

## **Women Representation in Iranian News Sites: A Case Study of Four News Sites**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper aims to provide an analysis of the content and topic of four Iranian news sites. The framework of this research is based on agenda setting theory and it is used to analyse the effect of this theory on defining and choosing news that are related to women. Based on theoretical framework, effective features and indexes in media in the women's topics are collected as: news orientation, mentioned request orientation, news content, news makers attributes, dominant news dimension on women's juridical subjects and socio-cultural subjects. According to this features, reflected subjects in four cyber news- Iranian Labor News Agency (ILNA)<sup>1</sup>, KhabarOnline<sup>2</sup>, International Women and Family News Agency (WAFA)<sup>3</sup> and Iranian Women News Site (KHATOON)<sup>4</sup>- are content analysed. Survey achievements in the second semester of 1388 and the first semester of 1389 shows that there is no significant difference between the insights and the way of agenda setting in women's issues among these four online news.*

**Keywords:** Representation, Agenda setting, Women's issues, News sites, Cyber media.

### **1. Introduction**

The contemporary emergence and application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and more specifically the Internet, has caused considerable changes in daily lives of people. One of distinctive features of the information society is the value of information usage among its citizens (Colley and Maltby, 2008). Since, women in modern society are recognised as a marginal social class, the effect of this information on between women, special immigrant, minority, disabled, poor, elderly women and the women from developing countries, and those who have no access to information sources, is quite clear (Khan and Ghadially, 2010). Nevertheless, despite the problems and gender restrictions (Ono and Zavondy, 2005), each day the number of women who have established online connection is increased. But while this increase is visible, subtle gender differences and negative aspects in the amount and purpose of the media user, especially in developing countries is still evident. Cyber media help the women in all over the world to participate in virtual communities and exchanging news, information, trade, knowledge, and gain intellectual support and assistance. On the other hand with everyday development of cyberspace into social spheres, the role of groups and news sites on information and awareness dissemination is more glaring than ever. Online news can provide a good opportunity to reflect on events and women's issues away from any tradition, custom, tension and other community issues; it can make creating vertical space for women's demands and help them to better represent themselves in society.

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<sup>1</sup> -www.ilna.ir

<sup>2</sup> -www.khabaronline.ir

<sup>3</sup> -www.wafa.ir

<sup>4</sup> - http://khatoonnews.com

Content analysis of different representation of women and the agenda setting around issues related to them in news sites, specially sites that are affiliated to the government, can create a better understanding among the statesmen and specifically can make Iranian women arrive at a better awareness of their issues and real problems in society.

## **2. Literature review: Cyber space and features in Iran**

In fact, cyberspace is a name that encompasses a large number of applications of information technologies. This name was coined for the first time by William Gibson in his 1984 novel, *Neuromancer* (Holmes, 2005). Access to this space, in other words is globalization of the media to allow large parts of population to access the information before it could not (Ritzer & Ryan, 2011). Online space create a golden opportunity for women specially in developing countries to able men work conjunction to achieve to their development and empowerment (Piela, 2010). Nowadays, the internet is the most powerful tool in the hands of women to enable them to extend their participation in numerous fields (Huyer & Tatjana, 2003). Cyberspace empower them to participate effectively in a variety of development fields, including planning and decision making at the family, institutional, and societal levels (Gurumurthy, 2004). Therefore, ensuring gender equal access to the internet has become an essential core objective and integral element in the global, extensive research and development initiatives to effectively improve women's lives by rising their capacities to share and access information and knowledge (Copper & Weaver, 2003).

