

National Self-Reliance in Discursive Legitimation: A Study of Vietnam’s “New Era” Discourse in State Media¹

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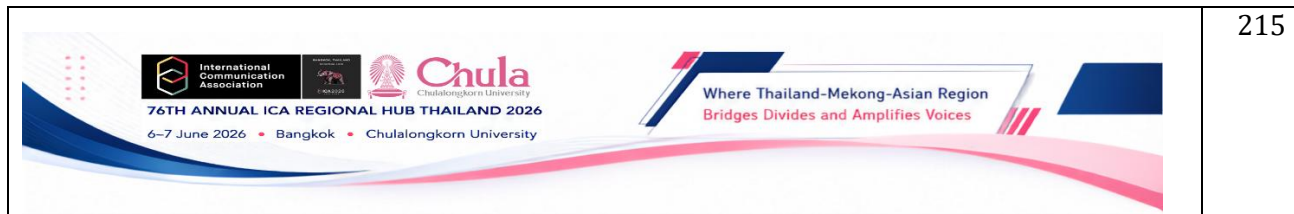
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Abstract

Under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, state media has consistently reinforced the vision of Vietnam’s “New Era”. This paper examines how state media legitimises the “New Era” discourse and how self-reliance is integrated into this process. Drawing on Van Leeuwen’s framework of discursive legitimation, Entman’s framing theory, and Downs’ issue-attention cycle, the study analyses 925 articles published between September 2024 and January 2026 on the English-language platforms of seven national state media outlets. Methodologically, it adopts a mixed-

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method design combining quantitative content analysis and CDA-informed qualitative analysis to identify legitimisation strategies and the discursive role of self-reliance. The findings show that state media legitimises the “New Era” primarily through authorisation, supported by moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis across fluctuating issue-attention cycles. Self-reliance operates as a tri-dimensional legitimisation resource that connects authority, morality, rationality, and historical memory, functioning at once as outward-oriented autonomy, techno-economic pragmatism, and a continuity of moral ethos. The study contributes to research on political legitimisation by showing how a Global South media system adapts universal strategies to project national agency ahead of the 14th National Party Congress.

Keywords: political communication, discursive legitimisation, issue-attention cycle, Global South, Vietnamese state media, self-reliance.

In the digital age, online transnational instruments have become essential for governments to disseminate messages and shape public narratives (Yuan et al., 2023). Many states now use digital communication to reach global audiences (Seo & Kinsey, 2013). Major powers such as China, the United States, and Russia operate international media outlets to promote national agendas and legitimise policy positions (Cook, 2020; Chernobrov & Briant, 2020; Dwyer, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2024). In centralised media systems such as Vietnam's, state-run media functions as both a communication apparatus and an ideological instrument of the Communist Party. Discourse construction on mainstream platforms therefore becomes an important mechanism for legitimising leadership, policy direction, and national visions (Phuong, 2025). In this context, the "New Era" vision associated with General Secretary To Lam has become increasingly prominent in national discourse. Self-reliance occupies a central place in this vision and is positioned as a foundational principle for future development. The phrase has received extensive coverage across state media, addressing both domestic and international audiences.

Problem Statement & Research Objectives

While previous studies have examined discursive legitimation in Western democracies and China, less attention has been paid to how Vietnamese state media, particularly English-language outlets, constructs political narratives for international audiences. This study focuses on English-language state media as a distinctive site of outward-facing legitimation, where national political visions are translated, condensed, and projected externally. This register is significant because it reveals how state media operates as both a policy amplifier and a discursive actor aligned with political leadership, especially in the lead-up to the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

Specifically, this paper investigates how Vietnamese state media promotes the “New Era” discourse through discursive legitimation strategies grounded in self-reliance. Drawing on van Leeuwen’s legitimation framework, it analyses English-language digital news content to examine how visions of national development are framed and reinforced within a centralised communication environment. The study treats self-reliance both as a recurring theme in Vietnamese political rhetoric and as a culturally grounded vocabulary of agency through which state media articulates national autonomy, developmental aspiration, and international positioning.

From a critical standpoint, this research assumes that state media is not just a neutral conduit of information, but an active ideological apparatus. By systematically analysing this discourse, the study aims to uncover how political legitimacy is constructed, highlighting whose voices are strategically amplified to reinforce the dominant narrative and what alternative perspectives are consequently obscured. It seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do Vietnamese state media discursively construct and hierarchically employ legitimation strategies to promote the “New Era” discourse?

RQ2. How does the theme of self-reliance contribute to the legitimation process?

Literature Review

Discursive Legitimation and Theoretical Foundation

Legitimation is widely recognised as a fundamental component in politics and communication, serving to maintain social order by reducing reliance on coercion and encouraging voluntary compliance (Weber, 1947). This viewpoint on the role of legitimation challenged the prevailing twentieth-century view that economic development was the primary driver of political

stability (Lipset, 1969). However, since then, more and more scholars have supported or proved the latter perspective. Rather than treating legitimacy as a fixed attribute of political institutions, contemporary scholarship increasingly approaches legitimation as an ongoing communicative process through which authority, policy direction, and collective identity are made acceptable to specific audiences. As Berger and Luckmann (1966/2016) argue, discourse is a primary tool through which political systems construct legitimacy. Actors in power, including governments, ruling parties or elites, “seek normative approval” through complicated and ongoing discursive practices involving interrelated texts and narratives (Rojo & van Dijk, 1997; Van Dijk, 1998). Legitimacy is achieved when organisations are perceived as congruent with shared norms, values, and expectations within a given social system (Greenwood et al., 2017). This perspective is particularly relevant to media discourse, where legitimacy is not simply declared but repeatedly constructed through selection, emphasis, quotation, evaluation, and narrative sequencing.

Among the most widely applied frameworks for analysing discursive legitimation is Van Leeuwen’s (2007) model. It identifies four main strategies: authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation and mythopoesis. Based on this framework, subsequent papers have examined how institutions justify actions and reinforce authority through discourse (Hansson et al., 2022; Reyes, 2011; Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Scholars have also proven the framework useful in empirical studies, including analyses of EU legitimacy in its official speeches (Pansardi, 2018), ideological framing during the Eurozone crisis (Vaara, 2014) and nationalism in the justification for Vietnamese foreign policy narrative (Trinh & Vu, 2024). Vaara, Aranda and Etchanchu (2024) noted, legitimation plays a “central role in today’s mass and social media”, and suggested more investigations into discursive strategies. For this study, van Leeuwen’s framework helps distinguish different modes of

justification, including legitimacy grounded in authority, values, practical reasoning, and exemplary narratives. The Vietnamese case, however, requires attention to how these strategies are culturally and politically mediated, particularly through self-reliance as a recurring vocabulary of national agency. To capture both the macro-level trends and micro-level linguistic nuances of this legitimization process, contemporary scholarship increasingly advocates for combining quantitative corpus linguistics with qualitative CDA. This approach allows researchers to map large-scale discursive patterns before subjecting typical texts to deep qualitative critique (Baker et al., 2008; Mautner, 2016), thereby enhancing methodological rigor and mitigating selection bias.

