

News Framing on the America-Iran Feud in the Coverage from Two American Online Newspapers

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Abstract—News media framing has been explicated as a way to construct social realities by persuading readers with the schematics of differently construed proceedings and events. Hence, this study engages in a critical discourse analysis examining the social representation of America and Iran in the coverage from two American online newspapers, namely *The New York Times (NYT)* and *The New York Post (NYP)*. Since the United States has incited decades of simmering conflict with Iran that involves a global concern, this study also illustrates the polarisation of ideologisation in the coverage in relation to the two newspapers' political leanings. The findings disclose a disparity of representation of social agents and ideological bias between the two news outlets, with the *NYT* presenting a balance of positive and negative 'Us', while the *NYP* exhibiting a prejudiced and one-sided ideology towards Iran. Consequently, this study sheds light on the critical role of news framing and highlights academically a systematic analysis of online news coverage considering their political dependency.

Index Terms—Framing, critical discourse analysis, ideological square

I. INTRODUCTION

The study aims to examine the discourse of newspaper articles reporting events that exacerbate the America-Iran conflict. The news articles are published in two American newspaper outlets of different leanings, specifically *The New York Times* and *The New York Post*. In the interest of the high tensions and hostility between the United States and Iran could be seen from the infamous depreciatory metaphors that were used against each other, namely the 'Axis of Evil' and 'Great Satan'. It reveals just how much these two past allies turned into sworn nemeses in the last forty years. Due to their hatred and animosity, actions by both parties have been viewed and countered as a threat and this enmity is intensely rooted in the two nation's identities as well as their ideological constituents with material and civilisation factors [1].

Given the depth of partisan politics in the United States, the news media outlets in America play a vital role in notifying the public of their political representatives and ideologies on social issues and proceedings [2]. Hence, the exploitation of political spectrum in newspaper coverage is likely one of the consequential conducts by news media, notably when they delicately highlight their stance and different predictions that can lead to the incorporation of media bias. Consequently, this study shed light on the critical role of news and media framing concerning this America-Iran

feud and to highlight academically a systematic analysis of online news media considering their political dependency as it could be applied to persuade and cloud the readers' judgement.

II. NEWS MEDIA AND FRAMING

The concept of framing generally alludes to the way that media reports and depicts similar topics in various styles. This concept was built on the work of Donald Schön and Martin Rein, the idea of '*frames and framings*', exclusively on "frame analysis" [3].

Media framing signifies how news coverage are structured as "patterns of selection, emphasis, interpretation and exclusion" which explicitly or implicitly exhibits (hidden) meanings and ideological insinuations in news articles, including facts that are purposely included and/or excluded [4]. As argued by Robert Entman in his infamous piece in 1993, journalists "frame" by "*select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text*" [5] (p. 52).

Researchers who delved into news media's coverage of the America-Iran conflict have established the relationship between media framing and political discourse, highlighting social issues such as *orientalism*, *radicalization* and *terrorism*. A discourse analysis study on the case of Iran's Nuclear Program by Izadi & Saghaye-Biria in 2007 found that orientalist portrayals of Islamic countries and their political concerns enclaves on the basis of "Islam as a source of threat" [6] (p. 161). In another framing analysis on Iran's nuclear deal carried out by Alavi [7], it is revealed that Iran is framed as an "untrustworthy" party that is inimical towards the U.S. by the *New York Times*.

As a result, media framing highlights a holistic image of the construction and shift of public opinions. When it comes to racialise or radicalize imagery in the media, it does not have to beef up explicit and disapproving stereotypes to create attitudinal changes. In fact, subtle and implicit "frames" and media prompts can influence audiences' racial views and evaluation [8].

III. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) examines the ways social structures are formed as well as the conducts of the discourse itself that accords to the (re)production of the structures [9]. It offers theories and methods for empirical studies on discourse and socio-cultural development in various social domains. CDA is a highly context-sensitive and democratic approach in which there are many tools that could be used to explore language and social issues, and one of the many is framing.

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A. Van Leeuwen's Socio-Semantic Approach

In order to uncover injustice of many kinds in the profound layers of the two discourses and social actors, this paper capitalises on a primarily linguistic-oriented framework proposed by van Leeuwen [10]. This framework is exceptionally suitable in interpreting the roles and functions of social actors in texts by unsheathing socio-semantic classifications, emphasizing on the complex categorisation of exclusion and inclusion, rather than grammatical aspects [11].

Furthermore, this framework is useful in projecting that social institutions can limit and restrict the information and knowledge about the issue and frame the participants according to their ideological implications and views [12]. By utilising this framework, social actors in news texts can be included and excluded for several ideological motives through socio-semantic mechanisms that serve as the criterion for the analysis. The definition of terms is imparted in accordance with van Leeuwen's [10] own extensive explanations.

