

## Media Framing of Technological Advancement and Human Rights to Saudi Arabia's NEOM Project

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines how *Asharq al-Awsat* and *ALQST* media framed the NEOM infrastructure project in Saudi Arabia. NEOM is a futuristic city project that is part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The project is designed to be the center of technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and economic development in the northwestern region of Saudi Arabia. It also explores the framing tools used and their impact on public perception and global outlook. This research uses a qualitative approach with Gamson and Modigliani's framing analysis. The results show that *Asharq al-Awsat* tends to frame the NEOM project as a form of technological progress and innovation that provides economic benefits. Meanwhile, *ALQST* highlights the negative impacts such as human rights violations and environmental damage. These framing differences affected public perception and political discourse regarding the project. This research expands the understanding of how the media frames large infrastructure projects in the Middle East region. In addition, it reveals the implications of framing for public perception and international policy regarding infrastructure projects and human rights.

**Keywords:** media framing, Middle East, public perception, NEOM Project

### INTRODUCTION

On October 24, 2017, the Saudi Arabian government led by Mohammed bin Salman announced an infrastructure project named NEOM that is designed as part of Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision. NEOM's infrastructure design promises to be a city of the future that will be a center of technological innovation and sustainability for the environment. The project covers an area of 26,500 square kilometers in northwestern Saudi Arabia and will include various zones. Among them are cognitive cities, industrial parks, and world-class tourist destinations (Farag 2018). The project aims to transform the Red Sea coastal area in northwestern Saudi Arabia into a futuristic smart city, where humanity can develop without compromising environmental sustainability (Farag 2018). NEOM project is open for investment by anyone. With investments reaching hundreds of billions of dollars, NEOM is expected to diversify Saudi Arabia's economy which has been dependent on oil (Yusuf and Abdulmohsen 2022).

The name NEOM consists of two parts. The first three letters are *NEO*, which is Greek for 'new', and 'M', which is Arabic for 'mostaqbal' which means 'future'. (Madakam 2020). Behind this naming is the Saudi government's grand ambitions regarding the future of the country and aspirations of transformation towards a new way of life. The project aims to empower people with advanced technology and an optimized environment to work and live (Alam 2021).

With this vision, NEOM is designed to be a magnet for the world's innovators and experts to gather and create innovative future solutions. In addition, NEOM will be equipped with high-tech infrastructure, including autonomous transportation systems and renewable energy that are expected to support sustainable living (Al-Otaibi 2021). The project not only focuses on economic and technological aspects, but also emphasizes the importance of environmental preservation and improves the quality of life of people living in the region.

The government of Saudi Arabia also hopes that this project will attract global investors, create new jobs, and promote sustainable economic growth for Saudi Arabia (Far and Azadeh 2023) .

However, despite things sounding relatively new and bright, the NEOM project elicited a various of reactions from various parties, both in favor and against (Kvasničková 2023). Many media outlets in Saudi Arabia have reported on the project in terms of its advantages and the future opportunities it could create, but some have also focused on the negative impacts and controversies that have arisen (Platonova 2023). In this case, the mass media has an important role in shaping public perception of NEOM. The media can frame news and information in a certain way so that it can influence how readers understand and assess an event (Zawawi et al. 2024). Therefore, framing analysis becomes a relevant tool to understand how the media presents the NEOM project to the public.

To understand how the media framed this project, the model of framing analysis from William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani (1989) is considered relevant. According to Gamson, framing is the process by which the media and other communicators construct social reality by selecting, highlighting, and interpreting certain information (Herdono et al. 2024). In the context of the NEOM project, this means that the media highlights certain elements such as economic benefits, social impacts, or controversies that may arise, and interprets the information in a way that can influence public perception. By analyzing how each of these elements is framed in the news text, it is possible to understand how the media shapes the narrative about the NEOM project and the implications of that narrative.

This research analyzes two online news sites, *Asharq al-Awsat* and *ALQST*. *Asharq al-Awsat* media is managed by the Saudi Research and Marketing Group, which contains various news supporting the NEOM project. Meanwhile *ALQST* media is an independent media that focuses on human rights violations in Saudi Arabia which contains news that criticizes NEOM project by highlighting negative impacts and human rights issues. *Asharq al-Awsat* media was chosen because it is one of the leading media that supports the Saudi Arabian government project and provides a pro perspective on NEOM project. Meanwhile, *ALQST* was chosen because it provides a critical view of this project, especially related to human rights issues. This choice, thus, provided a balance in the framing analysis.

