Constructing the Future City: Framing and Appraisal Strategies in NEOM's Nation-Branding Discourse

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Abstract

This study investigates how NEOM's official English-language discourse constructs the image of the future city and contributes to Saudi Arabia's nation-branding objectives within the context of Vision 2030. The study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic approach and examines a corpus of 23 excerpts collected from four sectoral sections of NEOM's official website: Biotechnology, Technology and Digitalization, Energy, and Health and Wellbeing. The analysis integrates Entman's (1993) Framing Theory with Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory to examine both the broader interpretive frames and the evaluative linguistic resources through which NEOM's future-oriented image is constructed. The findings reveal a consistent problem–solution framing pattern across the four sectors, in which contemporary technological, environmental, energy, and healthcare challenges are followed by the presentation of NEOM as an innovative and future-oriented solution. Positive Appreciation, Judgment, and Graduation dominate the evaluative discourse, while Engagement remains predominantly monoglossic, creating an authoritative institutional voice characterized by certainty and confidence. The interaction between framing and appraisal resources constructs NEOM not merely as a smart-city project but as a symbolic representation of Saudi Arabia's technological capability, environmental responsibility, and global ambition. The study demonstrates that official smart-city discourse performs an important nation-branding function by transforming sectoral descriptions into a coherent narrative of innovation, sustainability, and national transformation. It also highlights the value of integrating Framing Theory and Appraisal Theory for examining the relationship between macro-level discursive structures and their micro-level linguistic realization.

Keywords: nation-branding, smart cities, NEOM, appraisal theory, framing theory, vision 2030

1. Introduction

In 2016, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched Vision 2030 as a comprehensive national strategy aimed at diversifying the economy, reducing dependence on oil, and promoting sustainable development across multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, infrastructure, tourism, and digital transformation (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). A central pillar of this vision is the development of smart cities that integrate advanced technologies, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and sustainable urban planning to create innovative environments capable of attracting investment, fostering economic growth, and enhancing global competitiveness. Beyond their technological functions, smart cities have emerged as strategic projects through which governments construct future-oriented identities, promote strategic national objectives, and enhance their international image (Joss et al., 2019).

Among these ambitious initiatives, NEOM represents one of the world's largest and most innovative smart-city projects. NEOM, which is located near the Red Sea, operates as a nexus for advancements in artificial intelligence, renewable energy, biotechnology, and modern infrastructure (NEOM, 2024). Furthermore, the city incorporates many subprojects, such as The Line, that is a modern city designed without cars or roadways, thereby reinforcing its futuristic ambitions. Consequently, NEOM becomes a strategic communicative project through which Saudi Arabia seeks to present itself as an innovative, technologically advanced, and globally competitive nation. From a nation-branding perspective, NEOM functions as a symbolic representation of Saudi Arabia's future identity and its aspirations for global leadership in innovation and sustainability (Aly, 2019).

Because projects such as NEOM are communicated primarily through language and media, discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping how they are interpreted by national and international audiences. In this case, linguistic choices describe technological development, innovation, sustainability, education, national identity, and future transformation. Through framing strategies, evaluative language, and future-oriented expressions, official discourse contributes to legitimizing national projects, reinforcing public confidence, and strengthening nation-branding efforts. In this sense, discourse becomes an integral component of smart-city development rather than simply a means of describing it (Joss et al., 2019).

Previous studies have explored smart-city discourse from technological and urban-planning perspectives (Joss et al., 2019), while others have examined Saudi Vision 2030 and NEOM from communication and nation-branding perspectives (Aly, 2019). Likewise, framing has

been widely employed to investigate media representations (Entman, 1993), whereas appraisal theory has primarily been applied to evaluative meanings in institutional and media discourse (Martin & White, 2005).

However, limited attention has been paid to exploring how these two theoretical frameworks can be integrated to examine the linguistic construction of smart-city discourse, particularly within Saudi Arabia's official website of NEOM. Moreover, little research has investigated how framing strategies interact with appraisal resources to construct the image of NEOM as a symbol of technological innovation, sustainability, and national transformation. By addressing this gap, the present study contributes both to discourse studies and to the growing research on nation branding and communication in the context of smart cities.

Against this background, the present study investigates how NEOM's official English-language discourse constructs the image of the future city through the interaction of Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) and Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). While Framing Theory explains the broader structures through which NEOM is represented, Appraisal Theory reveals the linguistic resources through which evaluation is realized. By integrating both frameworks, the study provides a comprehensive account of how official discourse contributes to constructing future-oriented identities, promoting Saudi Arabia's nation-branding objectives, and supporting the broader goals of Vision 2030. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

How is the concept of the "future city" constructed in NEOM's official English-language discourse?

What appraisal resources are employed to evaluate technology, sustainability, education, and national identity?

How do framing strategies and appraisal resources interact in constructing NEOM's future-oriented image?

In what ways does NEOM's official discourse contribute to the nation-branding objectives of Saudi Vision 2030?

2. Literature Review

Beyond traditional marketing approaches, recent research regarding nation branding illustrates how language and discourse contribute to constructing national identity. In his study of Macedonia's campaign, Graan (2013) looks at nation branding as a semiotic sign, demonstrating how communication tactics and semiotic modes interconnect to form the Macedonian identity. Subsequent research has expanded this perspective by examining how multimodal resources contribute to nation-branding practices across different national contexts. Research on nation branding has also relied heavily on multimodality and multimodal analysis. For example, Lima et al. (2019) explain how Rio de Janeiro's nation-branding discourse effectively promotes cultural imagery and multiculturalism, while Cheregi (2018) illustrates how Romania and Moldova employ various visual modes of communication, including images, colors, and sounds, to attract tourists. Likewise, Allagui and Al-Najjar (2018) reveal how stereotypes and ideologies are visually represented within official discourse to align with global norms. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that nation branding extends beyond economic and political promotion to become a discursive process through which language and multimodal resources construct national identities and communicate strategic visions.

More recent work examines Saudi Arabia directly. Tamsyah et al. (2025) discuss how the Kingdom uses sports and investment narratives to reshape its global image, while Dineri et al. (2024) argue that nation branding performs important ideological functions. However, both studies primarily focus on political, economic, and ideological dimensions and pay comparatively less attention to the linguistic resources through which these branding strategies are constructed and communicated.

Research on Saudi megaprojects is still limited; however, recent studies have begun to address this area. Kashef (2025) compares Masdar City and NEOM's The Line, noting the recurring use of techno-futuristic language, while Hazaea and Qassem (2025) investigate how evaluative branding discourse operates on a smaller scale, such as Saudi coffee shops. Although both studies demonstrate the importance of discourse in shaping institutional and national identities, neither of them examines how the official English-language discourse of NEOM linguistically constructs the concept of the future city through the interaction of framing strategies and evaluative language.

