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FRAMING TRUMP: A METAPHORIC ANALYSIS OF IRANIAN MAINSTREAM NEWS

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Abstract
Donald J. Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election marked the beginning of a gloomy era for Iran-US relations which consequently brought about a series of economic and political consequences, most notably the international sanctions imposed on Iran. As the key player in these political affairs, Trump made several radical decisions involving Iran, provoking the Islamic regime's harsh and insolent rejoinders which were directed at the US president's personality. Being largely of a metaphoric nature, such negative remarks recurrently appeared across the state-run national media, constructing a particular social reality about the 45th President of the United States. This was in particular less challenging for the state, considering the general public in Iran had minimum knowledge about Trump before his election in 2016. Using Lakoff and Johnson's theoretical framework, and investigating the use of metaphors in political news articles published in some of the government's prominent online news agencies, this study reveals how such rhetorical devices are employed for framing Trump. Ultimately, the findings point to the idea that national media in Iran have craftily taken advantage of culturally embedded concepts to sway public perceptions against Trump, as part of the regime's anti-west political agenda.

Keywords: Iranian national media, mainstream political news, metaphoric analysis, Trump

Introduction
In the 4th century BCE, metaphors were famously recognized by Aristotle as merely aesthetic elements for stylizing language; a decorative means for making the plain words look more appealing to the addressees. Centuries later, however, some writers realized the deception and prevarication capabilities of metaphors, until they ultimately became known as powerful instruments for making meaning and constructing reality in the modern world. This is even though metaphors are still perceived by many people as "a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4). Nonetheless, the metaphors' power to shape reality comes from their ability to compare two, unlike concepts/objects that are experienced and understood concerning each other, inviting audiences to think about the main concept/object in new and different

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ways. That is to say, the main object of comparison (tenor) is transformed into the qualities of the object describing it (vehicle) to introduce a different variation of reality and offer a lexicon for thoughts and feelings (Burrell, 2017).

Far from being viewed as just a characteristic of language, metaphors are pervasive in everyday life, going beyond the linguistic domain and engaging people's thoughts and actions. That is to say, while the conceptual system governing our acts and thoughts is metaphorical, it plays a central role in how we define and perceive our everyday realities. Contributing to this process, however, are the mass media, within which news serves as a key disseminator of information. Like their everyday function, metaphors are used in political news not only for audience persuasion but also for structuring their perceptions and understandings of the world (Schmitt, 2005). In this way, the extensive use of metaphors in news is seen to help organize a whole system of concepts concerning one another to shape cultural norms and beliefs. Therefore, one way to usefully address the ideological drive of news is to investigate the metaphoric language through which stories are presented to the public (Mumby & Spitzack, 1983).

Following this view, the present study reflects on how news, as an integral part of the acculturation process, constantly reproduces the dominant ideology and subjectively defines a particular concept for its audience. In so doing, it examines political news stories of the national media in Iran and aims to uncover some of the ways these state-run institutions have attempted to construct a specific social reality about Donald Trump since 2016 when he won the presidential election in the US. Although, anti-Americanism has tenaciously steered the theocratic regime's both domestic and international policies since the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Alimardani & Michaelsen, 2021), Trump's presidency was in particular perceived as an extraordinary threat to the clerics' power (Simon, 2018), forcing them to boost and further mobilize their propaganda machine to demonize the 45th US President. Such level of trepidation and inimicalness, however, can be traced in several junctures when the regime's politically driven agendas, including nuclear ambitions and various seditionist operations in the region, were thwarted by Trump who turned out to be the harshest and most outspoken US president in dealing with Iran (Bahgat, 2017).

