual comparison would help identify whether English-language institutional texts emphasize global investment and competitiveness more strongly than Arabic texts, or whether Arabic texts foreground national identity, continuity, and participation differently. Such comparative work would strengthen the discourse-historical account without reducing it to word counts.

Table 1. Proposed Corpus-Assisted DHA Procedure

Stage	Procedure	Purpose
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1. Corpus documentation	Record institution, date, genre, language, audience and strategic theme.	Establish transparency and historical context.
2. Corpus-assisted orientation	Use keywording, collocation and concordance to identify recurrent future-economy language.	Guide qualitative interpretation without replacing it.
3. DHA coding	Code nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization and intensification/mitigation.	Connect linguistic features to discourse strategies.
4. Narrative mapping	Map coded data onto identity, modernity and risk dimensions.	Identify how future economies are narrated.
5. Historical interpretation	Relate findings to Vision 2030, national transformation and broader policy context.	Avoid decontextualized textual analysis.

8. Analytical Framework: The Identity-Modernity-Risk Narrative Model

The Identity-Modernity-Risk Narrative Model is designed to analyze how future economies are made meaningful in institutional discourse. It is not a mechanical coding scheme. Rather, it is a structured interpretive framework that links linguistic forms to historical and institutional functions.

The identity dimension asks who is being named as the subject of the future economy. Relevant actors may include the nation, citizens, youth, entrepreneurs, investors, ministries, public institutions, private-sector partners, global companies, tourists, students, workers, women, families, and future generations. The analysis examines nomination strategies such as our nation, our people, Saudi youth, investors, global partners, the private sector, and government entities. It also examines predication strategies: are these actors described as ambitious, capable, empowered, competitive, innovative, responsible, or ready?

The modernity dimension asks how progress is represented. It examines vocabulary related to technology, innovation, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, smart infrastructure, sustainability, tourism, entertainment, logistics, education, and knowledge economy. It also asks whether modernity is represented as a break from the past or as a continuation of national potential. This distinction matters because institutional discourse often has to modernize without appearing to abandon historical identity.

The risk dimension asks what makes transformation necessary. It looks for explicit or implicit references to oil dependency, uncertainty, global competition, demographic pressure, skills gaps, fiscal sustainability, environmental challenges, and technological disruption. It also examines mitigation strategies. A risk may be intensified to justify action, or mitigated to maintain confidence. For example, a text may present global competition as urgent but manageable through investment and national capability.

The model also identifies argumentative topoi. A topos is a recurring argumentative warrant that links a reason to a conclusion (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The topos of necessity argues that transformation must happen because the old model is insufficient. The topos of opportunity argues that new sectors must be developed because they unlock national potential. The topos of competitiveness argues that the Kingdom must transform in order to compete globally. The topos of responsibility argues that institutions and citizens owe future generations a more diversified and sustainable economy. The topos of continuity argues that the future economy is not alien to national identity but grows from it. The topos of risk avoidance argues that inaction would expose the country to avoidable economic or technological vulnerability.

Table 2. Identity-Modernity-Risk Narrative Model

Dimension	Core analytical question	Likely discourse strategies	Possible topoi
Identity	Who is constructed as the subject of future economies?	Naming citizens, youth, institutions, investors and partners; attributing capability, ambition and responsibility.	Continuity; participation; responsibility; empowerment.
Modernity	How is progress framed and made desirable?	Innovation, digital transformation, knowledge economy, sustainability, entrepreneurship, investment and competitiveness.	Modernization; opportunity; competitiveness; technological progress.
Risk	What makes transformation necessary and urgent?	Dependency, uncertainty, global competition, technological change, skills gaps and sustainability challenges.	Risk avoidance; necessity; resilience; preparedness.
Integration	How do identity, modernity and risk form one narrative?	Connecting national continuity with innovation and managed uncertainty.	Credibility; legitimacy; social consent.

9. Analysis and Discussion

9.1 Constructing the National Subject of Future Economies

Future-economy discourse does not merely identify sectors. It constructs social actors. In Vision 2030 and related institutional communication, the national subject is often distributed across several figures: the ambitious nation, empowered citizens, capable youth, responsible government, dynamic private sector, and attractive investment destination. These figures allow the discourse to represent transformation as collective rather than purely technocratic.

The identity work is important because economic transformation can otherwise appear abstract. Terms such as diversification, investment, and productivity may not automatically generate social attachment. When future-economy discourse connects them to citizens, youth, families, entrepreneurs, and national ambition, it gives them human and historical meaning. The future economy becomes not only a set of sectors, but a collective project in which the nation recognizes itself.