Based on the above background, by using framing analysis model of Gamson and Modigliani, this study aimed to reveal how *Asharq al-Awsat* and *ALQST* news media frame NEOM project and what the devices are used for the framing. In particular, this research explores how a news frame can influence public perception and global views on NEOM infrastructure project in Saudi Arabia. The way *Asharq al-Awsat* and *ALQST* cover the project can also influence global views on issues related to development and human rights in the region. For example, *Asharq al-Awsat's* portrayal of NEOM project as a form of progress and innovation could potentially lead to support and optimism from the international community, while *ALQST's* media portrayal of the project as a human rights violation could potentially lead people to criticize and reject the project.

This research emphasizes the role of international mass media in shaping global views on regional conflicts. How the international mass media report and review conflicts, so that they can influence the views and responses of the international community, and influence the foreign policy of a country and

international organizations. Through framing analysis, this research seeks to understand how the mass media shapes narratives and public discourse regarding NEOM project and its impact on global perceptions and international policies related to development and human rights.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This research seeks to understand how the media frames large projects, such as NEOM in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the context of technology and human rights. Several previous studies utilizing Gamson and Modigliani's framing theory have been conducted to analyze how mass media shapes public perception of significant issues. The following are some studies relevant to this research.

Adzhani and Ginting (2018) conducted a framing analysis of the coverage regarding Anies Baswedan's speech in two news portals, *viva.co.id* and *detik.com*, which discussed the use of the term *pribumi* (indigenous). The purpose of this study was to understand how the media framed the use of this term. The results showed that both media outlets framed the term *pribumi* as an important and significant issue that the public should be aware of. In this context, framing was used to amplify public attention to the sensitive ethnic identity discourse, which could widely shape public opinion.

Furthermore, the study by Aldilal et al. (2020) examined how the media framed the arrival of Chinese workers in Southeast Sulawesi during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed to analyze the role of the media in shaping public opinion about this policy. The results indicated a difference in framing between media supporting the arrival of foreign workers, which was seen as part of particular interests, and media reflecting local communities' concerns about the increased risk of virus transmission. This study highlights how media framing can shape a narrative either in favor of or against a certain policy.

Meanwhile, Rahim et al. (2022) conducted research focusing on the portrayal of women in work-life articles on the Wolipop portal. The study aimed to examine how the media constructs the image of women in its reporting. The findings showed that Wolipop framed women as inspirational, hardworking figures who support gender equality. This media outlet utilized a 'good news' reporting model to present a positive image of women, promoting empowerment and providing motivation to the public. This indicates how media framing can shape narratives about women's roles in society in an inspiring way.

Based on the previous studies, this research shares similarities and differences. The similarity lies in the theory used, namely the framing model by Gamson and Modigliani. However, the difference lies in the subject matter. The topic of Saudi Arabia's NEOM infrastructure project has not yet been the object of framing studies. NEOM project is relevant to be analyzed using this framing theory because it can provide insight into how the media shapes public perception of large-scale projects. Additionally, this study can reveal how the media portrays the benefits, controversies, and challenges associated with the project. Thus, this research not only fills a gap in the existing literature but also offers insights into how media frames large infrastructure projects.

## The Framing Concept of Gamson and Modigliani

According to Eriyanto (2002), in the framing theory model of Gamson and Modigliani, there are two main devices used to translate the central idea in a news text namely Framing device and Reasoning device. The Framing device is directly related to the core idea to be conveyed. This device highlights specific aspects of the idea through word choice, sentence structure, visuals such as images, and the use of metaphors. The framing device consists of five components: metaphors,

catchphrases, exemplars, depictions, and visual images. Meanwhile, the reasoning device serves to build the logical structure of the argument to support the claims. It consists of three components: roots, appeals to principle, and consequences. Through the reasoning device, the idea presented appears rational, acceptable, and convincing. The following is a breakdown of these components in tabular form to facilitate understanding.

