

IDENTIFYING PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE  
TECHNIQUES IN IRANIAN  
AND U.S POLITICAL NEWS ARTICLE: A CONTENT  
ANALYSIS OF THE JOINT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
OF ACTION

By

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Go Pokes!

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Title of Study: IDENTIFYING PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE TECHNIQUES IN  
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Abstract: The United States and Iran are often headliners in each other's media, especially during a historic deal such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015. When it comes to gaining readers' attention, the leading paragraph should contain the bulk of the information while drawing in the reader and convincing them to read more. These techniques are called persuasive language techniques and can be found in political media and speeches. Most of the existing literature focuses on studying political speeches or the body of political news articles rather than the leading paragraph. This research utilized strategic narrative theory to quantify the narratives being pushed and qualify what those purpose and scene narratives are. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study analyzed 305 articles from Iranian and American news outlets one-week pre and post the JCPOA Finalization, Adoption and Implementation Day. The research found Iranian and American news outlets to have different usage of persuasive language techniques, opinions about the other countries involved and different narrative themes. Moreover, the study found that both nations pushed a narrative of cooperation by stating why this historic accord would be a great start to a new chapter.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*“...[President-elect Ahmadinejad] clearly shares the view of a lot of Iranian conservative that all of Iran’s problems or most of them can be blamed on US interference in Iranian affairs...”*

*- Dr. Gary Sick, Columbia University*

In 2015 the world was shocked when the United States, China, Russia, Germany, France, the UK and Iran announced the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The JCPOA was a historic deal between powerhouse players on the international playing field; specifically, between the United States and Iran.

It began back in 1953 when the United States overthrew the first democratically elected prime minister, Mossadegh. The Prime Minister Mossadegh planned to nationalize the country’s oil which meant bad news for the United States and the UK. Mossadegh was then replaced with a more Western leaning Shah, Mohammad Reza. However, due to corruption, the citizens of Iran revolted and overthrew the Shah. Following this anti-Western wave, Iranian students took over the United States Embassy in Tehran for 444 days (Office of the Historian, n.d).

The relationship between the two nations positively shifted during Obama’s term in office. It was during his, and Iranian President Rouhani, that conversations started back up again. The JCPOA appeared to be the olive branch that was going to repair their relationship. To meet the goals of



the accord, the United States agreed to lift economic sanctions on Iran that had been stifling its economy since the late 1900s, and Iran had to reduce its nuclear development and allow for its facilities to be inspected.

During the time of this historic ‘coming to the table’ deal, the media discourse, similar to years past, continued to fall in line by painting each other as the enemy they wish to see (Beeman, 2005). American politicians and news sources portrayed Iran as a rogue nation by using loaded words like ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorist’. The nation of Iran was further labeled as the enemy by American political actors as they refer to the nation of Iran as an individual. Falling into old habits, this narrative has yet to change in the present day.

The history between the two nations has impact their ontological securities into vastly different storylines that contribute to the negative imagery used. While most countries act according to their best interest in wealth, military assets and natural resources, Iran acts according to religion and honor, which, as the American media puts it, is irrational (Beeman, 2005). On the other hand, Iran has portrayed the United States in an unfavorable light; often compared to religious figures, the United States is compared to Satan and how he tempts individuals into conducting sin, the United States tempts Iran to stray from the right religious path (Beeman, 2005).

The United States takes on the role of global leader and police for human rights; Iran takes on the international role of being a revisionist (Hinck, 2021). These two roles are, at the foundation, are opposites. The global leader wants to lead by example and steps in when they see injustice; meanwhile, the revisionist seeks to spread their culture and religion. These foundational differences cause miscommunication, which, as Beeman (2005) states that two nations were having after the Iranian Revolution. While the heads of the two countries weren’t talking for years, the international and domestic media outlets were talking about each other.

The domestic medias' commonly used the tactic, persuasive language techniques, to engage their readers, keep their attention and to relay their views on events. Persuasive communication has been crafted to become a tool used by political leaders, media and governments to enhance their power domestically and internationally. Actors such as these news outlets strengthen their message by utilizing language that provokes specific emotions to leave a lasting impression on the listeners (Dorcas, 2011). The term 'persuade' did not have the original intent to convince the listener; instead, it was used to express the attempt to convince (Brembeck & Howell, 1976). Scheidel (1967) defined persuasion as "the activity in which the speaker and the listener are conjoined and in which the speaker consciously attempts to influence the behavior of the listener by transmitting audible and visible symbolic..." messages (p.48). Scheidel's relationship connects the speaker's communication and the intent to persuade the audience, similar to how news media writers- consciously or subconsciously- deliver their news. Mayr (2008) stated that "...these institutions promote and legitimize discourses of who is and is not a good citizen and who are the evildoers among us"; if the media deems the United States as evildoers, then that will be the message the audience receives.

The media outlets are the gamemasters who control the narrative and, thus, how the audience perceives the event and key actors. The ones who own the narratives are those communities that dominate communication at the macro and micro levels, stated Hackler (1996). Thus, those at the top control the citizens' message from media outlets. Hence, the importance of studying the ability of the media to disseminate and reinforce domestic narratives. Media has more than just the power to shape our perception of an event; the message can influence the development of culture, states Pavelka (2014).

In modern-day language, the lines between persuasion and manipulation are often blurred. However, these two words are two different concepts. Persuasion allows the listener to "believe and act as they please, depending on whether or not they accept the arguments" (van Dijk, 2006,

p. 13). This concept allows the listener to believe what they are hearing or reading. Manipulation has a negative connotation in the English language and, Harre (1985) states, that the listener is not aware of the manipulation and therefore is a victim.

The act of persuading is a transactional process. There must be two or more individuals interacting with each other for a persuasive act to occur. This leads to either a new or change of reality in terms of the audiences' beliefs, behaviors and/or disposition towards the subject (O'Keefe, 2002). Gerritsen (1998) shows that the translation of communication can change based on the differing cultures. When one nation can understand another on a micro level, they start understanding them on a macro level. This is important for a nation that wants to foster peace with one another. Van Dijk (1989) stated that "news reports and analyses of newspapers do not merely describe the current events and their possible repercussions, but also portray the actions and expression of viewpoints.....of the policymakers and the public". Analyzing media bias illuminates patterns and the capability of leading an audience to a different conclusion.

Despite the increase popularity of political content analysis, few studies have focused on the articles produced by news sources and more on political speeches. While analyzing political speech is helpful, articles produced by news outlets can disseminate a summary of the speech to a larger population.

The proposed research study contributes to the limited pool of knowledge pertaining to how news sources, in countries with different cultural values, utilize persuasive speech to further their political narratives. First, when compared to research about persuasive language techniques used by the political actor themselves, it can shine a light on the different usage of techniques such as speeches verses print. Second, this study will contribute to the library of information that connects linguistic patterns with cultural values. The findings will provide the opportunity for cross-cultural research. Finally, by understanding how these countries make use of persuasive

techniques, researchers will be able to understand the importance of studying how media bias can lead audiences to a desired conclusion resulting in a change of country perception.

This research project aims to analyze the first paragraph of news articles in American and Iranian media to examine the use of persuasive language techniques. In addition, it will attempt to advance the theory of strategic narrative by providing knowledge of the rhetorical devices used by media outlets to persuade their audiences towards the desired political view.

## CHAPTER II

### LITATURE REVIEW

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was a historic deal made that impacted the international community. Countries across the global reporting watched closely as Iran and the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, China, France and Germany (P5+1) struck a deal to limited Iran's nuclear exploration. This plan was especially historic for the United State and Iran. The two countries have been at odds with one another since 1953 when the United States assisted in a coup that overthrew Prime Minister Mossadegh. The news outlets in America informed their constituents regularly about the statues of the plan and what it would mean for the United States and Iran.