From a DHA perspective, this is a nomination and predication process. Actors are named, and qualities are attached to them. Youth may be named as the energy of the future and predicated as creative, skilled, and globally competitive. Institutions may be named as enablers and predicated as efficient, transparent, and accountable. The private sector may be nominated as a partner and predicated as innovative and growth-generating. Such language does not simply describe actors; it positions them within a transformation narrative. Identity discourse also manages continuity. The transition from an oil-centered economy to future economies could be interpreted as rupture if it were framed only as replacement. Instead, institutional discourse often presents transformation as the realization of existing national potential. The future is narrated as something that belongs to the Kingdom because of its history, geography, religious and cultural significance, youth population, investment capacity, and strategic location. This type of argument matters because it makes modernity appear rooted rather than imported.

9.2 Modernity as Institutional Promise

The modernity dimension of future-economy discourse is visible in the repeated association of economic transformation with innovation, technology, digitalization, entrepreneurship, smart infrastructure, tourism, culture, sustainability, and global competitiveness. These terms are not neutral labels. They frame the future economy as a promise of institutional capability and national renewal.

Modernity here is not merely Westernization or imitation. In the discourse of Vision 2030, modernity is often represented as selective capability: the ability to use technology, invest strategically, create jobs, develop knowledge sectors, improve quality of life, and attract global participation while maintaining national identity.

This form of modernity is institutionally mediated. It is produced through programs, reports, performance indicators, investment strategies, and project narratives.

The promise of modernity has at least three components. The first is technological. Future economies are associated with artificial intelligence, digital government, data, smart cities, renewable energy, advanced industries, and innovation ecosystems. The second is institutional. Modernity is represented through governance, accountability, efficiency, public-sector transformation, and measurable progress. The third is social. The discourse suggests that citizens should experience transformation through employment, education, entrepreneurship, tourism, cultural participation, and quality of life.

A discourse-historical analysis should ask how these forms of modernity are connected. Are technology and investment presented as ends in themselves, or as instruments of national wellbeing? Are citizens constructed as users of modern systems, or as participants in shaping them? Are global partners positioned as authorities, collaborators, investors, or witnesses to national progress? Such questions reveal the social logic beneath economic vocabulary.

9.3 Risk as a Legitimizing Structure

Future economies become persuasive partly because they are linked to risk. This risk is not always expressed in negative language. Sometimes it appears as urgency, competition, changing global conditions, skills requirements, or the need for sustainability. Risk discourse turns transformation into a necessity rather than an optional preference.

The most visible risk is oil dependency. Rentier-state scholarship has long argued that oil revenues can shape state structures, labor markets, social expectations, and fiscal policy (Beblawi, 1987; Luciani, 1987; Ross, 2012). In Vision 2030 discourse, diversification addresses this risk not only economically but narratively. The future economy is presented as a way to reduce vulnerability and create wider sources of national strength.

Another risk concerns global competition. Future economies are often framed against a global field in which countries compete for investment, technology, tourism, talent, and innovation. This produces a topos of competitiveness: if the Kingdom is to occupy a leading position, it must transform institutions, sectors, skills, and infrastructure. The risk is not only falling behind economically, but losing future relevance.

A third risk concerns social adaptation. New economic sectors require new skills, new patterns of work, new forms of education, and new cultural participation. Institutional discourse must therefore manage the social meaning of change. It needs to make transformation appear empowering rather than threatening. This is where identity and modernity interact with risk. Citizens are not simply told that the future is risky; they are positioned as capable participants in managing and benefiting from transformation.

9.4 Argumentative Topoi in Future-Economy Discourse

The topos of necessity is central. It argues that transformation is required because the old economic model is no longer sufficient for the future. This topos often works through references to diversification, sustainability, and changing global conditions. It does not necessarily present the past negatively; rather, it constructs the future as requiring additional capacities.

The topos of opportunity is equally important. It shifts the discourse from defensive adaptation to proactive ambition. Future economies are not only responses to risk; they are openings for new sectors, jobs, investment, tourism, innovation, and global positioning. This topos allows the discourse to produce hope and agency.

The topos of responsibility connects economic transformation to moral and civic duty. Institutions are responsible for effective governance. Citizens are responsible for participation and skill development. Investors are responsible for contributing to growth. Government is responsible for enabling opportunity. This topos transforms policy into an ethical narrative.

The topos of national continuity helps reduce the tension between modernity and identity. It argues that the future economy is compatible with Saudi identity because it draws on national strengths, geographic location, cultural heritage, religious significance, and human capacity. In this way, modernity is not represented as cultural displacement but as historically grounded advancement.