Predicting Trump's adversarial position right before winning the election, while trying to neutralize his hard-hitting actions against Iran afterward during his presidency (Entessar & Afrasiabi, 2019), the Islamic regime relied heavily on its news media's editorial creativity to influence public opinion (Moradifar, Omidi, Ziabari, 2021). In so doing, these media outlets paid specific attention to both universal myths as well as local idiosyncrasies to represent Trump. Based on Lakoff and Johnson's framework, a metaphoric analysis was conducted on a small corpus of political news from an archival database of the Iranian government's online news agencies, revealing how Trump was defined through specific and recurrent use of metaphors. Although the antagonistic nature of these definitions was clear from the beginning, since the Islamic regime in Iran was founded on anti-West ideology (Matin, 2023), with a particular hatred towards the United States (or the so-called 'Great Satan' by proponents of the ruling clerics), there was little known about how metaphors were used by mainstream news media to

create cognitive frames and construct meanings within Iranian society around the central political figure of the US at the time, Donald Trump.

Metaphors and ideology in news

Lee (1992) described language as "an instrument for the phenomena of human experience to conceptual categories" (p. 8). Language, in this sense, rather than merely reflecting reality, "functions to impose structure on our perception of the world" (Lee, 1992, p. 8). One of the myriad aspects of language, however, is the metaphors that is the juxtaposition of two very different concepts which eventually foregrounds a particular understanding of the concept being described. This happens because it allows people to focus on only one aspect of the concept associated with the metaphor and the ideas evoked or entailed by it. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphor is a feature of thought, rather than just a linguistic style. In this way, metaphors are the foundation for much of everyday cognition, providing mental frames for perspectives on social issues (1980, p. 10). Metaphor, in the words of Todd and Harrison (2008), is a device used in the construction of meaning, and hence most of the research on metaphors take on qualitative methods that are interpretive or constructivist in their approaches. Another noteworthy matter is the difficulty in detecting the presence of conceptual metaphors in common expressions, precisely because of their mundaneness, ubiquity, and repeated usage (Danesi, 2018). This, in turn, creates an illusory version of reality in which people consider metaphors natural, innocent, and the only truthful way of seeing and describing the world.

Metaphors, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) put it, are capable of highlighting some aspects of a concept while at the same time disregarding or de-emphasizing others. This is because "there are always different ways of saying the same thing, and they are not random, accidental alternatives" (Fowler, 2013, p. 4). Such linguistic ability makes metaphors a powerful yet, subtle means of persuasion that serves ideological purposes, particularly in the press (Charteris-Black, 2004). This implies that the language used in news cannot be 'neutral' and 'value-free', both for their great degree of selectivity in what to publish, and also in 'how' to present the selected news for publishing (Fowler, 2013). Reflecting on cognition aspects of discourse, Wodak drew attention to metaphors' function as a cognitive linkage between discourse/language and society (2006, pp. 184-185). This is more noticeable in people's understanding of news stories, as they do not just rely on dominant prejudicial beliefs and stereotypes but draw on their circumstances and experiences to make sense of media texts presented in news.

Method

Metaphor analysis does not follow a single, fixed, and established method, and therefore, the level of evidence provided in different studies varies greatly too. Some studies, for instance, involve detailed analysis of several individual metaphors, reflecting on how they relate together, while others begin with structural metaphors, presenting little direct evidence of actual individual metaphors, but using metaphor as a tool to interrogate wider theory or ideology (Berg, Wenner & Gronbeck, 2004). This study, however, follows the latter inquiry trend, explicating how news language guides popular perception and the concepts and experiences that underlie such discourses. Here, the employed methodology is in line with the study's aim to show how using condescending and demonizing

metaphors to describe Donald Trump radically alters the people of Iran's sense of what his personality, attitude, and social background is; what kind of disposition is considered normal for a US president concerning Iran; and what political significance he should have on Iran's current state of affairs. This particular understanding of Trump occurs because each metaphor includes a system of subsidiary, related concepts, called *entailments*, that together create an ideological framework.

