Telegramming News: How have Telegram channels transformed journalism in Iran?

Hossein KERMANI[*]

Abstract

This research tries to evaluate Telegram's effects on journalism and news writing in Iran. The emergence of social media has affected many social and political trends in societies, as well as journalism practices and procedures. Telegram, as the most popular social media in Iran, hypothetically has the power to do so. Moreover, there are numerous channels on Telegram which publish news posts daily. Therefore, I tried to explore how these channels impact journalism in Iran. Doing so, I analyzed how the structure of news is transformed by the emergence of new forms of news writing and the disappearance of traditional standards. Furthermore, I probed the news values on Telegram channels to find out how a piece of writing becomes a news in this new space. Finally, I studied how objectivity was treated by Telegram channels, to provide a comprehensive interpretation of news on Telegram. A wide range of textual methods (both quantitative and qualitative content analyses and discourse analysis) were employed to analyze the most viewed posts on Telegram channels during Iran's 2017 presidential election period. As a result, 620 posts in 31 days were gathered and analyzed. The results showed that the news structure has changed more than the ways that channels use news values. In fact, the old standards of news writing are abandoned and new forms, such as screenshots, have emerged. Moreover, prominence is the most favorable news value on these channels; while relevance and magnitude are of least interest. Finally, findings revealed that the majority of news posts are objective.

Keywords: Social Media, Journalism, Iran, Telegram, News Values, News Writing, Objectivity.

Introduction: Social Media and Journalism

Social media have affected journalism and its related processes and procedures in many societies (Hermida, 2013; Lee, 2015; Gearhart & Kang, 2014; Hermida, 2010). In fact, social media have new and

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*   Visiting Scholar, University of Zurich, Department of Political Science, Zurich, Switzerland, hossein.kermani@uzh.ch., Orcid ID: 0000-0002-6626-1364.

innovative affordances which make them the most suitable tool for performing journalistic practices (Bossio & Bebawi, 2016; Jahng & Littau, 2016). For instance, these media are fast, interactive, prevalent, and using them is not expensive or complicated (Boyd, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, journalists, users and news organizations are adopting these media in their everyday news routines. As a result, news environments and practices of professional journalism are changing rapidly.

Journalists can promote their products and create self-brands (Lee, 2015; Bruns & Highfield, 2012), reach more audience, and have direct contact with them, using social media. Moreover, social media change the ways that journalists are seeking and gathering information too (Newman, 2009; Bossio & Bebawi 2016). In addition, reporters and commentators can search and find their sources in these participatory media (Veenstra, Iyer, Park, & Alajmi, 2015; Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith 2014). Transforming previously passive audience to active users, social media have affected users' perception and understanding of journalism and news as well (English, 2016; Lee, 2015; Örnebring, 2013). Nowadays, users can contribute to the process of making news (Papacharissi, 2014, p. 34). They have direct access to journalists which causes constant editing, revising and performing practices in journalists' communities. Furthermore, social media removed the old and professional barriers of reporting and covering (especially, the unexpected and sudden) incidents. Therefore, the form and essence of news coverage have been changed by the "cult of amateurs" (Bruns & Highfield 2012, p. 15), which is also known as Citizen Journalism (Veenstra, Iyer, Park, & Alajmi, 2015; Blaagaard, 2013). Social media are used by news organizations to reduce their costs and bring more audience at the same time (Bossio & Bebawi, 2016, p. 147).

The changes in journalism which are produced by social media, cause transformation in journalistic practices and norms as well (Barnard, 2016; English, 2016; Hermida, 2013). For instance, the one-to-many model of communication is shifted to a many-to-many model (Jahng & Littau, 2016; Newman, 2009). Furthermore, some practices such as objectivity and interacting with the audience are influenced (Molyneux, 2015, p. 932).

As a matter of fact, most of the research which have explored the relations between journalism and social media focus on Twitter (Jahng & Littau 2016; Hermida, 2013; Örnebring, 2013; English, 2016; Duffy, 2011; Vis, 2013; Broersma & Graham 2013). Especially, their concentration has been on the ways that journalists employ Twitter in their everyday or professional practices as well as users' news related behaviors and habits. As a result, some of the other social media such as Telegram and some aspects of journalism like news structure in this new space remained neglected. I, therefore, try to bridge these gaps by focusing on Iranian Telegram channels' generated content. The need for researching Telegram's impacts on journalism is more necessary in Iran, where this Instant Messaging Application (IMA) is the most popular social media with more than 40 million users (Kermani, 2016).

Moreover, Telegram channels are an undeniable part of this IMA. There are more than 380 thousand Persian channels in Telegram and more than 2 million posts are published in them daily. This is an unprecedented situation in the social media history in Iran and is the outcome of Telegram being ubiquitous (Kermani, 2016, p. 57). There are also official and digital-born news channels with

numerous members. For instance, @BBCPersian has more than 1 million and 100 thousand members. Interestingly, this channel freely publishes news and stories while BBC Persian satellite channel and its website are blocked in Iran. As another exemplar, digital – born @akhbarefori[1] has more than 3 million members. However, the functions of Telegram channels are not limited to news. In fact, there are many channels which publish entertainment, sport, professional, religious, and even personal content.

