

“Ambitions Like the Mountain of Twaïq”: A Cognitive Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Selected Speeches by the Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman

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Abstract: This paper is a cognitive analysis of conceptual metaphors as a vital tool for evoking emotion, simplifying ideas, and bonding individuals to a larger purpose. It focuses on selected impactful quotes by the Saudi crown prince Muhammad Bin Salman that reflect his visions and leadership style, with the aim of demonstrating the efficacy of Metaphor as a vehicle for promoting collective action and inspiring public confidence in the pursuit of national success. Using Conceptual Metaphor theory as a theoretical framework, the study investigates the metaphorical expressions used by the crown prince by framing them in terms of concrete concepts to make the abstract ideas behind them more easily comprehensible. The study finds that the crown prince uses a variety of conceptual metaphors including journey, war, nature, architectural and health metaphors to mirror his visions 2030, youth empowerment, as well as his political, economic, developmental and regional reforms. Investigating these metaphors through conceptual metaphor theory helps abstract ideas become more tangible and relatable. The study attempts to respond to the enormous need of the linguistic investigation of metaphor in leadership speeches as a powerful rhetorical tool used to motivate, encourage, and create a vivid connection with the audience, especially in phases of unprecedented, real, and impactful transformations that pave the way for better future.

Keywords: Motivation - Cognitive - Metaphor - Mohammad Bin Salman - Quotes

«هم مثل جبل طويق»: تحليل معرفي للاستعارات المفاهيمية في مختارات من خطابات ولي العهد السعودي الأمير محمد بن سلمان

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(تاريخ الاستلام: 03-05-2026؛ تاريخ القبول: 24-06-2026)

مستخلص البحث: تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية تحليلاً معرفياً للاستعارات التحفيزية باعتبارها أداة حيوية لاستحضار المشاعر، وتبسيط الأفكار، وربط الأفراد بالأهداف السامية. وتركز على اقتباسات مختارة مؤثرة لولي العهد السعودي الأمير محمد بن سلمان، تعكس رؤيته وأسلوبه القيادي، بهدف إثبات فعالية الاستعارة وسيلة لتعزيز العمل الجماعي وحث الثقة في نفوس الجمهور في سبيل تحقيق النجاح الوطني. باستخدام نظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية إطار نظرياً، تبحث هذه الدراسة في التعبيرات الاستعارية التي يستخدمها ولي العهد، وذلك بتأطيرها في سياق مفاهيم ملموسة لتسهيل فهم الأفكار المجردة الكامنة وراءها. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن ولي العهد يستخدم مجموعة متنوعة من الاستعارات المفاهيمية، بما في ذلك استعارات الرحلة والحرب والطبيعة والهندسة المعمارية والصحة، ليعكس رؤيته لعام 2030، وتمكين الشباب، فضلاً عن إصلاحاته في المجالات السياسية والاقتصادية والتنموية والإقليمية. إذ تبحث الدراسة في التعبيرات الاستعارية التي استخدمها ولي العهد من خلال صياغتها في مفاهيم ملموسة لتسهيل فهم الأفكار المجردة الكامنة وراءها. يُسهم تحليل هذه الاستعارات من خلال نظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية في جعل الأفكار المجردة أكثر واقعية وقرباً من الفهم. وتسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تلبية الحاجة الملحة للبحث اللغوي في الاستعارة في خطابات القيادة، باعتبارها أداة بلاغية فعالة تُستخدم لتحفيز الجمهور وتشجيعه، ولخلق تواصل حيوي معه، لا سيما في مراحل التحولات غير المسبوقة والحقيقية والمؤثرة التي تُمهّد الطريق لمستقبل أفضل.

الكلمات مفتاحية: التحفيز - الإدراك - الاستعارة - محمد بن سلمان - اقتباسات.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Metaphors are rhetorical tools for effective communication where a thing is described as if it were another, often to create a vibrant imaginative comparison. There has been a symbiotic connection between metaphor and leadership speeches that enable leaders to convert abstract political, economic, and social ideas into concrete and relatable forms, facilitating public understanding and promoting audience engagement. Each enhances the effectiveness of the other, leadership discourse counts on metaphorical expressions to deliver complex ideas, express visions, and engage audiences, while metaphors derive much of their persuasive power from their strategic use in leadership discourse. This symbiotic relationship between metaphor and leadership speeches extends beyond communication to the construction of communal identity and political legitimacy as leaders invoke metaphorical narratives to connect contemporary objectives with historical experiences, cultural values, and national aspirations.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, metaphor is recognized as an essential cognitive mechanism in understanding target domains. This notion of metaphorical models provides coherence to many realms of human society including language and literature, economics, law, and politics, religion, philosophy and science (Lakoff & Johnson, 1989). Metaphors help make a leader's message more relevant and meaningful by connecting abstract concepts to familiar experiences. Hence, metaphors are influential devices to communicate leadership ideas, build connection and persuasion, evoke communal response and emotions, and connect with audiences on a deeper and more intuitive level.

Born on August 31, 1985, to the Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Mohammed bin Salman is the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia. Mohammed bin Salman has been a key polarizing figure whose leadership and transformative vision have reshaped Saudi Arabia's future and brought rapid change to global politics. Mohammed bin Salman is viewed as a modernizer marking a pivotal chapter in Saudi history, balancing tradition with transformation and steering the Kingdom toward a prosperous future. His leadership's key aspects include Vision 2030 of transforming Saudi Arabia, drastic social reforms

of women's rights and cultural modernization, economic diversification and establishing Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy and Geopolitics as a strong regional power.

This paper is a cognitive investigation of selected quotes by Mohammad Bin Salman, whose utterances usually involve figurative statements that include metaphors, symbols, similes, metonymies, and other figurative language that entail certain cognitive characteristics, such as conceptual mapping, mental imagery, framing, inference generation, and embodied understanding, enabling speakers to communicate complex ideas in a more persuasive, memorable, and cognitively accessible manner, which effectively convey the intended message (Baldi, 2020). Conceptual metaphor analysis is a method that stems from Cognitive Linguistics, particularly the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their seminal book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). They introduced the idea that metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions but are deeply rooted in human cognition, shaping how we perceive, think, and act. According to them, people understand abstract concepts (target domains) through more concrete and familiar experiences (source domains) by means of systematic conceptual mappings between the two domains. These mappings are established in embodied experience, whereby recurring interactions with the physical and social environment shape underlying conceptual structures that influence how individuals perceive, reason about, and act within the world.

Cognitive analysis of metaphors aims at identifying various conceptualizations of the metaphors. It involves the viewpoint that metaphor is not simply a fragment of language, rather it denotes a key part of the way people think, reason, and imagine. The aim of this paper is to generate a classification of a leader's figurative quotes where he frames issues and endeavors to influence public opinion. The paper attempts to present an interpretation of the cognitive implications of the metaphor theory and postulates that cognitive analysis of metaphors can help enhance and elucidate linguistic metaphor theories that focus on the cognitive characteristics. The paper explores conceptual metaphors to trace the unconscious emotional traits that contribute to the mechanism of these metaphors. Hence, it establishes the intersubjective transitional space and its significance to the formulation of metaphor,

chiefly as related to metaphors in leadership speeches.