The topos of risk avoidance argues that failure to transform would carry costs: continued dependency,

missed opportunities, lower competitiveness, skills mismatch, or exposure to global uncertainty. This topic is powerful because it makes action appear both rational and urgent. Yet it must be balanced with credible evidence. If risk discourse is too vague, it can become a general rhetoric of urgency. If it is too dramatic, it can produce anxiety. Effective institutional communication must therefore combine risk awareness with transparent pathways for action.

9.5 Narrative Synthesis

The three dimensions work together. Identity makes the future economy nationally acceptable. Modernity makes it desirable. Risk makes it urgent. None of these dimensions is sufficient alone. Identity without modernity may produce continuity without transformation. Modernity without identity may produce novelty without social anchoring. Risk without identity and modernity may produce fear without agency. Their integration explains why future-economy discourse is powerful.

This synthesis also explains why a discourse-historical approach is useful. Future-economy discourse is historically layered. It speaks to earlier oil-based development, current transformation, and imagined national futures. It draws on old narratives of national strength and new narratives of technological progress. It manages the risk of change by locating transformation within institutional planning and national continuity. The future economy is therefore not a single phrase; it is a narrative structure.

The article's central argument is that Saudi future-economy discourse operates as a legitimacy-making system. It organizes social meaning by linking who the nation is, what kind of modernity it seeks, and what risks transformation is designed to manage. This does not mean that discourse alone produces economic transformation. Rather, discourse is one of the conditions through which transformation becomes intelligible, acceptable, and governable.

10. Implications

The first implication concerns public communication. If future-economy discourse is central to institutional legitimacy, then clarity matters. Terms such as innovation, diversification, competitiveness, sustainability, and opportunity should be explained in ways that connect policy language to lived experience. Vague future language can inspire, but it can also obscure. Institutions should therefore communicate not only ambition but also pathways, responsibilities, timelines, risks, and evidence.

The second implication concerns stakeholder inclusion. Future-economy discourse should not position citizens only as recipients of transformation. It should show how different groups participate: students through education and skills, workers through reskilling, entrepreneurs through innovation, investors through partnership, universities through knowledge production, and communities through cultural and social participation. Such inclusive framing strengthens social consent because it gives people a visible place in the future.

The third implication concerns risk communication. Risks should be neither hidden nor exaggerated. Transparent risk discourse can build credibility when it identifies challenges and explains how they are being managed. This is especially important for large-scale transformation programs, where delays, adjustments, and changing global conditions are normal. A strong institutional narrative does not need to deny uncertainty; it needs to make uncertainty governable.

The fourth implication concerns research. The Identity-Modernity-Risk Narrative Model can be applied to official Arabic and English texts, media coverage, speeches, project websites, annual reports, university strategies, investment materials, and public consultation documents. It can also support comparative research across Gulf states by examining how different countries narrate post-oil futures, technological modernity, and national identity.

The fifth implication concerns translation and multilingual communication. Vision 2030 and future-economy texts often circulate in both Arabic and English. The English text may target investors, global partners, tourists, and international media, while Arabic texts may address citizens and domestic institutions more directly. Future research should examine whether these languages construct identity, modernity, and risk differently. Such comparison would enrich both discourse studies and translation studies.

11. Proposed Empirical Application

The model developed in this article can be operationalized in a future empirical study through a carefully bounded corpus. A first stage could focus on high-level national documents, including the original Vision 2030 text, annual progress reports, National Transformation Program materials, and selected Public Investment Fund communication. This stage would examine how national future-economy discourse is organized at the level of broad policy vision. A second stage could add project-level texts from official institutional websites and annual reports linked to tourism, smart urbanism, renewable energy, entertainment, logistics, culture, and digital transformation. This would allow comparison between the language of national strategy and the language of sector-specific implementation.

An empirical study could begin with a keyword and collocation map. Terms such as future, opportunity, ambition, investment, citizen, youth, innovation, sustainability, diversification, competitiveness, risk, resilience, transformation, and global could be examined in Arabic and English texts. The goal would not be to let frequency replace interpretation. Rather, frequency would help identify where to look more closely. Concordance analysis would show how these terms co-occur with actors, values, time expressions, and institutional responsibilities. For example, if youth frequently appears near skills, ambition, employment, or innovation, this would indicate a specific identity construction. If risk appears near sustainability, oil, global markets, or competitiveness, this would indicate a specific risk narrative.