Nationalism and the Discourse of Self-Reliance

Nationalism is often mobilised as a political legitimization resource, linking state projects and policies to collective identity, historical memory, and national aspiration. (Fuchs, 2020). It is commonly defined as a political ideology that legitimises states (Freeden, 2002; Fuchs, 2020; Gellner, 1983; Kettunen, 2018) or as a popular perception of superiority and self-awareness among the populace, instead of the ruling class (Kellas, 1998; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989). Other definitions highlight that nationalism is an individual sense of belongingness that promotes aspirations at the state level (Dekker, Malova, & Hoogendoorn, 2003; Kellas, 1998). In contrast, various scholars hold that nationalism is a dynamic and changing phenomenon and hence cannot be defined in a fixed sense (Kundra, 2019). For this study, nationalism is approached not as a fixed ideology, but as a flexible language of legitimization through which national unity, historical continuity, collective agency, and developmental aspiration are made meaningful in public discourse.

From a perspective of political communication, nationalism is “a strategy for legitimization and reproduction of the ruling class’s interests”, activated mainly through discourse (Fuchs, 2020). Thus,

nationalistic rhetoric is often employed to justify various policy implementations, such as protectionist trade policies or restrictive immigration laws (Nowrasteh & Somin, 2024). The Communist Party of China also used nationalist narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen its legitimacy domestically (Klenk & Gurol, 2023). Similarly, in Vietnam, nationalism plays a significant role in the legitimization process of foreign policy, as demonstrated by Trinh and Vu (2024).

However, treating Vietnamese self-reliance merely as a sub-type of nationalism risks flattening its conceptual specificity. In the Vietnamese political and historical context, self-reliance is not only a rhetoric of national pride, but also a vocabulary of agency, resilience, and self-positioning in relation to external powers and global hierarchies. Moreover, self-reliance is among the most prominent elements of nationalist political rhetoric. It is described both as a goal and a prerequisite for the independence and development of Vietnam (Hoang & Phan, 2023). Since the introduction of the “New Era of Nation’s Rise” discourse in 2024, the concept of self-reliance has been widely utilised by state-managed media to justify the legitimacy of this political vision.

However, there is a large gap in research regarding self-reliance, particularly its role in political communication. In fact, many Western researchers focus on self-reliance in individual or economic terms, viewing it as the ability to be self-sufficient or independent (Ewing, 1968; Galtung, 1982/2019), or as a process of detaching from the global system and reorienting both international and domestic relations (Biersteker, 1980). This interpretation is different from the term of self-reliance in Eastern contexts, where self-reliance is viewed as an important part in the ideology, implying a regenerative process driven by collective effort (Vu, 2019; Yang, 2019). For instance, in Vietnam, self-reliance is framed as a key national value to protect and develop the nation, while fostering global integration, rather than a pursuit of isolationism (Nguyen, 2017). This distinction is

crucial for the present study. Self-reliance in Vietnamese political discourse does not simply imply withdrawal from the international system. Rather, it articulates a logic of “inner strength for external engagement”, in which national autonomy, developmental capacity, and international integration are presented as mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory.

Although self-reliance is prominent in contemporary Vietnamese political communication, limited research has examined its role in Vietnam’s media discourse and the CPV’s communication strategies. This study addresses that gap by exploring how self-reliance is constructed in state media, particularly within the discourse of the “New Era of Nation’s Rise.” It examines self-reliance as an indigenous legitimation resource: a culturally grounded concept through which state media connects authority, morality, rationality, and historical continuity. This approach moves beyond applying a Western-derived typology to a Vietnamese case, and instead asks how a Vietnamese political concept may complicate and extend existing understandings of discursive legitimation.

Vietnam’s Policy on Press

There are various perspectives on Vietnam’s policy on journalism. Some Western scholars view it as operating under a centralised structure in which Party institutions retain strong oversight over media production and editorial direction, emphasising ideological alignment (Pham, 2021; Grant, 2013). Although Chinese researchers are largely in agreement about the Communist Party’s dominant role, they often describe Vietnam’s media landscape in more neutral or pragmatic terms (Yi & Lai, 2009; Nie, 2017; Wang, 2018). These different assessments indicate that Vietnam’s media system should not be reduced to a single descriptive label. For the purpose of this study, however, the key point is that major state media outlets operate within an institutional environment in which political communication, policy explanation, and national image projection are closely connected.

However, Vietnamese scholars recently argue that such models no longer reflect exactly the complexity of the contemporary media environment. Defined locally as “Vietnamese revolutionary journalism” grounded in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh’s ideology (Dao, 2017; Dinh, 2024), state media now serves a hybrid function, both as politically embedded communication institutions and as channels for policy discussion, public feedback and supervision (Dang, 2012; Duong, 2023). In other perspectives, it acts as a “two-tier” system that adheres to strict political parameters while adapting to market pressures, audience demands, and external communication needs (Nelson et al., 2011; Nguyen, 2022). Rather than treating these features as mutually exclusive, this study approaches Vietnamese state media as institutionally embedded actors that combine policy communication, public communication, and audience-oriented adaptation.

While studies have examined the ideological landscape of Vietnam’s press, less attention has been paid to how its media system shapes discursive legitimation, especially in English-language state media for global audiences. This study addresses that gap by using van Leeuwen’s framework to analyse how state media construct political legitimacy through self-reliance in the “New Era of Nation’s Rise” discourse. The English-language corpus is treated not as a mirror of the whole domestic discourse, but as an outward-facing register through which political meanings are selected, translated, and organised for external communication. This framing clarifies both the value and limitation of the corpus.

Theoretical Framework

The research draws on van Leeuwen’s (2007) discursive legitimation framework to examine how the discourse of “New Era of Nation’s Rise” is justified in the context of Vietnam’s state-led media system. Also, it integrates the notion of national self-reliance rooted in Ho Chi Minh’s Ideology, which functions as both a moral value and a political rationale underlying many

legitimation practices. This study approaches them as mutually connected. Van Leeuwen’s framework provides the analytical grammar for identifying how legitimation is discursively organised, while self-reliance offers a culturally grounded vocabulary through which authority, morality, rationality, and historical continuity are articulated in the Vietnamese context.

