Investor's vantage

MARKAZ المركز

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Est. 1974 تأسس

H2 - 2025

The Data-Driven Investor:
Insight, Influence and Innovation

Investor's vantage

Issue 4, H2 2025

3 A message from the Chairman
4 Welcome page
5 The rise of AI across GCC equity markets
6 Family wealth in Kuwait: preparing the next generation
7 Why people still matter in a data-driven world
8 Income you can underwrite: the case for real estate credit
10 System 1 vs. System 2 in the digital age: how social media drives impulse investing and asset bubbles
12 GCC bonds & sukuk market 2025: annual highlights
14 How data integration is transforming corporate communications
15 Technology champion spotlight

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A message from the Chairman

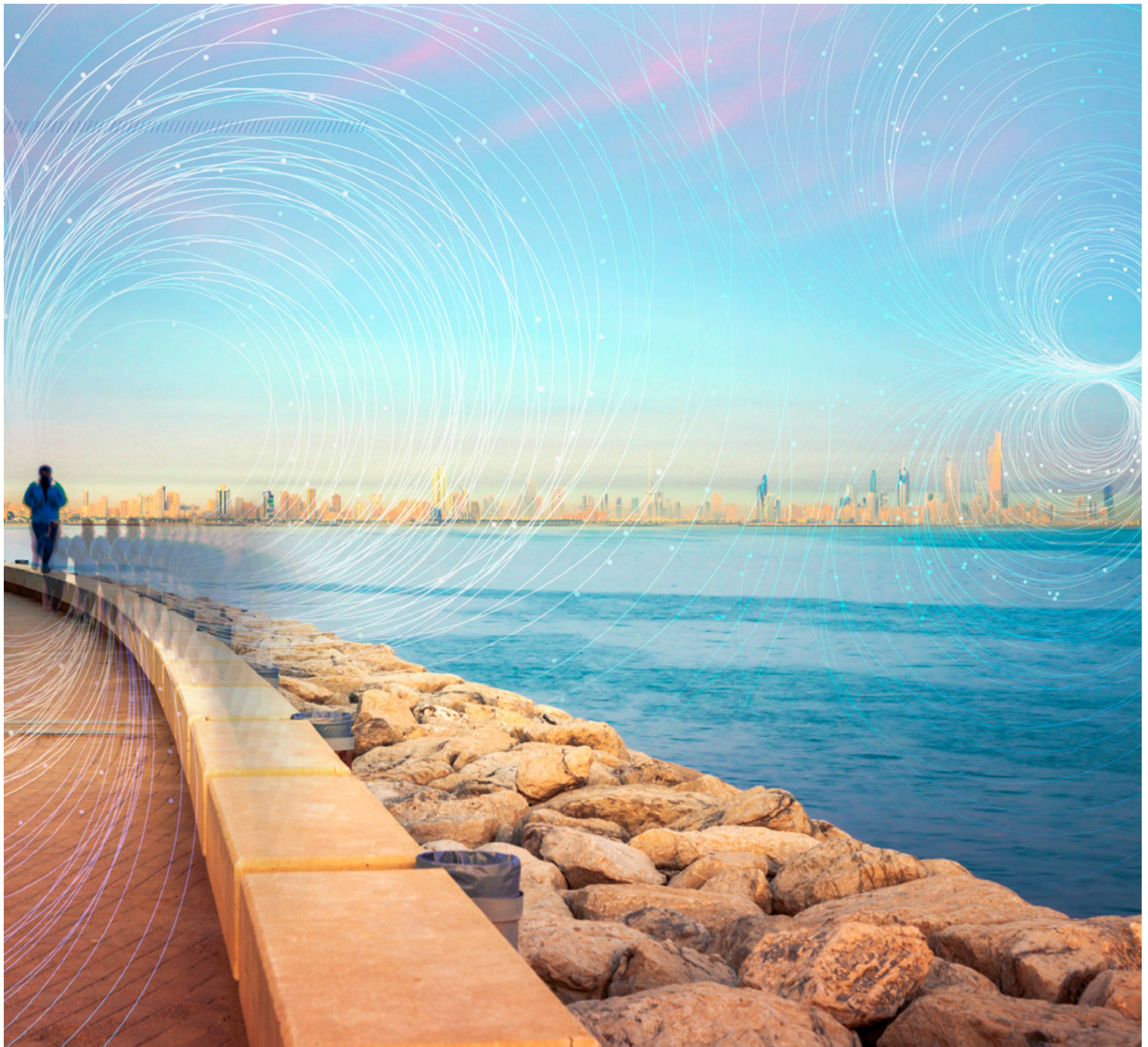
As we begin 2026, we do so with confidence rooted in Markaz's long-standing values and a clear view of the opportunities ahead. Since our founding in 1974, we have believed that disciplined thinking, sound judgment, and a long-term perspective are essential to navigating change and creating lasting value.

At Markaz, we move forward with optimism, guided by our heritage and motivated by the trust placed in us

Today's investment environment is shaped by rapid technological advancement, evolving markets, and an abundance of information. While tools and data continue to transform the way decisions are made, we remain firmly committed to balancing innovation with experience, and progress with responsibility. At Markaz, we believe that people, insight, and integrity remain at the heart of sustainable success.

As stewards of capital across generations, our focus remains on strengthening our capabilities, supporting our clients' long-term objectives, and contributing meaningfully to Kuwait's financial ecosystem. We move forward with optimism, guided by our heritage and motivated by the trust placed in us.

It is in this spirit that we present this edition of Investors Vantage, and we look ahead to the year with confidence and shared purpose.



Your vantage

As your partner in wealth creation, we differentiate ourselves with the exceptional qualities, knowledge, and professionalism of our teams, and present to you an intellectual platform bringing together our five decades of expertise and insights through our Investor's Vantage newsletter.

The word 'vantage' illustrates being in a strategic position that facilitates the ability to see further. As an organization, Markaz has always played a pivotal role in the development of investment solutions that have helped shape Kuwait's asset management and investment banking sector. Investor's Vantage features contributions from our seasoned professionals, who bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the table. Through the newsletter, you will gain direct access to their insights, allowing you to benefit from their expertise and stay ahead of market developments through the in-depth analyses and market trends shared in this bi-annual publication.