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has considerably researched the role of metaphors in political speeches, revealing metaphors' competence in framing issues, constructing political experiences, and influencing public opinion. Contemporary research has exhibited metaphors as a fundamental tool in political communication by worldwide political leaders, streamlining complex issues, inducing sentiments, and shaping public opinion.

From the international perspective, many studies targeted the analysis of metaphors in American, British, European & African political speeches. Kyeremeh et al. (2023) pursue to investigate the communicative functions of metaphors in selected political speeches of the African leader Mr. John Dramani Mahama. The study explores 20 political speeches to validate how Mahama consciously relies on metaphors of journey, sports, war and religion as speech actions that illustrate his ideologies in politics and combine to form coherent social interactions. It emphasizes metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon other than a purely lexical one and as a deep-seated conceptual phenomenon that shapes the way we think and not just the way we speak.

Koskinen (2022) discusses the use of English conceptual metaphors in 9 political speeches of the Council of the European Union (EU) during the Finnish Presidency term in 2019. The study adopts a cognitive linguistic approach to explain metaphor as a part of the human conceptualization system where political discourse is considered as a product of individual and collective mental processes. The study concludes that metaphors in political speeches are not merely a stylistic expression of oratory and literature but also affect our ideological flexibility by promoting people to recognize abstract issues by grounding them in something more familiar.

Petrovic (2024) seeks to investigate how American politicians tend to communicate their thoughts and ideas using different types of metaphors: ontological, structural, and orientational. The study analyzes 3 speeches by Barack Obama between 2008 and 2009, and three speeches by Donald J. Trump between 2016 and 2018. The study finds differences in the frequency and dominance of

metaphors between the two leaders. While Obama's speeches indicate a more balanced distribution of metaphors, with no single metaphor dominating his discourse, Trump's speeches display a thicker usage of certain metaphors, particularly War metaphors, which suggests a more consistent rhetorical theme in Trump's communication. Overall, both leaders implement a combination of ontological and structural metaphors, with structural metaphors being the prevailing type of metaphors they use. By doing that, they can mobilize the constituents, persuade the undecided and attack political foes.

Elizarov (2024) studies the degrees of imagery of metaphors in political discourse based on the speeches of the Russian president Vladimir Putin's public speeches, particularly their role in the construction of political identity and the justification of the state's activities. It shows how these metaphors testify to Putin's development concepts of the Russian state, and how they serve as the focused, prioritized, and dominant elements of my political rhetoric. The author considers three degrees of imagery of metaphors according to the frequency of their objectification in discourse and the strength of the figurative component. According to the results of the study, the conclusions were made that the most frequently represented group is the usual metaphors, the occasional metaphors are distinguished as the strongest in accordance with the figurative component in political discourse.

Beshlei (2025) attempts to explore the use of conceptual metaphors in British political speeches by Boris Johnson, Theresa May, and the late Queen Elizabeth II. The study aims to show how Johnson's ontological transformation metaphors, Theresa May's structural war metaphors and the Queen's collaborative metaphors help frame public opinion and shape British national identity, delivering complex realities in plain, persuasive terms.

Atmawijaya (2025) identifies how metaphorical language is strategically deployed in political crisis communication and its role in shaping public perception and policy debates. Focusing on Donald Trump's 2024 nomination acceptance speech following an assassination attempt, the study offers a unique case study of crisis-response rhetoric in a high-stakes political context. The study reveals how sophisticated utilization of interwoven metaphor scenarios such as survival as divine

intervention, immigration as invasion, and nation as construction project serve rhetorical functions by creating coherent narrative turns connecting private crisis to national regeneration. Thus, metaphors are strategically deployed to simplify complex issues, evoke emotional responses, construct leadership narratives and shape public perception during pivotal political moments.

Brahmi and Nesba (2026) apply qualitative content analysis method to explore the cognitive effects of metaphorical language on public perception in four American presidential political speeches of two American presidents, namely Barak Obama and Donald Trump. The study reveals how the strategic use of metaphors enhances politicians' capability to persuade by granting them to create memorable and vivid stories that have a deeper impact than literal language might. Hence, metaphors impact public opinion by accelerating the comprehension of complex political perceptions, inducing civilians' emotional responses, and making politicians more influential in their communications.

Notwithstanding the wide research body related to the analysis of metaphors in leadership speech, works related to the linguistic analysis of the speech of Saudi leadership, especially the Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, are scarce. Hudhayri (2022) linguistically inspected the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of Saudi politicians, especially Mohammed Bin Salman upon hosting the x-American president Joe Biden in the Jeddah's summit arguing that the linguistic behaviour of Mohammad Bin Salman reveals negligence and refutations for the policy of the president Biden's administration in reaction to the ties of his regime with Saudi Arabia that time. The study referred to his close-fist greeting and elimination of English as a signal to eliminate Biden and his companions from the linguistic scene during his speech as conservative reactions of Saudi diplomats have been implicitly transferred through the eloquence of verbal language and the implied meaning of non-verbal language.

Alharbi (2023) analyzed the types of illocutionary acts of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's speech and how they affected Saudi youth ideology. He collected the data by translating and transcribing the speech, then conducting a questionnaire survey to demonstrate the effectiveness of His Highness's

speech on Saudi youth. The findings showed that most types of illocutionary acts that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman used were representative rather than commissive acts. The questionnaire results showed that Saudi youths strongly agreed that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's speech positively affected their mentality, and this was reflected in their professional lives.

Almalki (2023) shed light on talk about political dialogue and the expansion of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's contract with the American Fox News Channel, because of its immense importance in terms of employing persuasive purposes and revealing the deliberative and argumentative dimensions of this speech. The paper found that his speech was directed towards his purpose. The paper implemented Argumentative pragmatics to explain a set of interactive connotations that include a set of tools which seek to achieve the speaker's goals that he seeks to achieve. This leads to the speaker choosing his linguistic structures, his argumentative connections, and his persuasive means with precision and ability in order to achieve a communicative position to build his political discourse; The study postulates Bin Salman's interview as successful deliberative argumentative speech as he aimed to make the recipient submit to his ideas, beliefs, positions, issues, and everything he presents.

Arubaiya (2024) analyzed the speech delivered by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the G20 Summit 2020, with a focus on doing linguistic structure through discourse, rhetoric, and communication style. The paper establishes how Bin Salman's speech presented an optimistic and future-oriented viewpoint, highlighting the need of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and other countries, while acknowledging the absence of past tensions. With the positive reinforcement techniques, the Crown Prince cultivates a sense of goodwill and emphasizes the significance of collaborative endeavors, especially in the pursuit of the Economic Corridor initiative. The speech employs a diplomatic and formal mode of communication, according to established international standards, but simultaneously emphasizing the collective obligation in attaining common goals. The paper concludes that this discourse exemplifies a collaborative and forward-thinking stance in the pursuit of enhancing mutual ties and attaining common developmental

objectives. By using rhetorical techniques such as expressions of congratulations and positive reinforcement, Bin Salman effectively cultivated a sense of goodwill and underscored the importance of collaborative efforts, specifically in the context of the Economic Corridor initiative. The use of formal language adheres to diplomatic conventions while highlighting collective accountability in attaining common goals.