Strategies of Discursive Legitimation

First introduced in the late 1990s and further elaborated in 2007, van Leeuwen’s framework of discursive legitimation is often described as a “grammar of legitimation,” offering a systematic way to analyse how language constructs the legitimacy of social actions (Yu & Zheng, 2023). It has become an important point of departure for studies of legitimation in discourse (Bennett, 2022), as it identifies the semantic and rhetorical devices through which speakers and writers justify political decisions, institutional practices, media narratives, and other forms of social action.

Van Leeuwen identifies four main strategies of legitimation: authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis. Authorisation legitimises action by invoking authoritative sources such as governments, political parties, laws, or recognised institutions. Moral evaluation justifies action through values and normative principles, presenting it as ethically desirable or socially beneficial. Rationalisation provides intellectual, instrumental, or utilitarian grounds, including necessity, purpose, or common sense. Mythopoesis relies on narrative devices, such as stories, exemplars, or cautionary tales, to demonstrate the appropriateness or consequences of certain actions. These categories are useful because they allow legitimation to be examined as recurring textual practices rather than as a general claim of political support. In this study, they are used to analyse how English-language state media construct the “New Era” as authoritative, reasonable, morally desirable, and historically continuous.

This study applies van Leeuwen's framework to a state-led discourse within Vietnam's centralised media environment, where legitimisation is also shaped by cultural-political narratives such as self-reliance in Ho Chi Minh's Ideology. The framework is therefore not treated as a simple Western-derived typology imposed on a Vietnamese case. Instead, the study asks how Vietnamese self-reliance mediates the four strategies by linking them to a locally grounded understanding of national agency, autonomy, and development. This is where the framework's decolonial value lies: the Vietnamese case is not merely empirical material, but a site from which the conceptual vocabulary of legitimisation can be refined.

Temporal Dynamics and Contextual Interpretation

While van Leeuwen's framework identifies the structural mechanics of legitimisation, it says less about how legitimisation fluctuates over time. To address this limitation, the study draws on Downs's (1972) Issue-Attention Cycle, which suggests that media attention to political issues changes across phases rather than remaining static. In state-led media systems, such shifts may be closely aligned with political events, commemorations, and institutional milestones, rather than driven only by public interest.

To connect textual strategies with their socio-political context, the study also draws on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak, 2001). DHA emphasises that discourse should be interpreted in relation to historical memory, institutional settings, and political contexts. Together, these frameworks support a longitudinal analysis of how the "New Era" discourse redistributes its legitimating emphasis across different political phases.

Self-Reliance within Ho Chi Minh's Ideology

Vietnam's independence, freedom, and development (Ngo, 2023). In this tradition, self-reliance is not merely a goal, but an internal strength, an inherent quality of the Vietnamese people, and a guiding principle of national development across historical periods. It does not imply isolationism. Rather, it supports international integration by strengthening national capacity and autonomy (Ngo, 2023; Hoang & Phan, 2023). Ho Chi Minh also emphasised the responsibility of the Communist Party and the State in promoting self-reliance. More recently, the 14th Party Congress and General Secretary To Lam identified self-reliance as vital to the "New Era" (Ha, 2024). In this sense, self-reliance provides a locally grounded vocabulary for understanding how national agency is articulated through historical experience, developmental ambition, and international engagement.

To operationalise self-reliance within Van Leeuwen's model, this study treats it as both a thematic narrative and a moral-political claim. It invokes national values, political identity, and historical continuity, thereby functioning as a discursive resource of legitimation. This operationalisation is relational. Rather than assigning self-reliance to one category in Van Leeuwen's framework, the study examines how it moves across and connects different strategies. The same concept can therefore operate as an authoritative directive, a practical rationale, a moral value, and a historical narrative.

In sum, Van Leeuwen's framework offers a structured lens for examining how legitimacy is constructed through multiple strategies. This study uses it to analyse English-language Vietnamese state media while also showing how self-reliance is embedded within and amplified by those strategies. Self-reliance is not treated as a passive theme fitted into a pre-existing typology. It is approached as a locally grounded legitimation resource that helps explain how authority, rationality, morality, and historical continuity converge around a culturally specific language of national agency.

Methodology

Constructed on Ho Chi Minh's Ideology on self-reliance as both an ideological foundation and a developmental principle, this study adopts a mixed-method design combining quantitative content analysis and CDA-informed qualitative analysis to examine how self-reliance is discursively mobilised in Vietnamese state media. The analytical framework integrates Van Leeuwen's (2007) model of discursive legitimisation strategies, quantitative and qualitative content analysis, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The two components serve complementary functions. The quantitative component maps the distribution and prominence of legitimisation strategies across the corpus, while the CDA-informed qualitative component interprets how these strategies are linguistically constructed. This combination follows an established tradition of corpus-assisted critical discourse studies, in which large-scale patterning and close reading reinforce one another (Baker et al., 2008; Mautner, 2016). A corpus of this scale ($n = 925$) is necessary to map strategy distribution reliably and to trace its longitudinal shifts. The qualitative analysis does not subject all articles to in-depth reading. Instead, illustrative examples were purposively selected for their typicality, prioritising high-frequency patterns and diversity across outlets.

Sampling

The corpus comprises 925 English-language articles published between 24 September 2024 and 25 January 2026, covering the period from the initial articulation of the "New Era" discourse to the conclusion of the 14th National Party Congress, the critical event that shapes Vietnam's policies for development in the coming years.

This timeframe was selected to capture the early development of the "New Era" discourse, from its initial articulation on 24 September 2024 through a period of major political and institutional

adjustments until the conclusion of the 14th National Party Congress. It provides a clear window for examining how the discourse was formed, circulated, and adapted in English-language state media. The study therefore treats this period as an early phase of outward-facing legitimization, rather than as a complete account of the evolving “New Era” discourse.

Content is drawn from seven English-language state media outlets selected for their institutional role in communicating national policy orientations and external communication messages: (1) The World & Vietnam Report, affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; (2) Vietnam Television (VTV); (3) Voice of Vietnam (VOV); (4) Vietnam News Agency (Vietnamnews - VNA); (5) Nhan Dan Online (People’s Newspaper); (6) People’s Army Newspaper; and (7) Public Security News. Together, these outlets provide a relevant corpus for examining how the “New Era” discourse is presented in outward-facing state media communication.

Articles were retrieved through Python-based scraping and Apify-assisted extraction, depending on the technical accessibility of each outlet. The search used the following keywords: “new era”. Articles were included if they: (i) were published in English; (ii) fell within the defined timeframe; (iii) referred directly to the “New Era” discourse; and (iv) discussed national development, leadership, reform, self-reliance, or Vietnam’s international positioning in relation to this discourse. Articles were excluded if they were duplicates, purely event-listing items without substantive textual content, unrelated uses of “new era”, or texts in which the search terms appeared only incidentally. After cleaning and deduplication, the final corpus consisted of 925 articles. As the corpus consists of English-language articles, it captures the outward-facing presentation of the “New Era” discourse to international readers. This framing clarifies both the analytical value of the corpus and its limitations.