Despite Telegram's important role in Iranians' everyday life, little research has been conducted into this field (Rezaei, Safa & Adibi, 2016; Kermani, 2016; Pak Nezhad, 2016). Moreover, there has not been any studies exploring the relations between Telegram and journalism in Iran yet. Thus, this study is trying to investigate how journalism is transformed by Iranian Telegram channels. In order to do that, I studied the changes in news structure and news values in Telegram as well as the objectivity on Telegram channels news posts.

This research was conducted during Iran's 2017 presidential election. Since the public sphere is usually occupied by hot political and social debates during a nationwide event like Presidential Election, this period was a favorable time for conducting this research. In fact, Telegram channels mainly published election news and completely covered the related events. Therefore, this period provided us with a sphere which was full of news content among various channels. Such environment can be the best field for analyzing the changes in news meaning and structure. Thus, I have captured the most viewed posts on Telegram channels during the Election period to analyze them for answering the research questions which will be elaborated in the next section.

Theoretical Background: News Structure, Values and Practices

What is news? Although this seems a simple question, a consensus on an answer can hardly be found among media workers (Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2014). A definition by William Randolph Hearst suggests that "News is something somebody wants suppressed – all the rest is advertising" (as cited in McKane, 2006, p. 1). This explanation is criticized because it generalizes a certain kind of news to all (McKane, 2006, p. 1). As another definition, Richard Rudin and Trevor Ibbotson (2002) argued that news is something that is new, interesting and true (p. 5). This definition is vague and broad. Moreover, it cannot be used as a guideline in newsrooms. There are other definitions, but since defining the news is not our aim in this study, we do not mention them to avoid prolixity. Nevertheless, the definitions of news vary from a journalist to another. Generally, it is believed that a piece of writing can be understood as news if it contains some specific attributes called news values (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014; McNair, 2009; Ricketson, 2004). In fact, news values are what distinguish news from other types of writing. Moreover, a piece of news has a general structure which differs its form other writing schema. Therefore, we can discuss news based on its content (news values) and its form (structure).

A piece of news consists of several parts. It could begin with a kicker which is followed by a headline. Then, a writer may use a subhead to explain the headline more. Next, there is the important part of a piece of news: a lead. A journalist can also embed one or more nutshell or billboard

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1   InstantNews

paragraphs into the writing. After the lead, there is the body of the text which is the longest part and explains the whole story (for further reading about news structre, look at: Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2014, chapters 9 and 11). However, I argue that this structure has significantly changed in Telegram channels. Before examining this argument, I will describe how much of Telegram channels and posts are news ones in order to evaluate if they have potentials to influence news writing and journalism in Iran. Therefore, the research questions which I try to answer first are:

RQ 1: Do the Telegram channels have potentials to affect the news structure and journalism in Iran?

RQ 2: How has the structure of news changed in Telegram channels?

While there has not been many researches investigating the above questions, there are more works on news values on social media. News values, as Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (2014, p, 170) define them, are the ability to evaluate stories based on some common criteria that make the event selection consistent for gatekeepers, and predict the interest of the audience. However, there are many forms of news values are suggested by scholars. The list of news values presented by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge (1965) has been highly popular in the literature. They offered 11 factors which can transform a piece of writing to news: Frequency, Threshold, Clarity, Meaningful, Consonance, Unexpected, Continuity, Composition, Concentration, Person-centered, and Negativity (p. 84-85). Given the notable changes in journalism practices caused by social media, some researchers demand revisiting news values on social media (Bednarek & Caple, 2014; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; 2001; Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014; Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012; Trilling, Tolochko, & Burscher 2017; Al-Rawi, 2017). Based on Galtung and Ruge's work (1965), Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill (2017) suggested 15 values for news on social media. These values include: Exclusivity, Bad news, Conflict, Surprise, Audio-visuals, Shareability, Entertainment, Drama, Follow-up, Relevance, Magnitude, Celebrity, Good news, and News organization's agenda (p. 13). Regarding the timeliness of this list, I used a combination of it with the news values which are suggested by Matthew Ricketson (2004) to shape a comprehensive set of news values to answer the subsequent questions. Ricketson's list includes impact, relevance, proximity, prominence, timeliness, conflict, currency and the unusual (p. 9-12).

RQ 3: What are the news values on Telegram channels?

RQ 4: Is there any difference between news values on news and non-news channels?

