

UK Media Coverage of Iraq War: A Content Analysis of Tony Blair Position in the Guardian Newspaper 2003-2007

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Abstract

Iraq war was one of the most important armed conflicts in 21st century which led by the United States with the support of the United Kingdom, caused death of hundreds of thousands civilians and militaries and cost trillion of dollars to the global economy. The present study have focused on the media reflections in war time and aims to examine how Tony Blair, the British prime minister is represented in The Guardian newspaper during Iraq invasion and content analysis is the research method that is used in this regard. The Guardian news stories which examined in this research, were about the role and the policies of Tony Blair in 2003 Iraq invasion from the start of the war until his resignation of UK primer ship in 2007. The findings of the study revealed some facts about the way that the Guardian newspaper represented Blair's involvement in Iraq; firstly the dominance of the news value of prominence and the news element of who showed that The Guardian news stories have focused on Blair's role and his policies in Iraq war and also all the remarkable events and individuals that were involved in this war. Secondly, the researcher observed the negative adjectives were dominant in The Guardian news stories about Blair and he has been portrayed negatively to the public opinion by this paper, in fact as a war criminal.

Keywords: Tony Blair; Iraq war; Content analysis; The Guardian newspaper; News; Media

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Introduction

After the 11 September terrorist attacks to the twin towers of the world trade center in the United States which was led by al-Qaida terrorist group "war against the terrorism" became the main goal of the this country in the Middle East and the Iraq invasion was based on this ideology. The Iraq war was led by the United States with the support of the United Kingdom against Iraqi government and toppled Saddam Hussein government in 2003. The rational of the start of this war was the belief that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and it was a serious threat to global peace and security.

The United Kingdom intervention to Iraq was during Tony Blair premiership. He entered his country to international wars more than any prime minister in the history. He sent British troops into battles like Kosovo (1999), sierra Leon (2000) and Afghanistan (2001) that was led by United States From the start of American

new ideology in foreign policy (war on terror) Blair strongly supported it and participate in wars on terror beside US. But the intervention in Iraq was particularly controversial as it attract the widespread public demonstration and 139 MP oppositions as the result he faced lots of criticism over his policy and at last losing his position as the prime minster and the leader of labor party.

In this study we are trying to show how the Guardian newspaper portrayed Blair policies in the period from 2003 until 2007, which marks the start of Iraq war to the end of his primer ship. The reason for the selection of this topic is that although there are lots of studies about Iraq war but we cannot find many studies conducted about media coverage of war specially the UK media coverage of Iraq war. Meanwhile the Iraq invasion was the most important conflict after Second World War and Tony Blair had a key role in the war process, he was criticized and lost his power because of involving Britain in this war. So, study on this topic is vital and important in both fields of media and politics.

Literature Review

The 2003 Iraqi invasion started in 19 March 2003. The invasion was named "the operation Iraqi freedom" by the United States. Before the 19 March 2003 it was called "Operation Enduring Freedom, a carryover from the War in Afghanistan". Four countries participated with troops to this war: the United States (148,000), the United Kingdom (45,000), Australia (2000) and Poland (194) to depose the Baathist government of Saddam Hussein.

The British prime minister Tony Blair was one of the closest allies to the George Bush in Iraq war. The Blair's government decision for going to war caused the biggest foreign policy and moral crisis since Suez. Blair government used intelligence sources and evidences that the Iraqi government had chemical and biological weapons in order to persuade public opinion about the war involvement. It seems that the prime minister pursued two wishes about Iraq: first, he wished to have share in global management beside the United States. In another level he wished that Blair wanted to the United Kingdom being in the heart of Europe [1].

Rodney P. Carlisle and John Stewart Bowman studied on Blair's justification of war [2]. They explained his efforts to maintain public support of Iraq intervention in this way: Since the Iraqi government had evaded the UN inspections and put some obstacles to the inspectors, the intelligence information suggested that Iraq still had the weapons of mass destructions and way of their production. When Tony Blair presented his report that called "the Blair's Dossier" to the British parliament in 2002 He stressed all the evidences that his intelligence agencies maintained that suggested Iraqi government still had WMD. He also detailed the Saddam regime operations against the Iraqi people including the tortures and executions without trial. The British prime minister reminded his people and the parliament the Europe situation of 1930 when Adolf Hitler defined the League of Nations and imposed a ruthless regime to the German people. He said "from history that diplomacy, not backed by the threat of force, has never worked with dictators and never will work ... the threat is not imagined. The history of Saddam and WMD is not American or British propaganda. The history and present threat are real". However in Britain, not everyone was sure about this invasion [2].