Each country utilized their own distinct voice to convey their side of the story to their citizens. The use of persuasive techniques is an essence of political rhetoric. Persuasion gives the actor a tool to help translate their message to their audience in a memorable way.

Citizens of the United States and Iran construct their perceptions of each other's involvement in the JCPOA through their intake of information provided by their news outlets. In this study, the researcher looked at current literature discussing the events and factors that lead news organizations to utilize persuasive techniques to convey political information.

The researcher begins by explaining the complex history between the United States and Iran's interactions that led them to the JCPOA, along with the cultural discourse between the two nations, the transition to exploring the strategic narrative theory and how both nations convey their messages to increase their constituent's ontological security. The researcher will conclude by describing persuasive techniques and how they are used in political rhetoric, and how political rhetoric is spread through the media.

### **History of Iran and the United States**

Iran and United States have been intertwined in international affairs from politics, economy, trade and military intervention for over 70 years. The push-pull, up-down relationship began when the United States and Britain helped overthrow Mohammed Mossadeq, Iran's democratically elected prime minister, in 1953 (Pillar, 2013).

The United States partook in what the *Times* called the "bloody uprising" in 1953 (Balaghi, 2013). In a joint operation between the British Secret Intelligence Service and the United States' CIA, they orchestrated Project AJAX to overthrow Mohammed Massadegh, Iran's Prime Minister. Britain was motivated to partake because Mohammed Massadegh planned to nationalize Iranian oil; this would have been determinantal as Britain was a major stakeholder of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (Balaghi, 2013). For the United States, removing Massadegh would result in stalling the Soviets from expanding and acquiring Iranian oil (Takeyh, 2021). By initiating the coup, it not only set back Iran's political development, but it also created a distaste for the United States in Iran. By removing Massadegh from office and replacing him with a more Western-leaning Shah, the United States positioned themselves as the enemy. Historians, such as Ervand Abrahamian, believe that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 can be traced back to this coup (Balaghi, 2013).

In 1979, an anti-Western movement began to spread. The people of Iran were tired of the Shah's corruption and decided to revolt. Impowered by the movement, Iranian students took the United States embassy in Iran hostage for 444 days with some Americans in it (Office of the Historian, n.d). The television network, ABC, started to air a program that discussed the details and developments that occurred. The program prompted the American citizens to buy, and burn, Iranian flags in anger towards the country (Fahimirad, 2017). The American public's anger towards Iran only grew as crisis continued. Every night for 444 days Americans were seeing the brutality ensuing their countrymen. This event added to the tension between Iran and the United States because, for 444 nights Americans were seeing the brutality ensuing their countrymen. This hostage crisis involved the American public, thus it resonated with them more than other events.

The first point of contact for nuclear weapons was in 1957, under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the "Atoms for Peace" initiative provided Iran with nuclear education (Nikou, 2015). The initiative was designed not only to provide nuclear education, but to provide the technology to developing countries. The United States provided Iran with a reactor and weapons-grade enriched uranium fuel to assist with their nuclear development.

The relationship continued to strain as the United States placed sanctions on Iran in the following years. In 1992, Congress passed the Iran-Iraq Arms Nonproliferation Act, which sanctioned Iran and Iraq from acquiring the necessary materials to develop advanced weaponry during the Iran-Iraq War. This sanction was expanded in 1995 to include a trade embargo on oil, which was expanded again in 1996 that placed an embargo against non-American companies from investing more than \$20 million per year in Iran's oil and gas industry. In 2006, President George Bush signed the Iran Freedom Support Act, which would impose economic sanctions on any nation or company that sold, gave money, or aided Iran's nuclear program (Nikou, 2015).

During, and after, the revolution the media industry took a hard hit in Iran. Multiple publications and journalism sources were shut down by the government (Rahimi, 2015). Media outlet content was censored by Iranian leaders. The journalist could only produce content and discuss issues based on the ideals of these leaders. Anything less would result in jail time or the shutdown of the media outlet. The government utilized the controlled media to ensure that their citizens were receiving the information that wanted them to. By utilizing the media outlets, leaders were able to package their messages to persuade the Iranian people (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004).

Mousavian & Toosi (2017) see the time before 2013 as a time of misalignment of leaderships between the United States and Iran. When President George W. Bush was in office- during which time the United States was attacked September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001- a reformist was president of Iran. However, when President Obama took office in the United States for a second term, so did Iranian President Rouhani. President Rouhani was the first to pick up the phone and call President Obama in 2013- this contact was the highest level of direct contact between Iran and the United States since the 1979 revolution (Naji, 2017). Together, with Obama's hopeful outlook for a promising nuclear deal with Iran, these two world leaders were able to achieve what their predecessors could not.

### ***Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.***

After decades of hostilities, the United States and Iran began to discuss nuclear weaponry in 2013 (Mousavian & Toosi, 2017). Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) accord, Iran agreed to dismantle a significant amount of its nuclear program and allow for its facilities to be open to international inspections. This was a historic accord due to the transparency standards it required. In return, Iran received billions of dollars' worth of sanctions relief from the United States and other countries who were apart of the accord. The relief from the international sanctions were vital for Iran due to their suffocating the economy.



On July 14, 2015, the agreement was reached and endorsed by all parties involved which included the United States, Iran, the five permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members and Germany, known as P5+1. This day is recognized as Finalization Day. It wasn't until October 2015 that the participants in the JCPOA started to prepare to implement their commitments, thus being named Adoption Day. In early 2016, Implementation Day arrived, and Iran was held responsible by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for their commitments in the JCPOA.

After a few months, the United States published a statement to the press stating that Iran was in compliance with the sanctions laid out in the JCPOA (Iran and United States Continue, 2016). However, Iran's officials complained about the United States and their lack of fulfillment to their commitments. In August 2016, the spiritual leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, stated that while the United States was talking kindly about Iran in the media, but they were not holding up their end of the deal. Khamenei went on to state that this instance showed what they had already known, negotiating with Americans is futile.

### **The Power of the Narrative**

In mass media, the narrative creates a framework for individuals to derive the story from, shape's public opinion and aids in the creation of stereotypes (Cohen, 1963). Authors and actors can shape the narrative so that the reader glean the point of view they intend. By manipulating the narrative, the story of the event is created and not told. The media has this ability to shape and construct the narrative so that the audience creates an image of an event, subject or nation.

The media has played a role in the degenerating relationship between the two nations. When reported on, each country portrays the other in a negative light by pushing a narrative of the enemy in their publications (Beeman, 2005). When the media produces a narrative of the enemy

domestically, it hinders future attempts at foreign negotiations by instilling an incorrect perception of the nation. Media narratives takes its cues from cultural context (Peterson, 2004).

The American news media, although free, often falls in line with the ideals of the political sentiment of the public and their political leaders. Studies such as Herman & Chomsky (2002) found that the media in the United States reports differently based on if the subject is about the “official enemy” or the “official friend” of the American people. These groups are determined by the country’s political position towards the United States. The narratives that are formed are influenced by the cultural narrative and the scripts within. For example, Kim (2014) found that North Korea and Iran were linked together with words such as *threat*, *missile*, *attack*, *ballistic* when discussed in American news articles. When former President George W. Bush gave his State of the Union address in January 2002, he cited Iran as part of an ‘axis of evil’.

Iran’s news organizations, both online and offline, are heavily controlled by the state.

Independent journalists were removed from their positions and replaced with reporters who wouldn’t stray from the opinions of the government. Topics and issue stances are influenced by authority figures resulting in the publication of one narrative.