The qualitative stage would then apply DHA coding. Each selected passage would be coded for nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification or mitigation. Nomination would identify social actors and institutional objects. Predication would identify the qualities attributed to those actors and objects. Argumentation would identify the topoi through which transformation is justified. Perspectivization would examine the standpoint of the institution and the imagined addressee. Intensification and mitigation would examine how urgency, confidence, uncertainty, and achievement are scaled.

A useful empirical design would also compare documents across time. Vision discourse in 2016 may emphasize ambition and foundational transformation, while later annual reports may emphasize progress, delivery, recalibration, performance indicators, and institutional accountability. Such temporal comparison would allow researchers to observe how a national future is stabilized, adjusted, and re-narrated. This matters because future-economy discourse is not static. It changes as projects advance, targets are revised, global economic conditions shift, and institutional priorities evolve.

Finally, the empirical application should include deviant or tension-bearing cases. A convincing discourse analysis should not search only for positive or promotional language. It should also examine how delay, adjustment, risk, recalibration, cost, capacity, or uncertainty are represented. These moments are analytically valuable because they reveal how institutions maintain credibility when the future is not linear. By incorporating such cases, future research can avoid treating Vision 2030 discourse as a simple success narrative and instead analyze it as a complex institutional effort to narrate ambition, govern uncertainty, and sustain public legitimacy.

12. Limitations

This article has clear limitations. It is a conceptual and methodological article based on a research proposal, not a completed empirical corpus study. It develops a theoretical argument and analytical model, but it does not present quantified corpus results, coded excerpts from a finalized dataset, or statistical comparisons across institutions. This choice is deliberate: reporting invented corpus findings would be methodologically irresponsible.

A second limitation is that the article focuses primarily on official institutional discourse. Official texts are important because they organize policy legitimacy, but they do not represent public reception. Citizens, workers, investors, students, journalists, and local communities may interpret future-economy discourse in different ways. Future research should therefore compare institutional texts with media discourse, interviews, focus groups, social media comments, and public deliberation.

A third limitation concerns language. Arabic and English versions of institutional texts may differ in audience, tone, and emphasis. A full bilingual study would need to examine both versions systematically. It should not assume that English translations simply reproduce Arabic discourse. Translation may shift agency, modality, risk framing, or investment vocabulary.

A fourth limitation concerns scope. Saudi Vision 2030 discourse is extensive and constantly developing. No single article can analyze every project, program, report, and institutional message. Future empirical work should define a bounded corpus, record metadata, and justify inclusion and exclusion decisions.

Finally, the Identity-Modernity-Risk model is interpretive. It is designed to guide analysis, not to predetermine findings. Future researchers should test the model against actual data, revise categories where needed, and remain open to additional dimensions such as gender, environment, religion, regional development, or cultural heritage.

13. Conclusion

This article has developed a discourse-historical account of Saudi future-economy narratives. It began from the observation that future economies are often treated as self-evident policy objects, even though their meaning depends on institutional language. The article argued that Saudi institutional discourse constructs future economies through the interaction of identity, modernity, and risk. Identity anchors transformation in national continuity and civic participation. Modernity frames diversification, innovation, technology, sustainability, and competitiveness as desirable forms of progress. Risk legitimizes transformation by presenting dependency, inaction, uncertainty, and global competition as challenges requiring coordinated action.

The article contributes an Identity-Modernity-Risk Narrative Model that can be used in future corpus-assisted discourse-historical research. The model connects DHA strategies with future-oriented economic imaginaries and offers a practical framework for analyzing nomination, predication, argumentation, perspective, intensification, and mitigation in official transformation discourse. It also clarifies how argumentative topoi, such as necessity, opportunity, responsibility, competitiveness, continuity, and risk avoidance, can be used to study the legitimacy of future-economy narratives.

The central claim is carefully bounded. Discourse does not replace economics, institutions, or material policy implementation. However, economic transformation becomes socially meaningful through discourse. Institutional language tells audiences what the future economy is, why it matters, who belongs in it, what risks it addresses, and how it connects to national identity. For that reason, future-economy discourse deserves close scholarly attention.

Future research can build on this article by constructing a bilingual corpus of Vision 2030 and related institutional texts, applying keyword and concordance analysis, coding DHA strategies, and comparing the discourse of identity, modernity, and risk across institutions, time periods, and audiences. Such research would deepen understanding of Saudi Vision 2030 and contribute more broadly to the study of how states narrate economic futures in periods of transformation.

Funding

The author extends their appreciation to Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for funding this research work through the Project number (PSAU/2026/02/39607).

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