While the aforementioned questions deal with the form and content of news on Telegram, I explored an important journalism practice to enrich the findings and analyses. Objectivity, generally, is considered as a sacred norm among journalists (McNair, 2009; Gans, 2004; Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009). Gaye Tuchman (1972) has argued that the practice of objectivity is best viewed as a 'strategic ritual' performed by journalists in order to command authority and legitimacy in the view of the audience (p. 661). As Tuchman (1972) argued, objectivity is achieved if journalists present both sides of a story, provide supporting evidence for their statements, quote the authoritative sources, separate facts and opinions, and present the information in a pyramidical structure (section III). In

fact, most of the media practitioners assert that their products are fair and with no intention to support or harm a specific group or individual (Gans, 2004, p. 39). Moreover, it is believed that an objective news is a piece of writing which is free from any ideological, political, economic, and other pressures. Objectivity is also twisted with other norms like fairness and truthfulness (Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2014, p. 15). Given the importance of this professional practice, I investigated if news on Telegram channels is objective. Therefore, the last question is:

RQ 5: How is the objectivity treated on Telegram channels as a journalistic practice?

Method

A wide range of quantitative and qualitative methods, mainly textual ones, were combined to thoroughly analyze the posts, in order to answer the research questions. First, I employed content analysis (both quantitative and qualitative) to extract the manifest and latent meanings of posts, in addition to describing their formal attributes. Doing so enabled us to go beyond statistical tables, which is common in quantitative methods. In order to explore the objectivity in news posts, another level was added to the examinations. In fact, quantitative content analysis only provided us with some simple numerical data. However, by applying qualitative analyses, I made more textual interpretations rather than just statistical ones. To go further, I used discourse analysis to interpret the social and political dimensions of the posts.

Content analysis is a popular method in social science and communication fields (Krippendorff, 2004; Prasad, 2008; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014; Rose, Spinks, & Canhoto, 2014; Wilkinson, 2000). In fact, there are many definitions of content analysis dealing with different aspects of this method. However, I based this research on Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy, & Frederick Fico's definition (2014) which sees content analysis as the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules; and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods (p. 3). Moreover, based on Margrit Schreier's (2014, p. 174) suggested plan, I began the content analyses by creating the research questions (which are stated in the previous section) and selecting the sample. The research sample consisted of the most viewed posts in Telegram. In fact, Telegram puts a sign under each post (an eye icon) to show the number of views, and we used it as a benchmark for measuring a post's popularity. Of course, it is a quantitative measure and we cannot conclude that a post with higher views is necessarily more popular. However, it is the only standard that we have for measuring the posts' popularity on a big scale. Although, we used it with caution, by acknowledging its limitations. In the next step, I collected the 20 most viewed posts, daily from May 3 to June 2, 2017. In fact, we began the process 16 days before the Election Day (May 19, 2017) and continued it to 14 days later. As a result, I gathered 620 posts with the highest views in each day in the election period. The bot designed by Social Network Lab of Tehran University (@tlgrphy) was utilized to identify the most viewed posts. Preparing the sample, I built the primary code schema (based on my experiences and anticipations as a Telegram user) and four coders were employed to code the posts. Meanwhile, the coding frame was modified and edited by coders to reach a final sheet. Then, they coded the posts again based on the new frame. Quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were blended in

taking these steps. For instance, we did not just put the posts in the predefined categories, but we redefined and modified the categories continually, based on the content and forms of posts.

Finally, I recruited discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Hopke & Simis, 2017; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; van Dijk, 1993; Wiggins, 2009), to find out if any ideological, social, political or economic interest intervene in the processes of making news, and to see if the news stories are narrated objectively or not.

Findings

The findings will be presented in three parts to answer the research questions. First, I will explore the importance and structure of news among Telegram channels. Then, I will focus on news values in these broadcasters to understand how they are being shaped. Finally, I will examine if news posts in Telegram channels are narrated objectively or not.

News on Telegram: In order to analyze the importance of news on Telegram channels, I used several metrics. Probing the types of posts and channels can provide us with insightful data to discuss the role of news on Telegram sphere.

Twenty-one different kinds of posts were distinguishable among Telegram channels. Of course, the types with frequencies less than 10 are joined with other categories. As a result, the typology of posts consists of 10 different kinds which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Typology of Posts

Post's type	Frequency	Percentage
News	366	59
Report	14	2
Comment	12	2
Quotation	32	5
Point	23	4
Public information	21	3
Yellow texts	14	2
Screenshot	25	4
Joke	28	4
Advertisement	10	2
Others	43	7

The results indicate that the majority of the most viewed posts consist of news posts (59%). In fact, the gap between this type and others is very wide. While there are 366 news posts, the second category is *quotation*s with only 32 posts. To do further analyses, I probed the news posts' content and orientation. Findings show that politics is the main content of news posts with 149 repetitions (40% of news posts and 24% of all posts). Second is sport news (71 posts), and accidents comprise the third category with 55 posts.

Moreover, informing is the major orientation of news posts. In fact, 317 posts (87% of news posts and 51 % of all posts) were produced to inform users about something (mostly political happenings).