Analytical Method

The analysis combined quantitative content analysis, deductive qualitative coding, and DHA-informed close reading. First, the corpus was mapped by outlet, publication date, and keyword distribution to identify patterns of media attention over time. Second, articles were coded in NVivo 15 using a deductive codebook based on Van Leeuwen's four legitimization strategies: authorisation, rationalisation, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis. These were further divided into sub-categories, including personal authority, institutional authority, instrumental rationalisation, theoretical rationalisation, abstraction, analogy, moral tales, and cautionary tales. References to self-reliance were then coded across these categories to examine whether it functioned as an authoritative directive, a practical rationale, a moral value, or a historical narrative.

The unit of coding was paragraphs. To enhance credibility, given the sheer volume of the dataset ($n=925$) and the qualitative depth required for CDA, a single-analyst-with-validation procedure was employed. The first author recoded a 20% subset (185 articles) of the corpus after a two-week interval. The intra-coder agreement demonstrated high consistency, and any minor discrepancies were resolved through reflexive consultation with the co-author, confirming the stability of the codebook.

The final codebook included code definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and representative examples. The quantitative distribution of strategies was then read alongside the Issue-Attention Cycle to examine temporal shifts in legitimization, while DHA was used to interpret selected examples in relation to Vietnam's historical experience, political context, and outward-facing communication environment.

Results

Discursive Legitimation Strategies

Drawing on Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework, this study identifies four major discursive legitimation strategies in the construction of the "New Era" discourse within Vietnamese state media: authorisation, rationalisation, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis.

A quantitative macro-mapping of the 925 articles revealed that authorisation (90.1%) was the most frequently used strategy, followed by moral evaluation (82.2%), rationalisation (78.4%), and mythopoesis (9.8%). Table 1 illustrates the distribution of these strategies on article-level frequency (the number of articles containing at least one reference).

Table 1

Discursive Legitimation on Digital Platforms

Discursive legitimation strategies	Frequency	Rate
Authorisation	834	90.1%
Expert authority	122	13.2%
Institutional authority	414	44.8%
Personal authority	625	67.6%
Role Model Authority	52	5.6%
The Authority of Conformity	270	29.2%
The Authority of Tradition	92	9.9%

Table 1

Discursive Legitimation on Digital Platforms (Contd.)

Discursive legitimation strategies	Frequency	Rate
Moral evaluation	760	82.2%
Abstraction	747	80.8%
Analogies	10	1.1%
Evaluation	107	11.6%
Mythopoesis	91	9.8%
Cautionary tales	18	1.9%
Moral tales	78	8.4%
Rationalisation	725	78.4%
Instrumental Rationalisation	719	77.7%
Theoretical Rationalisation	35	3.8%

Note. Article-level frequency. $N = 925$

While the quantitative frequency establishes the hierarchy of these strategies, the following qualitative CDA uncovers how they are linguistically operationalised to construct legitimacy.

Authorisation as Hierarchical Affirmation

Authorisation dominates the discourse, with state media relying heavily on institutional legitimacy, notably in regards to the authority vested in the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and top-ranking leaders like Party General Secretary, President, Prime Minister or Chair of National Assembly,

which are legalised as key state leadership positions of Vietnam. These sources are often expressed through quotation and authoritative tone that employs active action verbs, such as “affirm,” “direct,” and “underscore”. Personal and institutional authority are blended to emphasise the top-down leadership structure framing the “New Era” as a Party-led directive, not an open proposal, as follows:

Example (1)

“The idea of a new era of rise for Vietnam, introduced by Party General Secretary To Lam, has been highlighted by the recent 10th plenum of the Party Central Committee as a strategic direction for Vietnam’s development in the coming decades.” (VOV - November 15, 2024).

Significantly, the legitimation process in the English-language state media is inherently outward-facing, evidenced by the strategic use of internationalised conformity. Authorisation is not exclusively drawn from domestic entities but is actively extended to international partners, foreign governments, and global institutions to validate the vision of the 'New Era'. By quoting foreign experts and diplomatic allies, the state media projects a narrative that Vietnam's era of national rise is not merely a domestic ambition, but a trajectory globally recognised and supported.

For instance, endorsements from Western academics are systematically utilised to validate this new era: *“Prof. Thayer recalled President Ho Chi Minh’s principle of self-reliance and friendship with all nations [...] Looking ahead, he emphasised that amid global uncertainties and the challenges of digital transformation and climate change, Vietnam must continue to foster resilience and self-reliance to firmly advance into a new era.”* (Vietnamnews, August 24, 2025). Furthermore, at multinational forums such as the World Economic Forum and in strategic dialogues

with major powers like Japan and the US, state media emphasises that international actors are ready to “accompany the country in the new era” (Nhan Dan Online, August 7, 2025).

Example (2)

“Japan backs Vietnam’s reform efforts and expects to stand alongside the country as it pursues development goals in the new era.” (Nhan Dan Online, August 7, 2025).

This outward-facing conformity transforms global diplomatic engagement into a tool for domestic and external legitimization of the nation’s rising era.

While expert voices, including both domestic and international ones, are sometimes included, they largely function to reiterate and legitimise existing discourses instead of offering critical or independent perspectives.

Rationalisation as Strategic Coherence

The rationalisation strategy (78.4%) functions to make the “New Era” both logically necessary and strategically viable. While highly persuasive, the formulated goals occasionally lack granular specificity, relying heavily on sweeping developmental promises to unify public consensus.

Instrumental rationalisation (77.7%) overwhelmingly dominates this category by linking the ideological discourse to measurable, teleological milestones. These claims are constructed as the pragmatic, logical consequences of the Party’s vision. For example, state media explicitly quantifies the epoch’s utility:

Example (3)

“The era of the nation’s rise is the one of breakthrough development and acceleration under the leadership of the Party, successfully building a

happy, prosperous, civilised, equitable, democratic, and wealthy socialist Vietnam that can catch up with, advance alongside, and stand shoulder to shoulder with powers across the five continents.” (People’s Army Newspaper - December 31, 2024)

This dominance reflects an outward-facing legitimisation strategy tailored for an English-reading audience, prioritising pragmatic development metrics over abstract ideological discourse.

Conversely, theoretical rationalisation remains marginal (3.8%), acting not as the primary persuasive tool but as the essential ideological anchor for the domestic power structure. Rather than promising material outcomes, theoretical rationalisation justifies the New Era as a systemic and ideological necessity, intrinsically linked to the “natural order” of the nation's political trajectory, anchoring it directly to foundational doctrines. Thus, while instrumental logic is deployed to project economic competence to a global audience, theoretical rationalisation is subtly retained to reaffirm the indisputable ideological legitimacy of the Party navigating this transition.