The data collection was limited to pro-regime online news sources where the search for archived news articles containing relevant terms is possible and storing and sorting through their contents is easier and more efficient than looking for data among some other traditional forms, like broadcast television news or printed newspapers. In this way, the following four online news sources were used to collect the required data for the analysis:

- YJC (Young Journalists Club), a news agency affiliated with Iran's official state broadcaster was established in 1999 by the political affairs bureau of IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting). [https://www.yjc.news]
- Hamshahri is a daily newspaper that has kept an online archive of its issues since 1996. [https://www.hamshahrionline.ir]
- Fars News Agency, managed by IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) was founded in 2003. [https://www.farsnews.ir]
- Mashregh News is claimed to be a non-governmental news website but indeed is known to work closely with Iran's security and intelligence organizations. [https://www.mashreghnews.ir]

These online news agencies are financed and strictly controlled by the government, making them some of the most pro-regime media outlets in Iran. They were specifically chosen as sources of data because of their alliance with Iranian Conservatives led by the Supreme Leader, and thus being part of the state's ideological apparatus reflecting Revolutionary principles into their political news. The procedure began with entering the word 'Trump' ['ترامپ'] in the search option available on the Homepage of these four online news agencies. The overall search queries resulted in several hundreds of news articles dated as early as June 2016 (about the time of Donald Trump's first presidential campaign), with the word 'Trump' automatically highlighted in the excerpts which were initially pulled out from their websites' archives.

After a cursory inspection of the retrieved news articles, those that seemed to include metaphors directly or indirectly addressed to Trump were earmarked before sifting them through and making a list of those with metaphoric value. Subsequently, the collected metaphor was thematized according to various metaphoric vehicles. Subsequently, the analysis led to the emergence of particular clusters of metaphors. The six major metaphoric clusters were: *Trump is a Terrorist, Trump is a Kaffir, Trump is anti-Iranian, Trump is a Clown, Trump is a Philanderer, and Trump is a maniac*. To say that Trump is a terrorist, for example, means that the way people think of him is partially structured by their knowledge and experiences of the concept and activities associated with terrorism, such as being a murderer, ruthless, aggressive, nefarious, and so on.

Table 1. Metaphors occurrences across political news in pro-government news agencies

Metaphors	YJC	Hamshahri	Fars News Agency	Mashregh News	Total
Trump is a Terrorist	25	23	28	27	103
Trump is a Kaffir	14	19	18	17	68
Trump is Anti-Iranian	21	18	24	27	90
Trump is a Clown	19	12	18	28	77
Trump is a Philanderer	10	8	9	11	38
Trump is a Maniac	23	21	19	27	90

Table 1 gives some idea about the spread of the metaphors describing Trump, but their distribution is only secondary to the concerns of this study because it is difficult to understand the power of metaphors quantitatively. In the Findings section below, examples of the six different metaphors are given, followed by a partial list of entailments that help to characterize the realm of experience each metaphor draws. The metaphor *Trump is a terrorist*, for example, entails these concepts: a terrorist is an aggressive, rebellious, ruthless individual who either attack or order the assault on people, while activities associated with terrorism involves threatening, killing others, and bringing about chaos.

Findings and Discussion

Trump is a terrorist

	Entailment
Aggressive nature of Donald Trump and his controversial speech . . .	Terrorists are aggressive and rebellious
. . . Trump, a *sinister murderer* who . . .	Terrorism usually involves killing people
. . . Trump's actions created *chaos* in the region, threatening the peaceful efforts of . . .	Terrorists bring about chaos
. . . he [Trump] is a *ruthless murderer* . . .	Terrorists are ruthless
. . . he [Trump] encouraged his supporters to *assault* the congressmen, threatening the lives of . . .	Terrorism involves assault and other threatening activities

The first group of words used in Iranian political news to describe Donald Trump are all centered on a series of characteristics that collectively qualify him as a terrorist. Although on various occasions Iranian media openly call Trump a 'terrorist', in many other instances they use figurative words or phrases to do so; they metaphorically ascribe the attributions of a terrorist to him. For example, in describing him, they commonly use words such as ruthless, murderer, and aggressive, or they associate his behaviors and actions with words like chaos and assault. In this way, a common tendency to understand Trump as a terrorist is formed through an interrelated system of entailments where the terms 'terrorists' and 'terrorism' have discursively gained meaning within public discourses of Iranian society.