*Table 1: Framing Concept of Gamson and Modigliani (1989)*

Device	Component	Description
Framing	Metaphors	Metaphors are used to convey ideas or concepts, making it easier for readers to understand the message through familiar analogies.
	Catchphrases	A term or slogan that is repeated in the news to emphasize a particular message or theme.
	Exemplaar	Specific examples used to reinforce the message being conveyed.
	Depiction	Detailed descriptions or narratives that broadly explain the context.
	Visual Images	Visual images in the form of pictures or graphics to strengthen the delivery of messages in the news.
Reasoning	Roots	The cause or origin of the issue being discussed in a narrative or news story.
	Appeals to principle	Arguments made based on larger values, principles, or ethics.
	Consequences	The expected impact or result of an action, policy, or event

#### RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative research design with the framing analysis approach of William A. Gamson & Andre Modigliani (1989). This approach was chosen because it is relevant to reveal the broader context and meaning behind media coverage, as well as flexible in accommodating data. Meanwhile, framing analysis helps researchers to see how the media highlights and interprets information to shape certain social realities (Eriyanto 2002).

The data in this study are news texts published by two online media, namely *Asharq al-Awsat* and *ALQST*. The news retrieval period is from January to July 2023. *Asharq al-Awsat* was chosen because it is the leading media in Saudi Arabia that often supports government policies, including NEOM project. Meanwhile, *ALQST* is an independent media that focuses on human rights issues in Saudi Arabia and often criticizes government policies.

Data collection was conducted through the documentation method from both media by collecting news texts related to NEOM project. News texts were selected based on the specific discussion of NEOM project and covered technological, economic, environmental, and human rights aspects. News texts that met the inclusion criteria were saved in digital format and given identification codes to maintain order and facilitate further analysis.

In analyzing the data, this study used the Miles and Huberman (1992) approach which includes three main steps. The first step is data reduction, this was the stage where the researchers simplified and summarized information from the news. In this process, the researchers also coded the data to find and identify

key patterns relevant to the research. After the data had been reduced, the next stage is data presentation, where the summarized data were presented in the form of narratives, tables and visuals. The researcher explained direct quotes from the data findings and identifies them based on the framing elements. The last stage is conclusion drawing. At this stage, the researchers analyzed the results obtained to identify important findings that support the research objectives. In addition, he researchers also tried to ensure that the results obtained have relevance to the context of literary research and provide additional insights into the topic under study.

## THE FRAMING OF NEOM PROJECT

Framing analysis allows the researchers to discover how Saudi Arabia's NEOM infrastructure project is perceived in the news texts chosen as the object of research. As explained, NEOM is an ambitious project initiated by the Saudi Arabian government, and is often portrayed in various ways by the local media. In this section, it will be explained how information is conveyed to readers through the image of NEOM built in the form of news texts about the project, especially in the category of infrastructure development and sustainability.

The media plays an important role in emphasizing certain aspects of the project, which in turn affects the way readers understand and assess the project (Dwiyanti and Putri 2023). If the media accentuates the positives, NEOM project may be viewed as a favourable breakthrough for Saudi Arabia. Conversely, if certain aspects are highlighted negatively, the public may view the project more critically. The following analysis reveals the form of media framing in shaping public opinion about NEOM project.

### In *Asharq Al-Awsat* Media

*Asharq al-Awsat* is a newspaper founded by Saudi human rights defenders in 2014. This media has a close relationship with Saudi Arabian government, both in terms of ownership and editorial orientation. The newspaper is owned by Saudi Research and Marketing Group (SRMG), a major media company affiliated with the Saudi monarchy. *Asharq al-Awsat* is widely recognized as one of the media that often reflects the views and policies of Saudian government. This makes the media an important source of information on regional and international issues from Saudi's perspectives.

As a media with global distribution, *Asharq al-Awsat* has a significant influence in shaping Arabic and international public opinion regarding various political, economic and social issues. In this study, the news texts used as the data were taken from *Asharq al-Awsat* publication between July 1, 2023 and July 20, 2023. The collection of news provides an overview of the current and important issues covered by this media during this period.

«نيوم»... حضارة محورها الإنسان (1)

NEOM: Human-Centered Civilization  
(*Asharq al-Awsat* 1/7/2023)

News text (1) above discusses the NEOM project which is part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Vision 2030 is a national transformation initiative led by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The project focuses on developing futuristic cities that focus on sustainability. Through this project, the Saudi government hopes that NEOM will become a global model for future cities that are in harmony with nature. In this news text framing of NEOM, the prominence of the news is focused on the attractiveness of an idealized life (Amin 2023).

