An analysis on editorial content of two Iranian newspapers, regarding the parliamentary election campaigns for the 9th Islamic Consultative Assembly

Abdolreza Adhami[1], Talieh khademian[2], Hassan Almasi[3], Leyla Rafiei[4]

[1,2]Assistant Professor of Social Sciences Department, Tehran North Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
[3]Department of Management, Tehran Markaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
[4]Department of Social Sciences, Tehran North Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

This research uses content analysis and the theoretical framework of democracy, news gatekeeping, and agenda setting. The purpose of research, study and content analysis messages published on editorials of the two newspapers, and determines their role in encouraging the public to participate in the election. SPSS and LISREL software for data analysis is to test and review questions are used. The results show, the more democratic politics of the day, and editorial election with 91% of those allocated to the Front Page. The news gatekeeping theory and shows agenda setting the most important thing is to the mass media. In the present research, Freedman's test shows, the time for both the newspaper published an editorial with an average of 4.45 is a high priority and the place of insertion with 3.35 averages in the second priority, and the total print area with the 3.21 average are in the third priority.

KEYWORDS: Elections, Content analysis, Mass media press, Democracy, News gatekeeping, Agenda setting.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, the historical revolution of every kind of parliament indicates a transition from autocracy to democracy which brings about public power and control, respecting personal opinions, and moving away from totalitarianism toward national governance based on law. According to article 6 of the Iranian constitution, the country's affairs must be run in consideration of popular elections. As an essential section of mass media in every country, newspapers try to select from the available material in line with their viewpoints and publish the highlighted topics to influence the ideology, mindset and even votes of the audience. Since the formation of the Iranian government is founded on the concept of religious democracy, the press and mass media should act as representatives of people's voice and the society's public opinion in various social, economic, political and cultural areas, and also develop a competitive environment to express different viewpoints, considering unbiased approaches, clearly defining duties and obligations of parliament members and ultimately creating a national trust in people to play their political role and determine their destiny. Therefore, the function of media and political parties in fulfilling the objectives of election becomes more important during the voting days.

Observing the aftermath of presidential elections on June 2009, many experts among politicians and media community predicted that national motivation in Iranian people to participate would be fading, particularly in large and advanced cities. The Iranian mass media and news press are basically obliged to take an unbiased approach and spread enlightening information to improve the public choice. Consequently, the main question can be formulated as below:

Is it true that editorial articles of the two active Iranian newspapers, *Mardom Salari and Siyasat-e-Ruz*, as representatives of social and political parties in the country during the election days, have been equally effective on enlightening the public opinion and encouraging political participation in people?

Therefore, conducting a research on the 9th parliamentary elections is very significant for several reasons:

1. The issue of resignation or non-engagement of a few political parties in the elections, which calls for a necessary research to be done on how such behavior can influence the final result of elections.

2. The need for encouraging public participation in elections and boosting the level of acceptability and legitimacy of religious democracy against all the tight international pressures.

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*Corresponding Author: Hassan Almasi, Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Tehran Markaz Branch, Islamic Azad university, Tehran, Iran. Email: h_almasi85@yahoo.com Tel: (++98)21-66582170

The most important objectives of the present research are: Draw an analytic comparison on the policy of agenda setting and news gatekeeping applied by editors of the above mentioned newspapers.

Taking the research main question into account, there is a major hypothec proposed to measure the problem and find an answer:

It seems that the material published in editorials of the two newspapers regarding the 9th parliamentary election are: the number of the editorials about election campaigns, the total print area, time of publication, and the place in the paper where the editorial is inserted.

Theoretical framework of the research

Content analysis has been employed in all the study works focused on "what does he speak of?" Theoretical framework in the present research is based on Kurt Levin and David Manning White's concept of media gatekeeping. They believe that the amount of informative news passing through communication channels depends on how journalists and editors function as gatekeepers. Harold Lawson's sociological model in communication studies is consisted of five questions: who is the speaker? What does he speak of? Through what medium does he speak? To whom does he speak? And how effective does he speaks?

There are numerous theories in the field of mass media and communication among which the following can be mentioned: Collin Blackmoor and James Combs' theory of "Magic Bullet" or "Hypodermic Needle", Paul Lazarsfeld and Berelson's theory of "Limited Effects of Media", Gerbner's theory of "Cultivation", Marshal McLuhan's theory of "Media Determinism", Noelle-Neuman's theory of "Spiral of Silence", McGuire's theory of favorable and unfavorable media, Lippman's theory of "Agenda Setting", Kurt Lewin's theory of "Media Gatekeeping", Tichenor's theory of "Knowledge Gap", Habermas' theory of "Communicative Action".