Our goal is to continue to empower clients with the tools and insights needed to understand market tends and achieve their financial objectives and aspirations.

You remain at the center of all our operations, our Markaz.

Through the newsletter, you will gain direct access to their insights, allowing you to benefit from their expertise and stay ahead of market developments through the in-depth analyses and market trends

The rise of AI across GCC equity markets

By: Zaid Abdulkarim, Senior Analyst, MENA Equities

The GCC equity landscape is experiencing a notable shift driven by the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI). What was once a futuristic concept has now become an integral component of how markets function, how institutions operate, and how investors interpret information. AI technologies are reshaping trading behavior, enhancing regulatory oversight, and enabling deeper insights into corporate performance. Ultimately contributing to more efficient and data informed equity markets.

Across global markets, AI has become central to research, execution, and risk management. The GCC is no exception. The region has witnessed accelerated investment in digital infrastructure and analytics capabilities, supported by national transformation programs and increasing institutional sophistication. These developments are now reflected in how GCC equity markets behave, how information flows, and how decisions are made.

A key area where AI is already creating visible impact is market surveillance and regulatory oversight. Exchanges across the GCC including Tadawul, Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange, and Qatar Stock Exchange have deployed AI driven systems to detect unusual patterns, analyze order book behavior, and monitor market manipulation risks in real time. Such tools enhance transparency and strengthen investor protection in markets where activity levels and participant diversity continue to grow.

On the trading side, AI powered execution and liquidity analytics are becoming more common. Algorithmic trading, particularly VWAP, TWAP, and smart order routing has increased across the region's most active markets, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The effects are now observable in narrower spreads, more consistent intraday liquidity, and trading patterns that resemble global,

AI is no longer an emerging trend; it is an active force shaping how markets operate today. At Markaz, we view these developments as an important part of the market's evolution

electronically driven markets. As institutional participation increases, AI driven execution tools help reduce slippage, manage volatility, and optimize market making activities.

Another rapidly expanding area is the use of AI and natural language processing (NLP) for analyzing corporate disclosures. The GCC publishes thousands of announcements each year, many in both Arabic and English. AI tools are being used by regional analysts and financial institutions to extract sentiment, track management tone, and interpret earnings call transcripts more efficiently. This development is particularly impactful in markets where research coverage is relatively light, enabling faster and more consistent interpretation of publicly available information.

AI adoption is also visible at the corporate level among GCC listed companies. Firms in sectors such as energy, telecommunications, logistics, and banking are integrating AI to improve operational efficiency, analyze customer behavior, and enhance risk management. Companies like Aramco, ADNOC, and leading regional banks have publicly highlighted their use of AI in areas ranging from reservoir modeling to fraud detection. As these technologies become embedded in business models, the potential for improved earnings quality and operational performance becomes an increasingly relevant consideration for investors.

Collectively, these advancements reflect a pivotal moment for GCC equity markets. AI is no longer an emerging trend; it is an active force shaping how markets operate today. From smarter surveillance and more efficient execution to enhanced corporate insight and broader institutional adoption, AI is elevating the sophistication of the region's financial landscape.

At Markaz, we view these developments as an important part of the market's evolution. As the GCC continues to embrace AI driven innovation, the depth, efficiency, and analytical richness of regional equity markets will continue to grow. Offering investors more informed pathways to navigate opportunities within one of the fastest advancing financial regions.

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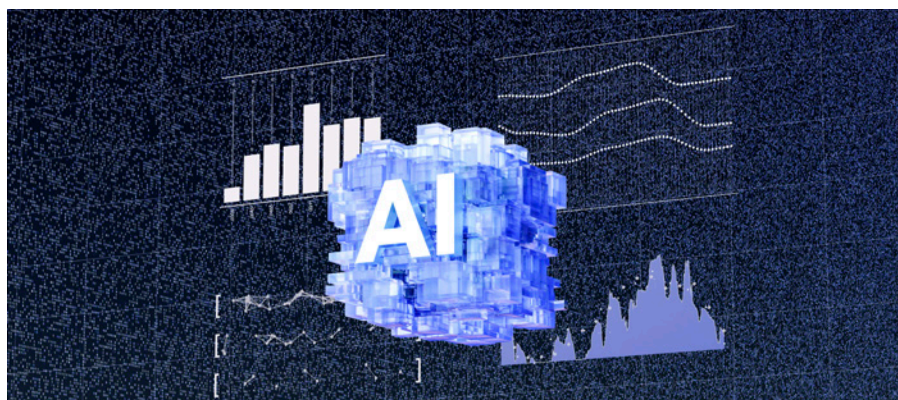
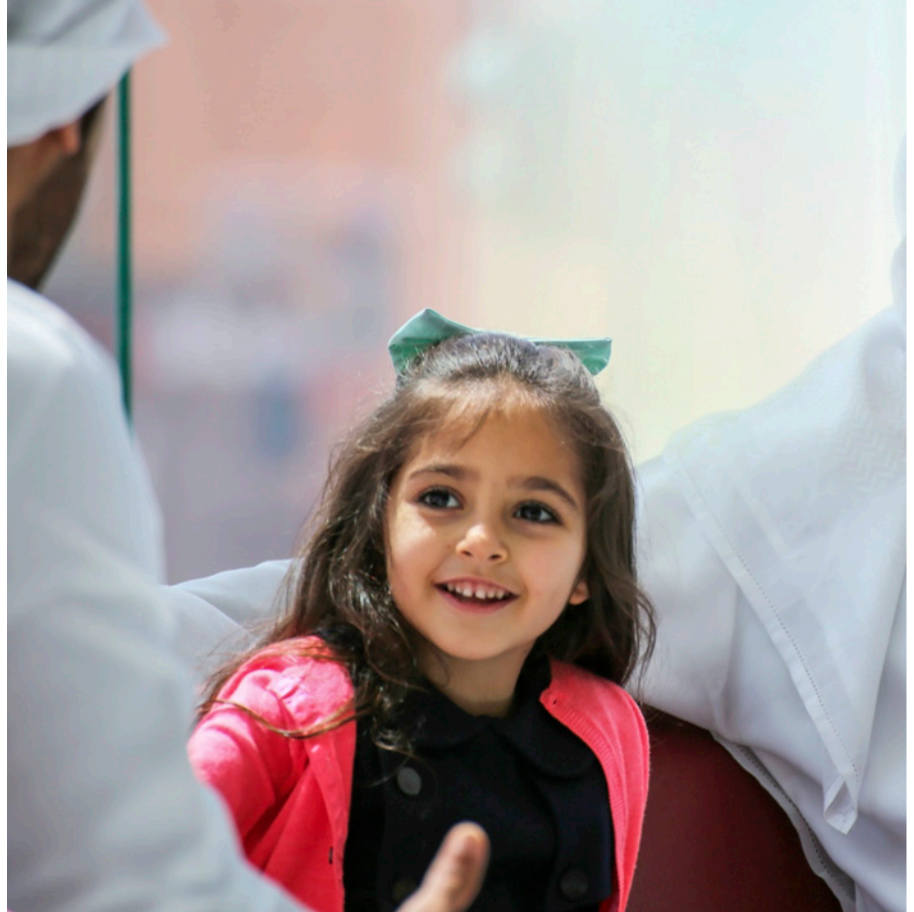
2 Qatar News Agency
3 NTB Kommunikasjon
4 Nasdaq
5 Finance Middle East
6 Gulf News