Despite the growing body of research on smart cities and nation branding, comparatively little attention has been devoted to examining how linguistic resources, particularly framing strategies and evaluative language, contribute to constructing future-oriented visions in the Saudi context. In particular, while NEOM has been investigated from different perspectives, including urban planning, economic development, and marketing, relatively few studies explore how official discourse constructs technology, sustainability, innovation, and national identity through specific linguistic choices. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to integrating Framing Theory and Appraisal Theory in the analysis of Saudi smart-city discourse. The present study addresses this gap by providing a linguistic examination of selected English-language texts from the official NEOM website. In doing so, it contributes to discourse studies, nation-branding research, and the growing scholarship on smart-city communication by demonstrating how framing strategies and appraisal resources work together to construct the discourse of the future city.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 NEOM as a Smart-City Megaproject

NEOM is one of the most ambitious megaprojects launched under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Announced in 2017 with an estimated investment of 500 billion US dollars, the project seeks to establish a new model of urban development based on artificial intelligence, renewable energy, biotechnology, sustainability, and economic diversification beyond oil (Yusuf & Abdulmohsen, 2023). Unlike conventional urban developments, NEOM is presented as a future-oriented city designed to reshape the relationship between technology,

society, and the environment while positioning Saudi Arabia as a global leader in innovation and sustainable development. Smart-city megaprojects are increasingly conceptualized as spaces where technological innovation, environmental sustainability, digital transformation, and knowledge economies converge. In this context, NEOM represents a comprehensive model that combines these dimensions within a single national development project...

As a megaproject, NEOM extends beyond its physical infrastructure to function as a symbolic and communicative representation of national transformation. According to Flyvbjerg (2014), megaprojects should not be viewed solely as large-scale engineering initiatives; rather, they function as strategic investments that reshape economic development, political priorities, and public imagination. Similarly, Orueta and Fainstein (2008) argue that megaprojects operate simultaneously as functional developments and symbolic representations of modernity through which governments communicate progress, competitiveness, and global aspirations.

Within this perspective, NEOM represents more than an urban development project. Through its official discourse, it is constructed as a symbol of technological advancement, sustainability, innovation, and future prosperity. The language employed on NEOM's official platforms consistently portrays the project as an ideal environment where technology, education, culture, nature, and human well-being coexist. Consequently, the project functions not only as a physical space but also as a discursive space through which Saudi Arabia communicates its future vision and reinforces its international position within the global knowledge economy.

3.2 Nation Branding and Strategic Communication

According to Anholt (2007), nation branding plays a significant role in shaping national identity, strengthening international relationships, and promoting economic development. In today's media- and technology-driven world, states can no longer rely solely on their economic or political power to establish their global reputation. Instead, they increasingly employ strategic communication to project their values, aspirations, and distinctive identities to both domestic and international audiences (Anholt, 2007; Dinnie, 2016). Consequently, nation branding extends beyond traditional marketing activities to encompass a wide range of practices, including cultural diplomacy, tourism campaigns, international events, and large-scale infrastructure projects, all of which contribute to constructing a favorable national image.

Language constitutes one of the most influential resources through which nation-branding strategies are realized. Through linguistic choices, governments construct representations of national identity, frame concepts such as innovation, sustainability, development, and modernity, and communicate future national aspirations. From this perspective, language functions not merely as a descriptive tool but as a strategic resource that shapes public perceptions and legitimizes national projects. As Entman (1993) argues, framing influences how reality is interpreted by selecting particular aspects of events and making them more salient, while Martin and White (2005) demonstrate that evaluative language enables speakers and writers to express attitudes, negotiate values, and position audiences.

Pamment (2013) further argues that nation branding is an interdisciplinary field that brings together linguistics, communication, marketing, and public diplomacy. Rather than functioning as isolated promotional activities, nation-branding campaigns are constructed through multiple communicative platforms, including official speeches, websites, advertising campaigns, and social media. Similarly, Szondi (2008) emphasizes that these communicative platforms enable governments to construct coherent narratives that simultaneously strengthen domestic legitimacy and enhance international prestige.

Beyond improving international reputation, nation branding also contributes to attracting foreign investment, encouraging tourism, and supporting economic diversification. More importantly, it enables citizens to participate in constructing a shared vision of the nation's future. In this regard, Surowiec (2017) introduces the concept of discursive nation branding, arguing that language does not merely represent the nation but actively participates in constructing national identities, future aspirations, and collective understandings of development. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study, as NEOM's official discourse not only promotes a smart-city project but also constructs a future-oriented vision through which Saudi Arabia presents itself as an innovative, technologically advanced, and globally competitive nation.

3.3 Framing Theory and Appraisal Theory: An Integrated Analytical Framework

Framing Theory, developed by Entman (1993), explains how discourse shapes public understanding by selecting particular aspects of reality and making them more salient than others. According to Entman (1993), framing involves defining problems, identifying their causes, making moral evaluations, and suggesting possible solutions. Rather than simply presenting information, framing directs audiences toward particular interpretations of events and social realities. Consequently, framing has become one of the most influential approaches in discourse, media, and communication studies for examining how language constructs specific representations of political, social, and institutional issues.

Within official communication, framing strategies enable institutions to construct coherent narratives that promote particular values, priorities, and future visions. In the context of smart-city discourse, framing plays a significant role in presenting concepts such as technology, sustainability, innovation, and education as interconnected elements of national transformation. Through the strategic selection of linguistic resources, official discourse encourages audiences to interpret urban development not merely as infrastructure but as evidence of progress, competitiveness, and future prosperity.

While Framing Theory explains how discourse organizes meanings at the broader interpretive level, it provides relatively limited insight into the linguistic resources through which these meanings are realized. For this reason, the present study complements Framing Theory with Appraisal Theory developed by Martin and White (2005).

Appraisal Theory, which originates within Systemic Functional Linguistics, examines how speakers and writers express evaluation, negotiate interpersonal relationships, and position audiences through language (Martin & White, 2005). The framework consists of three interrelated systems: Attitude, which examines expressions of affect, judgment, and appreciation; Engagement, which investigates how alternative voices and perspectives are acknowledged or excluded; and Graduation, which analyzes the intensity and force of evaluative meanings. Together, these systems provide a comprehensive framework for examining how evaluation is linguistically constructed in discourse.

Within official institutional communication, appraisal resources enable governments to evaluate technological development, environmental sustainability, education, innovation, and national identity while simultaneously encouraging audiences to adopt particular attitudes toward these concepts. Consequently, Appraisal Theory offers detailed analytical tools for examining the linguistic realization of evaluation within official discourse.