Given the above, two of the essential theories proposed in the field of communication and media were chosen as the basic framework for this research:

1. The theory of media gatekeeping

2. The theory of agenda setting

1. The theory of media gatekeeping:

There are three groups that can be called the major media gatekeepers:

A. The authorities and policy-makers who somehow stop the news against their interests from spreading.

B. Capitalists, powerful industry owners, and sponsors who financially support the media by placing lucrative commercial advertisements.

C. Managers and editors of the press community, who are the main gatekeepers and are often appointed directly or indirectly by the government especially in the third-world countries.

According to Ticher, media gatekeeping can be defined as a universal process of information control including all the aspects of message encoding, not only choices but also prevention from publishing, broadcasting, organizing, offering and supplying, program schedules, display and replay, all through transmission of information from source to receivers(Alavi Borujerdi 2002, p. 63).

2. The theory of agenda setting:

Research done on elections and political campaigns point out that media community, editors in particular, play an important role in prioritizing, highlighting, and ultimately molding up social facts into people's minds through news updates about elections.

Agenda setting is a process through which mass media transmits to the audience the significance of various topics. The more media highlights an event the more audience find it newsworthy (Sorien and Tankard, 1992, p. 328). Agenda setting is categorized into three areas: media agenda setting, public agenda setting, and policy agenda setting.

Media agenda setting is a process in which the news coverage is relatively controlled by the gatekeepers (news writers and editors) and the impact of prominent current events are determined by the audience preferences. This type of agenda setting can be measured using content analysis.

Public agenda setting is a process in which the populace decides what topics should be on the highest priority or significance. This type of agenda setting can be measured through maintaining surveys and opinion polls.

Policy agenda setting is a process in which authorities and government officials are appointed positions in a way to take command of the mass media and achieve a specific goal. Most experts believe that media agenda setting has a remarkable effect on public and policy agenda settings.

Among some of theories mentioned defined, democracy best qualifies as a suitable standpoint to analyze the media and Iranians' attitude toward elections. The central concept of democracy does not simply concern the public opinion, the number of involving voters or the winning candidates, but it all concerns participation.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

As a set of principles, instruments and systematically reliable procedures, research method is utilized to investigate facts, discover the unknown and find out solutions to problems (Khaki, 2009, p. 201). Based on the objectives listed earlier, the method employed here falls under applied research and takes the descriptive-documentary approach. The collected data is processed as an instrument to facilitate the content analysis. According to the American behavioral scientist Bernard Berelson, content analysis is a kind of organized research technique used to objectively describe quantitative probabilities taking place through communicative materials (Dadgaran, 1994, p. 163). The most critical element in content analysis is the unit of analysis, without which not a single part of textual content can be examined properly. Therefore, the publication time of each editorial, the number of editorial articles, the total print area, the place of insertion, in the studied newspapers, has altogether been considered as the unit of analysis.

Two Iranian newspapers, one supporting the conservative alliance and the other supporting the reformist alliance, were selected. A period of one month before the actual election day was assigned to observe a specific time span. At the next stage, 50 sample editorial articles published in the newspapers (from January 30 to February 29, 2012) were collected and then divided into two groups of "related to election" and "unrelated to election", containing 41 and 9 articles respectively.

Unlike survey and other methods, the researcher here has not directly analyzed the individuals. However, structural equations were created and processed by relevant statistical software's such as SPSS and LISREL. Finally, the hypothec and some key questions of the research were evaluated through descriptive statistics (average index, frequency and percentage frequency, one-column and two-column tables and histograms) as well as inferential statistics (Calmograph-Smirnoff test, T test, Kaiser Meyer Olkin test (KMO), Bartlett's test, Freedman's test).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In addition, Kaiser Meyer Olkin test and Bartlett's test were used to determine the validity of measurement indicators by factor analysis, the results obtained from Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) for this research is 0.89. And finally, scoring at least %95 certainly in Bartlett's test signifies the validity of the research.