Inclusion/Exclusion. Social actors could be omitted or backgrounded, totally or partially (in van Leeuwen's terms, radical or less radical), to serve specific intentions. Van Leeuwen states that total exclusion "leave[s] no traces in the representation, excluding both the social actors and their activities" [10] (p. 39), while partial exclusion can be dissented into two subclasses, which are *suppression*, wherein "there is no reference to the social actor[s] in question anywhere in the text" [10] (p. 39) and *backgrounding*, in which "the excluded social actors may not be mentioned in relation to a given activity, but they are mentioned elsewhere in the text" [10] (p. 39). They can be inferred with certainty who they are.

Activation/Passivation. The former appears when social actors are depicted as the 'active', dynamic forces in an activity [10] (p. 33), while the latter happens when they are depicted as "undergoing" the activity, or the receiver [10] (p. 33). Passivated social actors can be '*subjected*' or *beneficialized*, whereby being *subjected* means to be treated as objects, whereas *beneficialized* refers to when social actors benefit from the action whether positively or negatively [10] (p. 33).

Genericization. It shows the representation of social actors as classes or as explicit, distinguishable individuals [10] (p. 35).

Assimilation: (i) Collectivization. This transpires as social actors are denoted as groups, which could be recognised through plurality, by a mass noun or a noun signifying a group of people and not regarded as statistic [10] (p. 37). **(ii)**

Individualization. In contrast, *individualization* is recognised through singularity, where social actors are represented as individuals [10] (p. 37).

Nomination: (i) Formalization. *Formalization* pertains to the use of surname [10] (p. 41). **(ii) Semiformalization.** Refers to when both the given name and surname are used [10] (p. 41). **(iii) Informalization.** This happens when actors are represented by their given name only [10] (p. 41), while **(iv) Honorification** ensues when they are presented with the supplementary standard titles or ranks, such as 'Dr.' **(v) Affiliation,** too is part of the nomination class, whereby there is the use of personal or kinship relations terms, like "Uncle

Stephen" [10] (p. 41).

B. Van Dijk's Ideological Square

Van Dijk [13] concocts an approach that links underlying social beliefs to their expression in social realities and discourse. The Ideological Square is a one of the essential ideas in the approach, whereby it displays positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation which act as a prevailing aspect of group engagement and how people communicate with the opposed groups. The focal point of the ideological square is disclosed in the matter of emphasizing the positive actions of the in-group and de-emphasizing its negative actions, and contrarily de-emphasizing the positive actions of the out-group and emphasizing its negative actions. This conceptual framework grants the basis of ideological analysis and the investigation of ideological stances that are discursively presented. The four fundamental principle in this approach is as follows:

- Emphasize positive things about *us*.
- Emphasize negative things about *them*.
- Suppress/De-emphasize negative things about *us*.
- Suppress/De-emphasize positive things about *them*.

Fig. 1. Van Dijk's ideological square.

It is important to note that to show the linguistic realization of the "self" and "other" representation, the necessity of inclusion and exclusion which reinfuses binaries.

IV. METHODOLOGY

As mentioned, the purpose of this study is to reveal media framings of the parties involved in the America-Iran feud by two newspaper companies with opposing political leanings and its ideological implications; therefore, this study uses a mixed-method research design, explicitly, critical discourse analysis, to attend to the set of research questions reflecting on the data as well as to gain optimal result. The qualitative side of the research is the text and critical discourse analysis aided by the selected analytical and conceptual framework, whereas the quantitative aspects are summarised in table in the form of frequency and percentage. The latter is used as evidence to support the claims made by the research in the findings and analysis section.

The data for this paper comprise 20 hard news articles culled from two American online newspapers representing each of their discrete political beliefs and ideologies as a continuum; 10 articles from each platform. The selection of the two news media was restrained by specified parameters, distinctively its political stances and its popularity. The chosen two are *The New York Times (NYT)* and *The New York Post (NYP)*. The news articles focused on key issues of the America-Iran conflict in a twenty-month period from May 2018 to January 2020. The articles mainly emphasize on subjects covering the Iran nuclear deal, the attacks on oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, US strikes facilities in Iraq and Syria after the death of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, and lastly Iran's retaliations as well as counter attacks.

The topics are carefully selected as they are recent and tangible for studies on news framing and the ideological

stances, essentially on political world news. Furthermore, the articles covered keywords “U.S.,” “Iran”, “strikes” and “Trump” in their headlines and leads. The nature of discourse is ideational and argumentative; thus, the data are suitable for a critical discourse analysis on media framing and self-representations.

For the *NYT*, they lean more to the left, supporting liberalism, while the other orientating more to the right, favouring conservatism. The opposing views of both parties, America and Iran, is an interesting piece to look at especially when there are anarchism and fascism involved in the conflict, which significantly influences the formation of public opinion [14]. The possibility of attaining substantial findings and discussion on the representation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the two newspaper company’s coverage on the issue is one of the rationale behind the preferred data.