Some researchers have proposed that men and women are likely to engage in diverse patterns of information looking for and procedure this information in dissimilar ways (R. Spence, A. Lachlan & Westerman, 2009). All in all, more women have begun to utilize cyberspace through initiatives that advance women's access to and knowing of ICT (Rainer, Laosethakul, & Astone, 2003; United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005) Contemporary Iranian women also have used this space for their aims and movements (Masserat, 2008). Statistic in table 1 shows that the highest rate of using Internet among the middle east belong to Iran. Increasing of the Internet users in Iran has reflected dynamic changes in the news websites. Online news have many undeniable merits over traditional news. Some of the particular advantages of news websites are immediacy, interactivity, continuous publication and frequent updates (Karlsson and Strömbäck, 2010). An online newspaper is a newspaper's online edition (Lim, 2011). Media special the Internet news representation often influences women's beliefs about themselves, their behaviours and their social role (M. Quinlan and R. Bates, 2009).

### **2.1 Agenda-Setting Theory**

For over 30 years, agenda-setting theory has been one of the central theoretical close withes used to consider mass media consequences, particularly in political contexts (W. Dunn, 2009). Media are the primeval social agents in various societies around the world. Television, radio, magazines, cinema, newspapers, the Internet, and other so-called 'mass media'. Mass media pass on the values, ideas, norms, out looks, thoughts, and behaviours that socialize and make the social reality of those who use them for a wide diversity of causes (Bryant & Oliver, 2009). Agenda-setting is about the transmission of salience from the media to the public (McCombs, 2004). In more practical periods, agenda setting has been defined as "the idea that the news media, by their display of news, come to determine the issues the public thinks about and talks about" (Severin & Tankard, 1988, p. 164). In their primary study, McCombs and Shaw (1972) achieve a nearly ideal link between the media agenda and the public agenda on five issues: foreign law and order, policy, public welfare, economics, and civil rights. Agenda setting is the real power of mass media. Indeed agenda setting means media choose the news that must be covered and determine the political trend in their societies (W. Ragas & Kioussis, 2010). In contrast the situation, ignored the media can give governments the possibility that policy inertia or even worse was to continue (Bradley, 2008). previous findings has shown that media's agenda setting impact is unwavering with issues that the audience has less direct or inconspicuous issues, personalized knowledge with in real-world contexts (Zucker, 1978; Winter, Eyal, & Rogers, 1982; Smith, 1987; Weaver et al., 1981).

#### **2.1.1 Types of agenda setting**

Dearing and Rogers identified three categories of agenda-setting studies, which they named public agenda setting, media agenda setting, and policy agenda setting (Rogers, & Bregman, 1993). In each fields, first-level agenda setting imputes to the transmit of object salience (McCombs, 2005; Tai, 2009), with second-level agenda setting belonging to the transmit of attribute salience (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002; McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997).

Taking study in public agenda setting as an case, first-level agenda setting take places when mass media transmit issue salience to mass audiences, and second-level agenda setting occurs when media transfer salience about issue features (E. Denham,2010). In new years, academics have discussed the development to which second-level agenda setting and structure should be considered as conceptually alike processes, with agenda setting branching from approach accessibility and framing extending from attribution theory(see, for discussion, Iyengar, 1991; McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Reese, 2007; Scheufele, 1999, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007;Weaver, 2007).

Figure 1 proposed that media, the public and elite policy-makers were attached and placed in critic places to set the news agenda (Tai, 2009).

### **2.1.2 Agenda setting in cyberspace**

Since we need to know how agenda setting occur in the Internet and news websites. With almost 40 years of academic investigations on the agenda-setting theory, plenty data exists to display the impact majority and Internet media outlets have on telling and influencing how the public view a diversity of issues (e.g., Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008; Wallsten, 2007). Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) found that U.S. online media were victoriously able to set the agenda for U.S. electronic bulletin board users for three topics with a time-lag influence unstable between 1 to 7 days. Considering that the audience in cyberspace are very dispersed, therefore agenda setting is a bit harder in terms of other media. Williams believe because of branching serious issues in cyberspace, more mind control process be pursued through repetition and influence in the paradigm (Williams, 2003). Delwiche also tasted this theory on online space and his research has approved a theory that state the priority of media will move to priority of mass media. He sensing priority virtual environments and compare them with the priorities of visual and print media come to the conclusion that the priority of websites are more coordinated to audience desires. Therefore he predicts that in coming years virtual environments will find a stronger role in determining of the public's priority (Delwiche, 2004).