Moral Evaluation as National Imperative

Accounting for the majority of moral codes (80.8%), abstraction legitimises the New Era by translating concrete institutional policies into universally desired, morally undeniable concepts. The discourse systematically abstracts the political transition into elevated ideals such as the “nation’s rise”, “development”, “growth”, “prosperity”, and a variety of other respected values such as unity, patriotism, civilisation and particularly self-reliance.

Example (4)

“The top priority in this new era is to successfully achieve the strategic goals... It also aims to strongly awaken national pride, the spirit of confidence,

self-reliance, resilience, patriotism, and aspiration for national development, firmly combining the power of the nation with the strength of the times” (Nhan Dan Online, August 2025).

By abstracting complex governance into both an unquestionable pursuit of development and prosperity, together with various respected values, the discourse renders the New Era ethically non-negotiable.

This is reinforced by *evaluation* (11.6%), which relies on emotionally charged, value-laden adjectives to link the transition to an aura of historic inevitability. The systematic deployment of terms such as “ambitious”, “promising”, “significant”, “historic”, etc discourages critical dissent by categorising the era as an exceptional moment of national destiny.

Example (5)

“These resolutions constitute important stepping stones for the 14th Congress to open up a promising new era of development, positioning Việt Nam as a major power not only in the region but also in the world...” (Vietnamnews - January 23, 2026)

Crucially, the discourse employs analogies (1.1%) to morally validate the New Era through comparison with successful external models. State media systematically implements comparative analogies to place Vietnam's transition within a broader, morally justified socialist developmental space, particularly drawing parallels with China and Laos. This discursive alignment constructs an ecosystem of shared socialist resurgence, reinforcing internal legitimacy through regional ideological solidarity.

This framing constructs a moral consensus around the “New Era”, presenting it not only as beneficial but also ethically rightful. The strategy makes the vision a popular civic obligation rather than an exclusively political tactic.

Mythopoesis as Symbolic Reinforcement

Despite being rarer, mythopoesis plays an important symbolic role as state media evoke a feeling of historic continuity by linking the “New Era” to victories or successes in the history of Vietnam, including the resistance wars and the Đổi Mới reform. Such analogies frame the current period as a natural and momentous continuation of the country's legacy.

Narratives emphasise the virtues of resilience and renewal led by the Party, casting the current vision as built on attained achievements. This type of narrative, often working with strategies of authorisation, supports the CPV’s historical legitimacy and casts the same leadership traits, including discipline, foresight and unity, into future action.

The strategy of mythopoesis in the New Era discourse is operationalised not only through moral tales but also, significantly, through cautionary tales and comparative analogies. Initially, state media leverages historical milestones, such as the August Revolution, the April 30 Reunification, and the initiation of the Đổi Mới (Renewal) process, as moral tales to weave a narrative of inevitable triumph. This historicises the New Era, framing it as the logical, triumphant continuation of past struggles.

Example (6)

“Each turning point in history can become an opportunity or a challenge for countries depending on the preparation and readiness of each country. The achievements of 80 years of struggle for national liberation,

nation-building and defence are a solid foundation for our nation to enter a new era, and realise the two strategic goals for 2030 and 2045 set by the 13th National Party Congress.” (Vietnamnews, April 12, 2025)

However, our expanded dataset reveals a departure from purely inspirational narratives. The discourse strategically deploys cautionary tales focusing on the vulnerabilities of the past (*e.g., being a backward colony or facing Western embargos*) and modern systemic risks (*e.g., the middle-income trap or global uncertainties*). These narratives legitimate the New Era not merely as a desirable future, but as an urgent, preventative necessity to avoid historical regression.

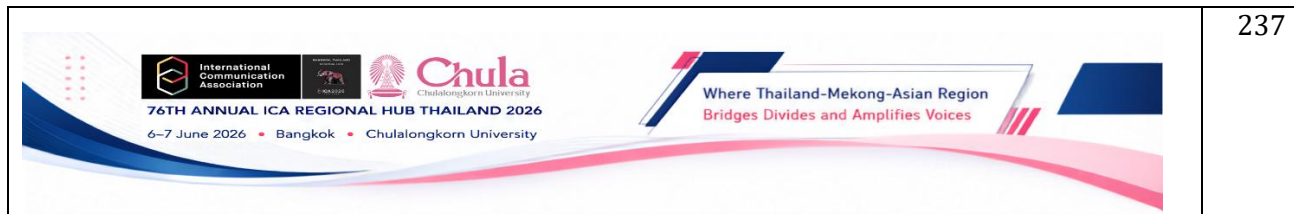
Example (7)

“Facing internal and external headwinds - slowing growth, low labour productivity and mounting geopolitical uncertainty - the Communist Party’s Politburo has issued four landmark resolutions that General Secretary Tô Lâm has described as the ‘Four Pillars’ that will drive the country forward in the new era, the era of Việt Nam on the rise.” (Vietnamnews - June 7, 2025)

Longitudinal Trajectory and the Issue-Attention Cycle

The longitudinal analysis (see Figure 1) demonstrates that the Issue-Attention Cycle of the New Era discourse is not driven by random media events, but is synchronised with Vietnam’s ceremonial political calendar. We identified four major discursive surges: the 95th CPV Founding Anniversary (February 2025), the 50th National Reunification Day (April 2025), the 80th National Day (September 2025), and the lead-up to the 14th National Party Congress (January 2026).