As both the news media agencies are deemed influential newspapers and leading media outlets in America, respectively ranking third and sixteenth with regards to their size of distribution; these two are nonetheless prominent newspapers pertaining to world and political news coverage and views, which attracts readers all around the world and within the country itself.

In order to deconstruct the discursive constructions of the two newspaper agencies, tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA) are used as an interpretive approach that permits researchers to disclose socially constructed implications that lies in social realities and issues, granting researchers to interpret veiled social meanings and power through language that are often overlooked [14]. Furthermore, according to van Dijk (1993), CDA is exceptionally befitting to the study of media and news discourse due to its distinctive socio-political outlook since an essential part of CDA is to uncover and explore ‘the role of discourse in the reproduction and challenge of dominance’ [9] (p. 249).

V. REPRESENTATION OF AMERICA AND IRAN IN THE *NYT*

The analysis of the news texts by the *NYT* is explicated in frames and themes as follows with regards to the evidence that are provided through socio-semantic scrutiny. There are four frames that have been identified in this section, which are (i) America as the ringleader, (ii) America as the unreasonable party, (iii) Iran as the incriminated threat and (iv) Iran as the target.

A. America as the Ringleader

In the *New York Times*, America is viewed as a force to be reckoned with, a country that holds a significant amount of veto power which would not step aside. This can be shown through inclusion and activation, in which America is presented as the country who has the upper hand to control Iran’s economy by withdrawing from the Nuclear Deal signed during the (President) Obama administration in 2015, along with 5 other countries namely, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China.

TABLE I: *NYT* – INCLUSION / EXCLUSION (ALL)

	Included	Backgrounded	Suppressed
America	97.03%	2.47%	0.5%
Iran	98.17%	1.05%	0.78%

TABLE II: *NYT* – ACTIVISATION / PASSIVISATION (ALL)

	Activated	Subjected	Beneficialised
America	78.83%	18.62%	2.55%
Iran	66.4%	27.47%	6.13%

As can be observed in Tables I and II, the United States is included notably more than Iran (97.03% vs 98.17%) and its role allocation as the activated agent is significantly higher than Iran as well (78.83% vs 66.4%). Consider the following extracts that present how the United States is depicted as the agent who controls Iran’s economy:

1. **Trump** abandons Iran Nuclear Deal he long *scored*.
2. **The United States** will now *reimpose* the stringent sanctions it imposed on Iran before the deal is considering new penalties.
3. In fact, there is an argument to be made that **Mr. Trump** pushed Iran into exceeding the stockpile limit.
4. **Mr. Trump’s announcement** drew a chorus of opposition from European leaders, several of whom lobbied him feverishly not to pull out of the agreement and searched for fixes to it that would satisfy him.
5. A spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Geng Shuang, called the **America sanctions on Iran ‘bullying’** in a news conference on Monday.

Excerpt 1

The participants and processes in the selected extracts above show that America is flexing its power by cornering Iran into exceeding its uranium limits because of the onerous sanctions imposed by Trump and his administration. Not only the sanctions were imposed before Iran breached the limit, the President again re-imposed threatening sanctions, resulting in Iran’s economic damage. In Excerpt 1 (3), even though the decision is not well accepted by the European countries, the United States even threatened other countries that tried to assist Iran economically, especially aiming at the three European forces (the United Kingdom, France, and Germany). This implies that America is not just against Iran, but against other countries that associate with Iran.

Although the *NYT* attempts to mitigate the situation through intertextuality, using other people’s words to justify Trump’s action by stating that America wants to stop Iran from building a nuclear weapon, the news media counter it with arguments from administration officials, who are genericized to stay anonymous, affirming that America’s action is premature and that Iran has a long way to go to build a nuclear weapon, considering how insufficient Iran is in terms of integral elements like uranium. The above Excerpt also exhibits that a Chinese spokesman refers to the sanctions as a kind of “bullying”. This part depicts America as the social agent who deliberately misused their power in relationships with other countries through the sanctions. It does not only cause direct economic harm towards Iran, but also social harms between nations who are caught up in the conflict.