The integration of Framing Theory and Appraisal Theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework for the present study. While Framing Theory explains how NEOM's official discourse constructs broader representations of the future city, Appraisal Theory reveals the linguistic resources through which these representations are evaluated and communicated. In other words, framing identifies what is being constructed, whereas appraisal explains how these meanings are linguistically realized through evaluative language. Neither framework alone is sufficient to explain the relationship between broad interpretive structures and their linguistic realization. Therefore, integrating the two frameworks enables both the macro-level organization of discourse and the micro-level construction of evaluative meanings to be examined simultaneously.

Accordingly, the present study employs Framing Theory to identify the dominant interpretive frames within the selected texts, while Appraisal Theory is used to analyze the evaluative linguistic resources that reinforce these frames. The integration of both approaches provides a more comprehensive explanation of how official discourse strategically constructs meanings related to technology, sustainability, innovation, education, and national identity.

4. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic approach to examine how NEOM's official English-language discourse constructs the image of the future city and supports Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. Rather than measuring the frequency of linguistic features, the study seeks to interpret how framing strategies and evaluative language collectively contribute to representing technology, sustainability, innovation, education, and national identity. To achieve this objective, the analysis integrates Entman's (1993) Framing Theory with Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, enabling the study to examine both the broader interpretive frames and the linguistic resources through which these frames are discursively realized.

4.1 Corpus

The corpus consists of twenty-three English-language excerpts collected from the official NEOM website (https://www.neom.com). The website serves as the primary source of data because it represents NEOM's official institutional discourse and communicates the project's vision, objectives, and strategic priorities to international audiences.

The excerpts were purposively selected from the sectoral descriptions published on the official website. Rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, purposive sampling enabled the selection of information-rich texts that explicitly communicate NEOM's future-oriented vision and its emphasis on innovation, sustainability, technology, education, and human development. The selected excerpts were subsequently organized into four thematic domains—Biotechnology, Technology and Digitalization, Energy, and Health and Wellbeing—which represent the principal sectors through which NEOM communicates its vision of the future city.

The following table presents the sectoral sections from which the analytical excerpts were collected.

Table 1. Sectoral Sections of the Official NEOM Website

Sector	URL
Biotechnology	https://www.neom.com/en-us/our-business/sectors/biotech
Technology and Digitalization	https://www.neom.com/en-us/our-business/sectors/technology-and-digital
Energy	https://www.neom.com/en-us/our-business/sectors/energy
Health and wellbeing	https://www.neom.com/en-us/our-business/sectors/health-and-wellbeing

Because the study focuses on linguistic representation rather than visual communication, only the verbal content of the selected webpages was analyzed. Images, videos, graphics, and other multimodal elements were excluded from the analysis.

4.2 Procedure

The analysis was conducted in four successive stages.

First, the researcher carefully examined the English-language texts published in the selected sectoral sections of the official NEOM website. Twenty-three excerpts that explicitly represented NEOM's vision of technology, sustainability, innovation, education, and future urban development were selected for analysis.

Second, the selected excerpts were organized into four thematic domains according to their primary communicative focus: Biotechnology, Technology and Digitalization, Energy, and Health and Wellbeing. This thematic organization enabled the analysis to examine how different sectors contribute to constructing the overall discourse of the future city.

Third, each excerpt was analyzed through the integrated analytical framework developed for the study. Entman's (1993) Framing Theory was employed to identify the dominant interpretive frames through which NEOM constructs its future-oriented vision, while Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory was used to examine the evaluative linguistic resources that reinforce these frames. Particular attention was paid to framing strategies, evaluative expressions, appreciation, judgment, engagement, affect, and graduation, as these linguistic resources collectively contribute to constructing positive representations of technology, sustainability, innovation, and national development.

Finally, the findings obtained from both analytical frameworks were interpreted collectively to explain how official discourse constructs the image of NEOM as a future-oriented smart city and how this discourse contributes to Saudi Arabia's nation-branding objectives and the broader goals of Vision 2030.

5. Results

This section presents the application of Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal framework and Entman's (1993) Framing Theory to 23 excerpts from the sectoral section adopted from NEOM's official webpage. The selected excerpts are grouped into four categories: biotechnology, digitalization, energy, and health & wellbeing which formulate NEOM as an AI-driven city. Appraisal Theory resources are used to describe NEOM's narrative. The interconnection between positive appreciation and judgment depicts NEOM as a credible and trusted agent of change rather than a passive receiver. The limited use of Affect and the supremacy of monoglossic assertions create an authoritative tone that elevates the sense of power and ability. Graduation amplifies discourse through upscaling terms creating a feeling that the use of technology is inevitable, unstoppable and unavoidable. These linguistic strategies collectively perform key nation-branding functions. They reframe the desert as an asset, depict Saudi Arabia as a hub of global problem-solving, and position citizens as co-producers of the envisioned future through individualized responsibility and empowered choice.

5.1 Biotechnology

NEOM’s biotechnology discourse positions Saudi Arabia as a leader in biotech, science, and sustainability and it conceptualizes Saudi ambition along with global humanitarian purpose. Through framing and evaluative linguistic devices, biotech is represented as a symbol of national transformation aligned with Vision 2030.

1: "Our mission is to address major human and planetary health challenges by establishing a cutting-edge biotech innovation ecosystem based upon world-class infrastructure and regulatory standards – and global partnerships".

2: "Shaping the future of life sciences, NEOM Investment Fund will back transformative ventures in medical, agricultural and industrial biotech. We aim to create a thriving NEOM biotech ecosystem through investment and a global innovator network".

3: "We will tackle global healthcare challenges including antimicrobial resistance, treatments for heart and metabolic diseases and more".

4:" We will foster a collaborative innovation ecosystem for a more sustainable, resilient world. NEOM's desert is ideal for developing genetically improved plants, advancing synthetic biology for humanity. Our abundant renewable energy supports biofuel development using cell engineering".

5: "Industrial technologies will help us deliver biotechnologies efficiently and affordably at scale".

6: "We are committed to creating a world-class biotech ecosystem that will spearhead developments in human and planetary health, along with scaling new industrial biotechnologies. NEOM is a home to great ideas, where innovative projects are translated into technologies that solve global needs. We are key stakeholders in Saudi Arabia’s National Biotech Strategy".

7: "NEOM is building a network of global partners to build local research and development and manufacturing capabilities. We collaborate with innovators tackling local challenges in order to grow a robust biotech ecosystem. Get in touch to explore opportunities to collaborate with NEOM".

NEOM’s biotechnology discourse constructs biotechnology as a strategic pillar through which Saudi Arabia positions itself as a global leader in innovation, sustainability, and development. With respect to the selected excerpts, biotechnology is continuously represented as a solution to global challenges rather than a result of local needs. By integrating Entman's (1993) framing functions and Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal resources, the discourse succeeds in promoting scientific advancement, ethical responsibility, and Saudi Arabia's nation-branding objectives according to Vision 2030.