As it is discussed above, news posts are prevalent types of news on Telegram channels. Next, I analyzed the typology of channels to see how much of them are news ones. At the first stage, two primary themes emerged: Digital-born and official channels. According to Silvia Majó-vázquez, Jun Zhao, Jason R. C. Nurse, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (2017), digital-born channels are channels which have no clear and valid equivalent in offline word (p. 1). In the next level, two categories emerged as secondary themes: news and non-news channels. Finally, each secondary theme includes several types of channels which are presented in Table 2. In addition, I analyzed the activity rate for each category by measuring the number of posts which were published by each type. Doing so enabled us to do more reliable analyses, because it is completely possible that the channels of a specific type with low frequency, were more active and vice versa.

Table 2. The Typology of Channels

Primary theme	Secondary theme	Type	No.	Number of posts	Activity rate
Digital-born channel	News channel	Local	7	33	4.7
		National	14	112	8
		Ephemeral	4	7	1.7
		Permanent	17	138	8.1
		General	16	119	7.4
		professional	5	26	5.2
	Non-News channel	Entertainment	5	17	3.4
		Sport	5	35	7
		Fun and Joke	14	116	8.3
		Transmitter	3	14	4.6
Official channel	News channel	news agency	15	156	10.4
		news website	5	53	10.6
		Website	3	8	2.7
		Newspaper	6	18	3
	Non-News channel	Governmental organization	8	8	1
		personal channel	9	31	3.4
		non-governmental organization	3	3	1
		TV program	5	11	2.2
		sport club	3	5	1.7
			105	620	

While most of channels' types are clear, some explanations are needed for others. In fact, the logic of categorization for digital-born and official channels is naturally different; and the digital-born news channels are classified based on three distinctive attributes. First, they can be classified based on regional dependency to local and national channels. In terms of their continuation, there are two distinctive groups: temporary and permanent. Temporary groups are usually deleted or abdicated after a while. Moreover, general and professional channels are identified according to

their field of activity. These three sets are not essentially separable, while other categories are. In categories of digital-born and official news, there is one new class which needs more explanation. In fact, Transmitter channels are broadcasters which juts share and republish content from other platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. For instance, @VahidOnline or @Mamlekate only transmit the selected tweets from Twitter to Telegram. Therefore, these channels play an important role in convergence of social media.

It is not only news channels which broadcast news posts. The news posts can be distributed by every channel type. In this sample, 184 news posts were published by official news channels, while official non-news channels shared only 21 news posts. Furthermore, digital-born news channels published 134 news posts, and non-news channels in this category shared 45 news posts. However, news posts which were published by each type manifest different attitudes. The similarities and differences of news posts in these channels will be examined in the next sections.

Table 2 shows that news channels are an undeniable part of Telegram sphere. In fact, 21 digital-born and 29 official channels are news ones, which means there are 50 news channels among 105 channels that published the most viewed posts. News channels consist the majority of channels (47%) in this sample. Moreover, their activity rate is so high among all channels. In fact, the highest activity rates belong to news websites (10.6) and news agencies (10.4). This finding shows that online official sources are more trustable for users. This could be proven by another metric.

In order to further evaluate the importance of news on Telegram channels, I listed the 10 top channels which published the most posts during the election period. Table 3 shows the result.

Table 3. 10 Top Broadcasters

No	Channels' name	Type	No. of posts.
1	Fars (including its subchannels)	Off/ News/ News agency	35
2	Isna94	Off/ News/ News agency	32
3	Tasnim (including its subchannels)	Off/ News/ News agency	25
4	Gizmiztel	Digital-born/ Non-News/ Fun and Joke	21
5	MizanOnline_ir	Off/ News/ News agency	13
6	yjcnewschannel	Off/ News/ News agency	13
7	rouhani96ir	Digital-born/ News/ ephemeral – national – general	10
8	NavadTV	Off/ Non-News/ TV program	10
9	khamenei_ir	Off/ Non-News/ Personal	9
10	khabaronline_ir	Off/ News/ News agency	9

Table 2 shows that 7 out of 10 top broadcasters are news ones. In fact, there are 6 official and 1 digital-born news channels among them. This finding confirms the last result which asserts that news channels (particularly news agencies' ones) are the most active broadcasters.

In sum, the results confirm that news is the main kind of posts' type, and news channels are the most active and important broadcasters on Telegram. Therefore, we can conclude that Telegram

channels can potentially affect journalism and news writing in Iran. I did further inquiries to see if such a hypothesis is true or not.

News structure on Telegram: In order to understand whether or not (and how) news structure has changed in Telegram channels, I analyzed the news posts to see whether traditional norms of news writing are obeyed or not. Next, I explored the news styles in Telegram channels and identified their characteristics.

Table 4 shows the frequency of news, which includes some of the traditional news elements.

Table 4. The Frequency of Old News Elements on Telegram

	No. of news posts containing the element	Percentage (of news posts)
Kicker	47	13
Headline	301	82
Subhead	5	1
Lead	4	1
Nutshell paragraph	218	59

The results show that the traditional standards of news writing are mainly abandoned by Telegram broadcasters. Most of news posts do not have any clear structure and just try to convey the main point. They obviously try to be as short as possible, not to bother the readers. In this regard, it can be said that a news post in Telegram is becoming more and more like a tweet.