TABLE III: *NYT* – INCLUSION / EXCLUSION: AMERICA (SPECIFIED)

	Included	Backgrounded	Suppressed
Trump	98.65%	1.35%	-
The United States / America	87.64%	10.11%	2.25%
US officials, departments, allies, and citizens	100%	-	-

TABLE IV: NYT – ACTIVISATION / PASSIVISATION: AMERICA (SPECIFIED)

	Activated	Subjected	Beneficialised
Trump	91.89%	5.41%	2.7%
The United States / America	66.27%	33.73%	-
US officials, departments, allies, and citizens	79.15%	-	3.4%

Moreover, based on Tables III and IV, President Trump has the second-highest occurrence in the text in terms of activation (68 times – 91.89%), displaying that most of the actions the United States carried out are rendered by him. For instance,

1. **Mr. Trump's** move could embolden hard-line forces in Iran, raising the threat of Iranian retaliation against Israel or the United States, fueling an arms race in the Middle East and fanning sectarian conflicts from Syria to Yemen.
2. Months of intense negotiations with the Europeans to keep the accord in place collapse over **Mr. Trump's insistence** that the limits placed by the agreement on Iran's nuclear fuel production were inadequate.
3. **Mr. Trump** in April ratcheted up the pressure by imposing severe sanctions aimed at cutting off Iran's export of oil, the lifeblood of the now struggling Iranian economy.
4. Mr. Trump responded with a campaign of "maximum pressure" that began with punishing new economic sanctions, which began a new era of brinkmanship and uncertainty.

Excerpt 2

This aligns to van Leeuwen's (2008) claim on how the government is "often individualized and nominated, that is, personified in the person of the prime minister", (or in this case, "president") [11]. In every single article analysed, the *NYT* never fails to introduce their President with formalized nomination, which is his surname 'Trump' as well as his title 'the President'. The usage of functionalised titles and credentials in the articles showcase Trump's authority and power in carrying out activities that he wishes, which could result in compliance or contradictions to his actions as a response from other participating social actors. Nonetheless, this could also imply that the *NYT* has an inclination of saving America's "face" by way of putting the blame onto the President while making clear of their democratic stance.

B. America as the Unreasonable Party

After the U.S.' withdrawal from the nuclear deal ordeal, the tension between the two nations worsened, which led to a series of airstrikes. Other than being represented as the ringleader to the activities and events happening during the never-ending feud, the United States is also depicted as the unreasonable party, especially in relation to the killing of the Iranian general, Qassem Suleimani. America's reasoning to the killing of the general stems from a report from unnamed Israel agents who have located evidence that the Suleimani was planning an attack on the United States, around the same time as protestors stormed the U.S. embassy in Iraq after a strike eradicated 24 and injured more than 50 Iranian proxies.

1. "If **we** get words of attacks, **we will take** pre-emptive action as well to protect American forces, protect American lives," **Mr. Esper** said. "The game has changed."
2. "This strike was aimed at deterring future Iranian attack plans," the **Pentagon** statement said late Thursday. "**The United States** will continue to take all necessary action to protect our people and our interests wherever they are around the world."

3. In killing General Suleimani, **Mr. Trump** took an action that Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama had rejected, fearing it would lead to war between the United States and Iran.
4. Iran's foreign member, **Javad Zarif**, called the killing of General Suleimani an act of "international terrorism" and warned it was "extremely dangerous and a foolish escalation."

Excerpt 3

Similar to the previous claim, this argument is backed up by the socio-semantic resources – inclusion and activation, in which America is seen to be the social actor carrying out activities that are deemed as irrational by other parties other than the United States' own allies, resulting in ideological concepts of problematising situation. The above extract represents the news article in the *NYT* that displays the actions executed by America in the name of 'self-defense' was unwarranted. According to the individualized and personalised social actor, Mark Esper, the Defense Secretary of the United States, the Pentagon out the strike to "protect their people" from the attacks that were claimed to be planned out by Suleimani, and that "we" as a pronoun to replace "the U.S." is willing to take defensive actions for its people (refer Excerpt 3). Additionally, it is worth pointing out that instead of putting the just President under the limelight, the *NYT* included Esper and the Pentagon as well, eventuating a collectivized action.

C. Iran as the Incriminated Threat

Moving on to the representation of Iran in the *NYT*, Iran seemed to be mostly depicted as an incriminated threat towards America and its allies. It is undeniable that the tension between America and Iran is aggravated by both nations and that Iran also has a role to play in this feud. With its historical circumstances as to being accused of aiding al-Qaeda in the tragic attack of 9/11, Iran has always been projected as a threat to world peace and security that has to be stopped and isolated [15].

TABLE V: NYT – INCLUSION / EXCLUSION: IRAN (SPECIFIED)

	Included	Backgrounded	Suppressed
Iran	97.04%	1.18%	1.78%
Iranians, officials, departments, allies, and proxies	99%	1%	-
Rouhani and Khamenei	100%	-	-

TABLE VI: NYT – ACTIVISATION / PASSIVISATION: AMERICA (SPECIFIED)

	Activated	Subjected	Beneficialised
Iran	63.41%	28.66%	7.93%
Iranians, officials, departments, allies, and proxies	67.5%	27.5%	5%
Rouhani and Khamenei	90.91%	9.09%	-

1. **Iran** on Monday violated a key provision of the 2015 international accord to restrict its nuclear program and signaled that it would soon breach another as it seeks more leverage in its escalating confrontation with the United States.
2. Mr. Trump, who has vowed that Iran will never get a nuclear weapon, told reporters that **Iran** was "playing with fire," and in a statement the **State Department** criticized Iran's moves as an effort "to extort the international community and threaten regional security."
3. Rocket attacks over the last two months by **Iranian proxies** threatened the uneasy peace, and Friday's deadly strike broke it.