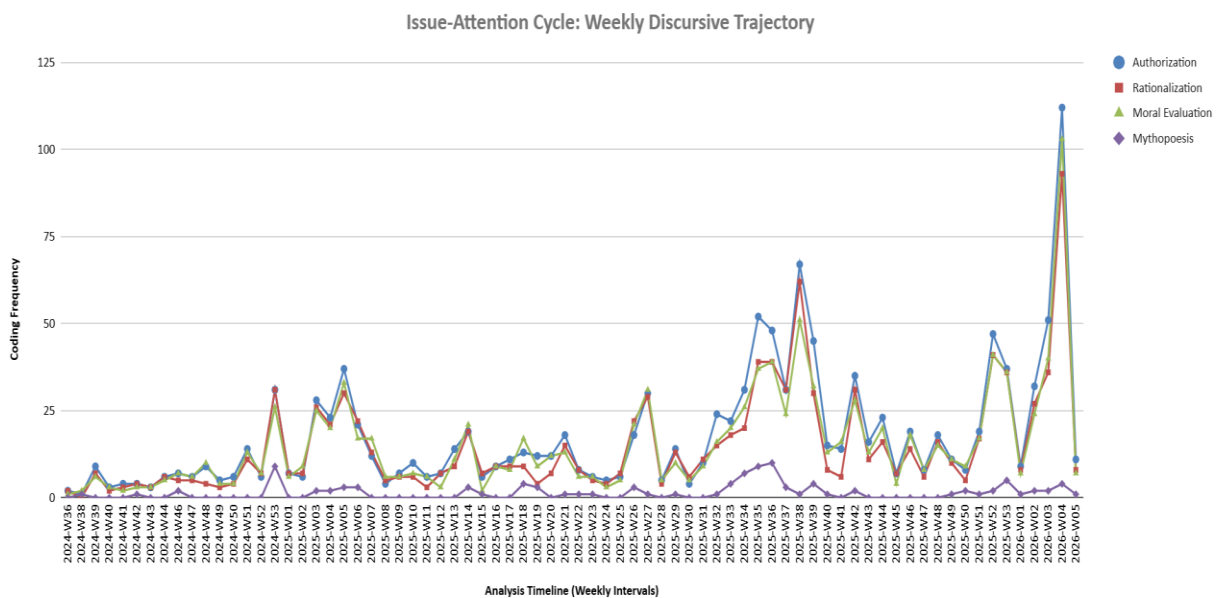
Each milestone triggered a specific reconfiguration of legitimization strategies. During historical anniversaries (April and September), Mythopoesis and Moral Evaluation spiked as state



media deliberately intertwined the New Era vision with the legacy of the August Revolution and national reunification, framing future developmental aspirations as a continuation of historical victories. Conversely, during Party-centric events (February and January), Authorisation and Rationalisation dominated, reinforcing institutional leadership and pragmatic policy directives. This strategic rhythmic fluctuation reveals how the state media apparatus performs its outward-facing communication: leveraging historical memory for affective mobilisation while deploying institutional authority for political consolidation.

Figure 1

Issue-Attention Cycle: Weekly Discursive Trajectory



Note. Paragraph-level coding density

Table 2

Aggregate Coding Frequency by Localised Strategy Phase

	Phase 1:	Phase 2:	Phase 3:	Phase 4:	Phase 5:	Total Coding
	Institutional	Party Jubilee	Reunification	Nationalist	Congress	Density
Legitimation Strategy	Framing (Sep – Dec 2024)	& Tet (Jan – Feb 2025)	Surge (Mar – May 2025)	Autumn (Jun – Oct 2025)	Consolidation (Nov 2025 – Jan 2026)	
Authorisation	116	145	145	521	389	1316
Rationalisation	97	137	112	427	324	1097
Moral Evaluation	102	139	124	430	340	1135
Mythopoesis	13	10	13	48	21	105

Note. Paragraph-level coding density

Each milestone triggered a specific reconfiguration of legitimization strategies. During historical anniversaries (April and September), Mythopoesis and Moral Evaluation spiked as state media deliberately intertwined the New Era vision with the legacy of the August Revolution and national reunification, framing future developmental aspirations as a continuation of historical victories. Conversely, during Party-centric events (February and January), Authorisation and Rationalisation dominated, reinforcing institutional leadership and pragmatic policy directives. This strategic rhythmic fluctuation reveals how the state media apparatus performs its outward-facing communication: leveraging historical memory for affective mobilisation while deploying institutional authority for political consolidation.

Thematic Deployment of Self-Reliance Across Legitimation Strategies

The concept of self-reliance, deeply rooted in Ho Chi Minh’s Ideology, emerges as the foundational narrative anchor pervading the legitimation of the “New Era” discourse. A detailed thematic analysis of the corpus yielded 159 specific references to self-reliance that links to legitimation strategies of the “New Era” discourse, which have been categorised into three groups. This actively challenges the Western-centric interpretation of self-reliance as an isolationist or retreat to self-sufficiency. Instead, state media deploys it as a versatile, outward-facing legitimation instrument across three distinct tiers (summarised in Table 3).

Table 3

Thematic Distribution of Self-Reliance Sub-Codes

Discursive legitimation strategies	Frequency	Rate
Outward-Oriented Autonomy	35	22.0%
Techno-Economic Pragmatism	66	41.5%
Historical Continuity of Moral Ethos	58	36.5%

Note. $N = 159$

Contrary to the rhetoric of defensive nationalism, the first tier constructs self-reliance as the definitive prerequisite for proactive global integration. This tier directly supports the strategies of authorisation (specifically internationalised conformity) and rationalisation. State media systematically argues that independence, strategic autonomy and internal resilience are what allow Vietnam to engage with the world securely and equitably. Official directives explicitly emphasise “strategic autonomy and self-reliance as the foundation for deep integration without dependence,

while clearly defining the development of foreign affairs in the new era” (Vietnamnews - January 22, 2026).

Furthermore, this outward-facing autonomy is validated through international expert authority, noting that adherence to self-reliance has allowed Vietnam to emerge “as a constructive and reliable global partner” capable of navigating “global uncertainties and the challenges of digital transformation in the new era” (Vietnamnews - August 24, 2025). Here, self-reliance legitimises an open-door policy, framing integration not as a concession of sovereignty, but as an exercise of national strength.

Dominating the thematic distribution, Techno-Economic Pragmatism operationalises self-reliance as a highly technocratic and pragmatic instrument, closely intertwined with instrumental rationalisation. The discourse shifts the definition of self-reliance from purely military or political independence to measurable capacities in institutional reform, digital transformation, and comprehensive security. The Central Committee’s report radically modernises the concept, asserting: “Security in the new era is not just about border or territorial security; it also includes security of the regime, cultural and ideological security, economic security, financial security, data security, energy security... Therefore, sustainable development and strategic self-reliance must be placed within the overall task” (Nhan Dan Online - January 19, 2026). Additionally, the military and technical sectors are commanded to “take the lead in scientific and technological innovation... researched and produced in the spirit of confidence, self-reliance, autonomy” (Vietnamnews - January 15, 2026). This tier effectively rationalises the New Era's aggressive modernisation agenda by framing technological and economic mastery as the modern equivalent of national survival.

The final tier of Historical Continuity of Moral Ethos acts as the ideological and emotional core, driving the strategies of moral evaluation and mythopoesis. Self-reliance is moralised by anchoring it in collective historical memory, acting as the bridge that connects past wartime resilience with future developmental aspirations. By deploying moral tales, state media historicises the current political agenda and frames it as the spiritual engine for future ambitions: *"It is a momentous event that promotes patriotism, revolutionary heroism, self-reliance, and the strength of national unity. This tradition serves as a continuing source for us to confidently enter a new era - the era of the nation's rise"* (Nhan Dan Online - February 03, 2025).