Unlike the traditional news, news posts on Telegram almost do not have any kickers or subheads. The body is very short too, and readers are asked to click on a link to follow the complete text. In fact, the Telegram affordances enable news writers to embed links and other new elements in the body of news. It changes the nature of the body essentially. In many cases, there is no distinction between a headline and other elements such as a kicker or subhead. In fact, the news post consists of something like the old headline and an explanation which tries to act as a subhead, or even a lead. Particularly, the lead paragraph is not included into the news posts anymore. Therefore, we can conclude that the whole piece of news on Telegram channel is just an extended headline in the context of old news forms.

While the kicker, subhead and lead are mostly eliminated on Telegram channels, the nutshell paragraph survives in the news posts. However, the nutshell paragraph's form is changed as well. In some cases, there is no body and the news is solely formed of a nutshell paragraph. In such cases, the main point comes in the beginning of the news and after that, there are some sentences which announce the most important parts of news as an old nutshell paragraph. Thus, we can call them nutshell posts.

Besides the general changes in news structure, the official news channels differ from digital-born ones in some ways. In fact, official broadcasters try to comply with the old standards, while digital-born publishers are freer in news writing. For instance, all of the 47 kickers and four leads were used by official channels. In addition, only two posts of digital-born channels included a subhead. However, these two types of channels are more similar in using headlines and nutshell paragraphs. In fact, 177 news posts in

official channels (95%) and 124 posts in digital-born broadcasters (92%) had headlines. It is interesting that none of the news posts in non-news channels had a headline. In fact, news on non-news channels is mainly interwoven with personal notions, and is free of news writing standards. Such news posts are combined with jokes and sarcasm. It can be said that non-news channels form news in other formats. They just want to attract members, and the news writing rules have no meaning for them.

However, we can conclude that the nature of news is transformed on Telegram channels. Generally, it is hard to identify a particular part of a news post as kicker, subhead or lead in most cases. It can be said that the news structure in Telegram is baffling, and every segment is all and nothing at the same time. Even though official news channels' posts conform to news writing norms, they resemble the transformed nature of news on Telegram in the end.

Moreover, the changes of news structure are not limited to transformations in the old standards of news writing. In fact, new forms of news have emerged on Telegram channels. Interestingly, we can consider some of non-news posts type in table 1 as news as well. The most important new forms of news are quotations, comments, and screenshots. Despite their usage as parts of old news forms, quotations and comments are the whole thing on some of the Telegram news posts. In fact, there are some news posts which consist of just a quotation or comment. Here, the kicker, headline, subhead and lead are merged. Such posts usually begin with the name and the position of the speaker followed by his/her words immediately. There is nothing else in many cases.

While we can see quotations and comments as textual self-efficient news, screenshots are visual self-efficient news on Telegram. It is one of the affordances of social media which makes the appearance of screenshot possible, but not every screenshot is news. Obviously, it is the content of the screenshot that makes it news. In such cases, users publish a screenshot of what they want instead of transforming it to words. Here, the screenshot is not recruited just as a supplementary material, but it is the whole thing. In fact, they are used to convey meaning in a faster and simpler way. For instance, if we want to change an Instagram post by a celebrity into news, we have to be familiar with journalism rules, and spend some time on it. Moreover, reading such news may be a time consuming action for readers too. However, anyone can take a screenshot of the post and publish it. It does not need any especial education and is even more valid. Therefore, it can be said that the users' desire to get more in a shorter time, and the prevalence of different forms of citizen journalism has caused the emergence of screenshots (even quotations and comments) as new forms of news.

Additionally, news posts on Telegram can use new elements which traditional news could not. Social media offer users communication in new ways by using emojis, and addressivity markers (including hashtags, usernames and links). The employment of these new formats by news channels affects the news writing as well. In order to explore more, I analyzed the ways that these new formats are employed by news posts.

Generally, using emojis is very common in Telegram posts. Overall, 1092 emojis were used in 620 posts during the election time, which means that on average 1.76 emojis were embedded in each post. Moreover, seven different types of emojis were identified in Telegram posts: discriminative, highlighting, encouraging, iconic, ornamental, phatic, and compensatory. Discriminative emojis

were mainly employed to separate different parts of a message, while highlighting ones were used to emphasize a certain part of a message. Encouraging emojis usually try to persuade users to join the parent channel. An obvious example of these kinds of emojis is the hand emoji, the main form of which is the one pointing to the channel's link (☝). Iconic emojis simply represent something. For example, a camera emoji (📷) is used to represent a camera! Ornamental emojis are used to make a post more beautiful and colorful. Phatic emojis are used to show the author's sympathy. The most-used phatic emojis are (☺) and hearts. Finally, a compensatory emoji tries to increase the richness of message. For instance, when the author expects that a reader is going to laugh, s/he uses a laughing emoji (☺).