Family wealth in Kuwait: preparing the next generation

By: Hamad Al Essa, Assistant Manager, Wealth Management and Business Development

In Kuwait, family wealth is often built over decades, but sustaining it across generations requires more than strong investment returns. As portfolios grow and families expand, the focus naturally shifts from accumulation to continuity, discipline, and alignment. Preparing the next generation is essential to preserving long-term wealth. This preparation rests on three key pillars: governance, education, and succession planning.



Governance
Structure creates stability

Clear governance helps families manage complexity and avoid emotional or reactive decision-making. A defined investment framework brings clarity by outlining objectives, risk tolerance, liquidity needs, and decision-making authority.

For Kuwaiti families with diversified holdings—often spanning local assets, international markets, real estate, and operating businesses—governance ensures consistency and accountability, even as market conditions change.

Education
From inheritance to stewardship

Market risk is unavoidable; lack of understanding is not. Financial education equips the next generation with the knowledge and confidence needed to manage wealth responsibly.

Early exposure to investment principles, combined with gradual involvement in portfolio discussions, helps younger family members understand long-term strategy rather than focusing on short-term performance. Education transforms inheritance into stewardship.

Succession planning
Planning ahead reduces risk

Succession planning is not simply about transferring assets—it is about ensuring continuity. Clear structures, leadership transition planning, and liquidity management reduce uncertainty and protect the portfolio during generational change.

Succession planning is not about transferring assets—it is ensuring continuity. Structures, leadership transition planning, and liquidity management reduce uncertainty and protect the portfolio during generational change

Early planning allows families to make thoughtful decisions aligned with their values, rather than reacting under pressure.

Markaz perspective

At Markaz, we believe successful wealth management extends beyond portfolio performance. By integrating disciplined investment management with governance, education, and succession planning, families can position their wealth to endure across generations—preserving not only capital, but purpose and legacy.

Why people still matter in a data-driven world

By: Karen Gomes, Chief Officer, Human Resources

Data has fundamentally reshaped decision-making. From risk management to portfolio construction, analytics now offer speed, scale, and precision that were once unimaginable. For boards and clients alike, this capability is not optional—it is essential.

Yet as data becomes more powerful, one principle remains unchanged: outcomes still depend on People. Data informs decisions; it does not make them.

Judgment sits at the intersection of information, experience, and accountability. Models can identify patterns and probabilities, but people provide context—understanding market nuance, behavioral signals, regulatory implications, and second-order risks that data alone cannot fully capture. Especially in complex or volatile environments, experience matters. This is why experienced, well-aligned teams remain a strategic asset. When people work together over time, they develop shared judgment—the ability to challenge assumptions, stress-

Judgment sits at the intersection of information, experience, and accountability. Models can identify patterns and probabilities, but people provide context

test conclusions, and recognize when something does not feel right, even when the numbers appear sound. This collective discipline is difficult to replicate and often underestimated.

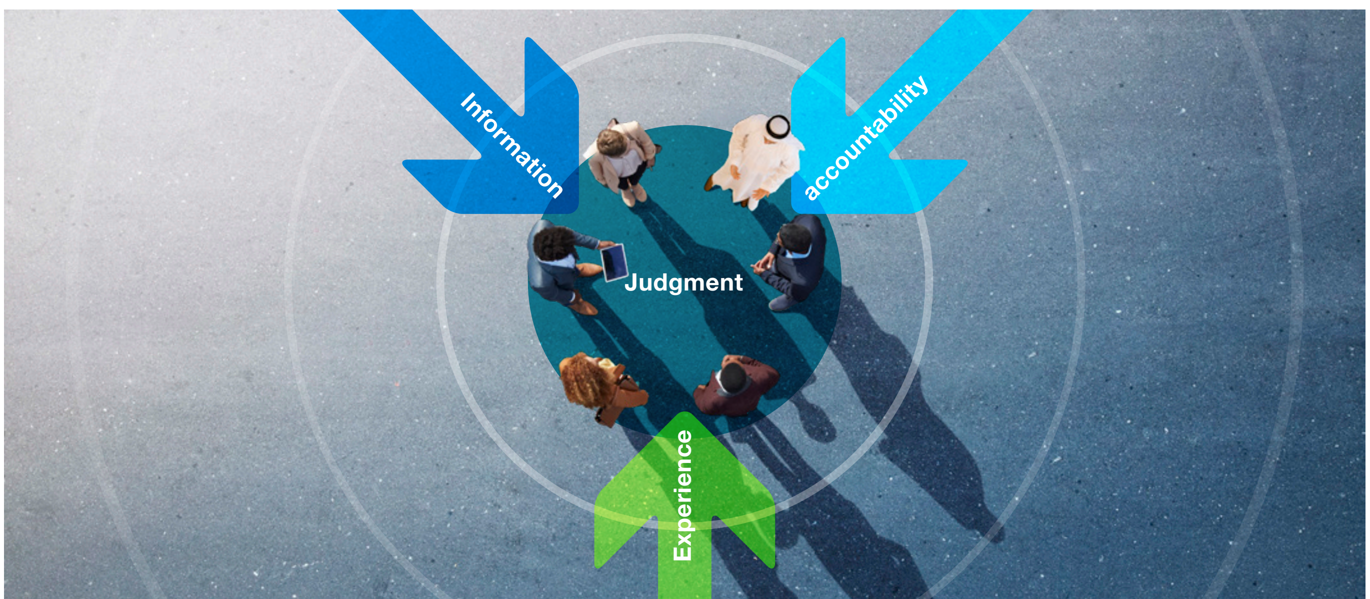
The quality of decisions improves when data and dialogue work together. Strong organizations encourage constructive challenge and debate. They do not treat data as unquestionable truth, but as an input to be examined from multiple perspectives. In such environments, insights are tested, not accepted at face value—and better decisions follow.