### **2.2 Women and cyberspace**

The second half of the 1990s saw rising movements everywhere in women's activism to advance their contact to, and representation in, the media. Intensified movement by women both made and was ordered by the Beijing Platform for Action, which appeared from the UN-sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women held in China in 1995. The Beijing Platform found 12 keys fields of concern, including education, poverty, the effects of armed conflict on women, violence against women, and the need to end inequality in power division and decision making the entire stages. It listed communication structures and the mass media as one serious area. Tactical purposes were to boost women's contribution in media decision making and uphold non-stereotypical media description of women. Attempts to get these aims were followed inside and outside the UN organization. Within the United Nations, UNESCO's Communication Division had some responsibilities. Outside it, global non-governmental sets such as the ecumenical World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the Association for Progressive Communication (APC) arrangement programs to advance women's access to the media in a range of paths. The APC's role, such as was to hold up women's netting via the Internet (SAKR,2004).

The importance of women's media growths and ICT use is to expand spaces where women can talk amongst themselves, discover a voice, fluent demands and concerns and obtain recognition from each other, as well as mutual support in the numerous discussions beyond the diplomatic of sorority(Sreberny,2005) The considered use of ICTs to reinforce of women's activism and agendas has many consequences. It assists women to achieve a better awareness and understanding around the issues of their concern. It supports solidarity movements. It can improve long-established women's networking actions. It can be used to secure the rights of women to join equally in civil and public life. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, women have expanded various newspapers and journals (Khiabany and Sreberny 2004) and are very actively participating in social networking sites.

### **3. Method**

Content analysis is one of the most trustworthy study methods for studying media content due to its prospective to make an "objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952). We established the article as the unit of analysis, defined as any combination of a headline, subhead, body copy, images, captions, and any other elements treating the same topic. This study analysed online news in Iran during two semesters from four news sites.

Among these four news sites, two news sites dedicated only to women-WAFA and KHATOON- and the other two sites-ILNA and KHABARONLINE- are the news sites that have different fields including women's issues. These four online news selected after searching in 20 news sites and 15 women's news sites. One of the reason for choosing these sites was sites being audience filled and the second important factor was high rank to know which sites are devoted to ALEXA<sup>1</sup>. WAFA and KHATOON also were high rank among the other sites about women. Evaluated and selected other sites, especially in the field of women indicated that their archives do not have strong data storage. Some sites that have had some content richness were not as well as updates and achieving them in some other was not possible due to security. Use the filters to access such sites stats contacts them was brought down largely. As a result, the researcher on work news sites that also have more contacts and show better government approach.

Because in this study as mentioned, we want to compare views news sites raised the country with approaches of women's news sites. Sampling in this study, is stratified random sampling. Procedure for selecting samples is considering six days from Saturday to Fridays for each season and then we randomly selected a Saturday from all fall Saturdays, a Sunday from all fall Sundays, a Monday from all fall Mondays, a Tuesday from all fall Tuesdays, a Wednesday from all fall Wednesdays, a Thursday from all fall Thursdays and a Friday from all fall Fridays. This process was done for each season and for each news sites separately. So that a total of 28 days was selected for analysis.

### 3.1 The most important findings:

After 400 review issues on four news sites separately and comparing them in two news sites and women's news sites, researcher decided show the most considerable results in this article. For better and more efficient compared, two online news- ILNA and KhabarOnline- putting in group1 and two women's online news – WAFA and KHATOON – putting in group 2. Table 2 shows after analysing 400 news orientation, 163 issues have negative orientation and 148 issues have positive orientation. Comparing news orientation show that KhabarOnline with 56% have highest negative orientation and ILNA with 57.1% have highest positive orientation among 4 news sites. Moreover, chi-square test with df (degrees of freedom) =3 and level of confidence=95% shows that there is a significant difference between two groups in news orientation. This means that group1 has used more negative direction than the second group.