The dominant framing strategy throughout the biotechnology corpus is the problem–solution frame. Rather than introducing biotechnology as an independent technological field, the discourse first constructs global health and environmental issues as urgent challenges requiring quick intervention before presenting NEOM as the institution capable of addressing them. This framing is immediately established in Excerpt 1 through the reference to "major human and planetary health challenges," where the scale of the problem extends beyond national borders to encompass humanity as a whole. The proposed solution is simultaneously introduced through expressions such as "cutting-edge biotech innovation ecosystem," "world-class infrastructure," and "global partnerships," which collectively position NEOM as possessing both the technological capability and institutional authority necessary to address these

challenges. The same framing strategy is reinforced in Excerpt 3, where specific threats including "antimicrobial resistance" and "heart and metabolic diseases" further legitimize the urgency of intervention while broadening NEOM's mission from national development to global humanitarian leadership. Rather than focusing on Saudi Arabia's domestic needs, the discourse deliberately internationalizes the problem in order to internationalize Saudi Arabia's role as part of the solution.

The contrast between the problem-oriented expression “major human and planetary health challenges” and the positively evaluated solution-oriented expressions “cutting-edge” and “world-class” further strengthens this positioning. Linguistically, this contrast shifts NEOM from being merely associated with biotechnology to being constructed as an institution with the capacity and legitimacy to respond to challenges presented as global in scope.

The treatment recommendation becomes progressively stronger throughout the remaining excerpts. Excerpt 2 expands the solution frame by presenting the "NEOM Investment Fund" as supporting "transformative ventures" across medical, agricultural, and industrial biotechnology, thereby framing scientific investment as the principal mechanism through which future challenges can be addressed. Likewise, Excerpt 4 reconstructs the Saudi desert from a geographical limitation into a strategic scientific resource by describing it as "ideal for developing genetically improved plants" and advancing synthetic biology. Through this reframing, natural geography itself becomes an economic and technological asset rather than an environmental obstacle. Excerpt 6 further strengthens this solution-oriented narrative by presenting NEOM as capable of "spearhead[ing] developments in human and planetary health" while simultaneously "solv[ing] global needs." Consequently, biotechnology is framed not only as scientific innovation but also as a moral responsibility that legitimizes Saudi Arabia's leadership within international sustainability and healthcare agendas.

Beyond problem definition and treatment recommendation, the biotechnology discourse also performs a strong process of moral evaluation. Rather than merely claiming technological superiority, the discourse repeatedly associates biotechnology with universally desirable values including human welfare, environmental protection, scientific cooperation, and sustainable development. Expressions such as "human and planetary health," "global needs," and "collaborative innovation ecosystem" extend the discourse beyond economic competitiveness and construct Saudi technological advancement as ethically justified. In Entman's terms, this moral evaluation legitimizes NEOM's ambitions by presenting biotechnology not simply as beneficial for Saudi Arabia but as valuable for humanity more broadly. Such framing strengthens the ideological foundations of nation branding by positioning Saudi Arabia as an internationally responsible contributor to global scientific progress rather than solely as a beneficiary of technological innovation.

These framing strategies are systematically reinforced through Appraisal resources, particularly Appreciation, Judgment, Graduation, and Engagement. Appreciation dominates the discourse through highly evaluative lexical choices including "cutting-edge," "world-class," "transformative," "innovative," "sustainable," "resilient," and "renewable," all of which assign exceptionally high value to biotechnology and construct scientific progress as inherently desirable. Judgment is realized by representing NEOM as a competent, visionary, and socially responsible institutional actor capable of addressing complex global challenges. This positive institutional evaluation is particularly evident in expressions such as "committed to creating a world-class biotech ecosystem," "spearhead developments," and "solve global needs," which evaluate both institutional capacity and ethical responsibility simultaneously.

Graduation further amplifies these positive evaluations by maximizing the scale, significance, and anticipated impact of biotechnology. Lexical items such as "world-class," "global," "major," "transformative," and "thriving" increase the intensity of evaluation and project biotechnology as historically significant rather than merely beneficial. Modal expressions including "will back," "will tackle," and "will foster" strengthen this evaluative pattern by presenting future achievements as institutional commitments instead of hypothetical possibilities. Consequently, futurity is represented with certainty rather than speculation, reinforcing the discourse's authoritative tone and aligning NEOM's ambitions with the broader objectives of Vision 2030.

Engagement, by contrast, remains relatively limited throughout the corpus. Most statements are expressed monoglossically without acknowledging alternative viewpoints, creating an authoritative institutional voice that presents technological progress as an accepted fact rather than a contested possibility. The only notable expansion of dialogic space appears through references to "global partnerships," "global innovator network," and "building a network of global partners," which introduce a heteroglossic orientation by emphasizing collaboration with international actors. Rather than weakening institutional authority, these references reinforce NEOM's global legitimacy by portraying international cooperation as evidence of external recognition and credibility. The concluding invitation to "get in touch" further broadens this collaborative stance by positioning readers as potential participants in the project rather than passive observers, thereby extending the discourse from institutional representation to audience engagement.

Taken together, the biotechnology discourse demonstrates that framing strategies and appraisal resources operate interactively rather than independently. While Entman's framing functions organize biotechnology as the solution to global health, environmental, and scientific challenges, Appraisal resources linguistically reinforce this representation through intensified positive evaluation, institutional authority, and future certainty. Consequently, biotechnology is constructed not simply as a technological sector but as a symbolic resource through which NEOM advances Saudi Arabia's nation-branding objectives, projects a future-oriented national identity, and aligns technological innovation with the broader ambitions of Saudi Vision 2030.

5.2 Technology & Digitalization

NEOM’s digital and technology discourse systematically frames the project as a global model for smart future cities, depending on Entman's (1993) framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation.

8: "NEOM's mission is to harness the power of disruptive technology to build an ecosystem for sustainable solutions that touch every aspect of life".

9: "Building a hyperconnected future through digital foundations".

10:"We are building digital infrastructure to serve as the operating system for future hyperconnected cities and destinations, integrating tomorrow's transformative technology solutions today".

11: "Integrated cognitive technology, powered by trusted, consent-based data, can create more equitable and sustainable societies by automating manual work and opening access to public services".

12: "By partnering with game-changing visionaries and business leaders, we are building a future that will progress how we live, work, and play".

13: "Cognitive technology is built on data, data is built on trust. Consent-driven data collection will fuel growth and help solve the world's biggest challenges".

NEOM's digital and technology discourse systematically constructs the project as a global model for future smart cities through the interaction of Entman's (1993) framing functions and Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). Rather than presenting digitalization as a technological objective alone, the discourse frames it as a transformative force capable of reshaping urban life, promoting sustainability, and addressing global challenges. Across the six excerpts, technology is consistently represented as both a developmental necessity and a moral responsibility, reinforcing NEOM's role as a future-oriented model aligned with Saudi Vision 2030.