Al-Qahtani (2025) analyzes four interviews conducted with the Mohammad Bin Salman including his interview with CBS TV in 2019, his interview on Vision 2030 broadcast on Saudi national TV in 2021, his interview with The Atlantic in 2022, and his interview with FOX News in 2023, to demonstrate how the image of a capable political leader is linguistically rendered by numerous linguistic practices in the chosen interviews. The study finds that Mohammad Bin Salman not only does politics but also projects a positive self-image by presenting himself as a solidary and collective, decisive, diplomatic, human-rights observer, and broader-goals-seeking leader. The study concludes that a positive self-image can be efficiently communicated linguistically deciphering the socio-political meanings and postulates political interviewing as a method of mediatized political discourse that communicates ideology-laden messages of politicians.

From the aforementioned review of literature, it is obvious that all the existing knowledge has widely focused on metaphors in international political leaders' speeches as sites of power negotiation and persuasion, while the few studies related to the linguistic aspects of Mohammad Bin Salman focused on general analysis of his speech acts and language behaviour through descriptive methods. Most of the studies focused on the dialogic relation between his speeches and readers or society. No study to date has intended to highlight the conceptual metaphors in Mohammad bin Salman's speeches to dig into the ornamental stylistics of his figurative language deciphering its hidden meanings from a cognitive analytical standpoint particularly. Furthermore, no study has attempted to systematically examine the embedded motivational sentiments that his famous quotes aim to communicate. This study, therefore, attempts to extend the existing body of research in the field of cognitive analysis of the language of Mohammad Bin Salman by explaining the meaning

of the metaphors he deployed through conceptual metaphor theory to understand how these metaphors stir the human mind and help deliver meaningful insights of his visions and missions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In cognitive linguistics, Conceptual Metaphor Theory is a cognitive-linguistic perspective of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is a foundational bedrock. According to them, metaphors are conceptual (mental) processes displayed in human language that allow speakers to structure and construct abstract areas of knowledge and experience in more concrete empirical terms. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) coined the theory of Conceptual Metaphor proposing that metaphor is not just an aspect of language, but a fundamental part of human thought (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). According to this theory, the human conceptual systems are metaphorical. They comprise of concepts which structure everyday lives and how humans define their everyday realities, and metaphor performs a pivotal part in this construction. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors entail cross-domain mappings, the conceptualization of one mental domain in terms of another and describe the essence of metaphor as "understanding and experiencing of one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 5).

A central assumption of CMT is that metaphorical thought is grounded in embodied experience. Human interactions with the physical and social world generate recurring cognitive patterns known as image schemas that provide the conceptual foundation for metaphorical reasoning (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Johnson, 1987). The hypothesis is further cultivated claiming that metaphor is a set of correspondences between two conceptual domains: the source domain that signifies more tangible characteristics of experience, and the target domain, which is more intangible. The connecting of these two domains is what is known as a conceptual metaphor. According to the Lakoffian approach, conventional metaphors are the foundation of poetic metaphors. The innovative metaphors in poetic compositions are comprehensible as they employ the same metaphorical structures that exist in everyday language. Hence, "the extending forms" of ordinary ones. According to this viewpoint, metaphorical models provide coherence to many

spheres of human culture, from economics, law, and politics, to religion, philosophy, or science (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

The relevance of CMT to political and leadership discourse has been extensively demonstrated in contemporary metaphor research. Political leaders frequently employ metaphor to frame national challenges, mobilize public support, construct collective identities, and communicate policy objectives. Metaphors enable leaders to simplify complex political issues while simultaneously shaping how audiences interpret events and evaluate future actions. Metaphors such as Journey, Building, War, Family, and Pathway are frequently employed in political discourse because they draw upon culturally shared experiences, making political messages more persuasive and motivational (Charteris-Black, 2011; Musolff, 2016).

Recent developments in metaphor studies have further emphasized the role of metaphor as a cognitive framing device in public discourse. Scholars have highlighted how metaphors influence public perception, emotional engagement, and collective decision-making by activating particular conceptual structures and suppressing alternative interpretations. Consequently, metaphor analysis has become an important methodological tool for examining political speeches, leadership narratives, and national vision statements.

In the present study, CMT provides the analytical framework for examining motivational metaphors in the selected quotations from Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's speeches related to Saudi Vision 2030. The analysis identifies the source and target domains underlying the metaphors and examines how conceptual mappings contribute to the construction of a motivational discourse. For instance, expressions such as "our journey toward Vision 2030," "roadmap for the future," and "travelling confidently toward a new horizon" instantiate the conceptual metaphor national development is a journey. Through this mapping, the process of national transformation is conceptualized as purposeful movement toward a desired destination, while citizens are positioned as collective travellers progressing toward shared goals. By applying CMT, the study investigates how these metaphorical structures frame national reform,

inspire public participation, and communicate the aspirations of Vision 2030 in a manner that is cognitively accessible and rhetorically persuasive.

Given the focus of the study on leadership and political discourse, discussions of metaphor in scientific, technical, or medical communication have been excluded, except where they contribute directly to understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphor use in political speech. This ensures that the theoretical framework remains closely aligned with the objectives of the study and the analysis of motivational metaphors in contemporary Saudi leadership discourse.

3. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were taken from selected quotes from official speeches, interviews, and public statements by the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman during the years 2016-2025 with a particular focus on speeches related to Vision 2030 and national transformation. For the present study, only relevant aspects and metaphorical expressions are examined. The processes of data collection passed through four stages. The first stage is the selection of text and attentive review and identification of metaphoric words. This procedure was accomplished by pinpointing metaphor-related words (MRWs) by scrutinizing the text on a word-by-word basis. According to the metaphor identification procedures (MIP), a method offered by the Pragglejaz Group (2007), the metaphorical meaning is the result of a disparity between the basic meaning of a lexical unit and the contextual meaning. Therefore, there are words in each context that are metaphor related words (MRWs). The next stage, the conceptual metaphors are determined in the form of 'A is B' in accordance with the five-step method by Steen (1999) for inferencing the conceptual metaphor from the linguistic metaphorical expressions in five steps: i. Identifying the metaphorical focus, ii. Identifying the metaphorical idea, iii. Identifying the metaphorical comparison, iv. Identifying metaphorical analogy, v. Identifying the metaphorical mapping. The selected data analysis method helped in amplifying and creating meaning from these metaphors to get a better insight into the mind and psychology and models of acquisition, conceptual change, abstract reasoning and persuasion of political leaders, and the development of empathy between the leaders and the human world.

4. FINDINGS

The present study aims at analyzing five metaphors in selected quotes by the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman to show the effectiveness of these metaphors in communicating his thoughts and constructing a motivational effect on the reader. Following the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2020), the metaphors are classified into the categories of Journey, War, Nature, Health and Building metaphors. The classification are theoretically motivated conceptual domains grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory and contemporary research on metaphor in political communication. They are based on the underlying source domains and conceptual mappings identified in each selection of expressions. Specifically, metaphors referring to movement, direction, destinations, pathways, or progress were categorized as Journey metaphors; those invoking conflict, struggle, victory, or enemies were classified as War metaphors; expressions drawing on natural phenomena, growth, environmental processes, or ecological elements were categorized as Nature metaphors; expressions associated with illness, health, treatment, recovery, addiction, or well-

being were categorized as Health metaphors, and references to construction, foundations, builders, structures, or development were classified as Building metaphors.