Table 2: Framing and Reasoning Devices in the News Text (1):

«نيوم» ... حضارة محورها الإنسان

Framing Device	Reasoning Device
<b>Metaphors:</b> المدينة العالمية على ساحل البحر الأحمر بوصفه ضرباً من ضروب التفكير خارج الصندوق A global city on the Red Sea coast as a form of out-of-the-box thinking <b>Catchphrases:</b> مدن المستقبل Cities of the future رؤية 2030 Vision 2030 <b>Exemplaar:</b> التطورات الديموغرافية السعودية Saudi demographic development <b>Depiction:</b> مدينة تقدم حلولاً جديدة ومبتكرة A city offering new and innovative solutions <b>Visual Images:</b> None	<b>Roots:</b> الزيادة السكانية المتصاعدة Growing population increase  <b>Appeals to Principle:</b> تحقيق الاستدامة المثالية للعيش بتناغم مع الطبيعة Achieving ideal sustainability to live in harmony with nature  <b>Consequences:</b> تحويل الأحلام إلى حقائق Turning dreams into reality

In *Asharq al-Awsat's* view, the NEOM project is described with the phrase (out-of-the-box thinking). This gives the impression that the creation of such infrastructure is a form of innovation and creativity. *Asharq al-Awsat* media also portrayed NEOM as a representation of a future city in line with Saudi Arabia's vision 2030 (Amin 2023). Vision 2030 is positioned as a catchy and memorable slogan. The slogan is in line with Saudi Arabia's grand goals that are channeled through NEOM project.

In *Asharq al-Awsat's* view, NEOM is a clear example of demographic development in Saudi Arabia (Amin 2023). The media sees NEOM as an example of an innovative solution that is expected to provide solutions to various development problems, especially the current development problem, that is the rapid population growth in the country. Through this news text, NEOM is promoted as a sustainable concept that will make anyone's dream come true with all its ideals.

محمد بن سلمان: «ذا لاين» ليست مجرد مدينة... إنها قطعة فنية للحالمين (2)

*Mohammed bin Salman: 'The Line' Is Not Just a City, It's a Work of Art for Dreamers.*


(*Asharq al-Awsat* 10/7/2023)

News text (2) discusses Prince Mohammed bin Salman's statement regarding 'The Line' project within NEOM. 'The Line' project is described as a futuristic linear city that offers innovative solutions to modern urban problems. The city is designed without roads, cars or pollution, utilizing advanced technology to create a living environment in harmony with nature. In this news text, the prominence focuses on the appeal of technological innovation and

environmental benefits (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2023), as well as the technological advantages and environmental benefits that can be achieved through the project.

Table 3: Framing and Reasoning Devices in the News Text (2):

محمد بن سلمان: «ذا لاين» ليست مجرد مدينة... إنها قطعة فنية للحالمين

Framing Device	Reasoning Device
<p><i>Metaphors:</i></p> <p>بأكملها قطعة فنية</p> <p>Whole artwork (The Line is called a 'whole artwork' because it combines art and practical function in addressing the population surge in Saudi Arabia).</p> <p><i>Catchphrases:</i></p> <p>صناعة حضارة جديدة</p> <p>Creating a new civilization. من أجل كوكب أفضل</p> <p>For a better planet.</p> <p><i>Exemplaar:</i></p> <p>ن يوم هي مكان للحالمين بغد أفضل</p> <p>NEOM is a place for those who dream of a better tomorrow.</p> <p><i>Depiction:</i></p> <p>تمتلك طبيعة متنوعة بين جبال وأودية وشواطئ وجزر وواحات</p> <p>It has a diverse nature of mountains, valleys, beaches, islands and oases.</p> <p><i>Visual Images:</i></p>  <p>The appearance of Prince Mohammed bin Salman during the announcement of 'The Line' project in the city of 'NEOM'</p>	<p><i>Roots:</i></p> <p>النمو السكاني في السعودية سيتضاعف من 33 مليوناً إلى نحو 50 أو 55 مليون نسمة في 2030</p> <p>Population growth in Saudi Arabia will double from 33 million to around 50 to 55 million people by 2030.</p> <p><i>Appeals to Principle:</i></p> <p>إطار التطلعات الطموحة لرؤية 2030</p> <p>Within the ambitious framework of Vision 2030.</p> <p><i>Consequences:</i></p> <p>المشروع يجني المال، ويستوعب الطلب الذي نتوقعه في المملكة، ويخلق طريقة جديدة لبناء المدن وطريقة جديدة للعيش</p> <p>The project makes money, meets the demand we expect in the kingdom, and creates a new way to build cities and a new way to live.</p>