Table 3 shows after analysing 400 the mentioned demands orientation, 210 issues have female and gender demands. Furthermore, chi-square test with df =2 and level of confidence=99% shows that there is a significant difference between two groups in mentioned demands orientation. This means that group1 has used more combination demands and group2 has used more female and gender demands.

Table 4 shows after analysing 400 news content, the most dominant content include: medical, health with 62 cases, judicial Affairs, crimes with 58 cases, social rights of women with 48 cases, religious Affairs with 43 cases and cultural development with 28 cases. In addition to, chi-square test with df =17 and level of confidence=99% shows that there is a significant difference between two groups in news content. It means that group1 has used more social rights of women (22.7%) and medical, health (16.2%) and group2 has used more religious Affairs (15.4%), medical, health (15%) and in social rights of women has only used 5.3% while there is a dramatically different between two groups in social rights of women.

Table 5 shows after analysing 400 news makers attributes, the most dominant content include: government agencies(185), academics, doctors, teachers (65), Civil institutions, NGOs (28), women's groups, Institutions and associations (26) and foreign politicians and statesmen (25). Also, chi-square test with df =10 and level of confidence=99% shows that there is a significant difference between two groups in news makers attributes. It means that group1 has used Government agencies in their news more than group2. Among the four sites mentioned ILNA has used Government agencies more than others.

Table 6 shows only 169 of total 400 news content equal to 42.3 percent had been mentioned aspects related to women's rights. Of which, respectively, the highest frequency with 33 cases is about violence against women, laws and new bills with 26 cases, management inequality with 20 case , marriage and divorce, international institutions and conventions each with 16 cases, health inequality with 11 cases and educational inequality with 10 cases.

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<sup>1</sup> - <http://www.alexa.com>

Besides, chi-square test with  $df = 10$  and level of confidence = 99% shows that there is a significant difference between two groups in dominant news dimension on women's juridical subjects. Group 1 and two have used more issues of both violence against women (Medley, rape against women and etc) laws and new bills that amount in two groups respectively (23.6%) and (16.9%) in group 1, respectively (15%) and (13.8%) in group 2. The statistics define women's news sites have worked more than the other news sites.

Table 7 shows only 115 of total 400 news content equal to 42.3 percent had been mentioned aspects related to women's cultural-sociological subject. Of which, respectively, the highest frequency with 41 cases is about cover, with 24 cases is about employment and unemployment, runaway girls and women with 12 case, sports constraints and addiction – AIDS each with 11 cases, health inequality with 11 cases and family constraints with 5 cases. Moreover, chi-square test with  $df = 8$  and level of confidence = 99% shows that there is a significant difference between two groups in dominant news dimension on women's cultural-sociological subjects. Group 2 covers more subjects about cover with 46.4% and employment and unemployment with 17.4% while group 1 covers more subjects about addiction – AIDS with 21.7% and employment and unemployment with 26.1%.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Today, women presence is clearly seen in different scenes and different matters in our society. No doubt it is important to balance the relative positions and providing equal opportunities between men and women and eliminate exclusion and discrimination against women requires awareness and promote the collective consciousness. Meanwhile, the media's role in this regard is very sensitive, serious and decisive. This role will be doubled, especially for developing countries such as Iran in a path of growth and development are moving and this is just the beginning. Subjective perceptions of people towards women's issues and subjects, Observations obtained through the daily media and appears in the current era more than ever in cyberspace as a matter of fact. Thus, this assumption is defensible when obtained using a scientific method and in an area away from any particular prejudice, attitudes and building mental orientation. So that, to be reasonable figures this way. This paper was performed on all subjects related to women in four cyber news ILNA, KhabarOnline, Wafa and KHATOON during second semester of 1388 and the first semester of 1389. Overall, the research findings indicated group 2 compare with group 1 in some areas the difference is less notable work in the field of women. Areas that might address them are very important and might be highlighted by the women's news sites.