4.1 Vision 2030 and the metaphor of “Journey”:

The “journey” is a influential metaphor used in politics and public discourse to frame a country’s national vision. It portrays the nation as a collective traveling toward a shared destination, making complex political processes more relatable and understandable to the public.

Realizing the power of the journey metaphor in shaping a country’s vision and influencing how the public thinks about political and social issues, Crown Prince Mohammad has been often found quoting journey metaphors while referring to Vision 2030 he launched in 2016, that epitomizes one of the most ambitious national transformation projects in the world. The vision outlines a long-term roadmap designed to diversify Saudi Arabia’s economy, reduce dependence on oil, and develop a vibrant society and an innovative, globally competitive nation.

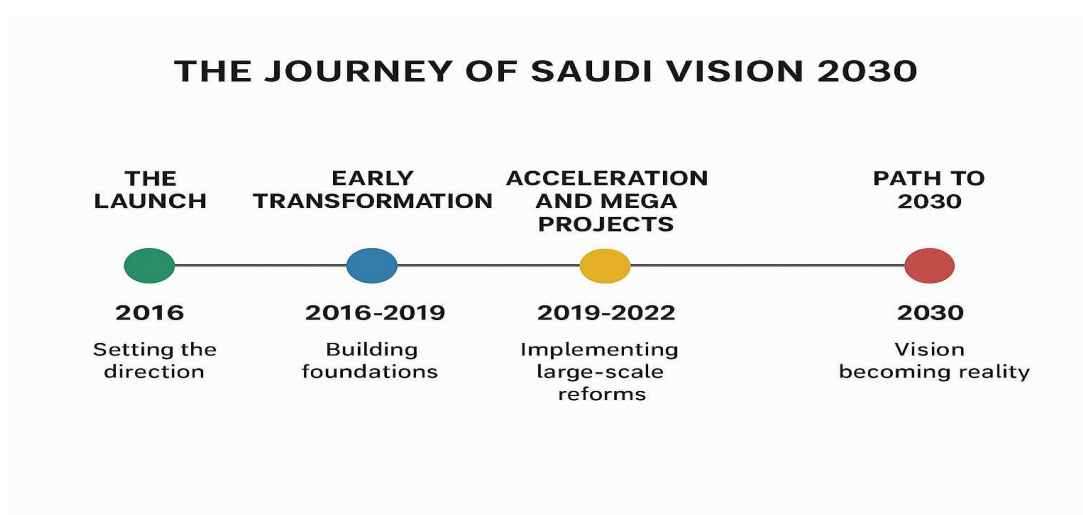


Image 1: The timeline of the journey of Saudi Vision 2030

For such a vision that echoes drastic transformations not just in infrastructure and technology, but in mindset, ambition, and global engagement, the prince felt the need for a discourse that assures simplification of complex issues, eliciting emotional responses and managing perceptions. Therefore, the best metaphor he used for this vision is the metaphor of journey that makes abstract concepts and complex policies more tangible and accessible to the public, evoking emotions of hope, determination, and unity, and framing the struggle toward a national vision as a noble and shared endeavor and frame the leadership as a competent and reliable "driver" who can steer the country through challenges. The most famous metaphorical expressions he used in this regard are:

1. "Our journey toward Vision 2030 has already begun."
2. "Vision 2030 is our roadmap for the future."
3. "The Kingdom is travelling confidently toward a new horizon."
4. "We will overcome all challenges on our path."
5. "Our journey toward a vibrant society and a thriving economy has begun."
6. "We are taking confident steps toward a better future for all Saudis."

The following conceptual mapping of the metaphor of journey can help reveal the effect of the metaphor of journey on the new vision shaped by the prince for his country.

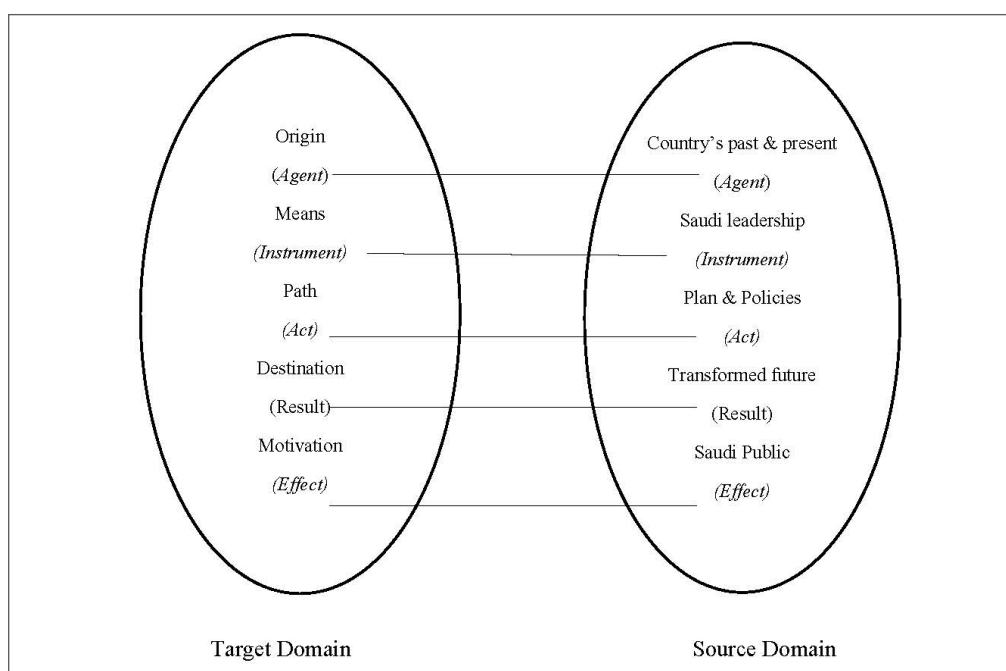


Figure 1. Conceptual mapping of the metaphor "Journey"

The country's present is mapped to the origin and start point of the journey metaphor, the Saudi leadership is mapped to instrument of the metaphor and the means of transportation and transformation, the act of journeying in the path is mapped to the drawing of the plan and policies of the vision by the government and concerning authorities, the destination is mapped as the bright future of the country after achieving the vision goals, while the effect of the metaphor is the trust, hope and confidence of the Saudi public in their leadership.

Hence, a complete abstract map emerges out from the literary map conveys a motivational impact of the Vision 2030 metaphors on Saudi public as shown in figure 1. The journey metaphors express progress, momentum, and collective movement making citizens feel part of the transformation. It transforms Vision 2030 from a bureaucratic document into a narrative of national movement where all Saudis are "travelers" working toward the same bright and promising destination.