In this section, all the collected data and information will be analyzed through statistical measures such as mean, frequency, and percentage frequency and also through graphical representations such as one-column and two column tables and histograms.
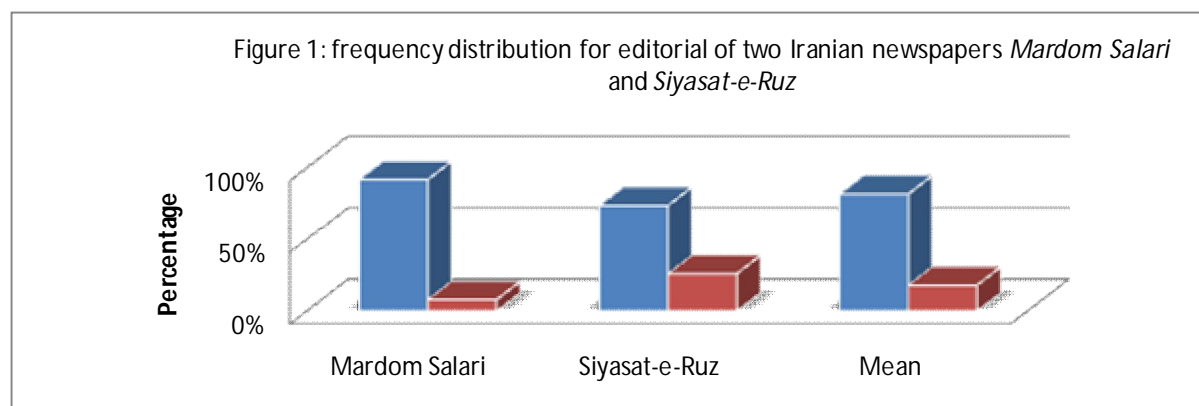

Figure 1 shows that 41 editorial articles published in the two newspapers over the last month before the actual parliamentary election time were related to election, which makes 82 percent on average, while only 9 editorials (18 percent) were unrelated to the elections.

Figure 2: Frequency distribution for the place where the editorials were inserted in the newspapers *Mardom Salari* and *Siyasat-e-Ruz*

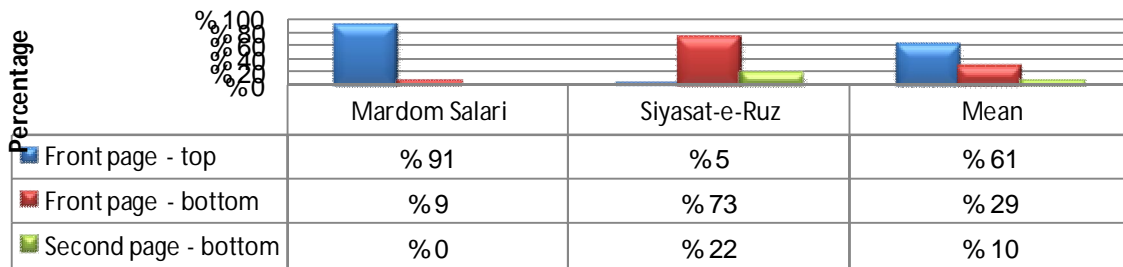| Percentage	Mardom Salari	Siyasat-e-Ruz	Mean
Front page - top	%91	%5	%61
Front page - bottom	%9	%73	%29
Second page - bottom	%0	%22	%10

Figure 2 shows that 61 percent of the material related to elections (25 editorial articles) published over the last month before the actual parliamentary election were inserted in top of the front pages and *Mardom Salari* ranks the higher frequency for publishing editorial in top of the front pages with 91 percent.

Figure3: Frequency distribution for the total print area in the two newspapers *Mardom Salari* and *Siyasat-e-Ruz*

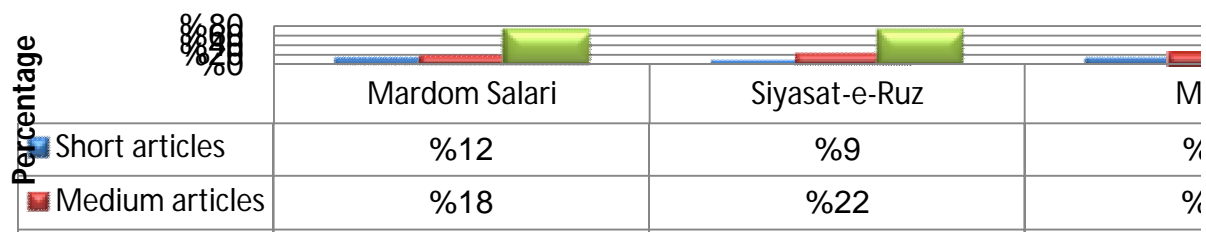| Percentage	Mardom Salari	Siyasat-e-Ruz	M
Short articles	%12	%9	%
Medium articles	%18	%22	%

Figure 3 shows that over the last month before the actual parliamentary election, the average print area dedicated to long editorial articles published in newspapers *Mardom Salari* and *Siyasat-e-Ruz* were 70 and 69 percent respectively.