Through emotional abstraction, the populace is called upon to *"strongly promote patriotism, self-reliance, confidence, strength, and national pride... to firmly enter a new era of strong and prosperous development"* (People's Army Newspaper - May 19, 2025). In this capacity, self-reliance ceases to be merely a policy objective; it becomes a civic duty inherited from the nation's forebears.

Ultimately, this tri-dimensional deployment illustrates that self-reliance is not a static ideological relic. By functioning simultaneously as a rationale for global integration, a mandate for techno-economic modernisation, and a moral continuum of historical victories, self-reliance provides the ultimate discursive glue that binds the legitimisation strategies of the New Era together.

Discussion

Patterns of Legitimation in State Media

Methodologically, this study employs CDA as an analytical rather than evaluative approach. Its critical orientation lies in making visible the discursive processes through which legitimacy is constructed. The analysis therefore focuses on how authority, value, rationality, and historical

continuity are brought together to form a coherent narrative, rather than on judging the actors involved. Legitimation is treated here as a structured communicative practice whose internal logic can be described, interpreted, and analysed. Within this framework, one notable feature of the discourse is its largely one directional organisation. Expert and external voices are mainly drawn upon to support and reinforce the dominant narrative. They tend to function as sources of corroboration rather than as independent or contrasting perspectives. This feature is understood as part of the discourse structure and is consistent with the outward facing, policy communicative role of English language state media within a centralised one party media system. The point is therefore descriptive rather than normative: the analysis seeks to clarify how the discourse is organised, not to advance a judgement on its political validity.

The analysis shows a hierarchical use of legitimation strategies by Vietnamese state media in constructing the discourse of the “New Era of Nation’s Rise.” Drawing on Van Leeuwen’s (2007) framework, authorisation is the most prominent strategy, followed by moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis. This order indicates that the discourse is first grounded in institutional authority, then reinforced through national values, practical reasoning, and historical narrative. Legitimacy is therefore not presented as a fixed attribute of political institutions, but as discursively constructed through authority, collective identity, value systems, and shared expectations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966/2016; Greenwood et al., 2017).

Authorisation is rooted in institutional and personal authority, including quotations by top officials, Party resolutions, and references to state institutions. It highlights the Party’s central role in defining national vision and frames the “New Era” discourse as part of its leadership responsibilities. This pattern reflects the institutional role of Vietnamese state media, where

journalism, policy communication, and national image projection are closely connected. Pham (2021) notes the centralised structure of Vietnam’s media system, while Dao (2017) frames Vietnamese revolutionary journalism as politically and ideologically grounded in the leadership of the Communist Party. The dominance of authorisation is therefore structural rather than incidental.

Authorisation also extends beyond domestic hierarchy. Through conformity-based legitimisation, state media refer to international partners, organisations, foreign governments, and political parties to suggest that Vietnam’s “New Era” is recognised or accompanied by external actors. Given the outward-facing nature of the English-language corpus, this use of external recognition helps strengthen the acceptability of a domestic political vision for international readers. It also supports the article’s broader argument that English-language state media operate as a communicative register where national political meanings are selected, translated, and projected outward.

Moral evaluation reinforces the discourse through values such as patriotism, unity, aspiration, resilience, and self-reliance. The “New Era” is framed not merely as a policy orientation, but as a national imperative. This value-based construction connects the discourse to nationalism, in which collective identity and historical memory help justify political projects. Fuchs (2020) conceptualises nationalism as a strategy of legitimisation activated through discourse, while Trinh and Vu (2024) show that nationalist narratives can legitimate foreign policy in the Vietnamese context. Yet the present findings suggest that nationalism is not the only explanatory frame. Self-reliance gives moral evaluation a specifically Vietnamese vocabulary of agency, resilience, and self-positioning in relation to external powers.

Rationalisation gives the discourse a pragmatic foundation. The “New Era” is linked to modernisation, administrative reform, technological development, economic competitiveness, and long-term national targets. In Van Leeuwen’s (2007) terms, rationalisation legitimates action by connecting it to goals, utility, and necessity. Here, rationalisation works with moral evaluation: moral evaluation makes the “New Era” desirable in value terms, while rationalisation makes it necessary in developmental terms. This combination allows the discourse to move between national aspiration and policy problem-solving. It also echoes the literature review’s treatment of self-reliance as national capacity-building and external engagement rather than withdrawal from the international system (Hoang & Phan, 2023; Nguyen, 2017).

Mythopoesis appears less often but performs an important narrative function. It links the “New Era” to historical memories of resistance, national reunification, and *Đổi Mới*, presenting the current vision as part of a longer process of national renewal. It operates through both moral tales and cautionary tales. Moral tales highlight past victories, resilience, and collective renewal. Cautionary tales refer to colonial subjugation, embargo, underdevelopment, global instability, the risk of falling behind, and the middle-income trap. These narratives do not simply celebrate progress. They construct change as urgent by linking the “New Era” to the need to avoid stagnation, dependency, and vulnerability. Mythopoesis thus supports rationalisation by giving emotional and historical depth to the claim that reform and renewal are necessary.

Rather than reproducing a generic pattern of state media discourse, the Vietnamese case adapts these established strategies to a forward-looking developmental vision, in which authority, national values, practical necessity, historical continuity, and self-reliance interact and are reaccented across different political moments.

Packaging Legitimacy: The Framing of the New Era

The legitimization strategies identified in this study do not operate in isolation. Instead, they are systematically packaged through specific framing patterns (Entman, 1993) to guide public interpretation. These frames act as lenses through which the state media projects the “New Era,” translating Van Leeuwen’s structural strategies into accessible political narratives. Four key frames emerge from the discourse:

(1) The Leadership-Centric Frame (Translating Authorisation): This frame translates the strategy of authorisation by consistently presenting the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) as the primary and legitimate architect of the “New Era.” By projecting a top-down leadership structure and highlighting international endorsements, state media positions the Party not just as a ruling organisation, but as the essential guide for the nation’s future trajectory.

(2) The Necessary Pathway Frame (Translating Rationalisation): Reflecting both instrumental and theoretical rationalisation, this frame depicts the “New Era” not as a mere political option, but as a practical necessity. By constantly linking the discourse to economic targets, global integration, and national development, the media builds a narrative where embracing the “New Era” is the most logical path to reach high-income status and avoid falling behind globally.

(3) The United National Will Frame (Translating Moral Evaluation): This frame converts moral evaluation and the spirit of self-reliance into a narrative of national consensus. The “New Era” is portrayed as the ultimate alignment between “the Party’s will and the people’s hearts.” Through this perspective, collective participation becomes a civic duty. As a result, the frame subtly discourages opposition by implying that resisting these goals goes against patriotism and national unity.