4.2 Economic reforms and the metaphor of “War”:

Mohammed bin Salman’s economic reforms mark the most important milestone of his political career. They focus on transforming Saudi Arabia from an oil-dependent economy into a diversified, globally competitive one. He launched major initiatives such as expanding non-oil sectors, including tourism, entertainment, technology, mining, and renewable energy and promoting private-sector growth. Key reforms include the partial privatization of Saudi Aramco, creation and expansion of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), large-scale infrastructure and megaprojects (like NEOM), along other major investments that aim to diversify national revenue, stimulate innovation, create employment, and position Saudi Arabia as a leading economic hub in the region and beyond.

Mohammed bin Salman’s approach to combating corruption has been one of the most high-profile elements of his economic reforms. In 2017, he launched a sweeping anti-corruption crackdown that led to the detention of princes, ministers, and major businessmen, with the government reporting over \$100 billion recovered through settlements and asset seizures. Officially, the campaign aimed to protect public finances, increase transparency, and modernize the economy as part of Vision 2030. It has been recognized as a bold step against long-standing corruption in the Kingdom.

The metaphor of war is an influential rhetorical device in which a struggle, challenge, or conflict is described as a battle or war. It is widely used in politics, leadership speeches, and social campaigns to convey urgency, intensity, and the need for decisive action. In the context of Mohammed bin

Salman’s anti-corruption campaign, the “war on corruption” is a direct metaphorical use of war:

1. “We will fight corruption in all its forms.”
2. “Anyone involved in corruption will not escape.”
3. “All anti-corruption actions were necessary, and taken under clear laws, with the goal of sending the message that we will not tolerate any corruption.”
4. “If fighting corruption is not on the top of the authority’s agenda, then you don’t truly fight corruption — no matter what you do.”

In the above quotes, Bin Salman has prominently used military metaphors comparing the society to “battlefields” where the government is an “army” who “fights” with its “weapons” to “save” public assets and money and “defeat” corruption. Corruption is framed as the enemy; the government and legal institutions are the army; the campaign is the battlefield. The metaphor implies a decisive, all-out effort and adds a war-like urgency to reform actions. Using the combat metaphor of “fighting” signifies confrontation and active resistance against entrenched corrupt elements. The war metaphor portrays the process as painful but necessary to cleanse the system, like a battle that may be harsh but is ultimately lifesaving. The enemy metaphor strengthens the perception of corruption as an active threat that must be destroyed, justifying strong actions and centralized power. Strategic operations like a military campaign identifying targets, mobilizing forces, achieving objectives which dramatize governance measures. This has been metaphorically suggested by comparing society to a battlefield as shown in the mapping in Figure 2.

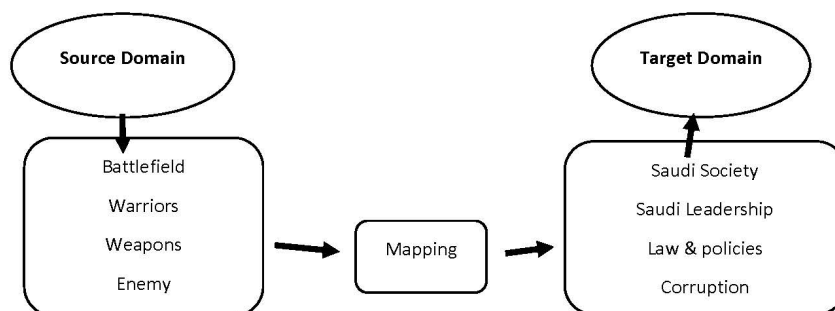


Figure 2: Conceptual mapping of the War metaphors in MBS quotes.

The war metaphors mapped above serve the purpose of helping readers to understand the economic issue by utilizing familiar conceptual domains related to wars and battlefields. The mapping shows a set of systematic correspondences between the source and the target as the constituent elements of the target domain are projected onto constituent elements of the source domain. It identifies a battlefield (economy), an enemy (corruption), warriors (Anti-corruption force), and weapons (law). The prince does not refer to this war as an individual war, rather a collective war that the entire society must fight along with the Saudi leadership. Hence, the psychological status of self-affirmation, strength and optimism is articulated via the metaphor of war by drawing a line between the bad (corruption) and good (honesty) unifying society against a common enemy. Hence the metaphors persuade and manipulate readers, shaping how they think about the economic issue and triggering their motivational responses.

Hence, MBS uses war metaphors to frame corruption as an existential threat to Saudi Arabia. This makes reforms seem urgent and unavoidable, while justifying sweeping legal and political measures. The metaphors also help communicate a moral narrative: the leader as commander, corruption as foe, and the nation as the battlefield, creating urgency, mobilizing support, emphasizing seriousness, and simplifying complexity.

4.3 Youth empowerment and the metaphors of "Nature":

Mohammed bin Salman has been enjoying strong popularity among Saudi youth as surveys have shown an overwhelming support for him as a modernizing leader. Young Saudis are attracted to his economic and social reforms under Vision 2030, expanded job opportunities, cultural openness, and his image as a dynamic, youthful figure breaking from old traditions. He is widely seen by many young Saudis as a symbol of modernization and future opportunity, though expectations are high and his long-term appeal depends on continued reform progress.

Mohammad bin Salman's approach to youth empowerment forms a central pillar of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, reflecting a strategic commitment to transforming the Kingdom into a knowledge-based and innovation-driven society. Through

flagship initiatives such as the Misk Foundation and the Mohammed bin Salman Nonprofit City, he has expanded opportunities for young Saudis in leadership development, entrepreneurship, education, digital skills, and creative industries. These institutions function as platforms for nurturing talent, fostering civic participation, and enabling youth to take active roles in economic diversification and national development. By prioritizing skills training, startup support, and global partnerships, Mohammad bin Salman positions Saudi youth as key agents of change, contributing to the country's long-term social and economic transformation.

Mohammed bin Salman's speeches very often address youth reflecting how he frames young people's role, potential, and the future of his country:

1. "We believe in the power of youth. They are the driving force behind our vision and the future of our nation."
2. "We have amazing and wonderful Saudi minds, especially in the youth generation - strong energy, courage, high culture, good and strong professionalism; what remains is work."
3. "The Saudis' ambition is like that of the Tuwaiq Mountain, unbreakable, unless this mountain is leveled and equaled to the ground."

Nature metaphors have served as influential tools in these quotes of Mohammad Bin Salman, allowing him to communicate complex ideas through simple, vivid images. By drawing on familiar elements such as mountains, lands, rivers, and seasons, he transforms abstract concepts like national strength, unity, crisis, or reforms into concrete symbols that resonate emotionally with audiences. Because nature is universal, shared across cultures and generations, these metaphors anchor political messages in imagery that feels both timeless and accessible.

The most famous nature metaphor Mohammad bin Salman used is the use of Mountain Tuwaiq. The quote was delivered in a high-profile international investment-forum context, which signals that MBS wanted to project Saudi Arabia as a unified, stable, confident nation ready for ambition (economic diversification, international investment, reform). Mountains generally symbolize unshakeable stability; the metaphor suggests that Saudi youth

strength and willpower are firm and enduring. Saying that the strength lasts “unless the Mountain is flattened” implies that only a catastrophic, unimaginable event could break that unity or resolve. Also, since Mountain Tuwaiq is a major geographical landmark in central Saudi Arabia and is historically and culturally important, he used it as a metaphor to tie it to the modern national identity and strength the sense of rootedness and belonging

to the land and its heritage. The metaphor speaks not just about leadership, but the Saudi people “the Saudis” broadly suggesting unity, shared purpose, and collective strength among citizens. Over time, the metaphor of Mountain Tuwaiq has gained deeper cultural resonance, it appears in discourse about national ambition, resilience, and identity, not only in political speeches but also among citizens as a symbol of pride.