While no two countries are going to agree on what side of the story should be told, it is important to analyze the degree of discourse and techniques used. The political messages distributed take on the narratives aligned with the culture for their domestic audience. This message, pertaining to the United States and Iran, is the image of enemies.

## **Strategic Narrative Theory**

### ***Theory and Application***

The comprehensive strategic narrative framework adds an essence of soft power into their framework to fill a gap in the study of political communication (Miskimmon et al., 2014). Soft

power is an ideal that emphasizes the importance of public diplomacy and the power a country could yield without force. The addition of soft power into this framework was critical because soft power was becoming "increasingly important in a period when the global rules of international order are being reshaped with the rise of new powers" (Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 2). Strategic narratives connect media and international relations literature to the development of narratives. A space where actors form and understand narratives and how a separate third party interprets this and interacts with said narrative.

According to Miskimmon et al. (2014), strategic narratives are comprised of acts, agents, scenes, instruments, and goals/purposes. Burke (1945) states that a complete statement, i.e, narratives, about motives will give some answer to the act, agent, scene, instrument and purpose; the act refers what was done, the scene is where or in what environment it was done, agent refers to who did it, the instrument is how it was done, and the purpose is why they did it. Narratives are an employee of politics as they take on the role that instigates and guides what is normal and assists in creating identities (Opper BLANK).

These narratives operate on three levels: a) international system narratives, b) national narratives, and c) issues narratives. The first level, international system narratives, describes the narratives about the world structure, the actors, and how it works (Roselle et al., 2014). The national narratives explain the nation's story and its values. Finally, the issue narratives describe governmental actions by elaborating on the actors, the conflict and the course of action.

Miskimmon et al. (2014) recognize their framework for studying political communication is limited and difficult to apply. The framework cannot determine the degree to which the message is consumed by the audience (Crilley, 2015). However, possessing the ability to understand the media space and its connection with war and international policies is growing more relevant;

thus, a framework intended to help explain foreign media correlations from actors and narratives was needed.

As countries become more intertwined through foreign policies, partnerships and international organizations, it is appropriate to use the comprehensive strategic narrative framework to identify emerging themes. Political communication studies have frequently utilized strategic narratives to analyze media, both nationally and regionally, to determine the extent of strategic narratives in foreign media articles. Another use of the framework occurs when researchers are concerned with political actors and their use of strategic persuasive techniques to create a defined narrative.

Successful narratives utilize imagery like metaphor, allusion and others to create an image in the reader's mind.

A handful of studies have focused on using this framework to influence other countries through soft power. Roselle (2017) used the framework to address how strategic narratives used by the United Kingdom and France swayed the United States to use military force in Libya. Scholars found that narratives that emphasize the fear of abandonment resonate with the United States. However, the researchers found that the framework only provided a foundational criterion and could not explain effectiveness of the strategic narratives. Other researchers have found that strategic narrative studies have focused their attention on using strategic narratives in propaganda but have not addressed the reoccurring narratives utilized by these actors interacting with each other.

### ***Applied to Understanding Iranian Actions***

As mentioned above, Iran has had a history filled with influences from foreign countries and internal religious groups. This turbulence has caused their cultural identity to change over time, creating a mixture of cultural and social norms (Hinck et al., 2014). The ontological security- or

the reason states act and speak based on their sense of self plays a significant role in the reasoning behind Iran's actions and chosen discourse (Mitzen, 2006).

Individuals can trace the tone of Iranian political actors speaking of the United States back to their historical and cultural roots. When analyzing Iran's speech about the JCPOA, scholars can infer that their persuasive techniques help establish and reinforce the state's ontological security (Krolikowski, 2018; Hinch et al., 2021). The information being supplied to the constituents aids in providing reassurance in the nation's ideals (Giddens, 1990). When the environment is constant and known, citizens have more confidence in their identity linkage, thus creating a solid identity in their nation.

When applying an ontological security lens, Iran leaders' actions to promote their views are seen more clearly. The media in Iran, as mentioned previously, is censored by the Iranian government, which control the "production of ideas, information, images, values and emotions in the public sphere" (Rahimi, 2015, p. 359-360). The leaders can maintain the narratives they wish to promote by utilizing the media. This cultural narrative published to its citizens increases their ontological security, or self-identity, with Iran (Hinck et al., 2021).

Iran's historically rich religious narratives have assisted in shaping its national image today (Behraves, 2018). Iran often relies on religion to content ideals or push narratives in speeches and print media. A revisionist actor like Iran will take on a negative view of the outside 'other' character and need to extend their sense of self to them. This revisionist stance spurs Iran to create a negative image of the United States (Hinck et al., 2021). We see this when Iran, which sees itself as a righteous country, expresses their need to protect itself from the United States ideals.

While the United States' history is not as old as Iran's, Western countries have risen to become a great power in 245 years. Unlike Iran, the United States has not experienced as much domestic

religious turmoil but has experience division in its political system. Instead of resulting from international involvement like the overthrow of Mohammad Mossadegh, the United States' political issues stem from domestic division fueled by the media.

Abroad, the United States has fought in multiple wars to stop those they believed were violating their values (Choi & James, 2014). World War II and the Cold War brought international dominance to the United States (Burns, 2019). After the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States was the largest superpower on the geopolitical playing field. However, this dominance has faded as other nations now challenge the United States. As coined by former President Trump, a new sense of need, or urgency, to 'Make America Great Again' emerged in American discourse (O'Rourke, 2021).

Former President Trump and his administration are viewed as shifting the role of the United States in the world order from that of his predecessors (O'Rourke, 2021). During the Trump era, the United States withdrew from being a global leader. Past administrations worked towards placing the United States in this role of being a global leader who defends human rights, freedom, and democracy.

Being the country labeled as the global leader has resulted in the United States involving itself in foreign affairs. This label, either self-given or given based on past actions, has spotlighted the country's view on international affairs. Often, others look to the United States for framing issues (O'Rourke, 2021).

### **Persuasive Language in Political Speech and Media**

Persuasive language, discourse strategies, rhetorical devices, and communication strategies are all a part of the language game (Lyotard, 1979). Shokouhi and Moazed (2017) define persuasion as the act of one group using language to influence another group, while rhetoric is the range of methods one can use to persuade others. Persuasion is often the speech act; meanwhile, rhetoric is

the how or method the speaker uses to persuade the audience (Charteris-Black, 2011). Van Leeuwen (2008) defined discourse as “socially specific ways of knowing social practices” and as a means of showcasing social practices in the text (p. 6). These styles speak to the format of manipulating the narrative so that the audience takes away the viewpoint the authors want them to (Corbett, 1990). Understanding and identifying these techniques helps understand the actors’ vessel to deliver their narratives to the receiving audience.

### ***Persuasive Language Techniques***

There are many types of persuasive language techniques that political actors, writers and even individuals employ to persuade others. Researchers have found alliteration, hyperbole, metaphors, simile, rhetorical questions, parallelisms and allusions to be the most common (Ferrari, 2007; Khan et al., 2019; Najarzagadan, 2017).

*Hyperbole* is an exaggerated term that is used to exaggerate conditions to emphasize or effect the sentence (Rivikin & Ryan 2004; Harris, 2002). Khan et al. (2019) found that hyperbole is the second highest rhetorical device used by newspapers.

*Metaphor* is used to persuade the audience or reader by comparing two unlike things in which one thing is stated in terms of another (Harris, 2002). Ferrari (2007) found that metaphor is a tool used often in discourse strategies. Metaphors are also used by political actors to support their point of views or delegitimize other statements (Shokouhi&Moazed, 2017).