4. **Iran’s military** announced early Saturday that **it had accidentally shot down a Ukrainian passenger jet, blaming human error** because of what it called the plane’s sharp, unexpected turn toward a sensitive military base.

Excerpt 4

The above extracts exhibit how Iran is accountable for its actions - from breaching the uranium limit to the continuous strikes at American forces in Iraqi bases. This is presented through inclusion and activation as well. Overall, Iran is included 375 times (refer Table V) and activated as the social actor carrying out activities for 247 times (see Table VI). Though it is significantly less than America, these two socio-semantic properties do bring out the representation of Iran. In the first three extracts from Excerpt 4, Iran is presented as being the one violating treaty and breaching limits placed, in which the actions were regarded as attempts of nuclear production and that it intimidates the global community and threatens security. Lexicalisation functions as a rhetorical strategy that empower social actors with “impersonal authority, unseen but powerfully felt coercive force” [11]; hence, the evaluative words that contain negative connotations and processes such as ‘violated’, ‘extort’ and ‘threaten’ are utilised to display that Iran is dangerous and in a process of developing an atomic warfare.

It is also important to stress that Iran is presented as an entity, a collectivized nation, unlike America who is frequently represented by President Trump. However, although Iran is portrayed as the atrocious party, the *NYT* mitigates Iran’s actions in various forms, essentially using other people’s voice and opinions to justify the actions. Therefore, Iran is depicted as an ‘incriminated’ threat as they are being accused and framed as a threat but not exclusively one.

D. Iran as the Target

Apart from being represented as an implicated threat, Iran is also depicted as the target by the United States. This can be supported by the given statistics in Table II, in which Iran is often the social actor who is undergoing processes (33.6%), from receiving inflictions of tough sanctions and an economic downfall to the killing of their much adored general, Iran is displayed as the subjected agent in various situations. Compared to America, Iran is passivated particularly more than the United States in terms of a collectivized agent (see Table VII).

TABLE VII: NYT – GENERICISATION / SPECIFICATION

	Genericised	Individualised	Suppressed	Collectivised
America	21.58%	40%	3.68%	34.74%
Iran	15.43%	25.14%	4.29%	55.14%

1. **The United States** will now *reimpose* the stringent sanctions it imposed on Iran before the deal is *considering new penalties*.
2. Saavid Jaafar Al-Husseini, the Hezbollah military spokesman in Iraq, claimed that 24 were killed and more than 50 wounded.
3. **President Trump**, faced with scenes of unfolding chaos at an American embassy, *lashed out against Iran*, which he *blamed for the protests*. President Trump *blamed Iran* after demonstrators breached the compound’s outer wall.
4. Mr. Trump *said* on Tuesday that **Iran would “be held fully responsible”** for the attack on the embassy, in which protesters set fire to a reception building on the embassy compound, which covers more than 100 acres. He also *blamed* Tehran for directing the unrest.

5. **“Iran will be held fully responsible** for lives lost, or damage incurred, at any of our facilities,” **he** (Trump) said in a tweet. **“They will pay a very BIG PRICE!** This is not a Warning, it is a Threat. Happy New Year!”

Excerpt 5

Other than sentence 2, the above extracted sentences show that the United States and its president, Trump, are the activated social actors of heated activities in the conflict. Passivation could be reached by being the goal, carrier, and phenomenon in terms of Halliday’s transitivity [11]. In this case, Iran is seen to be subjected to excessive sanctions that could potentially impact their economy. This could presuppose that due to the sanctions, Iran is being cornered to either deal with a deteriorating state of economy or infringing limits and sanctions placed to recover their financial prudence.

Conjointly, it is observed that Iran is subject to Trump’s words and commands. One appealing detail to be focused on is the fact that the protest was done in Iraq instead of Iran; however, Trump directed the case to Iran, blaming and threatening the assimilated agent for the protest. In the *NYT*, the headlines for the report on the protest is *“Protesters Attack U.S. Embassy in Iraq, Chanting ‘Death to America’”*. It is unsure whether all protesters are Iranians or Iranian-backed proxies. Some of the protesters could be Iraqis and the way the *NYT* inserted its judgement at the very end of the article unfolds a kind of uncertainty and that Iran is not the only one who should be responsible.