Image 2: The Mountain Tuwaiq near Riyadh city in Saudi Arabia.

The power of the metaphor lies in their ability to blend emotion, culture, and meaning. They allow leaders to inspire, to reassure, and sometimes to mobilize, using images that feel extended beyond politics itself. Through nature, political speech becomes not only persuasive but also poetic, reminding citizens of their shared world and their shared future.

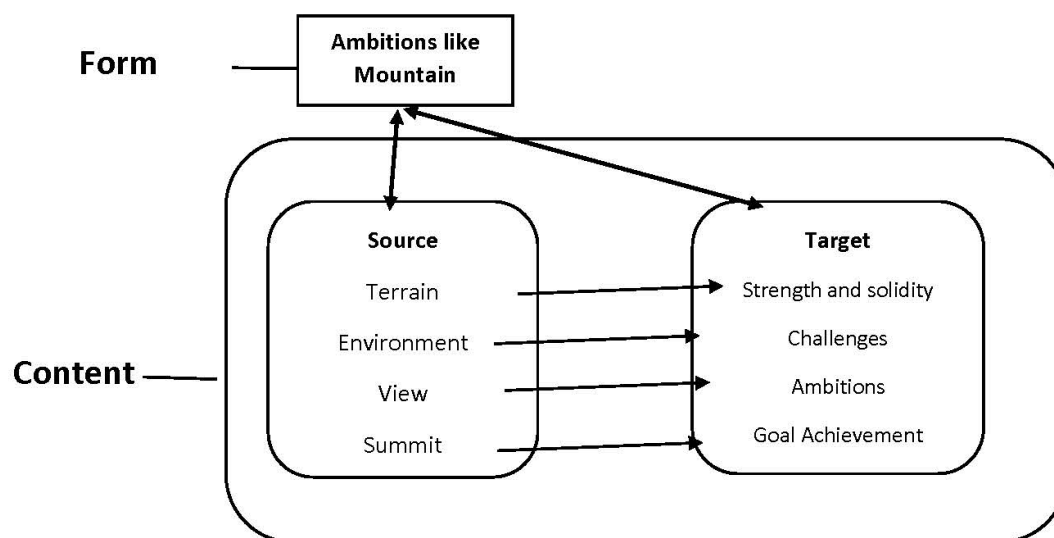


Figure 3: Conceptual mapping of nature metaphor in of Mountain Tuwaiq

The conceptual mapping of the mountain metaphor above exhibits the cognitive construction between the metaphors and motivation. In the mountain metaphor, motivation acts as the driving force that propels a person from the base to the summit. At the base, it provides the initial energy to begin the journey, while along the slope it sustains persistence and determination despite obstacles. Motivation influences how challenges are perceived either as barriers or opportunities to overcome and encourages progress by reinforcing effort at milestones along the way. It also interacts with external factors, helping the climber withstand difficulties such as setbacks or unexpected events. The mountain serves as a influential symbol of firmness and ambition, representing stability, strength, and the drive to reach higher goals. Its solid base reflects a firm foundation, illustrating reliability, resilience, and groundedness in principles or values. The upward climb toward the summit embodies ambition, determination, and the pursuit of excellence, highlighting the effort, focus, and perseverance required to achieve success. Just as a mountain withstands storms and endures over time, it symbolizes a steadfast commitment to long-term objectives, inspiring individuals, or organizations to remain resolute in the face of challenges while continuously striving toward greater heights. Ultimately, motivation is the vital force that fuels continuous effort, resilience, and focus, enabling the individual to reach the peak and achieve their goals.

Thus, the metaphoric projection of the concrete source domain to the emotional target domain has served in conveying the intensity of human emotion behind, enhancing the rhetorical impact of the situation and strengthening conceptual connections within the audience's cognition.

4.4 Energy revamping and the metaphor of "Health":

A key part of Mohammad bin Salman's transformative initiatives is moving the economy from the existing position as the 19th largest economy in the world into the top 15. To achieve that, plans were set to restructure the state's economy with a focus on building well-diversified sources, turning the country's sole reliance on oil to diverse revenues and domestic energy sources. A target was set to raise the share of non-oil exports in non-oil GDP from 16% to 50% and increase non-oil government revenue from (SAR) 163 billion to SAR 1 trillion (Fattouh and Sen, 2016).

One of the most cited metaphors used by Mohammed bin Salman to describe his concerns about Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil was the metaphor of addiction.

1. "We have a state of addiction in the Saudi Arabian kingdom, by everyone, and that's dangerous."
2. "We want to quit the oil addiction in Saudi Arabia."

The metaphor parallels Saudi Arabia's dependence on petroleum revenues to a person suffering from a dangerous addiction describing the Kingdom as having developed an "oil addiction." This metaphor frames reliance on oil as a dangerous dependency that constrains economic growth and necessitates diversification and structural reform.

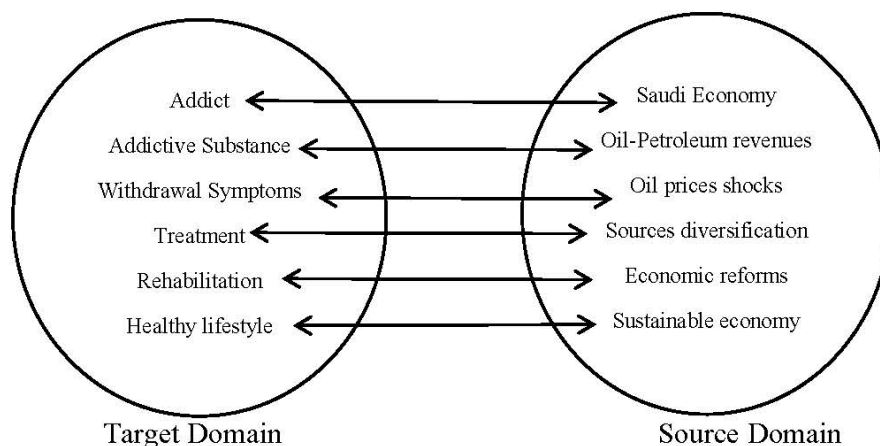


Figure 4. Conceptual mapping of the metaphor "Addiction"

The above mapping illustrates how the metaphor of addiction helps to justify the economic reform and diversification led by Mohammad Bin Salman by portraying dependence on oil as unhealthy and risky. The Saudi economy is pictured as the addict, while oil revenues denote the addictive substance on which the economy has been solely dependent. Just as an addict encounters withdrawal symptoms when deprived of a substance, the Saudi economy faces economic challenges and insecurity and destabilizes when oil prices fluctuate or decline. The process of treatment relates to the efforts to diversify the economy beyond oil, whereas rehabilitation is embodied by the implementation of the economic reforms. Finally, a healthy lifestyle after recovery from an addiction in the source domain maps onto a sustainable and diversified economy, where growth is supported by multiple sectors rather than dependence on a single resource. By applying this metaphor, Bin Salman simplifies for his public both the risks of excessive reliance on oil and the necessity of economic transformation.

