



The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Power Structure in Saudi Arabia

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In recent decades, the expansion of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), has redefined the nature of power and the ways in which it is exercised within the international system. In this context, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as one of the major actors in the Middle East, has recognized the significance of technological transformations and developed a comprehensive strategy for leveraging artificial intelligence within the framework of its national development program, Vision 2030. With the aim of reducing its dependence on oil, enhancing governance efficiency, and strengthening its international position, Saudi Arabia has pursued the development of artificial intelligence as a strategic instrument for economic, social, and political transformation. In fact, by in-

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tegrating advanced technologies with strategic policymaking, Saudi Arabia seeks to reshape the structures of power at both the domestic and regional levels. The significance of this study lies in demonstrating how artificial intelligence functions not merely as a technology but also as a geopolitical and strategic instrument for reproducing Saudi Arabia's power and influence.

Research Method

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and is based on Joseph Nye's theory of smart power. The research data were collected through library resources, official documents, international reports, and academic articles. The primary focus of the study is to examine Saudi Arabia's major policies concerning artificial intelligence and to analyze its role in redefining domestic and regional power structures. Within this framework, the study employs qualitative and comparative content analysis to explain the relationship between emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, and processes of smart power in Saudi Arabia's domestic and foreign policies.

Findings

The findings indicate that, within the framework of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has systematically pursued technological modernization and digital transformation through the establishment of the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) and the formulation of the National Strategy for Data and Artificial Intelligence (NSDAI). Through investment in large-scale projects such as the smart city of NEOM, the development of digital governance, and cooperation with leading international companies such as Google, Microsoft, and NVIDIA, the country seeks to consolidate its position as a technological power at both the regional and global levels. Artificial intelligence has also been employed as a tool for improving efficiency in key sectors, including healthcare, education, and security, while playing an important role in diversifying the national economy and strengthening political legitimacy. At the broader level, Saudi Arabia has utilized artificial intelligence to simultaneously strengthen the components of hard power—including military, economic, and infrastructural capabilities—and soft power, including its international image, technological diplomacy, and domestic legitimacy. This com-

bination indicates the emergence of a model of “technological smart power” in Saudi Arabia. The findings further demonstrate that the concentration of power in the hands of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the centralized decision-making structure have facilitated the rapid implementation of technological policies. At the same time, however, this concentration has increased the risks associated with excessive dependence on individual leadership and the limited development of institutionalization.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that Saudi Arabia is using artificial intelligence to develop a form of hybrid smart power that is transforming the country’s traditional power structure. This approach, aimed at consolidating Saudi Arabia’s position as a leading power in the digital economy, has contributed to enhancing its geopolitical influence and bargaining power within the international system.

Nevertheless, the successful implementation of this model faces several challenges, including a shortage of specialized human resources, weaknesses in data management, legal gaps, organizational resistance to new technologies, and inequalities in digital infrastructure. Overcoming these challenges requires a multilayered policy framework encompassing human-resource empowerment, the development of specialized education and training, the strengthening of the innovation ecosystem, and the expansion of international cooperation. If these challenges are effectively managed, Saudi Arabia may develop a new model of technology-based governance grounded in smart power and emerge as one of the influential powers in the new digital order of the twenty-first century.

Key words: Artificial Intelligence; Saudi Arabia; Power Structure; Smart Power.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.