The framing analysis of NEOM project in this news text describes 'The Line' as one of the infrastructure components. It is described as an aesthetically pleasing and innovative artwork of NEOM project. This metaphor aims to evoke a sense of awe and underline the beauty value of NEOM. In the reasoning, it is

mentioned that Saudi Arabia's population growth will jump from 33 million to 50-55 million people by 2030 (*Asharq al-Awsat* 2023). This seems to confirm that the project's presence is to address the infrastructure challenge.

Phrases like *صناعة حضارة جديدة* (Creating a new civilization) dan *من أجل كوكب أفضل* (For a better planet) highlights the grand aspirations and global impact of NEOM. When linked to Vision 2030, this news text provides additional legitimacy and shows that NEOM is part of the national strategic plan. In addition, it explains that NEOM is also planned to generate revenue, fulfill domestic needs, and create innovation in development and lifestyle. The description in this news text has the potential to add to the attractiveness of NEOM to global investors.


: نيوم ستصبح منتجاً هيدروجينياً منخفض التكلفة على مستوى العالم (3)  
*KAPSARC: NEOM Will Be the World's Low-Cost Hydrogen Producer*  
(*Asharq al-Awsat* 20/7/2023)

News text (3) explains that according to KAPSARC, NEOM will be the world's leading low-cost hydrogen producer. KAPSARC (King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center) is a research institute established by the Government of Saudi Arabia with the aim of supporting energy and economic policies. NEOM will use advanced technology and renewable energy to produce hydrogen. This is expected to support the global transition to clean energy. The project aims to provide green energy and promote economic and environmental sustainability in the region (Hamdi 2024).

Table 4: Framing and Reasoning Devices in the News Text (3):  
كابسارك: نيوم ستصبح منتجاً هيدروجينياً منخفض التكلفة على مستوى العالم

Framing Device	Reasoning Device
<i>Metaphors:</i> نيوم في قلب تطوير NEOM is at the heart of development تتحرك السعودية نحو هدفها القادم Saudi Arabia moves towards its next destination	<i>Roots:</i> تمتلك المملكة أدنى أسعار لإنتاج الكهرباء من مصادر الطاقة المتجددة في العالم The Kingdom has the lowest cost for electricity production from renewable energy sources in the world. بما أن المملكة لديها الطاقة الشمسية، وطاقة الرياح، والميثان، وتكنولوجيا حجز الكربون "وتخزينه" Because the Kingdom has solar energy, wind, methane, and carbon capture and storage technologies
<i>Catchphrases:</i> أكبر مصنع لإنتاج الهيدروجين الأخضر في العالم World's largest plant for green hydrogen production السعودية الخضراء Saudi Green الشرق الأوسط الأخضر Green Middle East	<i>Appeals to Principle:</i> الوفاء بتعهداتها نحو تحقيق صافي الانبعاثات الصفرية بحلول عام 2060 Fulfilling the pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 تساهم في خفض انبعاثات الغازات الدفيئة Contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions
<i>Exemplaar:</i> تكلفة الهيدروجين الأخضر المنتج في «نيوم»، أقل من دولارين للكيلو غرام	<i>Consequences:</i> يمكن استخدامها وقوداً للنقل البري والبحري Can be used as fuel for land and sea transportation تضمن مكانة ثابتة في أي سوق للطاقة في المستقبل



The cost of green hydrogen produced at NEOM, less than two dollars per kilogram	Securing a fixed position in the future energy market
<i>Depiction:</i> وجود نيوم في قلب تطوير الوقود الخالي من الكربون NEOM's presence at the heart of carbon-free fuel development الطاقة المستدامة	
Sustainable Energy	تكاليف منخفضة
low cost	مورداً موثوقاً للطاقة
a reliable energy supplier	
<i>Visual Images:</i> 	
The event of book launch <i>The Clean Hydrogen Economy and Saudi Arabia</i> in a conference room. The event highlighted NEOM's role in low-cost hydrogen production.	