A *simile* is relating two unlike things using “like” or “as” (Chugh & Sharma, 2012). This rhetorical device is commonly used when the writer wants to make his or her point clear in the minds of the audience (Khan et al., 2018).

A *rhetorical question* is when a question is asked without wanting a response (Rivikin & Ryan, 2004). Khan et al.(2018) found that, in their study of newspapers, this rhetorical device was the

third most common technique used. This technique is used to gain the attention of the listeners and to provoke thoughts. McCabe (2012) stated that political actors utilize rhetorical questions in order to elicit audience members to mentally participate in the communication exchange.

*Allusion* is the rhetorical device that connects a thought to something outside of the paper that is typically “famous” (Harris, 2002, p.40). This rhetorical device allows the writer to enhance their discussion and can even help explain a difficult concept by relating it to another story, event, or person.

*Parallelism* is when several parts of a sentence reoccur syntactically similar (Harris, 2002). This technique often adds clarity to the sentence.

*Expert Quotes* are often used to bring in clarification or background information on a subject (Conrad, 1999). Good sources, such as experts, add credibility to the piece of writing.

### ***Persuasive Language Techniques in Political Media***

Van Dijk (1988) states that media and news are sociocultural practices in the ways they are used. Individuals obtain cultural clues from mass media by watching, reading or listening creating a mediated culture. Political actors utilize political mass media to influence society by delivering their message through the channel. This message is further amplified by persuasive language techniques that draw the reader in and increase the retention of the information.

Barack Obama has been identified as a political actor who excelled at his use of persuasive language and rhetorical techniques. Najaradegan (2017) analyzed speeches from former President Barak Obama and the Iranian President Rouhani at the 2013 UNGA. Former President Obama speeches had simple words strung together to create simple sentences, while Iranian President Rouhani filled his speech with metaphors and repeated phrases. The repeated phrases, as stated previously, are a rhetoric strategy to get the audience to internalize them and contribute



to the speech. The study also found that both presidents used the rhetorical devices polarization, lexicalization and victimization to persuade and justify their points.

Ghanem & Speicher (2016) studied speeches delivered from Arab and Western speakers and the language techniques used by both. The researchers found that Western speakers were more likely to use storytelling, metaphors, and quotes in their speeches; Arab speakers were more likely to use cause and effect and listing to emphasize their points. The study of General Assembly speeches suggested that the Arab speakers used more quasilegal features meanwhile English speaker from the United States used more analogical tactics.

Former President Obama was not the only American political actor who utilized persuasive language techniques to influence the public's opinion about their actions. Former President Bush used metaphors to emphasize the need of more American soldiers in Iraq (Hobbs, 2008). He utilized metaphors to frame the message delivered to the American citizens that there was a need to send additional support to Iraq. At the time, sending more soldiers was not a popular opinion, thus he employed persuasive language to help convey the message.

Fartousi (2012) analyzed the rhetorical devices used in *Wishing Iraq Well*- an article published in a Malaysian paper. The researcher used the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) model to break down the articles to locate the rhetorical devices used. The analysis showed the three most common rhetorical devices used were zeugma, alliteration, and metonymy; the three least common rhetorical devices were parallelism, metaphor and personification.

Lihua (2012) found that the *New York Times* utilized discourse strategies to influence their audience about their judgement of China. Using critical discourse analysis as a framework, the study found that the newspaper used dichotomy, many voices, a perceived balance of voices, detailed information, and utilizing eyewitnesses to present a negative image of China. With these

persuasive techniques, the newspaper aimed to persuade its audience into a certain mindset about China.

The stated research studies found that the actor- whether it be a political speaker or article author- utilized persuasive language techniques to frame their message in a certain light so that the recipients took away the message that the actor wanted. Frank (2011) studied Obama's inaugural speech and was able to identify his own distinct signature. If an individual such as a former United States President can form his own distinct signature by his use of rhetoric techniques, it can be argued that nations can do the same if even inadvertently so.

### **Role of Mass Media and the Translation of News**

A common analogy of the media is that of the watchdog. The watchdog should serve the public by being vigilant to the incoming information and events happening. They should be the eyes and ears for the citizens they serve and pass along the most important information (Tran, 2020). When it comes to political information, the media obligated to not only report the information, but serve as a guardian and investigate the claims made by the government (Kenterelidou, 2005).

Media systems are "points of convergence of political....forces grounded in the local, the national and the global" level (Flew & Waisboard, 2015, para 37). Constituents can hear the voice of a nation from their respected leader; however, the authentic voice of a country can be read and understood. While some researchers have claimed that media is not an actor, Miskimmon et al. (2014) argued that political actors use narratives to push and pursue their goals and interest. Arsenault et al. (2017) added that media isn't an actor, but it takes on an actor's role that voices and helps spread multiple actors' narratives. In addition, media discourse and cultural context are intertwined (Peterson, 2008).

When digital media was an up-and-coming source, it completely changed the way political actors publicized information out to the public. Wattal et al. (2010) found that the internet was a major

factor in campaigning for the United States 2008 presidential race. By utilizing empirical analysis, the study showed that the internet changed the landscape of political competition. This study shows the critical role that media now plays in political communication; it has enabled political information to be accessed easily.

The consumption of digital media has been increasing over the years. A Pew Research study found that 43% of American adults got their news from the internet in 2019 (Mitchell et al., 2020). The people who produce the articles are the ones that have the opportunity, and power, to convey the message, along with the skill set to craft the message using rhetoric techniques that enhances the receptive ability of the message. While all news stations report the news, they differ slightly in journalistic practices, narrative techniques, and cultural norms (Aalberg & Curran, 2012). A story can be told positively by one news source, but another could shift the story into a negative light.

Hearns-Branaman (2017) studied the connection between news media and the views of their government. It was found that news sources do not follow the ideals of their governments. There are independent commercial media such as the New York Times and the Guardian; in contrast, media outlets that are private news organizations often mirror the views of their nation.

Thomason et al. (2014) stated that if these news sources produce content that aligns with the government's perspective, it can be correlated with social significance and impact the audience. Readers often look for information that aligns with their viewpoint; if primary news sources produce such information, they will receive higher views. Thus, it is usually in the best interest of the news outlets to create information that will lure their audience to consume it.

An example of news sources reporting on information that aligns with the majority's views is the news produced around the Vietnam War. When the United States was reporting on the Vietnam War, the media was supportive of the conflict in the beginning (Hallin, 1986). The American

media only turned hostile when the political actors and public became critical of the war. In this instant, the media did follow the views of the government and the public.

When it comes to the Middle East, the United States carries on the “us versus them” narrative (Hearns-Branaman, 2017; Behnam & Zenous, 2008). In response, Iran typically takes the defending role on political issues (Hearns-Branaman, 2017). Unlike the United States, where we see some news sources as less credible than official governmental literature, the news outlets in Iran are often perceived as official discourse by the public. Thus, the newspapers have a real influence on Iranian’s reality of events through their publications.

Due to the official perception of media in Iran, it is crucial to understand the power media has. Media can reinforce certain stereotypes that can harm the reputation of a nation. Gorham (1999) argues that stereotypes are crucial because the repeated message can become embedded within a culture. That culture narrative then provides ontological security by reinforcing contrasting rhetoric that feeds into establishing their social reality. Studying the discourse between two nations, especially two nations who label each other as the enemy, is an important field of research exploring the techniques employed to construct a nation’s social reality.

### **Justification and Research Question**

An in-depth analysis of persuasive political techniques used by news sources, not political actors themselves, would help provide insight into various important communication issues. For example, this study will examine how news sources used persuasive language techniques to frame the JCPOA in their respective country.