Nonetheless, for sentence 2 in Excerpt 5, the perpetrator was excluded from the sentence, backgrounding that America was the one who killed 24 and wounded 50 through an airstrike. Although the exclusion may not bear much significance, the aggregated number of casualties indicate that Iran is at the receiving end and the targeted party. Certainly, Iran has also launched an attack at the U.S.; withal, there is only reported death from America, who happened to be a contractor working with one of the tankers. There are another four injured American service members as well. The difference between the two with regards to the aggregated amounts of casualty exhibits that Iran lost more of their men than America.

VI. REPRESENTATION OF AMERICA AND IRAN IN THE *NYP*

In contrast to the previous section, this section provides findings on the representation of America and Iran in the *NYP*. The findings are also explained in frames and themes according to the results that are examined via socio-semantic analysis. There are four frames to this section, which are: (i) America as righteous and (ii) Iran as animosity to the United States.

A. *America as Virtuous*

Contrary to the *NYT*, the length of the *NYP*’s news articles is very much shorter. The events are mostly reported in an average of 2 pages; some so brief that they appear to be merely stating what happened without any contextual information or related historical background leading to the events. Since the *NYP* is deemed to be a news media with political bias leaning more to the right, it attempts to depict the United States as the virtuous one among the two, subsequently shedding the negative light on Iran. This claim is supported through inclusion and activation, in which

America has more ‘voice’ than Iran, foregrounding the participants from the U.S., including President Trump and his allies around the world as the entity who is facing Iran’s nuclear threat and airstrikes. It also represents them as the social agency who makes the effort to resolve intense encounters between the two, even if violence and threat are entailed.

TABLE VIII: NYP – INCLUSION / EXCLUSION (ALL)

	Included	Backgrounded	Suppressed
America	94.93%	4.35%	0.72%
Iran	90.57%	7.55%	1.88%

TABLE IX: NYP – ACTIVISATION / PASSIVISATION (ALL)

	Activated	Subjected	Beneficialised
America	70.99 %	27.48%	1.53%
Iran	68.75%	25%	6.25%

Table VIII captures the number of exclusion and inclusion in the news texts, along with the activation and passivation occurrence percentage between the two nations. As can be seen, the United States is included particularly more than Iran (57.71% vs 42.29%) and its role allocation as the activated social actor is also considerably higher than the other as well (70.99% vs 68.75%, refer Table IX). The following excerpt consists of extracts from the NYP chosen news coverage on the America-Iran conflict:

1. **President Trump** on Tuesday pulling the US out of the Iranian nuclear deal — declaring that “America will not be held hostage to nuclear blackmail” — despite warnings that withdrawal could make it easier for the regime to develop nuclear weapons.
2. **The White House** has also ratcheted up the US military presence in the region after it said Iran attacked two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman in an attempt to disrupt international shipping lanes.
3. **The United States** carried out “defensive strikes” against terror group Kata’ib Hezbollah in Iraq and Syria on Sunday, after an American civilian contractor was killed in an attack on an Iraqi military base, the **Pentagon** said.
4. “**The U.S. and its coalition partners** fully respect Iraqi sovereignty, and support a strong and independent Iraq. **The U.S.**, however, will not be deterred from exercising its right of self-defense,” he (Hoffman) said.
5. Earlier this month, **US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo** blamed Iranian-backed forces for a series of attacks on bases in Iraq, and warned Iran that any attacks that harmed Americans or allies would be “answered with a decisive US response.”
6. **Iraqi troops backed by US-trained counter-terrorism forces** were deployed to try to prevent the mob from entering the embassy, including by firing tear gas to disperse the crowd.
7. **Trump** responded to the attack by noting in a tweet that “Iran killed an American contractor, wounding many. **We** strongly responded, and always will.”

Excerpt 7

Interestingly, the United States is mostly represented by itself or its administration “the White House”, followed by its President and individualized leaders. Hence, it could be inferred that the United States is depicted as a collectivized entity, favourably activated, functionalized, individualized and nominated. In Excerpt 7, most of the sentences present that the U.S. is carrying out the activities to protect their country from dangers and attacks from Iran. The airstrikes launched by the U.S. military are regarded as “defensive strikes” in retaliation to Iran who had killed one of their contractors. This could indicate that the U.S. is a virtuous social agent who possesses the right motives and

commitments; in this case, revealing authenticity and moral authority by protecting its country from harm. In addition, the verbal-behavioural processes such as “*blamed, warned and declared*” displayed resistance towards Iran’s actions, which portrays a narration of “resistance as a virtue”. The processes are also used as a signification of power assertion as the sayer (America) who does the verbalisation is against the receiver (Iran). In the last sentence, it can be observed that President Trump insisted that Iran would pay double the price for having to initiate a strike.