The dominant framing strategy throughout the digitalization discourse is the problem–solution frame. Across the six excerpts, NEOM's website identifies a global problem in which current urban systems are portrayed as technologically insufficient to sustain efficient, resilient, and future-ready societies. In Excerpt 8, the statement that NEOM's mission is to "harness the power of disruptive technology" positions the project as a necessary response to existing technological limitations. The phrase "sustainable solutions that touch every aspect of life" broadens the scope of the problem beyond local concerns and constructs technological transformation as a universal necessity. Excerpt 9 reinforces this diagnostic frame through the expression "building a hyperconnected future through digital foundations," suggesting that digital transformation constitutes an essential prerequisite for future urban development. This framing becomes more explicit in Excerpt 10, where digital infrastructure is metaphorically described as "the operating system for future hyperconnected cities." By conceptualizing the city as an operating system, the discourse constructs urban life as programmable, intelligent, interconnected, and continuously optimized. Rather than describing infrastructure, this metaphor redefines technology as the foundation upon which future societies will operate.

The treatment recommendation is subsequently strengthened through moral evaluation and institutional legitimacy. Excerpt 11 introduces the concept of "trusted, consent-based data" capable of creating "more equitable and sustainable societies," thereby positioning NEOM as an ethical alternative to conventional models of digital governance. Instead of presenting technological development as an end in itself, the discourse links innovation to justice, transparency, and social responsibility. Likewise, Excerpt 12 reinforces institutional credibility through references to "game-changing visionaries and business leaders," implying that internationally recognized expertise already supports NEOM's future vision. Finally, Excerpt 13 extends the solution frame by redefining cognitive technology as a mechanism capable of solving "the world's biggest challenges." The repeated assertion that "data is built on trust" transforms trust from a technical requirement into a moral principle upon which technological development depends. Consequently, digitalization is framed not merely as technological progress but as a globally relevant, ethically grounded, and humanitarian project through which Saudi Arabia contributes to solving international social, environmental, and digital challenges.

These framing strategies are further reinforced through a wide range of appraisal resources. Positive Appreciation dominates the discourse through highly evaluative lexical choices such as disruptive technology, hyperconnected future, digital foundations, transformative technology solutions, equitable, sustainable, and game-changing, all of which portray technological innovation as inherently desirable and socially beneficial. Graduation intensifies these evaluations through expressions including every aspect of life, future hyperconnected cities, the world's biggest challenges, and transformative, maximizing the scale and anticipated impact of NEOM's technological ambitions. Judgment is primarily realized through the positive evaluation of institutional competence. Expressions such as building digital infrastructure, building a future, and game-changing visionaries and business leaders construct NEOM and its partners as capable, innovative, and forward-looking actors, thereby strengthening institutional credibility through association with recognized expertise. This evaluative pattern is further reinforced by the repeated use of the present continuous form (building), which emphasizes continuous institutional commitment, and future-oriented expressions such as will progress and will fuel growth, which project confidence and certainty rather than possibility.

Metaphors also play a central role in strengthening the evaluative dimension of the discourse. The metaphor describing digital infrastructure as "the operating system" conceptualizes the city as an integrated digital organism whose functions are coordinated through intelligent technological systems. Likewise, the structural metaphor "Cognitive technology is built on data, data is built on trust" presents technology, data, and trust as interconnected layers of a unified structure, reinforcing the idea that ethical governance constitutes the foundation of technological innovation. The metaphor "operating system" therefore does more than describe technological integration; it frames digital infrastructure as the organizing structure through which the future city is expected to function. Throughout the corpus,

engagement remains predominantly monoglossic. The discourse rarely acknowledges alternative perspectives or competing viewpoints, instead presenting technological development as an unquestionable institutional reality. The absence of hedging devices and epistemic markers contributes to constructing an authoritative institutional voice that projects certainty, legitimacy, and strategic confidence.

Taken together, the digitalization discourse demonstrates that framing strategies and appraisal resources operate simultaneously to construct NEOM as more than a technologically advanced city. Framing organizes digital transformation as the solution to global urban and technological challenges, while appraisal linguistically reinforces this representation through positive evaluation, institutional authority, intensified futurity, and ethical legitimacy. Consequently, digitalization becomes a strategic nation-branding resource through which Saudi Arabia projects itself as an innovative, trustworthy, and globally connected leader capable of shaping the future of smart urban development.

5.3 Energy

Entman's (1993) framing model is effective in analyzing how NEOM's energy discourse constructs Saudi Arabia as a nation moving intentionally toward technological and environmental leadership in energy production and use.

14: "Supporting Vision 2030 to enhance the energy efficiency and safeguard natural resources of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia".

15: "Digital technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be embedded in NEOM's renewable energy system".

16: "Smart Grids and a Digital Energy Platform will enable the optimal provision of energy, automatically adapting supply to demand".

17: "NEOM, through its energy and water company ENOWA, is building the world's first at-scale, fully integrated 100% net renewable energy system".

18: "Leveraging NEOM's unique geographic position with ample access to wind and solar power, NEOM is creating a smart grid infrastructure which will transmit clean solar PV and wind energy from its source to the demand points".

NEOM's energy discourse constructs Saudi Arabia's energy transition as a strategic process through which the Kingdom positions itself as a global leader in renewable energy, technological innovation, and environmental sustainability. Through the interaction of Entman's (1993) framing functions and Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), the discourse presents clean energy not merely as an environmental objective but as a national transformation that reinforces Saudi Arabia's future-oriented identity under Vision 2030. Across the five excerpts, renewable energy is consistently framed as a technological, environmental, and institutional achievement that extends beyond national development to global leadership.

The dominant framing strategy throughout the energy discourse is the problem–solution frame. Rather than explicitly criticizing previous energy systems, the discourse implicitly constructs conventional models as insufficient, environmentally unsustainable, and incompatible with future development. This framing is immediately established in Excerpt 14 through the statement "Supporting Vision 2030 to enhance the energy efficiency and safeguard natural resources of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." The verbs enhance and safeguard simultaneously define the existing challenge and introduce the desired solution, framing energy reform as both a technological necessity and a national responsibility. This solution-oriented narrative is further reinforced in Excerpts 15 and 16, where digital technologies, Artificial Intelligence, Smart Grids, and Digital Energy Platform are presented as the principal mechanisms through which energy systems become more efficient, adaptive, and intelligent. Rather than portraying technology as an independent objective, the discourse frames digital innovation as the indispensable means through which sustainable energy can be achieved.