Considering cultural differences, the two nations would most likely use different persuasive language techniques to package their messages. Additionally, underlining messages are also important to study because they deliver sub messages to the reader. The narratives being subtly used would illuminate the true intentions of the nation in their endeavors to persuade their

readers. As the reader intakes the narrative before them, it guides their framework of the relationship between Iran and the United States (Oppermann & Spencer, 2017).

This study contributes to the field further clarification of the linguistic and rhetorical techniques news sources utilize to persuade the public's opinion in favor of the domestic viewpoint. The researcher analyzed the persuasive language techniques from three media outlets from Iran and three media outlets from the US. The researcher chose these news sources for their distribution range and popularity in their respective nations. The persuasive language techniques will center around the JCPOA and how the articles discussed the opposing government and the deal itself. The researcher selected each persuasive language technique based on past research highlighting political actors utilizing them in various speeches.

Below are four research questions to guide this study:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** Within the media discourse of Iran, which persuasive language technique(s) are used the most?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2):** Within the media discourse of the United States, which persuasive language technique(s) are used the most?

**Research Question 3 (RQ3):** How are the media coverages similar or different between Iran and the United States?

**Research Question 4 (RQ4):** What purpose or scene narratives were emphasized in Iranian and the United States news articles?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This study conducted a mixed-methods research design utilizing quantitative and qualitative coding to analyze persuasive language techniques used by news sources in Iran and the United States media. The researcher used content analysis to look at articles produced by Iran and the United States and their usage of persuasive language techniques. Cavanagh (1997) found that content analysis is a useful method to analyze text due to its flexible nature. Schenk (2012) utilized content analysis to look at Russian newspapers and how they publicized their nationalistic views. Stroud and Higgins (2011) stated that “content analysis is a method of quantitatively analyzing communication messages” (p. 123).

The quantitative research questions in this study focus on examining and describing the types of sources cited persuasive language techniques and the attitude towards other countries involved in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The qualitative research question describes the narratives subtly pushed about the two nations. Looking at the underlining message allows the researcher to go beyond a description of the techniques.

Weber (1990) defines content analysis as a method that “uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (p. 9). Kerlinger’s (1973) definition states content analysis as a method “of studying and analyzing communications in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner to measure variables” (p. 525). These two definitions show a commonality of deriving measurable

data from text. Content analysis allows text to be analyzed to identify the message and other qualities.

While content analysis has many attractive traits, it is limited because of the coding schema. The words or phrases are coded into a schema have a meaning only in conjunction with a classification. Without a specific category, the codes would not be reliable or consistent. To ensure that two people are coding the text the same way, the coding team must establish inter-coder reliability. In conclusion, a lack of consistent and defined descriptions of the coding scheme limits the issues associated with content analysis.

The researcher used content analysis because it does not restrict a set number of categories for their codes but allows the researcher to produce their own based on the articles' information. The researcher initially created the coding categories based on the literature review of past studies' analysis persuasive linguistic techniques and categories grounded in strategic narrative theory. The researcher chose this method because the goal is to measure the frequency of persuasive language techniques in Iran and the United States sources that discuss the Iran deal.

The following sections outline how the researcher chose the articles, analyzed them, and what analytical approach was used for the data collected.

### **Selection of Articles**

The researcher selected Iran and the United States because of their primary involvement in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Both countries had an invested interest in the nuclear deal and interests in each other's foreign policy issues and international affairs. The researcher will seek articles from popular news outlets run in both countries to cover the wide range of news produced by journalists. The sample included American news articles from the New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal; the Iran articles had sources such as Tehran Times, Fars News Agency and Mehr News Agency. Tehran Times is an English paper that the Iranian

government published while Fars News Agency and Mehr News Agency are allegedly independent of government control. By analyzing popular news outlets, audiences can read the cultural narratives of the nation, and the picture of one another's enemy within the storylines will emerge. The researcher also chose these newspapers because of their online availability, which widely disseminates their articles to readers.

The researcher pulled the articles surrounding Finalization, Adoption and Implementation Day based on their importance to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The Finalization Day, July 14, 2015, marks the day that those involved agreed to the terms, and an investigation into Iran's nuclear weapons development began. On October 18, 2015, the Adoption Day was 90 days after the UN Security Council Resolution endorsed the deal. This day also spurred those involved to begin taking steps to meet their commitments. Implementation Day, January 16, 2016, was when Iran was found to have taken the necessary steps and reduced its nuclear program. Implementation Day was also when the United States, EU and UN relieved their sanctions on Iran. To ensure the selected articles captured the JCPOA, the articles were pulled one-week pre and post-the original date. Finalization Day, Period 1, articles were pulled from 07/07/2015-07/21/2015; Adoption Day, Period 2, articles were pulled from 10/11/2015-10/25/2015; and Implementation Day, Period 3, articles were pulled from 01/09/2016-01/23/2016.

Key search terms were identified and strung together to pull articles surrounding the topic, as seen in Table 1. The search string included 'nuclear' along 'or Finalization Day' (Ex. Nuclear OR "Finalization Day"). The researcher chose this search string because articles produced during the time outlined above containing the word nuclear have a high probability of discussing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

**Table 1.**

*Search Terms Used to Pull Articles.*



English	Arabic
United States	يوم الإنهاء
Iran	يوم التنبني
Nuclear	نووي

### Article Instrument

An instrument of textual analysis will be employed. The researcher created a coding scheme based on Burke's (1969) and Miskimmon et al. (2014) notion of narratives as an act, agent, scene, instrument, and purpose. The coding scheme created was influenced by Martino et al. (2020) list of propaganda techniques, Shokouhi & Moazed (2016) list of ideological strategies, Miskimmon (2014) description of strategic narratives, and Hinck et al. (2019) metadata category. Martino et al. (2020) and Shokouhi & Moazed influenced the persuasive language techniques coding category. The researcher utilized a modified version of the strategic narratives defined by Burke (1969) and Miskimmon et al. (2014) by only using purpose and scene. Looking at the purpose will illuminate whether the actor is trying to portray themselves as the protagonist or show the 'other' nation as the antagonist; the scene narrative will show whether the actors, the United States or Iran, intend to use the message to portray a dominate or submissive narrative.

The researcher developed the coding categories before the coding begins to minimize research bias, as Neuendorf (2002) suggests. Neuendorf also proposes a preliminary reading of a text sample to create an accurate and applicable coding schema.

Each coding category had a predetermined definition to ensure no confusion. The codes for the technical characteristics are as follows: source cited will be not apparent (0) and apparent (1); the country discussed will have a coding schema of negatively (-1), neutral (0), positively (1), or not applicable (5). The category of persuasive language techniques was coded by counting the number of times the specific technique was used in the first paragraph. According to typical journalist practice, the reader can glean the crucial information of an article from the first

paragraph. This paragraph is often called the leading paragraph and should gain the reader’s attention. The review of the literature revealed that hyperbole, metaphor, simile, rhetorical question, expert quote, alliteration, parallelism and allusion were all linguistic techniques commonly used by political news sources.

**Data Collection**

The researcher used the Factiva Database provided by Oklahoma State University to obtain articles for analysis. The researcher found the articles using search terms, as shown in Table 2. Articles were selected based on the date they were published, the organization or news source that produced them, and if they contained the key terms.

The researcher pulled 1,468 articles from Factiva that match the criteria by utilizing a search string of keywords and established periods. The researcher calculated the sample size from the population, with a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error; the sampled population was 305 articles. As table 2 shows, they were 45 New York Times articles, 36 Washington Post articles, 31 Wall Street Journal articles, 34 Tehran Times articles, 78 Fars News Agency articles, and 81 Mehr News Agency articles.