Regardless, a strikingly unique point that is worth noting can be found in sentence 1 in Excerpt 7. In contrast to how the *NYT* reports it, the *NYP* describes the situation in a way that it shines a positive light on the President. This can be viewed when the recipient and the indirect object is the United States. It might aid in framing the President as the hero who saved the States from Iran’s nuclear deal and its nuclear blackmail. Another point that should be highlighted is the fact that the reporting of the “warnings that withdrawal would assist Iran in building nuclear weapons” opted out the social actor who did the activity. The exclusion of social actors is not common in the *NYP*, this news media tends to background the actor through passive agent selection and in order to avert the focus on the phenomenon or goal, preventing the actor from taking responsibility for their actions.

B. Iran as Animosity to the US

Corresponding to the previous theme of “America as Virtuous”, Iran is undoubtedly depicted as the negative participant, specifically, being animosity to America. Since the U.S. is represented as the social agency who is defending its nation from Iran, the latter is portrayed as being the instigator and the ferocious opponent. Parallel to the prior framing, the utilisation of inclusion and activation support the claim by showing that Iran is the active social actor who carried out the activities, compelling them to be accountable for their actions. This is also demonstrated in *NYP*’s coverage that shows America’s will to protect its people and the negative actions that were executed by Iran as shown in Excerpt 8.

1. “This will make America safer. **The Iranian regime** is the leading state sponsors of terror,” **Trump** said, accusing the mad Mullahs of supporting terrorists throughout the volatile region.
2. **Iran** blew past limits set by the 2015 nuclear deal on Monday and began enriching uranium to 4.5 percent, further jeopardizing the pact signed by world powers.
3. **Kata’ib Hezbollah** is an anti-American Iraqi-Shia military group that is primarily supported by Iran and was deemed a foreign terrorist organization by the US in 2009.
4. **Chanting “Death to America,”** hundreds of supporters of an Iranian-backed militia enraged about airstrikes in Iraq stormed the US Embassy compound in Baghdad on Tuesday, forcing the evacuation of the ambassador and his staff.
5. **It** (Iran) also threatened Israel.

Excerpt 8

Other than the socio-semantic features, the choice of words (lexicalisation) used by the *NYP* to describe Iran is observed to have evaluative and negative meanings. The unconstructive connotations are ideologically exploited by the *NYP* to represent Iran as a threat. The material and verbal processes performed by Iran such as “*chanting death to America*”, “*threatened*”, “*stormed*” and “*jeopardizing*” could insinuate that Iran is the violent counterpart who seeks

to violence and desires to develop a nuclear bomb that could endanger the world. The Iranian-backed proxy, Kataib Hezbollah could be seen to be labelled and recognised as a foreign terrorist organisation by the U.S. Owing to the nature of *NYP*'s news coverage on Iran, it could result in readers associating terrorism with Iran. This finding is consistent with past literature that explored the framing of Iran, namely Brewer and Graf (2013) *et al.* [16], Maiwandi (2013) [17] and Röker (2017) [18] which found that Iran is viewed as a terrorist country.

Additionally, the use of dysphemistic words like “*mad*”, “*terror*” and “*anti-America*” functions as the country's negative attributes. Even so, since the *NYP*'s style of reporting is brief and short, the results may not be as ample; nonetheless, the existing exhibits are adequate to show that Iran is painted as an animosity to the States.

VII. POLARISATION OF IDEOLOGISATION (POSITIVE ‘US’ VS NEGATIVE ‘THEM’)

A. *The New York Times (Left Wing)*

In this study, the ideological constructions of the *NYT* are relatively imbalanced. Some articles lean more to positive ‘Us’ (America) and negative ‘Them’ (Iran), and some, negative ‘Us’ (America) and positive ‘Them’ (Iran). However, since Iran is mostly passivated and how the *NYT* put the blame on Trump shows that there is an inclination for the polarisation of negative ‘Us’ (America) and positive ‘Them’ (Iran). The administration, the President's allies (i.e. Israel) as well as the Pentagon as mostly the few who support Trump's decisions. Individualized officials such as Bolton, Hoffman and Pompeo are also often observed to be assisting the President and his outlook. Meanwhile, Iran is frequently collectivized and its representatives are principally the President, Hassan Rouhani and the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that on the report of the death of the Iranian general and his subordinates, the *NYT* thoroughly enlightens their readers how Suleimani is significant and valued by his people. He was described as ‘a hero at home’ and was also portrayed in the eyes of Iranians who looked up to him. This presupposes that the *NYT* considers Iran's perceptions towards the actions carried out by the United States and that the news media can be regarded as empathetic towards the Other (Iran).