The framing gradually expands from national transformation to international leadership. Excerpt 17 strengthens this trajectory by declaring that NEOM is building "the world's first at-scale, fully integrated 100% net renewable energy system." Here, the discourse no longer presents Saudi Arabia as responding to domestic challenges but as filling a global technological gap. Superlative expressions such as world's first, fully integrated, and 100% position NEOM as establishing new international standards rather than following existing ones. Institutional legitimacy is further reinforced through the explicit reference to ENOWA, which attributes technological competence and innovation to a Saudi institution. Likewise, Excerpt 18 extends this leadership frame by representing geography itself as a strategic national advantage. The statement that NEOM is "leveraging its unique geographic position with ample access to wind and solar power" reconstructs the desert not as a natural limitation but as a valuable renewable-energy resource. Combined with references to smart grid infrastructure capable of transmitting clean energy, the discourse constructs Saudi Arabia as possessing both the natural resources and the technological expertise required to lead the global transition toward renewable energy. Consequently, energy becomes more than an economic sector; it is framed as evidence of Saudi Arabia's environmental responsibility, technological capability, and international competitiveness.

These framing strategies are consistently reinforced through the Appraisal system, particularly Appreciation, Judgment, Graduation, and Engagement. Appreciation dominates the discourse through highly positive lexical choices such as renewable, smart, digital, optimal, clean, unique, and fully integrated, all of which evaluate Saudi Arabia's energy system as technologically advanced, environmentally responsible, and globally competitive. Judgment primarily evaluates institutional competence rather than individuals. Expressions including enhance energy efficiency, safeguard natural resources, building the world's first, and leveraging NEOM's unique geographic position construct Saudi institutions as capable, visionary, and responsible actors committed to long-term national development. Throughout the excerpts, the discourse emphasizes competence, innovation, and environmental stewardship, thereby strengthening Saudi Arabia's institutional credibility within the broader nation-branding strategy.

Graduation further intensifies these positive evaluations by maximizing both the scale and uniqueness of the project. Lexical items such as world's first, 100%, fully integrated, optimal, unique, and ample increase the force of evaluation and portray NEOM's energy system as historically significant rather than merely effective. The evaluative progression throughout the excerpts moves from gradual improvement, reflected in expressions such as enhance and safeguard, toward complete transformation through superlatives and absolute expressions that emphasize global leadership and technological excellence. This intensified evaluation contributes to constructing NEOM not simply as another renewable-energy initiative but as an unprecedented model for future energy systems.

Engagement remains predominantly monoglossic throughout the corpus. The discourse presents its claims with a high degree of certainty and rarely acknowledges alternative viewpoints, competing approaches, or possible limitations. The absence of hedging devices, epistemic markers, and dialogically expansive expressions contributes to an authoritative institutional voice that presents Saudi Arabia's energy transition as an established reality rather than a future possibility. Instead of inviting debate, the discourse projects confidence, inevitability, and strategic certainty, thereby reinforcing institutional legitimacy and public trust in NEOM's long-term vision.

Taken together, the energy discourse demonstrates how framing strategies and appraisal resources interact to construct renewable energy as a central component of Saudi Arabia's future national identity. While Entman's framing functions organize the discourse around energy transition, technological innovation, and global leadership, Appraisal resources reinforce these representations through positive evaluation, institutional competence, intensified commitment, and authoritative certainty. Consequently, renewable energy is transformed from a technical sector into a powerful nation-branding resource through which NEOM projects Saudi Arabia as an environmentally responsible, technologically advanced, and globally influential leader capable of shaping the future of sustainable development.

5.4 Health & Wellbeing

The following examples reveal how the discourse surrounding NEOM's Health and Wellbeing sector constructs an ambitious vision of future healthcare and formulates a broad narrative about national identity, capacity, and global leadership.

19: "NEOM will deliver world-class treatment and inclusive care through an integrated health and wellbeing ecosystem, focused on the individual and powered by innovative technology, research and education".

20: "NEOM's healthcare system will address holistic health at the individual level, weaving health and wellbeing into every aspect of life. NEOM will leverage data and AI to empower individuals with predictive, preventive, and personalized solutions and interventions".

21: "NEOM is developing advanced healthcare infrastructure assets, including digital health AI-based platforms, hospitals, healthcare centers, and community clinics. Our aim is to deliver seamless, real-time, one-touch primary care through digital-first services with agile access to world-class experts".

22: "NEOM's Health & Wellbeing Sector is shaping a global health tourism destination, combining world-class care, wellness resorts, and Centers of Excellence".

23: 'NEOM will empower healthier lives through pioneering systems, regulations and infrastructure. NEOM aims to be at the forefront of the shift towards a predictive, proactive, preventive, personalized health and wellbeing system driven by technology and behavioral insights".

NEOM's health and wellbeing discourse constructs healthcare as a future-oriented ecosystem in which technological innovation, individualized care, and sustainability converge to redefine the concept of healthcare itself. Through the interaction of Entman's (1993) framing functions and Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), the discourse moves beyond presenting healthcare as a public service to positioning it as a strategic component of Saudi Arabia's future identity and nation-branding agenda. Across excerpts 19–23, healthcare is consistently represented as an integrated, technology-driven, and globally competitive system capable of transforming both individual wellbeing and international healthcare provision.

The dominant framing strategy throughout the corpus is the problem–solution frame. Rather than explicitly criticizing existing healthcare systems, the discourse implicitly constructs them as fragmented, reactive, and insufficiently integrated. Excerpt 19 introduces this framing through the statement that "NEOM will deliver world-class treatment and inclusive care through an integrated health and wellbeing ecosystem." The need for "world-class" and "inclusive" healthcare implicitly suggests the limitations of existing models, while the proposed solution is realized through the construction of "an integrated ecosystem powered by innovative technology, research and education." Consequently, healthcare is framed not simply as medical treatment but as a comprehensive ecosystem capable of delivering a more advanced and personalized model of care. The evaluative expressions "world-class," "inclusive," and "focused on the individual" simultaneously perform Entman's moral evaluation function by portraying NEOM as technologically innovative while remaining ethically committed to equity, accessibility, and individual wellbeing.

This solution-oriented framing is further developed in Excerpt 20, where conventional healthcare is implicitly represented as fragmented and reactive, whereas NEOM's healthcare system is described as addressing "holistic health at the individual level." The discourse deliberately expands the concept of healthcare by integrating "health and wellbeing into every aspect of life," thereby shifting healthcare from a purely medical domain to a broader social, behavioural, and environmental framework. The reference to "data and AI" providing "predictive, preventive, and personalized solutions" establishes the causal interpretation within Entman's model by attributing the shortcomings of traditional healthcare to insufficient technological integration. Digitalization and artificial intelligence therefore become the principal mechanisms through which future healthcare can be achieved. At the same time, the emphasis on empowerment rather than

treatment morally legitimizes NEOM as progressive, humane, and technologically enlightened.