In the third news text from *Asharq al-Awsat*, NEOM is described as a center for developing carbon-free fuels (Hamdi 2024). It presents NEOM as a vital and essential component in Saudi Arabia's efforts for clean energy transition. *Asharq al-Awsat* emphasizes that Saudi Arabia is demonstrating progress and dynamic, future-focused ambition through the NEOM project. The news text also mentions Saudi Arabia's efforts towards السعودية الخضراء (Saudi Green) and الشرق الأوسط الأخضر (Green Middle East). Clean hydrogen is one of the main expected outcomes of NEOM project.

*Asharq al-Awsat* also shed light on the economic and efficient start-up of green hydrogen production by NEOM. It portrays NEOM as a reliable energy supplier and reinforces its role as a pioneer in the energy sector. *Asharq al-Awsat* frames NEOM as a symbol of innovation and sustainability in the region.

**In ALQST Media**

ALQST is a human rights organization founded by Saudi Arabian activists. The organization is headquartered in London, UK. ALQST is committed to promoting and protecting human rights in Saudi Arabia through various activities. Among these activities are reporting, advocacy, and awareness campaigns. The organization regularly publishes reports and news texts documenting human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, such as arbitrary detention, torture, and exploitation of migrant workers. ALQST is known for its boldness in criticizing Saudi government policies and consistently calling for reforms to improve human rights conditions in the country.

In the context of media and human rights advocacy, ALQST plays a role in providing information that is often not revealed by major media outlets with close

ties to the Saudi government. The news texts analyzed in this study are ALQST news texts published in the period 23 January 2023 to 15 July 2023. These news texts raise various issues about human rights and social justice, both of which are the main focus of *ALQST* media by providing a critical perspective.

الجانب المظلم من مشروع نيوم: حلقة نقاش نظمها القسط عن الانتهاكات الحقوقية المرتبطة بمشروع المدينة العملاقة السعودي (4)

*The Dark Side of the NEOM Project: A Panel Discussion Organized by ALQST on Human Rights Violations Related to the Saudi Giant City Project.*  
(ALQST 23/3/2023)

News text (4) discusses a panel organized by *ALQST* on human rights violations related to the NEOM project in Saudi Arabia. Forced displacement of local residents, especially from the Al-Huwaitat tribe, and poor working conditions for migrant workers were the main focus of criticism of the NEOM project. The discussion emphasized the importance of corporate responsibility and transparency in large projects such as NEOM. The discussion also covered inadequate compensation policies and legal prosecution of residents who oppose the project (ALQST 2023).

*Table 5: Framing and Reasoning Devices in the News Text (4):*

المظلم من مشروع نيوم: حلقة نقاش نظمها القسط عن الانتهاكات الحقوقية المرتبطة بمشروع المدينة العملاقة السعودي

Framing Device	Reasoning Device
<p><i>Metaphors:</i></p> <p>مشروع مدينة نيوم المستقبلية العملاقة</p> <p>NEOM's giant city project in the future</p>	<p><i>Roots:</i></p> <p>مصادرة أراضي سكان المنطقة وتهجيرهم ومتابعتهم قضائيا</p> <p>Confiscation of local people's land, forced displacement, and legal prosecution of them</p>
<p><i>Catchphrases:</i></p> <p>رؤية 2030</p> <p>Vision 2030</p>	<p><i>Appeals to Principle:</i></p> <p>المئات من العمال الوافدين سيوظفون خلال السنوات الثلاث المقبلة لبناء مدينة نيوم، وسيعرضون بشدة لخطر الاستغلال وسوء المعاملة</p> <p>Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers will be employed over the next three years to build the NEOM city, and they will be highly vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment.</p>
<p><i>Exemplar:</i></p> <p>تحدثت لينا الهذلول عن نتائج التقرير التي اعتمدت بشكل كبير على شهادات مباشرة من الضحايا</p> <p>Lina Al-Hathloul spoke about the findings in the human rights report behind the NEOM project that relied heavily on direct testimony from victims.</p>	<p><i>Consequences:</i></p> <p>صدرت أحكام قاسية بالسجن على العديد منهم لمدد تصل إلى 50 عاما أو حتى بالإعدام</p> <p>Many of them were sentenced to heavy prison terms of up to 50 years or even the death penalty.</p>
<p><i>Depiction:</i></p> <p>الإطار القانوني الغامض لمشروع نيوم</p> <p>The unclear legal framework of the NEOM project.</p>	

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*Visual Images:*

A press conference held by ALQST for Human Rights, with speakers including Lina Alhathloul, Julia Legner, James Lynch, and Isobel Archer.