Trump is a kaffir

	Entailment
Army of Islam will send Trump to *Hell* . . .	Kaffirs are doomed to go to Hell
Trump, the depraved *gambler, told lies* to . . .	Kaffirs engage in haram activities like gambling and drinking
Trump, a *drunkard gambler* tried to . . .	
[Trump] has *no respect for Islam* or any other religion."	Kaffirs are disrespectful to Islam
He [Trump] is an *enemy of God* and his decisions *against Muslim* nations . . .	Kaffirs are enemies of God and Muslims
Trump's *animosity towards Muslims* . . .	Kaffirs cannot be trusted
We *Muslims don't trust this American agnostic guy*	

Another metaphor that is frequently used in Iranian political news and other national media to describe Trump is 'kaffir'. Again, although this word is occasionally used in public discourses in Iran to execrate Trump, directly and in a nonmetaphorical way, in many other instances, the notion of being 'kaffir'is attributed to him metaphorically and through the word's entailments. This word, in particular, is a popular term used among Muslim nations to denounce someone and has rather specific entailments with culturally embedded meanings (or connotations) that might vary in different countries. In other words, how the people of a particular country have come to understand the term depends on that nation's specific history, as well as their cultural and political circumstances.

Trump is anti-Iranian

	Entailment
He [Trump] is just a *racist* cowboy with *adversarial attitude especially towards Iranians*.	Anti-Iranians are also racists
Trump, a *xenophobic, prejudiced* person who has *no respect for Iranians*	Anti-Iranians have xenophobic tendencies
. . . US President, a clown *disloyal to Iranian people* who has *betrayed* us several times	Anti-Iranians betray the people of Iran
He [Trump] is *disrespectful to Iranians* . . .	Anti-Iranians do not respect Iranians
Trump's plot to annihilate Iran other Muslim nations	Anti-Iranians are dangerous to Iran and Islam

One of the deceitfully astute ways that key religious and political figures used to antagonize people against Trump, was through taking advantage of the strong nationalistic sentiments among Iranians. As such, throughout Trump's presidency, the national media in general relentlessly tried to invoke nationalistic feelings of the people by constructing Trump as the most anti-Iranian president of the United States in history. This was more ubiquitous in the realm of political news where every gesture, action, or decision of Trump was represented as an act against the Iranians and their national identity. Whereas Trump was explicitly framed as an 'enemy of Iran' in political discourse, such an 'anti-Iranian' personage for him was by and large made through metaphor. In so doing, being 'anti-Iranian' was implied through the use of terms such as racism, xenophobia and also betraying, disrespecting, or posing danger to the nation and its beliefs and values which are, in one way or another, entailments of anti-Iranianism.

Trump is a clown

	Entailment
A TV *entertainer* like him cannot be a president	Clowns exist only to entertain others
. . . a *fool at the top of the political position*.	Clowns are not fit for important/serious jobs
"Trump is *a joke* and we even *don't take him seriously*."	Clowns are not to be taken seriously
Trump, a *dangerous joker* who . . .	Clowns perform silly and sometimes dangerous acts
. . . as Trump was *fooling around* about . . .	
. . . when Trump was dancing *foolishly* . . .	
Trump then with an utterly *ridiculous* tone said . . .	Clowns have outlandish behaviour and physical characteristics
"The *orange-head* man"	

One of the most common ways used in national media to demonize Trump was through emphasizing some of his oratory and physical characteristics that seemed to be at odds with other presidents of the United States, including, unusual hair, red oversized tie, and coarseness of his invective. As such, the media in Iran wickedly portrayed Trump in various artistic and creative forms, particularly caricatures. Parallel to this crudely satirical trend, the public discourses and at their forefront, the political news, made the most of the opportunity and employed their rhetorical arsenal to depict Trump as a 'clown'. Once again, this was widely practiced through the use of metaphors, and the culturally conditioned entailments that defined clown and clownery, for instance, looking funnily outlandish, or just existing to entertain others.