4.5 New Future and the metaphors of "Building":

Mohammad Bin Salman's name has been always associated with the notion of building new future, a concept that represents the transition from strategic planning to concrete action. This concept is based on developing human capital and enhancing capabilities through science and knowledge,

generating innovative ideas, employing modern technology, and investing in the present to achieve flexible goals. The first pillar of his building of the Future is investing in Human Capital because future requires a generation empowered with technical and scientific knowledge, capable of adapting to the changing times. Next comes Strategic and Flexible Planning as solid futures cannot be transformed into reality without clear strategies and plans that include measurable objectives, while maintaining sufficient flexibility to address challenges. Then comes Foresight and Innovation for creating alternative scenarios to address uncertainty. These notions are expressed by Mohammad bin Salman using the metaphor of building:

1. "We are not worried about the future of the Kingdom, but rather we look forward to a brighter future, which we are able to build with God's help."
2. "This nation was built by the hands of its sons in extremely difficult circumstances, and by the hands of its sons this nation will surprise the world again."
3. "Our ambition is to build a more prosperous nation, where every citizen finds what they wish for. We will not accept anything less than placing our nation at the forefront of the world's nations in the future, which we are building together."

Mohammed bin Salman utilizes the building metaphor to portray the future of Saudi Arabia as a building that is being constructed by its citizens. It frames the future of the nation as a communal constructive process that requires planning, effort, cooperation, and perseverance. He links the achievements of past generations with the aspirations of the present, implying that the future of Saudi Arabia will be “built” through the shared labor

of its citizens, just as the nation itself was originally built. By referring to the future as something “built by the hands of its sons,” he emphasizes that just as previous generations established the foundations of the country under challenging conditions, the current generation is responsible for constructing its future success and prosperity. This metaphor can be conceptually mapped as follows:

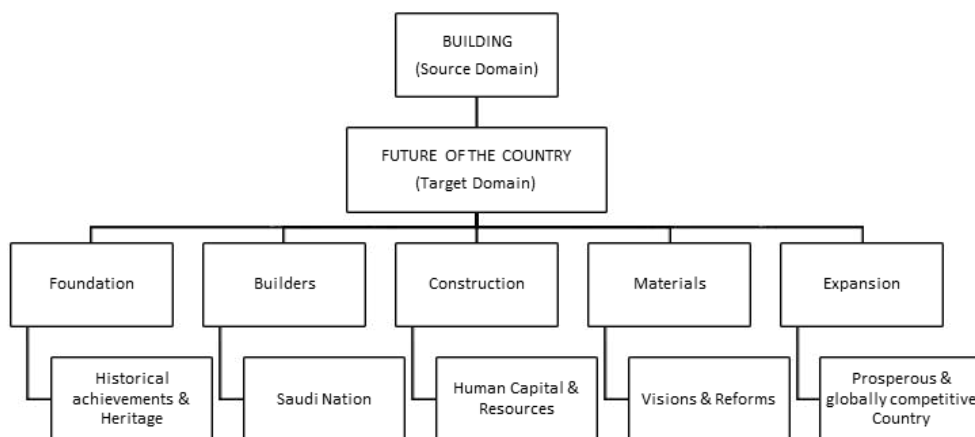


Figure 5. Conceptual mapping of the metaphor “Building”

The diagram shows a systematic mapping from the source domain of building construction to the target domain of country future. At the center of the metaphor, the building represents the future of Saudi Arabia. The foundation relates to the nation’s historical accomplishments, values, and heritage established by the ancestors. The builders are the Saudi citizens whose efforts and contributions are symbolized by the “hands” in the quote. The construction materials denote human capital, national resources, knowledge, and innovation that reinforce development. The process of construction and expansion indicates the current reforms and development initiatives, that target a prosperous, sustainable, and globally competitive future for the country and its nation. Through this structure, the metaphor underlines that the country’s future is not inherited rather dynamically built through mutual efforts, strategic planning, and continuous progress. Hence, the metaphor promotes responsibility, optimism, and active participation in achieving future goals.

From a stylometric examination perspective, the selected quotations reveal a systematic pattern of metaphorical lexical items. Five dominant metaphor categories are identified: Journey, War, Nature, Health, and Building metaphors.

Table 1: Frequency and Distribution of Metaphorical Lexical Items in Mohammed bin Salman’s Selected Speeches.

Metaphor Category	Key Lexical Items	Approx. Frequency
Journey	journey (3), toward (5), roadmap (1), travelling (1), horizon (1), path (1), steps (1)	13
War	fight/fighting (4), corruption (6)	10
Health	addiction (2), quit (1), dangerous (1)	4
Building	build/built/building (6), hands (2)	8
Nature	mountain (1), horizon (1), energy (1), driving force (1)	4

Journey metaphor is the most frequently occurring category. Lexical items such as journey (3 occurrences), toward (5 occurrences), roadmap (1 occurrence), travelling (1 occurrence), horizon (1 occurrence), path (1 occurrence), and steps (1 occurrence) appear repeatedly across six quotations. The recurrent use of movement-related vocabulary structures national development as a constant progression toward Vision 2030 goals. The repeated occurrence of directional terms, particularly toward, calls attention to forward motion and purposeful progression.

War metaphor is the second most salient category. The lexical item fight/fighting appears four times, while corruption is repeated six times. These recurrent expressions frame corruption as an adversary that must be confronted and defeated. The concentration of war-related vocabulary around anti-corruption discourse creates a sense of urgency, determination, and collective struggle.

Nature metaphors occur less frequently but stay rhetorically substantial. Expressions such as Tuwaiq Mountain (1 occurrence), driving force (1 occurrence), energy (1 occurrence), and horizon (1 occurrence) draw upon natural and physical imagery. Among these, the metaphor of the Tuwaiq Mountain stands out prominent as a symbol of resilience, strength, and national identity.

Health metaphors appear through the lexical items addiction (2 occurrences), dangerous (1 occurrence), and quit (1 occurrence). Although it is less frequent than journey and war metaphors, health-related terminology is strategically employed to portray diseases-like threats that endanger the nation's well-being and legitimizes reform measures as necessary treatment and recovery procedures.

Building metaphor is embodied in lexical items such as build (3 occurrences), built (2 occurrences), building (1 occurrence), and references to the hands of its sons (2 occurrences). These expressions conceptualize national development as a construction project. The recurrence of building-related vocabulary lays emphasis on collective effort, long-term planning, and the active role of citizens in shaping the future of the Kingdom.

Overall, the stylometric patterns establish that Mohammed bin Salman relies heavily on repeated journey, war, and building imagery to communicate

transformation, modernization, and national development. The recurrence of these metaphorical items contributes to a coherent rhetorical framework in which Saudi Arabia is depicted as steadily sailing toward a destination, overcoming hindrances, recovering from harmful situations, and cooperatively constructing a prosperous future.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings show that the metaphors incorporated in Mohammed bin Salman's speeches are not simply stylistic devices but indicators of underlying conceptual structures through which abstract political ideas are understood and communicated. Consistent with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), the identified metaphors reveal systematic mappings between concrete source domains and abstract target domains associated with national development, reform, leadership, and collective ambition. These metaphorical expressions allow complex socio-political concepts to be conceptualized through recognizable physical and empirical knowledge, making them cognitively accessible to the audience.

