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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Representation of Iran's 14th Presidential Election on the Iran International TV

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Elections are a phenomenon through which people play a role in determining their own destiny and the acceptability of their country in today's world. During elections, various media outlets, relying on their accumulated social capital and the trust and confidence that their audiences place in them, present their desired discourses to attract and guide people toward their desired aspirations and goals. Today, traditional media such as television or domestic newspapers are no longer the sole source of news and information for society, and the general public can easily learn about

different points of view using satellite and the Internet. It is of great importance to examine how competing media outlets address issues and to identify the nature of the owners of these media outlets in order to identify their methods of influence and impact on public opinion. One of the main functions of mass communication tools is to inform and disseminate news. News in today's civil societies wields enormous power, to the extent that in the field of international relations, based on the combination of power and media, a new concept called media war has emerged, which is considered an example of soft war. Media warfare-meaning the use of the media to weaken the country's discourse-aims to exploit their power and capacity by using psychological warfare methods. In this war, each news stream tries to further weaken the rival's discourse by using psychological operations techniques such as isolation and creating doubt in public opinion. The 2024 Iranian presidential election was one of the most important contemporary political events, which had profound effects on the country's domestic and foreign policy and was able to influence the direction of the government's interaction with the people and Iran's position in the field of international diplomacy. In the meantime, the media and political analysts played an important role in shaping public opinion and guiding the election process. The present study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the critical discourse of the Iran International website in its representation of the 14th presidential election.

Method:

Discourse analysis is a new technique and method in the study of texts, media, and cultures. In this method, the researcher aims to show the relationship between the author, the text, and the reader and to determine what social, cultural, political, and other factors and contexts influence the production of discourse. In this method, the analyst goes beyond the context of the text (form and structure) and enters the situational context of the text (conditions and ideological dimensions) and analyzes it. In fact, the method of discourse analysis tries to show the meanings hidden in the author's mind. The presidential election is a huge discursive scene in which meanings, identities, values, and ideologies compete. Critical discourse analysis helps the researcher understand how the "reality" of the election is constructed, who has the right to speak and whose voice is not heard, what issues are highlighted and what issues are marginalized, and how language and images affect our understanding of the candidates and the election process. The methodology of this study is based on critical discourse analysis with a descriptive approach. The research data includes 73 news reports published between June 19, 2024, and July 28, 2024, on the Iran International website that represented the election process. Validity and reliability in this study were examined and analyzed based on the descriptive critical discourse method. Methods to ensure validity include validation by participants, peer review, detailed description of the context, use of multiple data sources, and reflexivity. Methods to ensure reliability in this study include clear and documented coding, precise definition of terms and concepts, use of multiple coders, and focus on linguistic evidence.

Findings:

The findings show that Iran International has attempted to represent the fundamental crises of the electoral process by using specific media strategies, such as highlighting issues including rigged elections, electoral sanctions, structural corruption, the role of the Guardian Council, and the participation crisis. According to the theory of image-building in public opinion, especially in the field of political participation, such representations can play an effective role in shaping public awareness and guiding the electoral decisions of the audience. Accordingly, the central themes in this study include political legitimacy, which encompasses the concepts of rigged elections, show elections, and election boycotts; the theme of governance and supervisory institutions, which includes the concepts of the Guardian Council and disqualifications; the theme of corruption and

transparency, which includes the concepts of corruption and economic corruption; the theme of political participation, which includes the concepts of non-participation of the people, low participation of the people, and a cold electoral atmosphere; the theme of repression and social control, with the concept of suppressing protesters; and the theme of governance structure, with the concept of the Islamic Republic system.

Conclusion:

Therefore, using the critical discourse analysis approach and focusing on the content description stage of 73 Iran International news items, it became clear that the dominant discourse surrounding the 2024 presidential elections is based on two distinct poles: the "intra-discursive" pole (government and governing institutions), in which words such as "company," "transparency," "supervision," and "legitimacy" are prominent, defending the performance of official institutions and the need to gain public trust; and the "external" pole (opposition and critical media), in which terms such as "rigged elections," "economic corruption," "disqualifications," and "sanctions" reflect a focus on inefficiency and lack of legitimacy. The results of the study show that Iran International's approach was mainly critical and depicted the 2024 elections as a non-competitive and undemocratic structural process, in line with the representations of the elections of the previous presidential era (2017–2021)-a process that fundamentally questions the legitimacy of electoral institutions. By emphasizing electoral engineering, systematic political exclusion, and the crisis of participation, this media reinforces the dominant negative narratives and reproduces an atmosphere of political distrust. Finally, based on data analysis, the research provides a strategic-practical framework for countering these representations, which aims to reduce the impact of destructive narratives, promote transparency, and strengthen informed political participation. These findings can be used as a guiding reference for media policymakers and communication researchers in strengthening emerging democracies.

Data Availability Statement.
Data available on request from the authors.
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