Trump is philanderer

	Entailment
Trump's *voyeuristic behaviour towards women* caused some reaction . . .	Philanderers exhibit voyeuristic behaviour
. . . revealing Trump's *scandals* when *molesting women* in the past . . .	Philandering usually ends up in scandal
Such *harassment towards women*, also implies he [Trump] has *no fidelity to his own wife* Melania.	Philanderers sexually harass/molest women
	Philandering is about infidelity to one's own wife
A pervert that does *not respect women*	Philanderers are disrespectful to women

Although throughout the selected online news agencies the 'philanderer' metaphor was not as prevalent as the previously mentioned metaphors (e.g., terrorist, anti-Iranian, Kaffir, or clown), it still occurred during the search frequently enough to be of significance. Following the American and other international news that alleged Trump's misconduct and corrupt practices, particularly about women, Iranian media seized the moment and used such accusations to taint his image as a philanderer. In so doing, once more the Iranian state's media largely relied on metaphors to associate Trump with debauchery and other unrestrained self-indulgent immoral behavior towards women. This was, in particular, thought to be an effective way to destroy Trump's image, precisely because of Iranians' cultural sensitivity regarding man-woman relationships (Abedinifard, 2019). Nonetheless, the various entailments used, at least in political discourse, all positioned Trump as a philanderer through metaphoric linkages.

Trump is a maniac

	Entailment
Trump's *irrational* and *unintelligent* decisions . . .	Maniacs lack rationality/intelligence
Trump's recklessness and his hasty decision-making . . .	Maniacs are reckless
Dangerous acts of Trump . . .	Maniacs can be dangerous
Trump is just another imbecile with a *mental problem* whose . . .	Maniacs usually have mental problem
Trump, a *wild and violent* dictator who . . .	Maniacs exhibit wild and violent behaviour

Lastly, in conjunction with the continuous representational works of the world's major news media which incessantly attacked Trump, criticizing him for having coarse language, irrational judgments, as well as inhumane and grandiose ideas, Iranian media began to invest in introducing Trump as a maniac. Perhaps, the task of representing Trump as a wild, unintelligent, and mentally unstable person was not too hard for the Islamic regime, clearly because the path for such negative representation was earlier paved by the Democrats in the US and their powerful global media. Nonetheless, the metaphors in Iranian political news became an effective rhetorical tool to construct Trump this time as a 'maniac' who is not only unfit to serve as President of the United States but also dangerous for the whole world.

Nevertheless, at this point, it is also important to note that the metaphors discussed here do not exist in a mutually exclusive manner. Although each of these metaphors can construct Iranian people's perception of Trump differently (emphasizing some aspects and hiding others), most of them share entailments that provide *external systematicity* among them. This external systematicity shows that the experiential realms which the metaphors are drawn from are integrated in one way or another (Mumby & Spitzack, 1983). In the case of *terrorists* and *maniacs*, for example, both share the entailment of involving aggressive and violent behavior. The sharing of entailments means that people can talk about Trump in certain ways using metaphors drawn from both areas of experience.

This study began by making a case for how authorities in Iran had taken advantage of Trump's seemingly nonconventional personality to construct an anti-Iranian evil character and an enemy of the nation. This was in line with the Islamic regime's idea of justifying its shortcomings and failure at every level, from the country's isolation and a crippled economy to Iran's malicious foreign policies and other politically driven activities in the region. It was further argued that such propagandist efforts in framing Trump had mostly been exercised through extensive use of metaphors across the state-run national media, particularly within the political discourse. In response to this, a metaphoric analysis was performed on selected political news articles published in some of the government's most prominent news agencies. The study aimed to show the ability of metaphors to systematically highlight certain aspects of Trump's character while hiding others and subsequently revealing a perspectival view of Trump presented by the new language. This, in turn, underlined the Islamic regimes' antagonistic position against the 45th US President, albeit with a culturally embedded rhetorical twist and a more provocative tone than the ruling clerics' usual anti-West orations.