In sum, 633 emojis were used in news posts. It means that 58 percentage of the total emojis were used in news posts. Therefore, it is more common to see an emoji in a news post rather than a non-news one. The dispersion of the various categories of emojis in news posts is presented in table 5.

Table 5. The Frequency of Emojis in News Posts

	Frequency	Percentage
Discriminative	308	49
Highlighting	134	21
Encouraging	63	9
Iconic	64	10
Ornamental	36	5
Phatic	25	3
Compensatory	3	0.4

The above table shows that discriminative and highlighting emojis form the majority of emojis in news posts. Importantly, these emojis are used to highlight some parts of a text. Therefore, it is logical that their usage in news posts is widespread. Moreover, these emojis act like the bullets in traditional nutshell paragraphs. Figure 1 is a good example of posts which are just a nutshell paragraph with various discriminative emojis.

Figure 1. A Nutshell post with Discriminative emojis

Moreover, digital-born and official news channels are similar in employing emojis. For instance, 216 discriminative and 89 highlighting emojis were used by official news channels which are close to the number of emojis used on digital-born news channels. Furthermore, the main difference is not between digital-born and official news channels, but between news and non-news channels. In fact, non-news channels are more likely to embed ornamental, phatic and compensatory emojis in their news posts. Similarly, the frequency of encouraging and iconic emojis on non-news channels is higher than news ones.

Although using emojis is a common procedure on Telegram channels, these broadcasters rarely use hashtags and usernames. Moreover, the diversity of embedded hashtags and usernames is less than employed emojis. However, the results showed that 147 hashtags were used in 620 posts which means 0.24 hashtags in each post averagely (compare it with the average emojis used in each post). Furthermore, five various kinds of hashtags were identified in this study: identifier, emphasizer, indexer, slogan and pointless. Identifiers provide some information about the message. People and event's names are the best example of this type. Emphasizing hashtags is used to highlight some points conveyed in the message or something that the author wants to focus on. For example, #توزیع_حداکثری[2] was used to show that the channel's administrator wants users to publish the message in a massive scale. On the other hand, indexers operate as classifying signs. They separate different posts based on various factors. A slogan hashtag is normally a phrase which announces some political or ideological belief. Finally, I classified the hashtags that do not belong to one of the aforementioned types as pointless hashtags. For instance, #اعضا[3] does not pursue any clear purpose.

In general, 98 hashtags were used by all news channels. The identifier and indexer types, with 45 and 38 recurrences, consist the majority of hashtags in news channels. None of these 98 hashtags is slogan, while there are 11 emphasizer and 4 pointless hashtags. Like emojis, the nature of employment of hashtags by news and non-news channels is different. In fact, non-news channels (especially digital-born ones) are more inclined to employ the slogan (15) and emphasizer (13) types. Moreover, the majority of pointless hashtags occurred in digital-born non-news channels with 10 recurrences. In addition, official non-news channels have tried resemble the news channels behavior regarding the use of hashtags.

The usage of usernames and links are more monotonous than other types. In fact, each channel only uses its own username at the end of a post to advertise itself and show its possession. Similarly, they do it by mentioning the channels link too. There are more ways of using links in news channels as well. In fact, there are links to the parent website, news images, news stories in the parent website and news stories in other websites. These types of links are usually employed in news posts, although using channels' links is common among all broadcasters. As a result, it can be said that news channels employ links to validate their news and increase their website's ranking at the same time.

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2   Maximum_Dissemination

3   Members

News values on Telegram: In the previous section, the changes in the form and structure of news were examined. Now, I will delve into the ways that news is produced on Telegram. In order to do this, I will try to show how a post is converted to a piece of news by focusing on the news values which are shaped on Telegram. As it is discussed in the theoretical section, the combination of news values which are suggested by Harcup & O'Neill (2017, p. 13) and Ricketson (2004, p. 9-12) were used in this study. However, the primary analyses showed that the Harcup & O'Neill (2017, p. 13) and Ricketson (2004, p. 9-12)'s lists need some revisions. Moreover, some of news values in each list can be merged with some of the other list ones. Therefore, I will explain these cases before turning to analyze the news values on Telegram channels.

First, exclusivity cannot be considered as a news value on Telegram channels. In fact, proving that a piece of news is an exclusive one is very hard, considering the fast and chaotic flow of information on Telegram. However, some strategies are used by channels' managers to show that a post is their own production. For instance, they watermark the images published on their channels. They also use the channel's username at the bottom of a post to prove their ownership. Nevertheless, such tactics cannot guaranty the exclusivity because any channel is able to do them whether the post content is provided by the channel or not.