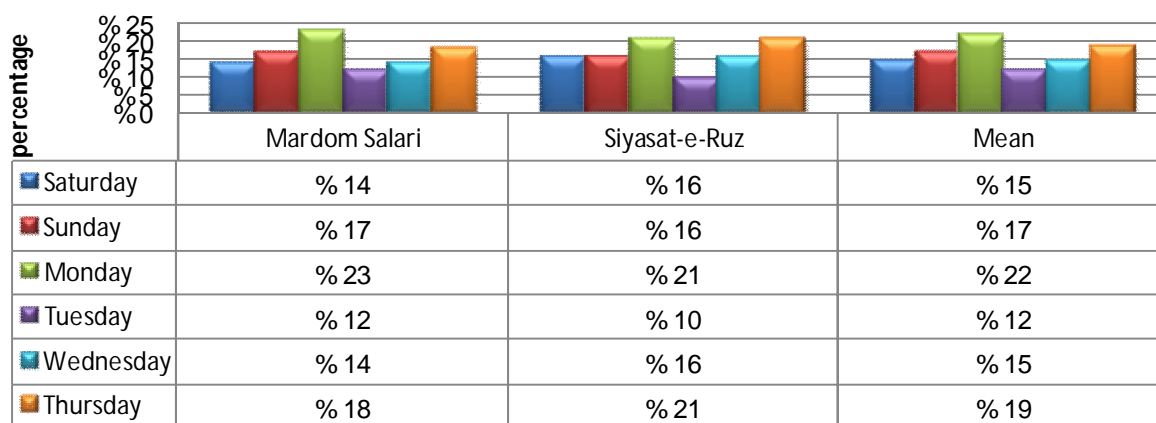Figure 4. Frequency distribution for the time of publication in the two newspapers Mardom Salari and Siyasat-e-Ruz

percentage	Mardom Salari	Siyasat-e-Ruz	Mean
Saturday	% 14	% 16	% 15
Sunday	% 17	% 16	% 17
Monday	% 23	% 21	% 22
Tuesday	% 12	% 10	% 12
Wednesday	% 14	% 16	% 15
Thursday	% 18	% 21	% 19

Figure 4 shows the average distribution time published over the last month before the actual parliamentary election**,** with 6 cases and 15% Saturdays, 7 cases 17% Sundays, 9 cases 22% on Mondays, 5 cases and 12% Tuesdays, 6 cases and 15% Wednesday and 8 cases 19% are Thursdays.

Step one: Measuring the level of normality in the data distribution using Calmograph-Smirnoff test

The hypotheses are evaluated by parametric or non-parametric tests. In order to achieve this, Calmograph-Smirnoff test is first employed to measure the statistical distribution of data. Therefore, the null and alternative hypotheses are as below:

For all the values belonging to the range $\rightarrow$ H_0: $F(x) = Fe(x)$
For at least one value belonging to the range $\rightarrow$ H_1: $F(x) \neq Fe(x)$

Figure 5: Results of the Calmograph-Smirnoff test		
Parameters of Normal distribution	Mean	12.55
	Standard deviation	1.37
The maximum difference	Absolute value	0.011
	Positive	0.132
	Negative	-0.132
Statistic of Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS)		0.56
Estimated significance level		0.93

In figure 5, the results of Calmograph-Smirnoff test are shown to evaluate the level of homogeneity in the distribution of variables. Considering the obtained significance level and the statistic of KS, the Hypothesis H_0 is not rejected. In other words, it can be stated that distribution of the variables follows the normal distribution at 95 percent confidence level.