**Table 2.**

*Number of Articles Coded from Each News Outlet Source.*

United States	Iran
New York Times- 45	Tehran Times- 34
Washington Post- 36	Fars News Agency- 78
Wall Street Journal- 31	Mehr News Agency- 81

The coding team analyzed and coded the articles in an excel document that contained the coding schema; the coding scheme contained definitions for each code category and mentioned the appropriate examples for each persuasive technique. The coding team then indicated whether the articles included each of the destined categories based on each code category’s appropriate

response. The coding team read the article once and then coded immediately after. After all the articles were coded, the researcher transferred the codes to statistical software for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

As aforementioned, this study is a mixed-methods design. A qualitative analysis of the articles using Strauss and Corbin's (2015) grounded theory approach by reading the entire leading paragraph before coding commenced.

Verification of this research is backed up using Simon's (2001) findings that state humans can consider the text and make distinctions in textual analytics instead of letting a computer program code the articles. To establish the credibility of the news organizations and journals, the researcher used Morin's (2016) method of choosing major newspapers with high daily circulation rates. News sources in Iran and the United States will be analyzed to ensure they (a) have high daily circulation rates; (b) are credible.

Two coders coded the articles to measure the consistency of the codes. The coding team selected a random 10% of articles for the final intercoder reliability (ICR) test for ICR purposes. To ensure ICR, the team went through three phases of training. Initially, the coders were introduced to the codebook and went through each category and the definitions. Then the researchers were given a sample of articles to assess inter-coder reliability. The coding team would gather to discuss their codes and note the categories where the average pairwise percent agreement was below 70 percent. Finally, the researchers were given a final, more extensive selection of articles to assess reliability. The coders achieve an overall value of 0.80 based on Cohen's kappa scale. A high-reliability number shows the standard of measurement and research quality (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). The coding team had the weakest value (.561) in evaluating how the UK was discussed and had the highest value (1.00) in metaphor usage as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.***ICR Code for Each Category.*

Country	Cohen's kappa value
US Sources	.674*
Foreign Sources	.838**
Hyperbole	.607*
Metaphor	1.00***
Simile	.791**
Rhetorical Question	.953***
Expert Quote	.943***
Allusion	.633*
Parallelism	.741*
U.S	.822**
Iran	.825**
Germany	.906***
China	.648*
France	.720*
Russia	.929***
UK	.561†††
Other	.797*
Protagonist	.883**
Antagonist	.858**
Dominate	.890**
Submissive	.791**

*A value between †0 and 0.20 is none, ††0.21 and 0.39 as minimal, †††0.40 and 0.59 as weak, \*0.60 and 0.79 as moderate, \*\*0.80 and 0.90 as strong and above \*\*\*.90 as almost perfect.*

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

**RQ1: Within the media discourse of Iran, which persuasive language technique(s) are used the most?**

#### *Persuasive Language Techniques*

To answer RQ1, the research determined the frequencies of persuasive language techniques in Iranian news articles. Table 3 shows the results that Iranian journalist utilized expert quotes most frequently at 34.2%, the most used persuasive language technique overall. The second most utilized technique is hyperbole at 9.3% and then metaphor was used third at 6.7%. The least frequently used persuasive language technique was simile at 1.6%.

**Table 4.**

*Frequencies of Persuasive Language Techniques Used in Iranian Political News Articles.*

Persuasive Language Technique	Frequency (%)	
	Iranian	American
Hyperbole	9.3%	12.5%
Expert Quote	34.2%	8.0%
Allusion	4.7%	12.5%
Parallelism	4.7%	15.2%
Rhetorical Question	1.6%	5.4%

Simile	0.0%	2.7%
Metaphor	6.7%	9.8%

**Table 5.**

*Chi-square Analysis of the Persuasive Language Techniques.*

Persuasive Language Technique	Chi-Square Test		
	Value	<i>df</i>	p-value
Hyperbole	.760	1	.439
Expert Quote	26.158	1	.000*
Allusion	6.243	1	.022*
Parallelism	10.050	1	.002*
Rhetorical Question	3.579	1	.079
Simile	5.221	1	.049*
Metaphor	.931	1	.380

\*p<.05

**RQ2: Within the media discourse of the United States, which persuasive language technique(s) are used the most?**

*Persuasive Language Techniques*

To answer RQ2, the researcher determined the frequencies of persuasive language techniques in United States articles. As shown above in Table 2, the United States used parallelism most frequently at 15.2%, followed by hyperbole and allusion tied for second and third at 12.5%. The

lowest persuasive language technique used was simile only being used about 2.7%. Other frequencies include expert quote at 8%, rhetorical question 5.4%, and metaphor 9.8%.

### **RQ3: How are the media coverages similar or different between Iran and the United States?**

To answer RQ3, the researcher conducted a series of independent sample t-test. There were significant differences found in sources cited, all but one persuasive language techniques used, countries discussed and which purpose and scene narratives were being pushed.

#### ***Sources***

There was significant differences in references to United States sources ( $t(303)= 1.891, p<.05$ ) and non-US sources ( $t(303)= -1.685, p<.05$ ).

#### ***Persuasive Language Techniques***

There were significant differences found for the following persuasive language techniques: hyperbole ( $t(303)= 1.065, p<.05$ ), simile ( $t(303)= 2.297, p<.05$ ), rhetorical question ( $t(303)= 2.028, p<.05$ ), expert quote ( $t(303)= -5.331, p<.05$ ) and allusion ( $t(303)= 2.861, p<.05$ ).

No significant difference was found in metaphor ( $t(303)= 0.963, p= 0.056$ ).

#### ***Country discussed***

Significant differences were found in how the two countries discussed Germany ( $t(303)= 2.251, p<.05$ ), Iran ( $t(303)= 0.251, p<.05$ ) China ( $t(303)= 0.1.556, p<.05$ ), France ( $t(303)= 1.824, p<.05$ ), Russia ( $t(303)= 1.237, p<.05$ ). (UK ( $t(303)= 1.824, p<.05$ ) and other ( $t(303)= -1.454, p<.05$ ). No significant difference was found for the United State ( $t(303)= -3.196, p= 0.07$ ).

When the United States news outlets were the authors, they discussed their own country negatively (-.12), Iran negatively (-.41), Germany neutrally (.00), China neutrally (.00), France neutrally (.00), Russia negatively (-.11), the UK neutrally (.00), and other countries negatively (-.26).

When Iran news outlets were the authors, they discussed their own country positively (.11), the United States negatively (-.24), Germany neutrally (.00), China positively (.04), France neutrally (.00), Russia positively (.04), the UK neutrally (.00), and other countries negatively (-.14).

### *Narrative*

Significant differences were found for narrative purpose protagonist ( $t(303) = -2.371, p < .05$ ), antagonist ( $t(303) = 1.366, p < .05$ ) and scene submissive ( $t(303) = 3.053, p < .05$ ). No significant differences were found relating to scene dominate ( $t(303) = 0.011, p = 0.982$ ).

### **Research Question 4 (RQ4): What purpose or scene narratives were emphasized in Iranian and the United States news articles?**

To analyze the purpose and scene narratives, the researcher pulled the quotes that exemplified narrative purpose and scene from the leading paragraphs and separated them out into prevalent themes. Both countries exhibited the presences of two or three major themes for each narrative category. However, when it comes to the narrative of protagonist, Iran and the United States overlap in conveying their position with the JCPOA.