The treatment recommendation becomes increasingly comprehensive in the remaining excerpts. Excerpt 21 focuses on digital healthcare infrastructure by presenting "advanced healthcare infrastructure assets, including digital health AI-based platforms, hospitals, healthcare centers, and community clinics." Existing healthcare systems are implicitly framed as disconnected and inefficient, while NEOM's "seamless, real-time, one-touch primary care" is introduced as the corrective solution capable of eliminating barriers between patients and healthcare providers. Likewise, Excerpt 22 extends the discourse beyond national healthcare by positioning NEOM as "shaping a global health tourism destination." Rather than treating healthcare solely as a domestic responsibility, the discourse reframes it as an international economic and geopolitical resource capable of combining "world-class care, wellness resorts, and Centers of Excellence." Finally, Excerpt 23 further strengthens this leadership frame by asserting that NEOM aims to remain "at the forefront of the shift towards a predictive, proactive, preventive, personalized health and wellbeing system." Through repeated references to prediction, prevention, personalization, and technological innovation, healthcare is no longer represented as responding to illness but as anticipating and preventing it. Collectively, these framing strategies construct Saudi Arabia not as an adopter of international healthcare models but as an innovator actively shaping the future of global healthcare. The cumulative sequence "predictive, proactive, preventive, personalized" intensifies this shift by presenting healthcare transformation as multidimensional rather than limited to a single technological improvement.

These framing strategies are consistently reinforced through the Appraisal system, particularly Appreciation, Judgment, Graduation, and Engagement. Positive Appreciation dominates the discourse through highly evaluative lexical choices including world-class, inclusive, integrated, holistic, advanced, seamless, real-time, predictive, preventive, personalized, and pioneering, all of which construct NEOM's healthcare system as technologically sophisticated, socially responsible, and internationally competitive. The metaphor "integrated health and wellbeing ecosystem" further strengthens this positive evaluation by conceptualizing healthcare as an interconnected ecological system in which services, technologies, research, and education function harmoniously rather than independently. This ecological metaphor naturalizes the proposed healthcare model and presents it as balanced, sustainable, and inherently desirable.

Judgment primarily evaluates institutional competence and ethical responsibility. Rather than evaluating individuals, the discourse consistently represents Saudi institutions as visionary, innovative, and capable of delivering technologically advanced healthcare solutions. Expressions such as "world-class experts," "advanced healthcare infrastructure," "Centers of Excellence," and "at the forefront" attribute exceptional institutional capacity while reinforcing Saudi Arabia's credibility within the global healthcare sector. Graduation further intensifies these positive evaluations through cumulative lexical patterns such as "predictive, preventive, and personalized," "world-class," "global," "advanced," and "pioneering," maximizing both the scale and significance of NEOM's healthcare ambitions. These intensified evaluations shift the discourse from describing healthcare improvements to constructing a comprehensive transformation of future lifestyles and wellbeing.

Throughout the corpus, Engagement remains predominantly monoglossic. The discourse rarely acknowledges competing healthcare models, alternative perspectives, or possible limitations. Instead, healthcare transformation is presented as an authoritative institutional reality supported by scientific innovation, technological expertise, and strategic planning. The absence of hedging devices or epistemic uncertainty reinforces a confident institutional voice that presents NEOM's healthcare vision as inevitable rather than negotiable. Consequently, readers are positioned not as critics evaluating competing proposals but as observers of a future already being realized.

Taken together, the health and wellbeing discourse demonstrates that framing strategies and appraisal resources function interactively to construct healthcare as a central component of Saudi Arabia's future-oriented identity. While Entman's framing functions organize the discourse around healthcare transformation, technological innovation, and global leadership, Appraisal resources reinforce these representations through positive evaluation, institutional competence, intensified futurity, and ethical legitimacy. Consequently, healthcare becomes more than a public service; it emerges as a strategic nation-branding resource through which NEOM projects Saudi Arabia as a global leader in innovation, wellbeing, and sustainable human development.

Table 2. Summary of Framing and Appraisal Patterns Across the Four Sectors

Nation-Branding function	Dominant Appraisal Resource	Dominant Frames	Category
Scientific leadership	Appreciation, Judgement, Graduation	Problem-solution, Moral Evaluation	Biotechnology
Digital transformation	Appreciation, Graduation	Problem-solution, Moral Evaluation	Technology & Digitalization
Sustainability leadership	Appreciation, Judgement, Graduation	Problem-solution, Global Leadership	Energy
Humanitarian innovation	Appreciation, Judgement	Problem-solution, Moral Evaluation	Health & Wellbeing

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that NEOM's official discourse does not merely describe individual sectors or promote technological initiatives.

Rather, it systematically constructs a coherent national narrative in which biotechnology, technology and digitalization, renewable energy, and health and wellbeing function as interconnected pillars of Saudi Arabia's future vision. Although each sector focuses on a different dimension of development, the analysis reveals a consistent discursive pattern across the corpus. Technology is repeatedly represented as the principal mechanism for addressing contemporary global challenges, sustainability is constructed as a national and international responsibility, and innovation is consistently associated with leadership, competitiveness, and long-term transformation. Consequently, the four sectors operate collectively to construct NEOM not simply as a smart-city project but as a symbolic representation of Saudi Arabia's future identity and as a communicative realization of Vision 2030. These findings indicate that official discourse performs a strategic nation-branding function by integrating technological innovation, environmental sustainability, economic diversification, and human development into a unified narrative of national transformation.

The analysis further demonstrates that Entman's (1993) framing functions operate systematically across the four sectors rather than independently within individual texts. Although the linguistic realization differs from one sector to another, the dominant framing pattern consistently follows a problem–solution structure supported by treatment recommendation and moral evaluation. Existing global challenges—including healthcare limitations, technological transformation, environmental sustainability, and energy transition—are first constructed as issues requiring urgent intervention before NEOM is presented as the institution capable of providing innovative solutions. This recurring framing strategy extends the discourse beyond describing sectoral development to positioning Saudi Arabia as an active contributor to solving global challenges. Moral evaluation further reinforces this representation by consistently associating NEOM with values such as innovation, sustainability, inclusiveness, responsibility, and global cooperation. Consequently, the discourse legitimizes Saudi Arabia's future ambitions not only through technological capability but also through ethical positioning, presenting national development as socially responsible and internationally beneficial rather than merely economically motivated.