Step two: Evaluating the hypotheses using T test

Since the variables take a normal distribution, the parametric T test can be used to evaluate and analyze the ten key questions as well as the major hypotheses of the research. The population mean was measured at the error level of 0.05. Degree of freedom in statistic of T is represented as n-1. The sample mean and standard error are measured by the following equations:

$$S_{\bar{X}} = \frac{S}{\sqrt{n}}$$

$$t = \frac{X - \mu_0}{S_{\bar{x}}}$$

Testing hypothec: "It seems that the material published in editorials of the two newspapers regarding the 9th parliamentary election are: the number of the editorials about election campaigns, the total print area, time of publication, and the place in the paper where the editorial is inserted.

$$H_0 : \mu_1 = \mu_2$$
$$H_1 : \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$$

Figure 6: results of testing hypothec					
Indicators	T	Degree of freedom	Significance level	Mean difference	The mean difference at the level of 95 percent	
					Low limit	High limit
Quantitatively equal	3.083	7	.013	1.15700	.2695	2.0445

Figure 6 shows that H_0 is rejected with 85 percent probability and H_1 is proved; because the significance level (0.013) is lower than 0.05. Hence, the first hypothesis of the research is valid.

Evaluating some key questions of the research: The results obtained in figure 7 show that all the means are equal to each other except for the indicator of sources and references.

Figure 7: results of T test regarding the ten key questions of the research						
Indicators	Significance level	Degree of freedom	T	Mean difference	The mean difference at the level of 95 percent	
					Low limit	High limit
Quantitatively equal	3.083	7	.013	1.15700	.2695	2.0445
Both consistent in the time of publication	-5.232	7	.001	-1.175714	-1.66117	-.69025
Both consistent in the place of insertion	4.224	7	.001	1.366571	.66759	2.06555
Both consistent in the total print area	3.273	7	.006	1.146429	.38977	1.90309
Both consistent in the number of editorial articles	4.481	7	.004	2.285714	1.03754	3.53389

Step three: Comparing the mean values using Freedman's test

In order to determine which of the research components stands at a higher rating and which stands lower, Freedman's test is used. The hypothec is as follow:

H_0: All the components are identical to each other

H_1: At least two of the components are not identical

Figure 8: results of Freedman's variance test	
Components	Average ratings
Election messages regarding the time of publication	4.45
Election messages regarding the place of insertion	3.35
Election messages regarding the total print area	3.21
Election messages regarding the editorial articles	2.12

According the obtained results shown in figure 8, the highest rating among the components goes to the time of publication and the rest fall blow that. The number of editorial articles gets the lowest rating. Therefore, hypothec H_1 is proved in Freedman's test, which means "At least two of the components are not identical".

Conclusion

Based on inferential statistics, figure 8 shows that H_1 is proved with 95 percent probability; because the significance level obtained from hypothesis (0.013) is lower than the significance level of T test (0.05). Hence, the material published in editorials of the two newspapers regarding the 9th parliamentary election are similar quantitatively-viewed (the number of the editorials about election campaigns and the total print area).

Based on descriptive statistics, figure 1 showed that average 44 percent of the editorial articles (82 percent in total) were published by *Mardom Salari*, in comparison with *Siyasat-e-Ruz* which ranked lower with average 38 percent. Furthermore, figure 3 showed that *Mardom Salari* ranked higher with 13 long articles published in 70 percent of the total print area, while *Siyasat-e-Ruz* published 10 long articles covering 69 percent of the total print area.

Having reviewed the final results, several findings can be summarized as below:

1. The high average number of editorial articles published in *Mardom Salari* compared to *Siyasat-e-Ruz* indicates that the reformist alliance were more concerned with public participation in the 9th parliamentary elections than the conservative alliance. Previous experience had always shown that whenever the level of public participation was very low, it normally ended up to the benefit of conservative alliance.

2. The average print area dedicated to editorials is almost equal in the two newspapers, which shows both pursued a similar political approach.

3. Regarding the place of insertion, *Mardom Salari* put more editorial articles at the top of the front page to create a sense of agenda setting and better influence the readership.

3. Regarding the time of publication throughout the weekdays, both newspapers chose Mondays to publish their editorial articles, frequency of which is higher in *Mardom Salari*.

Suggestions

Considering the findings, there are several constructive solutions suggested in brief:

1. When employing the technique of agenda setting, mass media and newspapers should better feel responsible as editorial staff and not emphasize only the role of editor in isolation.

2. Considering the fact that nearly 40 percent of Iranians living in large cities participated in the 9th parliamentary elections, it is strongly recommended to publish short editorial articles, so that more people would be attracted, and ultimately the public opinion would be persuaded to realize the significance of elections.

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