### *Protagonist*



In the Iranian articles, journalist would express that their nation was indeed following the rules laid out by the JCPOA. They would express that they would implement whatever was necessary, practice the utmost care and are in full accordance with the JCPOA. Examples from the study include:

“Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says directives issued by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached by Iran and the 5+1 group over Tehran's nuclear program will be fully observed.” *Tehran Times* 10/25/2015

“Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi stressed that the Leader's statements on uranium transaction with Russia will be fully heeded, adding we will practice utmost care in drafting the contract with Russia on selling our enriched uranium in exchange for supplies of natural uranium.” *Mehr News Agency* 10/25/2015

“Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has emphasized on implementation of JCPOA in full accordance with orders of Leader. In his letter to Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei President Rouhani hailed Leader's letter of approval of JCPOA along with the guidance and supports of Ayat. Khamenei during the negotiations.” *Mehr News Agency* 10/22/2015

“The head of AEOI has told a TV program Iran will sell its enriched uranium according to its obligations in the JCPOA.” *Mehr News Agency* 10/20/2015

“Iran on Sunday notified International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Yukiya Amano that it will provisionally apply the Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement when the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) comes into effect, the IAEA announced in a statement.” *Mehr News Agency* 10/19/2015

Not only did Iranian journalist state that they were in compliance, but they offered up direct quotes from actors who are well respected within the country. Iran also pushed a protagonist narrative by describing how they were helpful to others within the region.

“Iran has valuable experiences in fighting terrorism and we seek Tehran's cooperation in this field,” Diall said, voicing concern over the spread of terrorism to some parts of his country.” *Fars News Agency* 10/25/2015

Specifically, Tehran Times projected their appearance as the protagonist by stating “President Hassan Rouhani has reiterated that Iran is serious and determined to implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly called nuclear deal, if the other side fulfills its commitments.” Iranian authors would also use metaphors such as, “...realize that Iran is an anchor of stability in the Middle-East...”, to exert their position as the protagonist of the story. American news articles used sentences such as, “... President Obama went to the White House East Room to celebrate...”, to show how the then president celebrated his victory. The leading paragraph may also contain references to past beloved presidents such to emphasize their leading role, “Reagan and George H.W. Bush’s opposition to similar tactical nuclear weapons should provide guidance..”

The major themes presented included the success of the JCPOA and the relief that lifting the sanctions provided for Iran. When stating the success of the JCPOA, the journalist often sighted the work of President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry,

“President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry have a simple explanation for their surprising success in getting Iran to dismantle much of its nuclear infrastructure, ship out 98 percent of its nuclear fuel and release five American prisoners: Patient diplomacy, backed by escalating economic sanctions, accomplished more than military action ever could have.” *The New York Times* 01/20/2016

### ***Antagonist***

Reoccurring themes emerged in Iranian articles such as a negative view of the United States, regional issues and the sanctions the United States placed on Iran.

To show how the United States was the antagonist in the JCPOA, Iranian journalist would state “...the US is the same Satan of the previous years.”, or that the American government “had even used assertive and harsh tone toward Iran...” It is evident that Iran uses religion as a means of negating the image of the United States. Examples from the text include:

“Obama’s letter opener to what he calls ‘diplomacy’ and serving peace is actually more war threats. Despite Iran-5+1 nuclear accord in July, US hawkish senators are still threatening Iran with a military attack.” *Mehr News Agency* 10/13/2015

“Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan blasted the US for its continued enmity towards Iran even after the implementation of the nuclear deal, and underlined that the country's missile industries will continue growth and advancement despite Washington's intensifying sanctions.” *Fars News Agency* 01/18/2016

Regional issues were a pressing matter as the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabi was an important subject. Iran would briefly discuss the hostilities between the two but never in much detail. Examples from the text include:

“Participant in the meeting told Reuters, the barbed exchange between Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif at the meeting on Wednesday underlined the current hostility between the two Persian Gulf rivals.” *Fars News Agency* 01/23/2016

The continues threat of Unites States sanctions were also not tolerated in Iranian media. It contributed to the negative image of the United States published.

“Attempts to impose new sanctions under the pretext of irrelevant excuses show the United States' continued hostile policies and hatred towards the Iranian nation and its useless attempts to weaken Iran's defense power, which are not helpful to regional security, stability and tranquility,” Dehqan said on Monday in reaction to the US new sanctions against Iran's missile program.” *Fars News Agency* 01/18/2016

From the eyes of the American media, Iran is also discussed negatively through narratives. The lack of attention to the rules of the JCPOA, their constant rebellious state and the United States meddling in international affairs were common themes present.

American journalists paint an image of Iran by states how they are testing “nuclear-capable missile” despite the accord.

“Iran test-fired a new generation of surface-to-surface ballistic missiles on Sunday, its state news agency reported, a move that could complicate the implementation of the country's July nuclear deal even as its parliament ratified the historic pact's outlines.” *The Wall Street Journal* 10/12/2015

American journalist continued to push the narrative of Iran as a rogue nation and one that will never change.

“The world is watching Iran for signs of change, hoping it will evolve from a rogue revolutionary state into a respectable member of the international community. But Iran, rather than confronting the isolation it has created for itself, opts to obscure its dangerous sectarian and expansionist policies, as well as its support for terrorism, by leveling unsubstantiated charges against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.” *The New York Times* 01/20/2016

Examples of the United States causing international harm was also prevalent in the leading paragraphs.

“President Obama's foreign policy only has made matters worse. Rather than refer to Saudi Arabia's actions as "impulsive," as Mr. Ignatius did, policymakers should review carefully the United States' recent role in contributing to the region's instability (did we really expect, for example, that the Iranian nuclear deal would have no consequences for Saudi Arabian interests?) and carefully weigh the legitimate concerns of allies.” *The Washington Post* 01/11/2016

***Dominant***

Iranian articles showed that they weren't afraid of the sanctions and would answer, heroically, by "advancing its missile program and a greater military power." By showcasing they were willing to take

In response, the United States flexed its' muscles by discussing economic dominance and additional sanctions. By holding the power to impose or lift sanctions on Iran's economy, the United States showed that they were the dominate country in the deal.

"Iran is about to get a refresher course in the capricious nature of the oil market and the durable nature of economic sanctions." *The Washington Post* 01/17/2016

"The United States and European nations lifted oil and financial sanctions on Iran and released roughly \$100 billion of its assets after international inspectors concluded that the country had followed through on promises to dismantle large sections of its nuclear program." *The New York Times* 01/17/2016

There were discussions on the topic of limiting or imposing more sanctions on Iran.

"The United States should lift sanctions on Iran; no, it should impose new sanctions on Iran. The short answer is that the Obama administration should do both." *The New York Times* 01/11/2016

In addition, there was one instance where the United States implemented a new regulation on Europeans who had a dual citizenship in a Middle Eastern country. By showing they could make traveling difficult for their citizens, the United States showed once again that they had the upper hand.

"The journalist, Rana Rahimpour, had hoped to surprise her brother in New Jersey this week by appearing at his son's sixth birthday party with her daughter, but was turned away from her flight because of a new regulation that requires European Union citizens who are dual nationals of Iran, Iraq, Syria or Sudan, or have traveled to those countries in the past five years, to obtain a visa in advance." *The New York Times* 01/20/2016

***Submissive***

The two countries showed how they could be submissive and work together as seen by this leading paragraph from an American news outlet:

“A deal that sent \$1.7 billion in U.S. funds to Iran, announced alongside the freeing of five Americans from Iranian jails, has emerged as a new flashpoint amid a claim in Tehran that the transaction amounted to a ransom payment.” *The Wall Street Journal* 01/22/2016

A reoccurring theme in P2 was that of the American prisoners. Journalist in the United States would report on the prisoners saying they have “...been denied even the basic rights the regime sometimes affords political prisoners..”

Each country yielded something- money or prisoners- to get what they wanted. Meanwhile, other articles praised both governments for their teamwork but thought the deal encouraged hostage-taking.