Accountability also remains human. Systems can track performance and flag deviations, but responsibility ultimately rests with people. Clear ownership—knowing who decides, who reviews, and who is accountable—ensures decisions are timely, deliberate, and owned. As complexity increases, this clarity becomes even more critical.

Trust, particularly from clients, is built through human interaction. It is shaped by how teams communicate, how expectations are set, and how issues are addressed when conditions change. These moments of consistency, transparency, and follow-through—create confidence in ways dashboards cannot.

Technology, including AI, amplifies behavior. Used well, it enhances disciplined thinking and decision quality. Used poorly, it can reinforce blind spots or create false certainty. This is why capability, mindset, and governance matter as much as the tools themselves. Organizations that invest in judgment, ethics, and leadership are better positioned to use technology wisely—rather than rely on it unquestioningly. Risk management illustrates this clearly. Frameworks and controls are essential, but early risk identification often comes from people close to the work—those who notice weak signals and feel empowered to speak up. A culture that values insight over hierarchy strengthens both resilience and performance.

As data and AI continue to evolve, the role of people does not diminish—it becomes more important. The differentiator is no longer access to information, but how thoughtfully it is interpreted, challenged, and acted upon.



Income you can underwrite: the case for real estate credit

By: Lisa Amin, Head of European Real Estate, International Real Estate

Across global real estate, the capital stack has shifted. Higher base rates, tighter bank balance sheets, and a rolling wall of maturities have created a durable need for non-bank capital. That gap is not a "moment"; it's a multi-year opportunity to lend on tighter structures, more conservative leverage, and better pricing than we've seen in years. For long-term investors seeking defended, income-led returns, private real estate credit is a clear, timely fit.

Real estate credit focuses on contractual cash flows—coupons, fees, and prepayment economics—rather than mark-to-market sensitivity. You are paid to provide speed and certainty of execution

Real estate credit focuses on contractual cash flows—coupons, fees, and prepayment economics—rather than mark-to-market sensitivity. You are paid to provide speed and certainty of execution, and you're protected by seniority, collateral, covenants, and cash control. In practical terms, you earn income up front while prioritizing principal preservation. Upside comes from well-structured fee terms, disciplined underwriting, and timely exits; not from hoping for cap-rate compression.

Risk management in practice

Investors start with attachment point and leverage: loans are senior or near-senior, structured at conservative LTVs and underwritten with rents, timelines, and exits stress-tested to downside cases. We pair that with cash control—escrows, independent inspections, and disciplined draw procedures—so issues surface early and are addressed quickly. Documentation does the heavy lifting; we require enforceable, effective covenants (performance tests, debt service coverage ratio (DSCR) triggers, cash sweeps, and cure mechanics) to buy time and options before problems compound. Sponsor alignment is essential—meaningful equity at risk, a verifiable track record in the specific asset/market, and transparent reporting. At the portfolio level, we manage concentration and correlation across geographies, sectors, and loan types. Finally, every loan is underwritten to clear take-out paths (agency, banks, insurance capital, or securitization) as markets normalize.

We see 3 lanes with the most attractive balance of yield and control:

1. **Refinance & gap capital:** Sponsors facing legacy debt maturities need fresh financing at today's rates. Well-structured senior or senior-adjacent loans at conservative attachment points can capture yield with strong documentation, tight covenants, cash sweeps, and defined remedies. The key: clear paths to take-out (agency debt, bank financing as conditions normalize, or asset sales).

2. **Bridge financing:** Assets with executable business plans (lease-up, modest capex, re-tenanting) can support high-quality bridge loans when attachment points are validated by trades or replacement cost. Here, we emphasize sponsor quality, verified capex budgets, and step-in rights if milestones aren't met.

3. **Selective construction / build-to-core:** We remain selective, but where inputs are de-risked—with Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) contracts, credible general contractors, and visible demand (pre-leasing or proven tenant depth)—construction lending can offer compelling spreads and governance. We require fixed pricing, strong contingency, and third-party oversight.

Where we'll focus deployment

We deploy where demand is durable and tenants are deep. In multifamily, structural housing gaps and steady absorption create multiple take-out routes, from agencies to banks, supporting cash-flow visibility. In select industrial/logistics, we prioritize infill and supply-constrained submarkets with proven user demand and replacement-cost support. We'll also pursue targeted niches, small-balance portfolios or note purchases, where documentation is clean, lender protections are enforceable, and catalysts are clear. By contrast, office remains highly dispersed; where we engage at all, we'll size loans conservatively based on the specific asset's risks, with tighter covenants and clearly defined remedies.

How credit fits with an existing real estate portfolio

Real estate credit works well alongside equity. It delivers current income (coupons and fees), tends to be less volatile than owning buildings, and provides a steady pipeline of opportunities as loans mature. The cash flow helps smooth returns while equity projects work through the cycle.

