

Reflection of Divorce in Kayhan, Watan Emrooz, Etemad, and Shargh Newspapers in 1402 (2023–2024): Requirements and Strategies for Press Content Management

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Extended Abstract

Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to analyze and identify the extent to which the issue of divorce is reflected in four Iranian newspapers — Kayhan, Watan Emrooz, Etemad, and Shargh — over a one-year period (2023-2024). The secondary objectives include identifying the methods of content production, the directional orientation of divorce-related content, and the news values applied in these newspapers. The study seeks to answer whether there are significant differences in how these newspapers cover divorce, and more broadly, to examine the quantity and quality of divorce representation in the Iranian press. Furthermore, this research aims to propose strategies for improving press content management in dealing with this social issue.

Design/methodology/approach

This study employs a quantitative content analysis method using a reverse questionnaire technique for data collection. The statistical population includes all divorce-related content published in the print editions of the four selected newspapers throughout 2023-2024. The sampling method was total enumeration (census) and purposive, ensuring a diverse range of political and social perspectives. The theoretical framework is based on three communication theories: social responsibility of the press, agenda-setting, and news gatekeeping. The collected data were statistically analyzed using the non-parametric Wilcoxon test to examine possible differences between the newspapers in terms of both the quantity and quality of coverage.

Findings

Descriptive findings show that, out of a total of 53 divorce-related items, Kayhan published the most, with 31 items (58.5%), while Shargh published the least, with 6 items

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(11.3%). In terms of page placement, the majority of content (49.1%) had no main headline, and only 9.4% appeared on the front page, indicating the low priority of this issue in the press. Moreover, in over 96% of the content, no specific type of divorce was mentioned.

Regarding the causes of divorce, the most frequently cited categories were: "combined factors" (62.3%), "virtual space/social media" (11.3%), "economic problems" (5.7%), and "different worldviews" (5.7%). In terms of consequences, the majority focused on cultural consequences (64.2%), followed by social consequences (22.6%). The dominant format was "news" (54.7%), and among news values, "inclusiveness/relevance" (52.8%) was the most significant criterion for news selection.

Inferential findings (Wilcoxon test) indicate that there are significant differences among the selected newspapers in terms of the volume of reflection (sig. = 0.000), content production methods (sig. = 0.000), directional orientation (sig. = 0.000), and news values (sig. = 0.000). For instance, Watan Emrooz predominantly adopted a positive approach (88.9%), while Shargh adopted an entirely negative approach (100%).

Research limitations/implications

The main limitations of this study include: (1) difficulty in accessing complete printed editions of the newspapers over a full year, compounded by the lack of a coherent digital archive; (2) the time-consuming nature of total enumeration and manual coding; (3) the inability to measure the direct impact of this content on audience attitudes due to the absence of complementary field research; and (4) the potential influence of managerial changes and subjective regulatory oversight on the newspapers' editorial approaches, which could not be fully controlled. Additionally, the lack of longitudinal analysis, covering multiple years, and the absence of other intervening variables further restrict the generalizability of the findings.

Practical implications

The findings carry clear practical implications for cultural policymakers, media managers, and journalists. Key applications include: (1) revising press content policies to highlight divorce as a serious social issue; (2) producing educational and awareness-oriented content alongside news reports to enhance emotional and social literacy among couples; (3) paying more attention to the "how" and "why" elements of news, beyond just the "what," to provide deeper analysis of the causes and consequences of divorce; (4) using newspapers as a platform to share the lived experiences of divorced individuals and to present expert solutions for preventing family breakdown; and (5) aligning media strategies with the general family policies announced by the Supreme Leader, particularly in promoting cultural aversion to divorce and strengthening the family institution.

Social implications

From a social perspective, this study demonstrates that the press's silence or insufficient attention to divorce may lead to either the normalization of the phenomenon or the spread of public fear and anxiety without offering constructive solutions. As intellectual leaders of society, newspapers can help reduce the stigma surrounding divorced women by presenting accurate, evidence-based, and balanced portrayals of divorce, while also highlighting its negative effects on children and societal structures to promote family stability. Furthermore, media attention to the cultural and social dimensions of divorce can shift public attitudes, encouraging premarital counseling and timely interventions to prevent separation.

Originality/value

The originality and value of this study lie in several aspects. First, by examining four newspapers with diverse political and social orientations, conservative and reformist, over a full year, it offers a relatively comprehensive picture of how divorce is represented in the Iranian press. Second, unlike many previous studies that focused solely on identifying the causes of divorce, this research concentrates on media representation of the phenomenon as a communication issue, drawing on established communication theories, including agenda-setting and gatekeeping. Third, by providing evidence-based strategic recommendations in alignment with higher-level policies, such as the general family policies, this study serves as a valuable reference for future research in the fields of media content management and cultural policymaking regarding social harms. This combination of quantitative analysis, media critique, and strategic proposal is a key distinguishing feature of this paper.

Keywords: Awareness Transfer, Highlighting, News Gatekeeping, Divorce, Press