Moreover, bad news/good news are not types of news values. Indeed, a piece of news could be of interest because of having some of other news values, while the nature of it could be good or bad at the same time. Moreover, every piece of writing which has a good/bad attitude, cannot necessarily be considered as a different type of news. It mainly becomes a piece of news when it possesses another news value. Furthermore, assuming an event as good or bad is too subjective. In fact, when an incident can be a good news for someone, it could be a bad one for others. Therefore, describing a piece of news as good/bad can violate the objectivity by interfering the interpreter's personal beliefs, ideologies and interests. Likewise, drama cannot be considered as a news value. There is no clear distinction between a bad news and drama. It seems that these two concept say the same thing in different words.

In addition, entertainment does not seem an appropriate type of news value. In fact, it is more of a post (or news) orientation rather than a news value. A post can entertain people or not, while its newsworthiness should be evaluated considering other elements. In fact, we should separate news values from news subject (what is a piece of news about?) and orientation (what goal is a piece of news seeking?). Of course, this was done in this study, but since exploring news subjects and orientations is not this research's aim, I will only refer to them if they are really needed. Moreover, shareability is the nature of most viewed posts on Telegram. Thus, such value is a constant parameter in this study and each post is a shareable one.

The power of elites and celebrities can be merged and seen as prominence. In fact, the prominence is a more comprehensive concept which is achieved when a piece of news refers to a famous individual (whether s/he is an elite or a celebrity or none). Therefore, these two values are replaced by prominence. In addition, being audio-visual could be an aspect of a piece of news quality rather than a news value. A scenic post can be easily a junk not a piece of news. Adding some visual and audio

elements can enhance the desirability of news, but these elements do not make a news by themselves. Moreover, news organization's agendas are not identifiable by analyzing the most viewed posts. There are even some news stories from digital-born sources, which have no clear and announced agenda. In addition, while follow-up (as currency) can be assumed as a news value, it is not traceable on most viewed posts. Integrity and continuity of posts, which is logically a characteristic of channel posts, is absent in posts which are derived from various and different sources. Therefore, we cannot analyze if fragmented and separated posts are following their ancestors or not.

As a result, the final list of news values of Telegram posts includes: conflict, impact, surprise (unusual), prominence, relevance, proximity, magnitude, and timeliness. The following table shows the frequency of each news value among news posts.

Table 6. The Frequency of News Values

	Frequency	Percentage
Conflict	58	12.8
Impact	107	23.6
Surprise	50	11
Prominence	186	40.98
Relevance	4	0.9
Proximity	12	2.6
Magnitude	4	0.9
Timeliness	33	7.3
Sum	**454**	**100**

Table 6 shows that 454 news values were used in 620 posts. Interestingly, the number of posts which include at least one news value is more than the number of news posts. This finding means that some of non-news posts possess news values as well. Generally, it can be concluded that most posts in Telegram channels, whether they are news or non-news texts, are news-oriented in their essence. It means Telegram channels, even non-news ones in non-news posts, use news values as a means to get more views and attention.

However, results show that prominence is the most popular news value among Telegram channels with 186 recurrences (40.98 %). Exploring the posts subjects revealed that 45 of these posts deal with celebrities. Celebrity is one of the main themes among subjects, but not a news value. Moreover, 126 of these posts (68%) are news ones, which means 32 percent of posts which pay attention to prominent individuals are non-news posts. The second popular news value is impact. This news value mostly occurred in news posts (85%). Interestingly, these findings are in accordance with previous researches on traditional news sources.

While conflict and surprise are of modest interest, relevance and magnitude are the least favorable news values among Telegram channels. The findings confirmed that news channels and non-news channels have same behavior in utilizing news values as well as official and digital-born channels. For instance, prominence is the most wanted news value in news and non-news channels. Moreover, it has the same positions on official and digital-born sources. The main difference between various

channels is not in the ways that they are recruiting news values, but in framing a piece of writing as news which was discussed earlier.

The question of objectivity: In the last section we will see if (and in which rate) Telegram channels are objective in reporting events or not. I will try to examine the news posts to find out if they serve any particular political, social, cultural or economic purpose for individuals, groups, parties, etc.

The results show that there are 113 news messages with a clear bias in favor of a person, group, etc., by supporting it or criticizing its opponent(s). This means that the majority of news posts (82%) comply with objectivity norms. Table 7 shows how the unfairness posts are dispersed through various categories of channels.

Table 7. The Frequency of Non-Objective News Posts

	Official channels		Digital-born channels	
	News channels	Non-news channels	News channels	Non-news channels
Non-objective posts	26	9	64	14
Percentage (based on all posts in the category)	14	43	48	31

According to table 7, official channels published 59 of these posts, while 78 of biased posts were published by digital-born channels. Thus, official channels are reasonably more cautious about objectivity on news posts than digital-born broadcasters. Furthermore, official news channels are the most objective sources. They published 26 posts violating objectivity. Among these channels, @farsna was the first violator with 17 posts. This channel belongs to radicals and obviously supports Ebrahim Raeesi by publishing these posts.