One of these issues is news subject areas that considering the situation of women in Iranian society today, expected that women's online news more focused the issues of women's right and women's cultural-sociological subjects but the statistics show the main focus of two women's news sites were on the medical religious issues and two other news sites were more focused in the area of women's rights. These seem to focus on coverage of women in Muslim society largely seems unnecessary. Perhaps addressing more serious issues such as addiction – AIDS, colportage, employment and unemployment that significantly mentioned in the first group are of higher importance in our current society. Moreover, about news orientation and the mentioned demands orientation issues and also coincides with the passage of time researching some material added to the Family Protection Bill and the extent of the discussion, it appears that the website news- KHABARONLINE and ILNA- adopted a more pragmatic stance. Because these two sites have used more negative and combination orientation that both largely cover the discussion. According to statistics are offered news sites, especially women's news sites desired mentioned request orientation by the combination of demands related to women's demands are within the law. It seems the women's online news should pay more attention to different aspects of women's problems, particularly legal and social.

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**Tables and Figures**

**Table 1. Middle East Internet Usage and Population Statistics**

MIDDLE EAST	Usage, in Dec/2000	Internet Usage, Latest Data	User Growth (2000-2010)
Bahrain	40,000	649,300	1,523.3 %
Iran	250,000	33,200,000	13,180.0 %
Iraq	12,500	325,000	2,500.0 %
Jordan	127,300	1,741,900	1,268.3 %
Kuwait	150,000	1,100,000	633.3 %
Lebanon	300,000	1,000,000	233.3 %
Oman	90,000	1,236,700	1,274.1 %
Qatar	30,000	436,000	1,353.3 %
Saudi Arabia	200,000	9,800,000	4,800.0 %
Syria	30,000	3,935,000	13,016.7 %
United Arab Emirates	735,000	3,777,900	414.0 %
Yemen	15,000	420,000	2,700.0 %

Source: Internet World Stats (2010).

**Table 2 shows column percent compared to the news orientation in both groups 1 and 2**

Groups	Group1		Group2		Total	
	frequent	percent	frequent	percent	frequent	percent
news orientation						
Positive*	61	39.6	87	35.4	148	37
negative**	66	42.9	97	39.4	163	40.8
Neutral***	22	14.3	60	24.4	82	20.5
unknown****	5	3.2	2	0.8	7	1.8
Total	154	100	246	100	400	100

Sig=0.05 df=3

\*News is that hypnosis in order to progress, hope, optimism, progress, development and etc.

\*\*News is that hypnosis in order to despair, cynicism, lack of progress and etc.

\*\*\*News which have not neither positive nor negative hypnosis.

\*\*\*\*Type of news that is not clear hypnosis.

**Table 3 shows column percent compared to the mentioned request orientation in both groups 1 and 2:**

Groups	Group1		Group2		Total	
	frequent	percent	frequent	percent	frequent	percent
the mentioned demands orientation						
General demands without regard to gender*	25	16.2	63	25.6	88	22
Female and gender demands**	64	41.6	146	59.3	210	52.5
Combination demands***	65	42.2	37	15	102	25.5
Total	154	100	246	100	400	100

Sig=0.01 df=2

\*All demands or criticisms of the social, cultural, political and economic are considered without regard to gender.

\*\*All demands or criticisms of the social, cultural, political and economic are discussed with emphasis on the feminine gender.