Why manager selection and terms matter

In credit, results come from the loan and the lender. We look for teams with a clear

underwriting process, active monitoring after closing, and skin in the game. We also focus on fair fees and promotes so more of the economics reach investors, plus transparent reporting (loan KPIs, covenant status, cash controls) so there are no surprises.

What to watch

1. **Refinancing pace:** How quickly take-out lenders (agencies, banks, insurers) are lending again affects exits and pricing.
2. **Loan documents:** Stronger covenants and cash controls are becoming standard; an investor-friendly trend we expect to continue.
3. **Sector differences:** Performance varies by asset type and location; selectivity is key.
4. **Fundraising terms:** Competition for capital is pushing some managers to offer more investor-friendly economics; a positive for net returns.

Private real estate credit offers returns at a time when structure and discipline are rewarded. By keeping leverage low, documents strong, sponsors aligned, and exits clear, investors can earn yield with downside protection

Bottom line

Private real estate credit offers defended, income-led returns at a time when structure and discipline are rewarded. By keeping leverage low, documents strong, sponsors aligned, and exits clear, investors can earn cash yield with potential downside protection—a straightforward, repeatable alternative to put capital to work today.

System 1 vs. System 2 in the digital age: how social media drives impulse investing and asset bubbles

By: Pradeep Rajagopalan, Executive Vice President, Internal Controls

Financial history is not a linear progression of increasing sophistication; it is a cyclical narrative defined by the persistent flaws of human psychology. Asset bubbles are not modern anomalies born of the internet age; they are endemic to markets driven by fear and greed. While the mechanisms of transmission have evolved from coffee-house gossip to newspapers to 24/7 TV channels to always on apps riding on intercontinental fiber-optic cables, the underlying behavioral drivers remain unchanged.

Consider the Dutch Tulip Mania of the 1630s. At its peak, a single Semper Augustus tulip bulb commanded a price equivalent to a luxurious Amsterdam canal house, a figure often cited as being around 5,000 to 10,000 guilders (Dutch florins). In comparison, a skilled craftsman at the time might earn only 150 to 300 guilders a year. This absurd valuation meant that for a brief, frenzied period, a single flower bulb could be worth more than a mansion or a dozen acres of land. It was a mania fueled by social emulation and the newfound promise of easy wealth.[1] Three and a half centuries

Lacking fiduciary responsibility or accredited credentials, many fin-influencers utilize the "famous for being famous" playbook to project wealth and success. They do not sell sound financial advice; they sell a lifestyle

later, the Dot-com bubble exhibited the same irrational exuberance. The poster child of this era, Pets.com, raised $82.5 million in an IPO in February 2000 despite having no sustainable business model. Its stock peaked at $14 before crashing to roughly $0.22, and the company liquidated a mere 268 days after going public.[2]

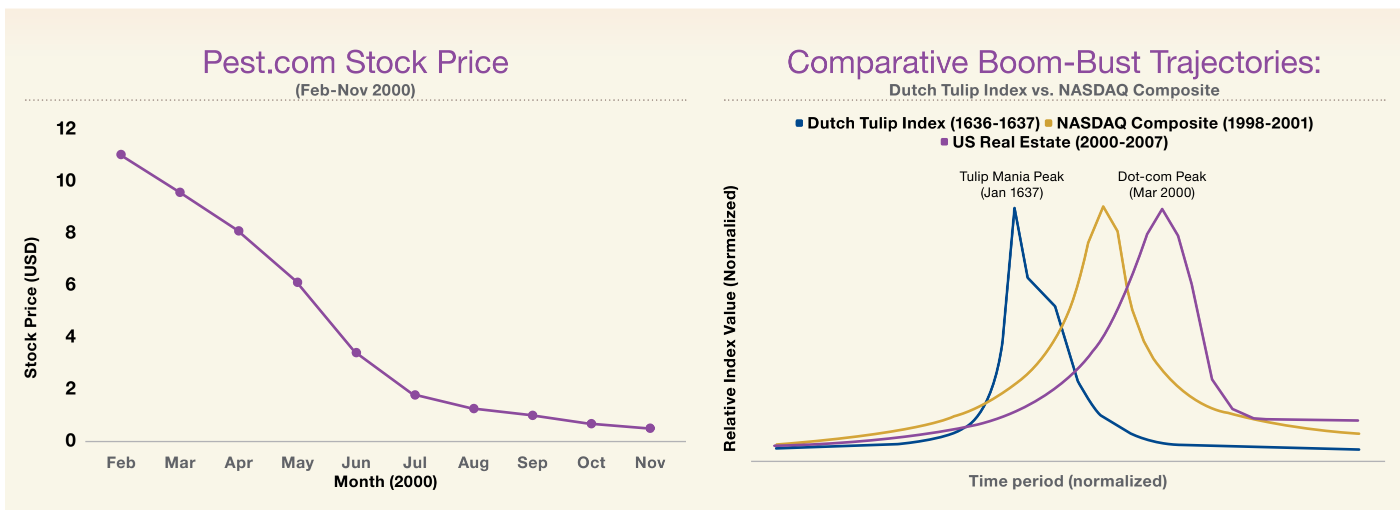
A comparative line graph showing the exponential price spike and subsequent collapse of the Dutch Tulip Index (1636-1637) alongside the NASDAQ Composite (1998-2001) and US Real Estate index, illustrating the identical "boom-bust" trajectory.)

The catalyst for these events is often a "new era" narrative amplified by media frenzy. Before social media algorithms, traditional 24-hour cable news cycles played a pivotal role in the 2006 real estate bubble. By incessantly showcasing "house flippers" making fortunes and broadcasting pundits who claimed housing prices would never nationally decline, television normalized extreme leverage and risk-taking for the average consumer, setting the stage for the Great Financial Crisis of 2006.[3]

The rise of the "fin-influencer" and the Kardashian effect

Today, the gatekeepers of financial information have been displaced by the democratization of content creation. In this new landscape, attention is the primary currency. The modern paradigm of celebrity—epitomized by the Kardashian family—demonstrates that one can become "famous for being famous," monetizing visibility regardless of underlying talent or expertise.