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In the *ALQST* media, NEOM is described as Saudi Arabia's العملاقة (giant) project. This kind of naming gives the impression that the project has unlimited and authoritarian power. As such, its impacts could potentially be felt directly by local communities and the environment. *ALQST* portrays the NEOM project as part of the Saudi government's Vision 2030. This shows that behind the massive promotion, there are other aspects that need to be considered.

*ALQST* highlights that behind the splendor of NEOM's infrastructure, there is a real impact on individuals who oppose the construction of the project. These individuals are the original residents of the areas used for the NEOM project. *ALQST* also revealed about the confiscation of local people's land, forced displacement, and legal prosecution of those who opposed the project. *ALQST* called this a human rights violation (*ALQST*2023).

In this news text, *ALQST* claims that their findings come from the testimonies of victims. Opposition by local residents led to heavy prison sentences or even death sentences. *ALQST* frames the NEOM project as one with legal uncertainties that make it difficult to assess the risk of human rights violations.

تأييد أحكام الإعدام على ثلاثة رجال قاوموا مشروع نيوم (5)

*Support for the Death Sentence for Three People Who Opposed the NEOM Project*

(*ALQST* 24/1/2023)

News text (5) describes a court decision in Saudi Arabia in favor of the death penalty for three members of the Al-Huwaitat tribe, for opposing forced evictions related to the NEOM project. Shadli, Ibrahim and Atallah Al-Huwaiti face execution for their opposition to forced displacement. The court charged them with various charges related to their peaceful activities. This case demonstrates how the Saudi Arabian government is using violence to force the realization of the NEOM project, despite local resistance (*ALQST*2023).

As seen in Table 6, according to *ALQST* media, NEOM is an ambitious and advanced futuristic project. However, the project has another side that is not widely known by the general public. The project is built on land belonging to local residents, which has led to resistance among them or the local population, although the resistance did not get the expected response from the authorities (*ALQST*2023).

Table 6: Framing and Reasoning Devices in the News Text (5):

تأييد أحكام الإعدام على ثلاثة رجال قاوموا مشروع نيوم

Framing Device	Reasoning Device
<p><i>Metaphors:</i>            نيوم هي مدينة مستقبلية عملاقة يجري بناؤها على            ساحل البحر الأحمر            NEOM is a giant futuristic city built            on the coast of the Red Sea in            Saudi Arabia.</p> <p><i>Catchphrases:</i>            رفضهم السلمي            Their peaceful resistance            (Non-violent resistance)</p> <p><i>Exemplar:</i>            عبدالرحيم الحويطي الذي قُتلته قوات الأمن            Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti who was            killed by security forces</p> <p><i>Depiction:</i>            تعرّض لمختلف أنواع التعذيب وسوء المعاملة            Experienced various types of torture            and ill-treatment</p> <p><i>Visual Images:</i></p> 	<p><i>Roots:</i>            رفضهم الإخلاء القسري            Their opposition to forced evictions</p> <p><i>Appeals to Principle:</i>            حقهم في حرية التعبير            Their right to freedom of            expression</p> <p><i>Consequences:</i>            خطر الإعدام الوشيك            The threat of impending executions</p>

There is a photo of 3 men with their names at the bottom. The three men were among the civilians killed for opposing the infrastructure project.

One example of the authorities' harsh response to this resistance is the case of Abdul Rahim Al-Huwaiti. He was subjected to various types of torture after uploading his refusal video to social media. ALQST medical framed this as a human rights violation and mentioned that the locals' steps were freedom of expression that should be guaranteed. As of this news release, the threat of execution still looms over those who oppose the project.