The most prominent pattern identified in the data is the Journey metaphor, which conceptualizes national transformation as movement toward a destination. Expressions such as "our journey toward Vision 2030," "roadmap for the future," "travelling confidently toward a new horizon," and "taking confident steps toward a better future" instantiate the conceptual metaphor National Development is a journey. Within this mapping, the nation is conceptualized as a traveler, Vision 2030 as the destination, progress as forward movement, and challenges as obstacles encountered along the path. This metaphor is established in the Path image schema, one of the fundamental cognitive structures arising from human embodied experience (Johnson, 1987). Through this schema, abstract political change becomes cognitively structured as purposeful movement from a present state to a desired future state.

Another substantial pattern is the Building metaphor, manifest in expressions such as "This nation was built by the hands of its sons." Here, the source domain of construction is mapped onto the target domain of nation-building, producing the conceptual metaphor "Future is a Building". The mapping projects elements such as builders,

foundations, structures, and construction processes onto national growth and social development. This metaphor allows listeners to conceptualize societal transformation as a gradual, purposeful, and collective process requiring effort and stability. The metaphor further highlights agency by positioning citizens as active builders of the nation rather than passive observers of change.

Likewise, the War metaphor recognized in statements such as "We will fight corruption in all its forms" reflects the conceptual metaphor "Political Action is War" and "Social Problems are Enemies". In the conceptual mapping of this metaphor, corruption is mapped as an opponent, reform measures as weapons or tactics, and the whole political action as combat scenario. The metaphor configures corruption in terms of fighting and resistance and thus providing a cognitively consistent framework through which the issue can be interpreted and addressed. The metaphor's efficacy derives not only from emotional appeal but from its faculty of organizing reasoning through a familiar conflict schema.

The analysis also showed metaphors obtained from the Nature domain identified in expressions such as "The Saudis' ambition is like that of the Tuwaiq Mountain." Such metaphors employ physical and environmental experiences to conceptualize abstract characteristics like resistance, strength, and perseverance. Through the mapping of traits associated with mountains onto national ambition, the metaphor facilitates listeners to recognize determination in concrete and embodied terms. The metaphor hence performs as a conceptual mechanism that transfers knowledge from a familiar physical entity to an abstract cognitive and collective attribute.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, these findings support the central claim of Conceptual Metaphor Theory that metaphor structures thought rather than merely embellishing language. The recurring metaphorical patterns identified in the speeches demonstrate how political concepts are systematically organized through embodied source domains that shape perception, interpretation, and reasoning. The metaphors identified in the corpus are therefore not isolated linguistic expressions but surface manifestations of broader conceptual systems underlying political cognition. Their

recurrence across different speeches suggests that they function as stable cognitive models through which national reform, leadership, and collective aspirations are conceptualized and communicated.

Additionally, the highlighted metaphors are influential political tools for shaping public perception and guiding collective understanding. They contribute to mobilization and long-term influence. Many of Bin Salman's metaphors have become memorable quote that are easily repeated and shared among the public. Over time, these metaphors have become embedded in the Saudi political culture, influencing how future issues are understood and discussed. the metaphors have proved to be influential psychologically because they tap into human emotions and cognitive processes. The brain processes metaphorical language in a way that connects logic with sensory and emotional experience, making messages more persuasive. When Bin Salman described obstacles as disease that necessitates treatment, it reduced fear and increased resilience by framing difficulties as temporary and survivable. This emotional resonance helps motivate his nation internally, encouraging confidence, hope, and determination.

On the other hand, metaphors serve to make authentic connection between contemporary national goals and the nation's historical experiences and collective memory. By drawing on metaphors like "built by the hands of its sons" and "by the hands of its sons this nation will surprise the world again.", "new frontier" and "new path", Bin Salman endeavored to frame the present in relation to the past, fostering a sense of continuity, identity, and shared purpose. Such metaphorical expressions help citizens interpret current challenges and aspirations through the lens of historical achievements, struggles, and values. Also, the metaphors in the highlighted quotes play a crucial function as a core stylistic device that elevates motivational leadership speeches from simple communication to impactful art. Abstract ideas such as vision, struggle, or success are presented in concrete forms that create depth and texture in language, making speeches more vivid and memorable. This literary richness captures attention and sustains audience engagement, ensuring that the message resonates beyond the moment of delivery.

Overall, the findings imply that Mohammed bin Salman's political discourse relies considerably on

conceptual metaphors that convert abstract political objectives into concrete practical experiences. By deploying familiar source domains such as journeys, buildings, war, diseases and nature, the speeches' structure coherent conceptual frameworks that enable audiences to understand complex national transformations through everyday human experience. As all previous related studies, the findings of the current study reinforce the instructive value of Conceptual Metaphor Theory as an analytical framework for investigating how metaphor constructs political thought and meaning in contemporary leadership discourse.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study conducted a cognitive analysis of metaphors in selected statements by the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. This study demonstrates that metaphors function as a influential cognitive and rhetorical tool for evoking emotion, clarifying complex ideas, and uniting individuals around a shared purpose. Through an analysis of selected statements by the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, it becomes evident that metaphor plays a vital role in shaping public perception and reinforcing his vision and leadership style. Guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study reveals consistent patterns in Crown Prince's use of metaphors and finds that he uses a variety of conceptual metaphors including journey, war, nature, architectural and health metaphors to mirror his visions 2030 initiatives, youth empowerment, as well as his revolutionary political, economic, developmental and regional reforms. These metaphorical frameworks effectively translate abstract ambitions into concrete, relatable concepts, thereby enhancing public engagement and confidence. The study findings postulate the important function of these metaphors is in audience adaptation as Bin Salman tailors them to suit the national, political, historical, psychological values of his people. It highlights the critical importance of metaphor in leadership discourse, particularly during periods of significant transformation, where it serves as a compelling means of motivating, inspiring, and fostering a collective vision for a better future.

6.1 CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

The research was conducted independently, and no financial, personal, or institutional relationships have influenced the study's design, analysis, or interpretation.

6.2 DATA ACCESS STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study consist of publicly available speeches, interviews, and official statements delivered by Mohammed bin Salman. These materials are accessible through official Saudi government platforms, reputable news outlets, and verified media archives. No restricted or proprietary datasets were used. All textual data analyzed in this study can be accessed by readers through publicly available sources, ensuring transparency and replicability of the research.

6.3 ETHICS STATEMENT

This study involves qualitative textual analysis of publicly available discourse and does not include human participants, personal data, or sensitive information. Therefore, it does not require formal ethical approval in accordance with standard institutional research guidelines. The research adheres to ethical principles of academic integrity, accurate representation of sources, and proper citation practices. All statements by Mohammed bin Salman are analyzed within their public and official context, with respect for their original meaning and intent.

6.4 FUNDING STATEMENT

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