This model has been disastrously adapted by the financial world, giving rise to the phenomenon of the "fin-influencer." To clarify, there is a distinction between financial experts who use online presence



to educate investors vis-à-vis parasitical fin-influencer. Lacking fiduciary responsibility or accredited credentials, many fin-influencers utilize the "famous for being famous" playbook to project wealth and success. They do not sell sound financial advice; they sell a lifestyle. By curating feeds filled with rented Lamborghinis and tropical locales, they establish a parasocial relationship with followers, effectively bypassing critical skepticism. When a beloved influencer recommends a dubious crypto-token or a highly speculative "meme stock," their followers often interpret it not as a financial gamble, but as an invitation to join an exclusive club on the path to similar riches.

Digital herding: Reddit, FOMO, and gamification

Social media platforms act as accelerants for "herding"—the behavioral tendency for individuals to mimic the actions of a larger group, often ignoring their own private information or analysis. Platforms like Snap, Reddit and Instagram have specific communities for e.g. r/WallStreetBets, which have industrialized this phenomenon.

In the saga of meme stocks like GameStop and AMC, these forums served as digital echo chambers. When users post screenshots of massive, sudden gains (often hiding equally massive losses), it triggers an intense fear of missing out ("FOMO") among thousands of observers. This collective emotional response creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop: buying begets more buying, driving prices deeper into uncharted territory detached from fundamentals.

Fin-Influencers exploit the Availability Heuristic, a mental shortcut that causes us to overestimate the likelihood of an event if an example of it comes to mind easily. Fin-influencers exploit this by creating an artificial flood of "available" information that suggests a dubious investment is legitimate, successful, and urgent.

This behavior is further amplified by social trading apps that "gamify" investing. By using confetti animations upon executing trades, push notifications emphasizing daily movers, and frictionless interfaces, these apps encourage high-frequency trading akin to pulling a slot machine lever, rather than considered, long-term investing.[4]

Information vs. influence: the battle for System 2

The danger lies in the inability of many retail investors to distinguish between information (verifiable data, regulatory filings, earnings reports) and influence (persuasive narratives designed to elicit an emotional response). Fin-influencers masterfully weaponize cognitive biases to ensure influence wins.

Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman's framework of thinking explains this vulnerability. "System 1" thinking is fast, intuitive, and emotional—it's the part of the brain that reacts to a flashing "BUY NOW" graphic on TikTok. "System 2" is slow, deliberate, and logical—the part required to read a balance sheet and correlate it with cash flow statements.[5]

Social media is engineered to keep users permanently locked into System 1. An influencer shouting about an imminent "short squeeze" accompanied by siren emojis is designed to bypass logical defenses. They utilize scarcity cues ("get in before it's too late") and social proof (millions of likes and comments) to pressure an immediate, unthinking decision to part with one's savings.

Conclusion: so, what can an ordinary investor do about it?

Three effective steps:

1 The anchor of the Investment Policy Statement (IPS)

The first line of defense against emotional investing is structural. Institutional investors do not make decisions based on Twitter trends; they follow a rigorous mandate known as an Investment Policy Statement (IPS). Retail investors would be wise to adopt this institutional discipline.

An IPS is effectively a written contract with oneself. It details your specific investment objectives, time horizon, risk tolerance, and asset allocation strategy. Having this clear roadmap transforms abstract goals into concrete rules. When a "hot stock" tip floods your feed, the IPS serves as a behavioral anchor. You simply ask: Does this high-risk, speculative asset fit the criteria I wrote down when I was calm and rational? If the answer is no, the decision is made for you. This pre-commitment strategy is the most effective tool to steer clear of the knee-jerk, impulsive purchases driven by FOMO.

2 Partnering with a regulated guide

Just as you wouldn't trust a medical diagnosis from a random viral video, you shouldn't entrust your financial future to unregulated fin-influencers. Engaging a trusted financial partner—such as a regulated investment advisor or a reputable financial institution—adds a critical layer of safety. Unlike anonymous online avatars, these entities operate under strict regulatory frameworks with built-in checks and balances designed to protect the investor. Crucially, they are often aligned with your long-term financial interests rather than short-term engagement metrics. This professional partnership acts as an external "System 2" mechanism, providing objective counsel and an emotional circuit breaker when market frenzy tempts you to abandon your strategy.

3 Cultivating digital vigilance

Beyond structural tools and professional guidance, combating the algorithmic stampede requires a conscious effort to re-engage your own critical thinking. There is no free lunch, if it is free then most likely, you are the lunch. Investors must recognize that in the digital financial ecosystem, if someone is loudly pushing an asset without disclosing their incentives, they are likely the product, not the client.

Vigilance means decoupling the message from the messenger's charisma. It requires checking the credentials of those offering advice, being inherently skeptical of claims of "guaranteed returns," and understanding that true wealth building is rarely exciting enough to go viral in a fifteen-second video. In an era drowning in noise, the most valuable financial asset is the discipline of silence and slow thought.

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GCC bonds & sukuk market 2025: annual highlights

By: Khaled AlAbdulrazzaq, Senior Analyst, Fixed Income

In 2025, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) bond and sukuk issuance reached a new peak of roughly $200 billion, much higher than 2024's $148 billion—itself a record. These issuances came from both corporate and sovereign borrowers spanning local and international markets. Notably, Kuwait's return to global bond markets and a shift toward corporate issuance were key developments. Despite high interest rates at the start of the year, investor appetite remained robust, buoyed by improving market conditions as central banks began cutting rates.