In another example, the U.S was surprised by their “success in getting Iran to dismantle much of its nuclear infrastructure....” Each country got what they wanted, the U.S succeed in reducing Iran’s nuclear infrastructure and Iran got economic sanctions.

Iran showed their willingness to work together by stating the benefits. The two countries would be able to put aside their history and start a new chapter in their relationship.

“The Obama administration and its partners hope the deal will resolve a dispute that at times threatened to spark a military conflict. In the optimistic view, it would ease tensions with Tehran over time and pave the way for fresh attempts to resolve some of the regions many other conflicts.” *Mehr News Agency* 07/15/2015

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This study sought to extend research on persuasive language techniques in political articles. The data showed that Iran used expert quotes, hyperbole and metaphors the most in their writing, while the U.S used parallelism, hyperbole and allusion. In addition, the results show that the United States and Iran conveyed themes portraying themselves as the protagonist of the JCPOA and the openness to work together by taking a more submissive stance. By demonstrating the willingness to be 'submissive,' the door opens for further international cooperation.

For the United States, the frequent use of parallelism, hyperbole and allusion demonstrates their desire to emphasize certain information and be understood. Parallelism and allusion are rhetorical devices that clarify the subject of the sentence. Meanwhile, hyperbole is used to emphasize the point of the sentence (Rivikin & Ryan, 2004). Together, these persuasive language techniques tell a story of the journalist wanting the reader to understand the topic while attempting to make it interesting enough to obtain their attention (Corbett, 1990).

Iran's use of expert quotes, hyperbole and metaphors shows its desire to back up its claims and exaggerate its message. Utilizing expert quotes adds credibility to their message, while political actors often use metaphors to support their claim by relating it to another 'thing.' The addition of hyperbole empathizes the message and entices the reader to continue. Shokouhi & Moazed (2017) found that metaphor and hyperbole were the frequent strategies employed by the *Tehran Times* and *Kayhan International*.

The data also showed significant differences between the usage of a rhetorical question, parallelism, expert quote and allusion. As Entman (2007) stated, finding a pattern in media bias is essential in understanding how an audience is led to a conclusion. By using these techniques, the authors of the articles can lead their audience to decisions that will be memorable (Zhao & Dong, 2016). News outlets take advantage of linguistic techniques such as persuasive language techniques to transform events and influence the opinions of the reader.

The difference in media coverage highlighted some exciting topics. First, it shows how each country discussed themselves and the others involved in the JCPOA within their domestic narrative. As past researchers showed and this project confirmed, the United States and Iran portrayed each other negatively (Beeman, 2005; Hearn-Branaman, 2017; Behnam & Zenous, 2008). However, the United States talked poorly about the United States, while Iran talked positively about itself. While this research project does not answer that question, past research can highlight one reason: freedom of speech. The media in the United States can talk freely about their opinion without fear of retribution; the press in Iran cannot. As suggested by Hinck et al. (2018) Iran's media is heavily monitored and controlled by the government. They do not have the freedom to express their opinion about a topic.

The narrative analysis showed that both nations published themselves as the protagonist of the JCPOA. Both governments regarded themselves as the hero who was the key individual in passing the deal. However, the analysis also showed a deep mistrust for each other as they were still being portrayed as the antagonist of the JCPOA. The United States would claim Iran was not following the rules laid out by the JCPOA. Iran would emphasize that the United States media and political leaders threatened their nation.

When it came to scene narratives, the nations diverged in why they were dominant. Iran discussed its willingness to continue developing nuclear weapons, despite the JCPOA, if the United States



kept threatening sanctions. While the United States asserted their dominance by discussing their desire to impose more economic sanctions on Iran and how the sanctions they have already lifted as helped Iran's economy.

The statistical significance of scene-submissive shows a bright future for international relations. Iran articulated the benefits of working together and how it could be the start of a new chapter for the two nations. The United States highlighted how the two nations worked together to swap American prisoners, and both came out with what they wanted.

The findings in this study support the claim that political media utilized persuasive language techniques and narratives to influence their readers' opinions. A difference in persuasive language technique usage shows the two nations critically thinking about their audience and what techniques they would be most receptive to. In addition, the significance of the submissive narrative highlights the importance of analyzing the contents of political news articles. Without Miskimmon et al. (2014) strategic narrative theory, the researcher would not have found the underlying message.

Future studies for this topic include expanding upon the research completed in this study. Identifying each article's attitudes towards the Iranian deal would illuminate another layer of the narratives already found. Comparing their stance on accord with the narratives could explain why the news journalists take a dominant or submissive perspective. Furthermore, a comparative study of the whole article would reveal whether the authors used the same persuasive language techniques or the same frequencies of techniques as in the leading paragraph. Since the leading paragraph should capture the reader's attention, one may think that is where the majority of techniques are used. However, an argument for the body of the paragraph could be that techniques used to exaggerate or emphasize a point would be found more often in the body of the section as this is where the majority of the information is.

Another future study can answer whether or not the political affiliation of a news outlet changes the frequency of persuasive language techniques. By adding in that layer, the researcher can analyze whether left, center or far-right news outlets attempt to persuade their audience with techniques differently from the others.

Additionally, a study of non-Western media would be beneficial. Many studies utilize Western media to compare non-Western media, but not many focus solely on non-Western media. By researching non-Western media on their opinions of the JCPOA and using persuasive language techniques, it can highlight and even create a sociocultural divide.

This study extends narrative theory by applying it to an international nuclear deal discourse. The theory is used to relate the media's influential power with international. Combining narrative theory with persuasive language techniques, the research told a story of how news outlets use linguistic techniques to influence soft power through news articles.

## **Conclusion**

The use of persuasive language techniques in political media is prevalent. While we can study the frequencies of the techniques, we cannot answer the question as to how effective they are in swaying the public. The study of international, political communications ties together public discourse, language techniques, ideals and international affairs.

This study has limitations since it only looked at the first paragraph, a few persuasive language techniques from the United States and Iranian perspectives and a few news outlets. By only looking at the first paragraph, the researcher limited the findings to one area of an article. The body of an article does contain more information and could show a different result. The limiting number of persuasive language techniques reduces the change of telling the whole story as there are many more techniques a journalist can use.

The whole picture is not visible by only collecting data from the United States and Iran, as there were five other countries involved in the JCPOA that aren't included in this project. Their articles could provide additional information on the ability of media outlets to persuade their readers by utilizing persuasive language techniques.

Lastly, only looking at six news outlets from the United States and Iran limits the breadth of the findings. Both countries have countless media outlets producing domestic content, and this study limited each to three. In addition, this study coded more Iranian articles than American articles, adding to the limitation. A more even sample size could produce different outcomes.

The study results show that the two nations use different persuasive language techniques to deliver their messages to the audience. In addition, the narratives confirm that both countries portray themselves as the hero of the JCPOA and the other as the villain.

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APPENDICES

**Coding Schema.**

Meta Data					Source Cited		Persuasive Language Techniques					
<i>Country</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Article Type</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>US news</i>	<i>Foreign New</i>	<i>Hyperbole</i>	<i>Metaphor</i>	<i>Simile</i>	<i>Rhetorical Q.</i>	<i>Expert Quote</i>	<i>Allusion</i>
					<i>0, 1</i>							

Country Discussed								Narrative- Purpose		Narrative- Scene	
<i>U.S</i>	<i>Iran</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Protagonist</i>	<i>Antagonist</i>	<i>Dominate</i>	<i>Submissive</i>
<i>0, 1, -1, 5</i>								<i>0,1</i>		<i>0,1</i>	

VITA

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