Here, the analysis revealed how national media in Iran constructed a particular social reality about Trump by foregrounding several metaphoric

understandings and obscuring others. That is to say, the metaphors used in Iranian mainstream political reporting created limited (and of course completely negative) ways of understanding Trump's personality, leaving little to no room for thinking of him or his identity beyond the associated metaphors' conceptual entailments. More specifically, the findings showed that Iranian mainstream news described Trump mainly as a terrorist, a blasphemer, an anti-Iranian, a clown, a philanderer, and a maniac person. In contrast, what might be obscured by the extensive use of such metaphors are perhaps those positive aspects that convinced millions of Americans to vote for Trump, and for instance, his supporters regarded his defiance as an act of strength and leadership (Seltzer, 2016). Such assessment is also openly exemplified in the works of some scholars whose survey results have shown a number of the positive traits that the respondents perceived to be true about Trump (e.g., Choma & Hanoch, 2017). Similarly, certain characteristics of Trump which have been perceived as positive for the role of the president of the most powerful country in the world have inspired many people around the globe who aspired to change (Slutsky & Gavra, 2017).

Nevertheless, by closely looking at these metaphors it becomes clear that in describing Trump, the Islamic regime has emphasized those concepts which people are most: 1) familiar with, as part of the local cultural knowledge, 2) sensitive about, primarily involving religion, racial intolerance and man-woman relationship, 3) threatened by, because of the volatility of political condition in Iran, and 4) readily inclined to believe, due to their alignment with the prevalent global attitude. From a critical standpoint, however, all these categories share the ideological basis from which specific forms of reality emerge to shape people's opinions, beliefs, and worldviews. That is to say, while at the local level, culture, religion, race, and politics join the mainstream global discourses to shape the so-called reality, people's sensitivity, intolerance, and uncritical views abetted the regime in perpetuating its oppressive ideologies and political agendas.

In terms of the effect, as already pointed out, our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphoric, so metaphors may directly or indirectly affect our everyday behavior. Moreover, there is the notion of *negativity bias* where messages of a more negative nature have a greater effect on people's psychological state and processes than positive or neutral ones. This has particular implications in political discourses where groups with different political orientations have shown significant psychological responses to the negativity, and formation of their political ideology (Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2014). In this view, the negativity bias, transpiring from recurrent metaphoric use within the framework of Iranian mainstream news describing Trump is more likely to influence much of people's thoughts and behavior, than if such metaphors were of a neutral or positive nature. That being said, it should be emphasized here that the mass media have mixed effects on values, attitudes, and beliefs, but these effects vary by social group. Hence, despite the state's massive investment in its powerful media to construct a negative image of Trump and turn Iranians against him, there seems to be little evidence of the impact of such representations. This is especially the case for those segments of the population who are not supportive of the government since the pro-regime groups inherently subscribe to the ideas and concepts put forward through national media.

Conclusion

As a final point, this study did not seek to redefine Trump in a new way, nor to judge his attitude, actions, and characteristics, whatsoever. Rather, the aim here was to merely reflect on the press bias and the hegemonic operation of national media in authoritarian states such as Iran, and in this case, framing a foreign political figure as a heinous enemy of the nation. The political agenda sought by so doing is to unite the nation against a common enemy and to distract the masses from their democratic goals, all of which ultimately help the elites to stay in power. What is more, is that the Iranian authorities' opportunistic attempts to brainwash the nation into despising Trump seem to be rather timely, and effortless, especially in an era when anti-Trumpism has shaped the dominant political discourses both within academic circles as well as across news media and even popular culture. In this view, criticizing Trump and associating his presumably unusual personality with various social/political problems in the US and around the world appear to be less challenging for the pro-regime pundits, and more natural to the mass audiences. Finally, the studied case here points to the importance of media literacy, reminding us once again that "media representations are *necessarily* different from lived reality", though such representations do organize how people understand lived experience (Barker, 2016, pp. 329-330).

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