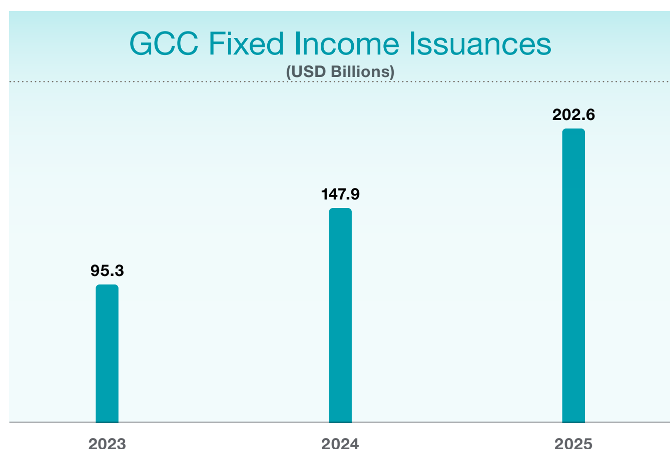
1 Saudi Arabia leads, but Kuwait Shines

Saudi Arabia remained the dominant issuer in 2025, accounting for roughly half of total GCC volume. Saudi entities (government, quasi-sovereigns, and corporates) raised on the order of $85-$95 billion. The Saudi Ministry of Finance moderated its international borrowing early in the year (fewer big sovereign issues than in 2024), but Saudi corporates and banks filled the gap. By year-end, Saudi Arabia still contributed the lion's share of regional debt sold, leveraging its strong credit ratings and large financing appetite.

Kuwait's $11.25 billion in Eurobonds, one of 2025's largest EM bond sales, was a resounding success: investors were 2.5× oversubscribed, allowing Kuwait to price the bonds at relatively tight spreads

The United Arab Emirates was again the second-largest source of issuances. UAE-based issuers raised roughly $50B. Notably, Dubai's corporates and GREs (government-related entities) were active, while Abu Dhabi made a strategic late-year entry with a multi-billion dollar bond when rates began to ease.

The standout story was Kuwait. After effectively abstaining from international markets for several years, Kuwait staged a dramatic comeback in 2025. Early in the year, Kuwait's government passed a new debt law, enabling funding for a persistent fiscal deficit. The result: in October, Kuwait's government issued $11.25 billion in Eurobonds (3-, 5-, and 10-year tranches). The deal – one of 2025's largest EM bond sales – was a resounding success: investors placed $28 billion of orders (2.5× oversubscription), allowing Kuwait to price the bonds at relatively tight spreads. This single transaction dwarfed Kuwait's total issuance in recent years.



2 Investor appetite

A critical factor underpinning 2025's issuances was the robust investor appetite for GCC debt. Despite global headwinds (wariness over inflation and geopolitical tensions), demand for GCC bonds and sukuk was consistently high. Many issuances saw large order-books and tightening spreads. This investor hunger is partly due to the GCC's improving credit story – relatively strong sovereign balance sheets and low default risk – and partly due to global investors seeking yield. By year end 2025, all GCC countries were classified as Investment Grade except for Bahrain, yet they offer higher yields than equivalently rated US or European credits.

Country	S&P	Moody's	Fitch
Saudi Arabia	A+	Aa3	A+
Kuwait	AA-	A1	AA-
Qatar	AA	Aa2	AA
UAE / Abu Dhabi (proxy)	AA	Aa2	AA-
Oman	BBB-	Baa3	BBB-
Bahrain	B	B2	B+

3 Corporates carry more weight

One notable change in 2025 was a tilt in the issuer landscape toward the private sector. In 2024, sovereigns had nearly half the issuance (about 46% of volumes) as many governments capitalized on low rates early that year. In 2025, corporates took a bigger lead. During the first half of 2025 especially, corporate issuance surged (H1 corporate volume was +67% YoY, while sovereign volume was –48% YoY). This was evident as many banks and companies rushed to issue debt in early 2025, while some governments paused. Saudi Arabia's huge 2024

By year end 2025, all GCC countries were classified as Investment Grade except for Bahrain, yet they offer higher yields than equivalently rated US or European credits

borrowing meant its Q1 2025 sovereign issues were fewer, and others like Oman delayed bond plans – which opened the door for corporates. The GCC debt markets ended the year with corporates making up around 60% of total issuances during the year, up from 54% in 2024.

Conclusion

2025 was another banner year for the GCC fixed income market, extending the issuance record set in 2024 and delivering several notable developments:

1. The annual issuance volume hit a new peak (~$200B), a remarkable achievement considering the higher interest rate environment that prevailed at the start of the year.
2. Kuwait's re-entry was a highlight, bringing a fresh AA-rated sovereign supply and demonstrating the depth of global appetite for GCC paper.
3. The issuer mix broadened with corporations taking a larger role, indicating a maturing market where not only governments but also private sector names can raise significant capital.
4. The GCC also navigated a turning point in global monetary policy and appears to have benefited from the onset of rate cuts – setting the stage for potentially cheaper refinancing in 2026.

From an investor's perspective, the GCC debt market in 2025 offered an appealing combination of high yields, improving credit quality, and currency stability (given most GCC currencies are pegged to the USD). The strong demand and oversubscription levels seen in deals confirm that international investors increasingly view GCC bonds/sukuk as core holdings for diversification and income. Going forward, the outlook remains positive. With oil prices at comfortable levels and economic diversification projects in motion, GCC entities will continue to require funding – likely keeping issuance elevated. If interest rates continue to fall in 2026, we may even see new refinancings and debut issuers tapping the market. Investors, having been rewarded in 2024–25, are likely to remain enthusiastic, barring any major shocks.

How data integration is transforming corporate communications

By: Mohamad Darwiche, Assistant Officer, Corporate Communications

In today's fast-moving corporate landscape, communication teams can no longer rely on intuition alone. The growing volume of digital information, market updates, and audience interactions has made it essential for organizations to anchor their communication strategies in facts rather than assumptions. The shift toward data-driven decision-making is reshaping how companies build trust, engage stakeholders, and strengthen their brand identity. When Corporate Communications integrates structured and reliable data into its daily workflow, for example, the impact is immediate, measurable—and often transformative.

At its core, data provides clarity and direction. Communication teams can gather insights from digital platforms, internal systems, app analytics, customer behavior, and broader market trends. This unified view helps them understand not only what is happening but also why certain shifts occur. With the support of accurate data, teams can identify patterns, anticipate public reactions, and craft messages that are not just relevant but also timely and sensitive to the audience's expectations. This removes guesswork and ensures that every announcement or campaign is anchored in strong evidence.