(4) The Natural Continuity Frame (Translating Mythopoesis): To ease the uncertainties often associated with major political transitions, state media uses this frame to place the “New Era” within a timeline of historical triumphs. Driven by mythopoesis, the new epoch is framed not as a sudden break from the past, but as a natural next step following the legacy of national liberation and the Đổi Mới reforms. This continuity provides narrative coherence and anchors the current vision in historical legitimacy.

Ultimately, these framing patterns show that the media coverage of the “New Era” is a carefully organised communicative effort. By filtering legitimisation strategies through these four frames, the state media effectively shapes public interpretation, ensuring the discourse is perceived exactly as intended: authoritative, reasonable, morally right, and historically inevitable.

Self-Reliance as a Narrative Anchor

Beyond its role as an ethical ideology, self-reliance operates as a connective logic linking institutional authority, moral evaluation, rational justification, and historical narrative. This reading is consistent with the study’s theoretical framework, which treats self-reliance as a culturally grounded legitimisation resource rather than a passive theme placed under a single category in Van Leeuwen’s (2007) model.

This interpretation also clarifies the conceptual distinction developed in the literature review. While some accounts associate self-reliance with self-sufficiency, economic autonomy, or partial detachment from the global system (Biersteker, 1980; Galtung, 1982/2019), the Vietnamese corpus frames it less as retreat than as a condition for secure and meaningful external engagement. This corresponds with Vietnamese scholarship that presents self-reliance as a principle of independence,

development, and international integration rather than isolation (Hoang & Phan, 2023; Ngo, 2023; Nguyen, 2017).

As the findings show, self-reliance operates through three interconnected dimensions. Outward-oriented autonomy reformulates independence as a condition for secure external engagement; techno-economic pragmatism aligns it with rationalisation by tying it to reform, digital transformation, and competitiveness; and historical continuity of moral ethos embeds it in collective memory, framing the current development agenda as an extension of established values rather than a sudden turn.

This also qualifies the relationship between self-reliance and nationalism. The discourse clearly draws on nationalist language, but self-reliance gives nationalism a more specific orientation by linking collective identity to how Vietnam positions itself amid global uncertainty, technological competition, and development pressure. It operates as a vocabulary of agency, allowing the “New Era” to be represented as both domestically rooted and externally engaged.

In summary, self-reliance serves as a narrative anchor that binds the “New Era” discourse to authority, values, policy rationality, and historical memory. Its three-dimensional deployment moves beyond a simple opposition between autonomy and integration, complicating any direct reading of self-reliance as isolationism. The Vietnamese case shows how a locally grounded political concept can organise multiple legitimisation strategies and give cultural coherence to an outward-facing state media discourse.

Strategic Shifts in Political Messaging

Whereas the narrative of the “New Era of Nation’s Rise” maintains a consistent legitimacy framework, Vietnamese state-led media shows strategic adaptability in its linguistic and symbolic

framing. From January 2025, the original phrase appears less frequently, while expressions such as the “New Era of Growth and Prosperity” or “New Era of Development” become more visible in high-level speeches and mainstream media articles (To, 2025; VNA, 2025). This lexical shift should not be read as a departure from the original narrative, but as a recalibration of emphasis within the same legitimization framework.

This recalibration operates alongside Vietnam’s institutional political calendar, adding a temporal dimension to Van Leeuwen’s (2007) framework. The findings suggest that legitimization strategies are not only textually differentiated, but also chronologically organised. During major historical commemorations, such as the 50th National Reunification Day and the 80th National Day, the discourse gives greater weight to moral evaluation and mythopoesis, anchoring the “New Era” in collective memory, national sacrifice, and historical continuity. By contrast, during institutional moments such as the CPV Founding Anniversary and the lead-up to the 14th National Party Congress, authorisation and rationalisation become more prominent, foregrounding Party leadership, policy directives, governance capacity, and long-term development targets.

The phrase “growth and prosperity” or “development” makes the discourse more concrete and development-oriented. Domestically, it links the “New Era” to reform, modernisation, competitiveness, and measurable development goals. Internationally, it translates the political vision into a vocabulary more familiar to external audiences. This is consistent with the article’s argument that English-language state media functions as an outward-facing register, where domestic political meanings are selected and organised for international communication. Such recontextualisation allows the discourse to resonate with values such as openness, stability, cooperation, and economic progress (Lawrence, Bressand, & Ito, 2000).

In relation to Vietnamese media scholarship, this pattern reflects the dual role of state media as politically embedded institutions and audience-oriented communicative actors. Vietnamese journalism operates within political and institutional parameters, while also adapting to changing media conditions and public communication demands (Dang, 2012; Duong, 2022; Nelson et al., 2011). The English-language outlets in this study perform a similar external communication function: preserving ideological coherence while adjusting wording, emphasis, and narrative rhythm to political moments and international readerships.

Conclusion

The current study examined how Vietnamese state media legitimise the “New Era” discourse, with specific attention to national self-reliance. Based on 925 English-language articles published between 24 September 2024 and 25 January 2026 across seven state media outlets, the study applied van Leeuwen’s framework of discursive legitimation through a mixed-method design combining quantitative content analysis and CDA-informed qualitative analysis. The findings show that authorisation is the most prominent strategy, followed by moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis. Together, these strategies anchor the discourse in Party and state authority, attach it to national values, present it as a developmental necessity, and connect it to historical memory.

The study further shows that self-reliance is not merely a recurring nationalist theme. It operates as a cross-strategic logic that links authority, morality, rationality, and historical continuity. Through outward-oriented autonomy, techno-economic pragmatism, and historical continuity of moral ethos, self-reliance helps frame autonomy and integration as mutually reinforcing. The longitudinal analysis also indicates that the discourse shifts across time in relation to Vietnam’s

political calendar. The movement from “New Era of Nation’s Rise” toward expressions such as “New Era of Growth and Prosperity” suggests a recalibration toward a more development-oriented and internationally legible vocabulary.

This study contributes to research on discursive legitimation by offering a Global South perspective that challenges Eurocentric models of media control. It demonstrates how a locally grounded political concept, self-reliance, can dynamically mediate multiple legitimation strategies in an outward-facing state media context. It also highlights English-language Vietnamese state media as a communicative space where domestic political meanings are selected, translated, and projected externally. The study, however, is limited to English-language outlets and an early phase of the “New Era” discourse. Its findings therefore do not represent the full domestic circulation of the discourse, and the coding remains shaped by researchers’ interpretive decisions despite validation procedures. Future studies could compare English- and Vietnamese-language coverage, trace the discourse beyond the 14th National Party Congress, and examine responses from foreign media or international audiences.

Declaration of AI Use:

As both authors are non-native English speakers, AI tools (Large Language Models) were utilised strictly for language editing, grammar refinement, and structural formatting to improve clarity, in compliance with ICA submission guidelines. All original arguments, data analyses, and theoretical contributions remain the sole intellectual property of the authors.

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