\*\*\*All demands or criticisms of the social, cultural, political and economic are discussed with emphasis on women's demands in the framework of legal and public demands

**Table 4 shows column percent compared to the news content in both groups 1 and 2:**

Groups	Group1		Group2		Total	
	frequent	percent	frequent	percent	frequent	percent
news content						
Economic Development	5	3.2	18	7.3	23	5.8
Faculty Development	5	3.2	11	4.5	16	4
Cultural Development	5	3.2	23	9.3	28	7
Political Development	10	6.5	4	1.6	14	3.5
Social rights of women	35	22.7	13	5.3	48	12
gender	5	3.2	8	3.3	13	3.3
Occupation	12	7.8	9	3.7	21	5.3
Judicial Affairs, crimes	24	15.5	34	13.8	58	14.5
Religious Affairs	5	3.2	38	15.4	43	10.8
Cooking, sewing, fashion	2	1.3	0	0	2	0.5
Violence Against Women	6	3.9	10	4.1	16	4
Total	154	100	246	100	400	100

Sig=0.01 df=17

**Table 5 shows column percent compared to the news makers attributes in both groups 1 and 2:**

Groups	Group1		Group2		Total	
	frequent	percent	frequent	percent	frequent	percent
news makers attributes*						
Government agencies	73	47.4	112	45.5	185	46.3
Civil institutions, NGOs	8	5.2	20	8.1	28	7
Clergymen and religious figures	0	0	9	3.7	9	2.3
Academics, doctors, teachers	21	13.6	44	17.9	65	16.3
Artists, art experts	2	1.3	6	2.4	8	2
Local politicians, political parties, and political figures	4	2.6	1	0.4	5	1.3
international organizations and Institutions	13	8.4	9	3.7	22	5.5
women's groups, Institutions and associations	11	7.1	15	6.1	26	6.5
foreign politicians and statesmen	13	8.4	12	4.9	25	6.3
Athletes, officials and sports organizations	4	2.6	16	6.5	20	5
Other	5	3.2	2	0.8	7	1.8
Total	154	100	246	100	400	100

Sig=0.01 df=10



\*To those who have caused news and somehow their lectures, talks, meeting and etc has led to news.

**Table 6 shows column percent compared to the dominant news dimension on women’s juridical subjects in both groups 1 and 2:**

Groups	Group1		Group2		Total	
	frequent	percent	frequent	percent	frequent	percent
dominant news dimension on women’s juridical subjects						
Marriage and Divorce	4	5	12	13.5	16	9.5
Inheritance and blood money	2	2.5	1	1.1	3	1.8
Violence Against Women	12	15	21	23.6	33	19.5
Polygamy husband	2	2.5	3	3.4	5	3
New laws and bills	11	13.8	15	16.9	26	15.4
international conventions and institution	10	12.5	6	6.7	16	9.5
Crime and punishment	6	7.5	7	7.9	13	7.7
Educational inequality	3	3.8	7	7.9	10	5.9
Management inequality	11	13.8	9	10.1	20	11.8
Economic inequality	8	10	2	2.2	10	5.9
Political inequality	5	6.3	1	1.1	6	3.6
Health inequalities	6	7.5	5	5.6	11	6.5
Total	154	100	246	100	400	100

Sig=0.05 df=1

**Table 7 shows column percent compared to the dominant news dimension on women’s cultural-sociological subjects in both groups 1 and 2:**

Groups	Group1		Group2		Total	
	frequent	percent	frequent	percent	frequent	percent
dominant news dimension on women’s cultural-sociological subjects						
cover	9	19.6	32	46.4	41	35.7
Addiction - AIDS	10	21.7	1	1.4	11	9.6
Colportage	4	8.7	0	0	4	3.5
Runaway girls and women	2	4.3	10	14.5	12	10.4
Employment and unemployment	12	26.1	12	17.4	24	20.9
Family constraints	1	2.2	4	5.8	5	4.3
Art constraints	2	4.3	1	1.4	3	2.6
Sports constraints	5	10.9	6	8.7	11	9.6
others	1	2.2	3	4.3	4	3.5
Total	154	100	246	100	400	100

Sig=0.01 df=8

Figure 1:  
Rogers and Dearing's (1987) model of agenda-setting.