Data integration also enhances long-term strategic planning. Tools such as Power BI dashboards, analytics models, and automated reporting systems give teams the ability to measure sentiment, track campaign performance, and evaluate content effectiveness across multiple channels. Instead of relying on general impressions or isolated metrics, communication teams can compare platforms, analyze engagement trends, and refine their approach in real time. This leads to higher efficiency, better resource allocation, and stronger overall impact, especially when insights are shared consistently across the organization.

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Another major advantage of integrating data is the creation of consistency across departments. When Corporate Communications, Business Development, Wealth Management, Digital Operations, and other teams rely on the same centralized data sources, the organization's messaging becomes more aligned and accurate. This minimizes the risk of conflicting information being shared internally or externally. It also strengthens brand credibility, since stakeholders experience a unified tone and message regardless of the platform or department they interact with. Consistency in communication is one of the strongest indicators of a mature and well-governed institution.

Data-driven communication also plays a crucial role in enhancing credibility. Whether the organization is releasing financial results, reporting on fund performance, launching campaigns, or responding to rapidly changing market conditions, the presence of validated numbers reinforces reliability and transparency. Stakeholders, regulators, and clients place greater trust in communication that is supported by evidence. In sectors like finance and investment, this trust can have a direct impact on reputation and long-term relationships. Data therefore acts as both a foundation for accuracy and a safeguard for integrity.

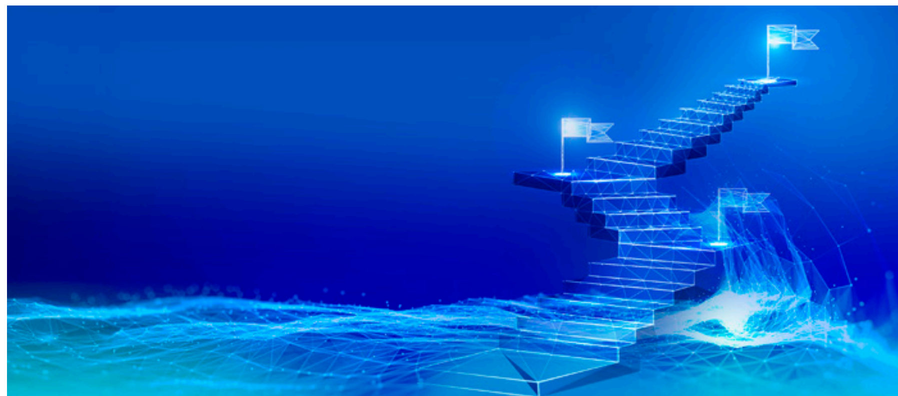
In short, integrating data into Corporate Communications is no longer optional. It is becoming a fundamental requirement for any organization that aims to communicate with confidence and impact. Data improves clarity, strengthens planning, enhances consistency, and builds credibility. As the volume of digital information continues to grow, the ability to transform data into meaningful communication will remain one of the most important skills for modern corporate teams, especially those striving to lead with transparency and trust in an increasingly information-driven world.

Markaz technology champion initiative

In 2023, Markaz launched the Technology Champion Initiative to empower employees to spearhead the integration of technology across various departments and enhance our digital ecosystem. In this and future editions of Investor's Vantage, we will spotlight the experiences and insights of the members participating in this program.

Technology champion spotlight

By: Noor Al Jeraisy, Officer, Wealth Management & Business Development Department



The initiative was a digital, goal-based planning platform designed to align each client's investment strategy with clearly defined financial goals such as wealth accumulation, capital preservation, retirement planning, and legacy objectives.

It was inspired by a fundamental challenge we observed in traditional portfolio construction: performance was often measured against market benchmarks rather than against what truly matters to clients—their personal goals. During periods of market volatility, this disconnect led to uncertainty and reactive decision-making.

Our goal was to shift the conversation from short-term performance to long-term outcomes. By leveraging advanced analytics, scenario modeling, and real-time progress tracking, the platform enables advisors to translate complex market data into clear, goal-focused insights. Clients can see how their portfolios are progressing toward specific objectives, understand trade-offs between risk and return, and evaluate different scenarios before making decisions.

This initiative was driven by the desire to strengthen client trust, enhance clarity, and create a more disciplined, purpose-driven approach to wealth management—one that keeps clients focused on their goals regardless of market conditions.

By implementing a digital goal-based planning platform, we empowered advisors to clearly connect investment decisions to client objectives, improving clarity, consistency, and confidence in the advisory process

The project was spearheaded by the Wealth Management team, with close collaboration across multiple departments to ensure both strategic alignment and successful execution.

Key contributors included:

1. Investment Advisory & Portfolio Management, to define goal-based frameworks, asset allocation models, and risk parameters
2. Technology & Digital Transformation, to design and implement the goal-based planning platform and analytics capabilities
3. Data & Analytics, to integrate client data, scenario modeling, and performance tracking
4. Risk & Compliance, to ensure regulatory alignment and governance throughout the planning process

This cross-functional collaboration was critical in translating client needs into a scalable, technology-enabled solution that enhances advisory effectiveness and long-term client outcomes.

This project enabled us to fundamentally transform how wealth management advice is delivered—from a performance-centric approach to a goal-driven, client-focused model.

By implementing a digital goal-based planning platform, we empowered advisors to clearly connect investment decisions to client objectives, improving clarity, consistency, and confidence in the advisory process. Clients gained greater transparency into how their portfolios are progressing toward specific goals, even during periods of market uncertainty.

The project also improved decision-making and efficiency by consolidating data, automating scenario analysis, and reducing manual processes. This allowed advisors to spend more time on strategic guidance and relationship building, while maintaining strong risk oversight and governance.

Ultimately, the initiative strengthened client trust, enhanced long-term outcomes, and positioned the Wealth Management department to deliver more personalized, resilient, and scalable advisory services in an increasingly complex market environment.

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