القسط تدعو للإفراج عن جميع معتقلي الرأي في السعودية (6)


ALQST Calls for the Release of All Saudi Prisoners of Opinion  
 (ALQST 15/7/2023)

ALQST calls for the release of all political prisoners in Saudi Arabia. They highlighted the poor conditions the detainees face, including torture and lack of access to lawyers. This news text links the call to the NEOM project. Saudi repressive policies are considered to be exacerbated by ambitious projects such as NEOM. ALQST asserts that the arbitrary detention of activists and dissidents

must stop. This must be done to comply with international human rights standards (ALQST2023).

Table 7: Framing and Reasoning Devices in the News Text (6):

نيوم: القسط تدعو للإفراج عن جميع معتقلي الرأي في السعودية

Framing Device	Reasoning Device
<p><i>Metaphors:</i> الجانب المظلم من مشروع نيوم The dark side of the NEOM project</p> <p><i>Catchphrases:</i> الانتهاكات الصارخة والوحشية A flagrant and brutal offense</p> <p><i>Exemplar:</i> حكم على خمسة منهم بالإعدام Five of them were sentenced to death</p> <p><i>Depiction:</i> صدرت أحكام بحق 16 منهم بالسجن لمدد تصل إلى 50 عامًا Sixteen of them were sentenced to prison terms of up to 50 years</p> <p><i>Visual Images:</i></p> 	<p><i>Roots:</i> رفضهم الإخلاء القسري Their opposition to forced evictions</p> <p><i>Appeals to Principle:</i> مسؤولياتهم القانونية والأخلاقية Their legal and moral responsibility</p> <p><i>Consequences:</i> اعتقال واحتجاز العشرات من أبناء قبيلة الحويطات Arrest and detention of dozens of Huwaitat tribe members</p>

ALQST news texts discuss the dark side of the NEOM project. They highlight the contrast between the positive development narrative being spread and the reality of the human rights violations taking place. It describes five local residents who were sentenced to death as a severe consequence for resisting forced evictions. In addition, sixteen others were sentenced to prison terms of up to 50 years.

ALQST calls on companies involved in the NEOM project to be mindful of their commitments to human rights. They highlighted the need for concrete action and consideration of the ethical and legal impacts of this engagement. Some companies have responded by expressing concerns. ALQST encourages companies to conduct meaningful consultations and provide necessary assistance to affected communities.

**CONCLUSION** This study applied Gamson and Modigliani framing analysis model to examine how the media outlets *Asharq al-Awsat* and *ALQST* framed their coverage of NEOM project. The analysis reveals significant differences in how both media framed the project, in terms of both framing and reasoning devices used.

*Asharq al-Awsat* consistently framed the NEOM project with an emphasis on technological advancements, economic contributions, and future innovations. The media employed framing devices with keywords such as 'progress' and 'modernization' which were supported by concrete examples of the economic benefits brought by the project. Additionally, the use of visual imagery depicting NEOM as a symbol of the future further reinforced the positive narrative promoted by the outlet. However, critical issues such as human rights violations and negative environmental impacts were largely overlooked in *Asharq al-Awsat's* reporting.

In contrast, *ALQST* highlighted the negative aspects of NEOM project, focusing primarily on human rights violations and environmental degradation. The media used metaphors portraying the project as an embodiment of injustice, along with moral reasoning that emphasized the root problems, such as forced evictions and harsh punishments for local residents who opposed the project. In *ALQST's* framing, the negative consequences of the project were underscored, aiming to evoke a moral rejection from the global community.

Through this analysis, the study reveals that *Asharq al-Awsat* emphasized the narrative of progress and development resulting from NEOM project, while *ALQST* focused more on ethical concerns and human rights violations. The framing employed by both media outlets directly influenced public perception, with *Asharq al-Awsat* generating support for the project and *ALQST* emphasizing criticism and constructing a narrative of opposition.

This study demonstrates that media framing does not only shape information from an economic and technological perspective but also incorporates ethical and moral considerations, influencing how society evaluates and responds to large-scale projects like NEOM. Additionally, media framing helps to shape the global narrative surrounding the project, affecting public opinion and international policymakers' views on the NEOM initiative.

However, this study has certain limitations, such as the scope of the analysis, which only involved two media outlets and a specific time period. To broaden the scope of the analysis, future research should include a wider range of media sources and a longer time frame to capture the dynamic shifts in framing over time. Furthermore, collaboration with media and communication experts could enrich the understanding of the impact of framing on public perception in the context of large-scale infrastructure projects, like NEOM.

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