Beyond the framing structures identified across the four sectors, the findings reveal that evaluative language plays an equally significant role in constructing NEOM's future-oriented discourse. The analysis demonstrates that positive Appreciation is the most dominant appraisal resource throughout the corpus, consistently evaluating technological innovation, renewable energy, healthcare, and biotechnology as desirable, transformative, and globally competitive. Lexical choices such as world-class, transformative, innovative, integrated, predictive, renewable, and smart repeatedly assign exceptionally positive value to both the project and its associated sectors. These evaluations are further reinforced through Judgment, which consistently portrays Saudi institutions as competent, visionary, responsible, and capable of delivering ambitious national objectives. Similarly, Graduation intensifies these positive evaluations through superlative and high-force expressions such as the world's first, 100% renewable, hyperconnected, and every aspect of life, maximizing the scale and significance of NEOM's achievements. By contrast, Engagement remains predominantly monoglossic, with very limited acknowledgement of alternative perspectives or competing viewpoints. The absence of hedging devices and epistemic uncertainty contributes to an authoritative institutional voice that presents Saudi Arabia's future vision as a strategic certainty rather than a negotiable possibility. Collectively, these appraisal resources transform descriptive information into persuasive discourse that promotes confidence, legitimacy, and institutional credibility.

The interaction between framing and appraisal resources demonstrates that NEOM's official discourse extends far beyond the communication of sectoral information. Instead, language functions as a strategic nation-branding resource through which Saudi Arabia constructs a future-oriented national identity. Across all four sectors, technological innovation is repeatedly linked with sustainability, economic diversification, human wellbeing, and global leadership, thereby reinforcing the broader objectives of Vision 2030. Rather than branding the nation through cultural heritage or tourism alone, the discourse projects Saudi Arabia as a knowledge-based economy capable of leading future technological and environmental transformation. This finding supports Anholt's (2007) argument that nation branding is fundamentally concerned with constructing favorable international perceptions through strategic communication. At the same time, the findings extend Dinnie's (2016) view by demonstrating that nation branding is realized not only through large-scale national campaigns but also through the cumulative effect of linguistic choices embedded within institutional discourse. Consequently, the official NEOM website functions not merely as an informational platform but as a strategic communicative space through which Saudi Arabia projects innovation, credibility, sustainability, and international competitiveness.

The present findings both support and extend previous research on nation branding, smart-city discourse, and strategic communication. Similar to Graan's (2013) analysis of national image construction, the findings confirm that national identity is actively constructed through discourse rather than merely represented. Likewise, the emphasis on innovation, sustainability, and global competitiveness is consistent with Joss et al.'s (2019) argument that smart-city discourse operates as a global communicative framework through which governments promote future-oriented urban identities. The findings also complement recent studies on Saudi Arabia's international image (Tamsyah et al., 2025; Dineri et al., 2024), which argue that national megaprojects contribute to reshaping international perceptions of the Kingdom. However, unlike these studies, which primarily examine nation branding from communication, political, or economic perspectives, the present research demonstrates the specific linguistic mechanisms through which this branding process is accomplished. Furthermore, while previous research has generally examined Framing Theory and Appraisal Theory independently, the present study illustrates how the interaction between framing structures and evaluative language provides a more comprehensive explanation of how official discourse simultaneously constructs technological legitimacy, institutional authority, and future-oriented national identity.

The study therefore makes several theoretical contributions to discourse studies and nation-branding research. First, it demonstrates that integrating Entman's (1993) Framing Theory with Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory provides a comprehensive analytical

framework capable of explaining both the macro-level organization of institutional discourse and the micro-level linguistic resources through which evaluation is realized. Rather than functioning independently, framing strategies and appraisal resources operate interactively to construct coherent narratives of innovation, sustainability, and national transformation. Second, the findings extend existing research on smart-city discourse by demonstrating that official descriptions of technological sectors simultaneously perform ideological and nation-branding functions. Finally, the study contributes to the growing literature on Saudi Vision 2030 by showing that language itself constitutes a strategic instrument through which national transformation is communicated, legitimized, and internationally projected. Consequently, NEOM emerges not only as a technological megaproject but also as a discursive project through which Saudi Arabia constructs and communicates its future identity.

7. Conclusion

This study examined how NEOM's official English-language discourse constructs the image of the future city through the interaction of framing strategies and evaluative linguistic resources. The analysis demonstrates that the discourse across biotechnology, technology and digitalization, energy, and health and wellbeing follows a consistent pattern in which technological and social challenges are framed as problems requiring innovative and future-oriented solutions. Within this discourse, NEOM is repeatedly positioned as an active agent capable of providing such solutions. Accordingly, the future city is constructed not simply through descriptions of infrastructure or technological advancement but through a broader narrative that connects innovation, sustainability, human development, and global leadership with Saudi Arabia's national transformation under Vision 2030.

The integration of Entman's (1993) Framing Theory and Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory further reveals how this broader narrative is linguistically realized. While framing organizes the discourse around problem definition, moral evaluation, and proposed solutions, appraisal resources strengthen these representations through positive Appreciation, Judgment, intensified Graduation, and predominantly monoglossic Engagement. Together, these resources construct an authoritative institutional voice in which technological transformation is presented with confidence and certainty. Thus, the findings demonstrate that framing and appraisal do not operate as separate linguistic strategies; rather, they interact to transform descriptions of individual sectors into a coherent discourse of national progress and future leadership.

More broadly, the study demonstrates that NEOM functions not only as a technological megaproject but also as a discursive nation-branding project. Through its official communication, technological innovation, renewable energy, biotechnology, and future healthcare become symbolic resources for representing Saudi Arabia as innovative, sustainable, globally competitive, and capable of contributing to the solution of international challenges. In this sense, language plays an important role in communicating and legitimizing national transformation. The study therefore contributes to discourse and nation-branding research by demonstrating the analytical value of combining macro-level framing with micro-level appraisal analysis in examining the linguistic construction of smart-city identities.

The study has several limitations. The corpus is relatively small and is restricted to 23 English-language excerpts from selected sectoral sections of NEOM's official website. Moreover, the analysis focuses exclusively on verbal producer discourse and does not examine visual or multimodal resources or audience reception. Future research could therefore extend the corpus to Arabic-language materials and other NEOM communication platforms, including social media, speeches, and promotional campaigns. Multimodal analysis could also investigate how language interacts with images, colors, videos, and architectural representations in constructing NEOM's future identity. Finally, comparative studies involving other Gulf or international megaprojects could determine whether the framing and appraisal patterns identified in the present study are distinctive features of NEOM's nation-branding discourse or part of a broader discourse of global smart-city development.

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Consent for Publication

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. The study did not involve human participants.

Ethics Approval

This article does not require ethical approval because it analyzes publicly available textual content from NEOM's official website and does not involve human participants or personal data.

Data Availability Statement

All data analyzed during this study are derived from publicly available textual content on NEOM's official website. The excerpts analyzed in the study are included in the article.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Generative artificial intelligence tools were used to assist with language editing, stylistic refinement, and the organization of selected sections of the manuscript. The research design, data selection, theoretical framework, analysis, interpretation of findings, verification of references, and final academic decisions were undertaken and reviewed by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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