This suggests that that the *NYT* has an internal debate within the nation itself, in which they support the Democrats instead of the Republicans, introducing a form of ideological stance. Therefore, the representation of Us/Them dichotomy within the country is positive ‘Us’ (Democrats) and negative ‘Them’ (Republicans). This is particularly significant as the words of the democrats often oppose to the actions achieved by the current government, which includes the withdrawal of the nuclear deal, the deployment of thousands of troops to Iraq as an act of ‘self-defence’ as well as the killing of Iranian General, Qassem Suleimani. This can be supported through the inclusion of Democratic responses from the Democratic Party or democratic representatives. In some cases, the responses are a counter reply to statements from the Republicans.

The inclusion of sentiments by the Democrats functions as

a mitigation strategy while the words from the Republicans are often disputed by the *NYT* through voices from other parties. The debate in discussion between the two opposing groups displays a suggestive upshot of for-Trump and against-Trump, which could indirectly reduce the negative image of Iran, subsequently emphasizing on the negative portrayal of America instead. Mirilovic & Kim (2017) made a comparable conclusion, claiming that both groups may not condone to Iran's actions but the two demonstrated a dissimilar set of ‘America values’, in which they branded as ‘national Self’ versus ‘national Other’, and have different ways to address the issue [19]. Overall, regardless of the negative assessment of America and Iran, both positive and negative frames can be observed from the data.

B. *The New York Post (Right Wing)*

As stated earlier, the *NYP*'s news coverage is comparatively shorter than the *NYT*, which can be a rhetorical strategy to keep the readers from knowing more than they should. The readers of the *NYP* might not be well-informed as this news media keeps their reporting brief and conservative. This can be supported through the inclusion and activation of America compared to Iran. The voices are mainly from the former, leading to Iran not being able to express their opinions and being silenced as their voice is totally excluded from the coverage. This could result in readers to be deprived of grasping a balanced and fair report and would be persuaded to conform to their ideological stance.

While the *NYT* favours the left, the *NYP* tilts more to the right, providing supplementary conservative contents. However, in opposition to the former news agency, the latter's news report and information are widely disputed by the public. It appears that the *NYP* has received many criticisms for media exaggeration, transparent advocacy as well as conservative favouritism [20]. In the previous analysis on the representation of America and Iran, it is found that this right-wing news media depicts the United States as the righteous and virtuous social agent, while Iran as a threat to America. This results in the polarisation of positive ‘Us’ (America) and negative ‘Them’ (Iran).

Moreover, the *NYP* quoted Iran and its proxies as “*sponsors of terror*”, “*lunacy*”, “*mad Mullahs*”, “*foreign terrorist group*” and “*anti-America*”. The lexicalisation used by the *NYP* demonstrates Iran as the negative ‘Them’, pursuant to van Dijk's (1993: 264) statement in which media exploiting lexis with negative connotations is a general style to media discourse, portraying a negative-Other representation of out-groups [9]. The evident attempt of the *NYP* trying to accentuate the inferred virtuousness of America's viewpoint and actions towards the America-Iran conflict initiated an ideological stance (conservatism) intended to influence the readers' beliefs and standpoint within the boundaries of the government's interest. Conclusively, the analysis shows a clear positive-negative standpoint between the two nations.

VIII. CONCLUSION

News framing creates social realities by influencing and altering readers' interpretations and ideologies with construed reporting of events pertaining to the news media's political leanings. This research investigates the problem by

exploring how the *New York Times* and the *New York Post* frame America and Iran in their news coverage by analysing the representation of the two social agencies in the news articles. The study further explains the polarisation of ideologisation focusing on the depiction of ‘self’ and ‘others’ by the two online newspapers concerning their political spectrum. The two news media propose and promote the salience and significance of specified perspectives exclusively, the left-wing and right-wing; hence, impelling strategies which invite target audiences to think and evaluate in a way that the media persuades them to [21].

As mentioned, the *NYT* shows how America flexes its power on Iran, which could make the country seem like the instigator and unreasonable one between the two, while Iran is shown as the stereotypical but mitigated ‘threat’ to the U.S. and it could be observed that the latter is the victimised party. On the other hand, the *NYP* depicted America as the virtuous one, following its belief in conservatism and nationalism, while Iran as the negative-Other, in which they are animosity to America. These portrayals of the two social agencies presented by the two media are widely acknowledged as ‘legitimate’ by readers; thus, constituting the essence of media persuasion [22]. The representations of America and Iran in the texts reflect the polarisation between positive ‘Us’ and negative ‘Them’ in the news coverage. For the *NYT*, a balance of positive and negative “Us” and “Them” can be observed. In contrast, the *Post* evidently displays a positive ‘Us’ and negative ‘Them’ ideology in their reports.

In conclusion, the research enlightens readers on the vital role of news and media framing underlines scholastically a systematic critical discourse analysis of online newspapers coverage in view of their political dependencies.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Sofea Azlena conducted the research, analysed the data and wrote the paper while Surinderpal Kaur directed and revised the paper; both authors approved the final version.

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