It seems that the official channels' roots in known offline organizations inhibit them from violating objectivity in large scale. On the other hand, digital-born broadcasters are publishing their desired posts freely. As it was discussed earlier, such channels do not have any clear and formal restricting connections with organizations and institutions. As a result, they are more reckless in supporting and criticizing others. Moreover, some channels have been created to do such duty like @Rouhani96ir. Therefore, it is not surprising that these channels are violating objectivity more than official publishers.

Furthermore, the biased posts either support or reprimand individuals. Regarding the importance of election as a nationwide event, most of the biased posts (77%) are toward election's candidates. Among the six candidates, Hassan Rouhani, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and Ebrahim Raeesi were the main subjects of supportive or critical posts. Table 8, presents the number of posts published to support or criticize these political figures.

Table 8. The Number of Personal Supportive and Critical Post

	Supportive	Critical
Hassan Rouhani	29	7
Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf	21	12
Ebrahim Raeesi	8	10

The results revealed that the news posts among the most viewed posts on Telegram channels do not violate objectivity significantly. Moreover, a great number of such posts tried to support or criticize election's candidates, which seem logical. In addition, the official news channels considerably represent their parent organization's agenda and priorities in covering events. For instance, @farsna, as a channel which has relations with political hardliners in Iran, supported candidates who represent such groups and parties in election (i.e. Raeesi and Ghalibaf). This channel also published three news posts about international incidents. These posts covered some events in Bahrain, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Although the content of the posts were almost objective, the selection of these countries, which are mainly supported or criticized by state and radical groups, showed how ideology affects the gatekeeping process in this channel. Generally, the digital-born channels' behavior in reporting news resembles the behavior of such channels. On the other hand, some channels which argue that they cover news objectively, such as @isna94, tried to cover all the candidates and publish their opinions in direct quotations.

Conclusion

This research tries to evaluate Telegram's effects on journalism and news writing in Iran. In order to do so, I focused on the most viewed posts on Telegram channels in the recent presidential election. While it seems that Telegram affects some journalistic practices like news gathering and relating with sources, the main concern of the current study was assessing Telegram's impacts on the news structure and values. Moreover, I studied how objectivity was treated by Telegram channels.

However, this research shows that the majority of the most viewed posts on Telegram channels can be considered as news. In addition to the old forms of news, new types of posts such as screenshots, comments and quotations have emerged in Telegram as news. Moreover, the structure of news has been significantly affected by Telegram channels. The results show that most news posts on Telegram do not obey the traditional and standard forms of news writing. For instance, the kicker, subhead and lead, as old parts of news structure, are mainly abandoned. Nevertheless, the main concern of Telegram channels is to convey the key point of the news. Therefore, they do not spend more time to write a lead or subhead. They just write the main point as short as possible. This fact causes the emergence of what I call a "nutshell post". The preference toward short messages, which convey the maximum of data in shorter time, can be seen in screenshot as a new form of news as well. Nonetheless, there is a significant difference between the structure of news posts on official and digital-born channels. While the style of news writing on official channels has changed as well, these channels are trying to comply their news writing with traditional standards more than digital-born broadcasters. Although the news posts on official channels are as small as news messages on digital-born publishers, they

are written in formal language and some parts of them can be considered as subhead or lead. On the other hand, news posts on digital-born channels are more in colloquial form. In addition, they do not have any particular structure, and their form varies from one to another.

Despite the massive changes in news structure, news values on Telegram posts are almost the same as those of traditional press. However, the findings show that not all news values suggested by Harcup and O'Neill (2017) are applicable on Telegram posts. In fact, we should not confuse the news values with news subject and news orientation. Therefore, I altered the Harcup and O'Neill (2017) list and combined it with Ricketson's (2004) suggested values to reach a comprehensive and appropriate list of news values. However, results indicate that official and digital-born channels show the same behaivior in enriching their news posts with news values. In accordance with previous research into news values of traditional press in Iran (Kheirabadi and Aghagolzadeh, 2012), prominence and impact are the main news values on Telegram posts. Conversely, relevance and magnitude are less favorable news values in these posts. Analyses did not lead to any new forms of news values on Telegram news posts. Therefore, we can deduce that the news values have not been affected by Telegram channels as news structure. In fact, news valuse are the same as traditional ones because the people's news taste has not changed.

Finally, the results show that the proliferation of Telegram usage in Iran has not drastically modified the objectivity of news. Although there are some biased posts on Telegram channels, the quantity of them is not considerable enough to give them the power to affect the Telegram information flow. Moreover, most of the biased news posts support or criticize a candidate, which is not surprising. However, official channels are more careful in reporting news objectively. Whilst the formal connection of official channels with some organizations prevents them from acting freely, digital-born channels can almost do whatever they want. As a result, the number of biased posts among digital-born broadcasters is more than that of official channels.

This research shows that Telegram has substantially affected the news structure rather than news values or objectivity. It can be predicted that the massive usage of Telegram by news and non-news organizations for spreading news will deeply transform the news style. Subsequently, it can be inferred that Telegram as a type of social media in the context of Iran has affected the form of news, rather than its content.

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