Williamson Murray and Robert H Scales focused Blair's motivations of British intervention to Iraq. They believed that the British prime minister, Tony Blair risked his career, his international influence and his position in the history to stand side by side and shoulder to shoulder with United States in Iraq war [3]. While he was surrounded by the opposition even in his own party, provided the leadership, drive, foresight and moral conviction to put the British troops to the war in Iraq.

These researchers believe that the reason of Blair's intervention in this war with million oppositions against him, was to make sure that Britain maintained his position across the Atlantic in opposition of Jacques Chirac's united Europe under the French banner against the United States hegemony also he recognized that a stable middle east in the near future is impossible

without Saddam Hussein's removal. He believed that because of producing and developing the weapons of mass destruction by the Saddam's regime, liberal governments had responsibility to stand against such regime and employ military forces against it. So during the 2002 Blair followed a consistent line in saying that he would support the United States in the Iraq war and in January 2003 he sent substantial military forces to the war [3].

Stephen Dyson In another research described the Blair's expectations of Iraq involvement. He believed that the Iraq war was a huge personal war to Blair by the Bush's turning attention toward Iraq; Blair quickly offered the support of United States by the basic principles. His black and white framing of the world and his beliefs on an activist approach, provided sympathy toward administration arguments about the threat of Saddam regime and its weapons of mass destruction. Blair recognized that when the Bush administration determined goes to the war, no one can stop it. The elements of his policy sounds good but he couldn't apply his policies in the proper way. He over estimated to shape the circumstances under which the war would be fought and ended without the support of international community and the United Nations. Moreover his ability to shape the policies of the Bush administration was less than he supposed. Finally Blair estimated his ability to shape the domestic picture into the UK and found himself as the leading of the skeptical nation to the war. Linking these events reveals that despite Blair's success in Kosovo and Sierra Leon he failed to gain his aims in Iraq war [4].

Frank P. Harvey explained the importance of Blair's policies and his effects in Iraq war in his book. He believed that, Bush understood that Tony Blair was an essential actor in resolving the Iraq problem. He was a very popular prime minister, who made credible the multilateralism policy and provided a complete defense of this approach. The United States president needed his alliance withstand the neocons pressure for the pre-emptive unilateral invasion. Blair forced Bush to reject unilateralism in order to returning to UN for new resolution. The strong efforts of Washington to maintain the UN support would make it easier for Blair to address his own pressures. Tony Blair could predict and adjust Bush's policies toward Iraq. So when Bush delivered UN speech committing country to another round of UN negotiations on another resolution, Tony Blair understood that is one of his most important achievements. The multilateral efforts made it easier to Blair to bring the European powers to sign the coercive diplomatic strategy. So, British officials understood that they were not allied to the singularly committed administration that committed to fighting unilateral war [5].

Matthew Evangelista is another scholar who studied on Iraq war and its consequences. He argued about Blair's failure in Iraq war. He argued, Blair's Iraq policy misled British assets from al-Qaida and war on terror and undermined the international institutions on which the security of Britain rests. His insistence to the Iraq's WMD threat made the Britain the object of scorn and ridicule in Europe and international community. He lowered the British position in the world and lost the support of his people. Also he didn't find friends in Washington because he couldn't bring Germany and France to the coalition against Saddam Hussein

and to obtain UN authorization for military action. Since Blair derived no benefit from his special relationship with George Bush the allegiance to Washington did not appear to pay. In the other hand his policies were not in opposition of French model. Tony Blair separates himself from his colleagues in EU for the Bush support. This made Britain as much hated as the United States in the international community [6].

According to the infamous Project for a New American Century (PNAC) document endorsed by senior Bush administration officials as far back as 1997, "While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification" for the US "to play a more permanent role in Gulf regional security," "the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein." So Saddam's weapons of mass destructions were not the issue.

Shai Feldman studied on the pentagon's media policy in Persian Gulf regarding Iraq war. He mentioned in his book that, the media policy was used in Iraq war in order to win public confidence and capture the public support for the war. In order to achievement of this purposes, the pentagon invited the journalists to be close as possible to the fighting through the process of embedding. But the organized efforts of the new policy didn't work for the positive coverage of war. In the first weeks of war the news were dominated by failure and presented a distorted picture of American led campaign but in a few weeks later the media were reporting the victory. The reports from embedded journalist, successfully positioned the war as liberating Iraq from the Saddam's regime and deflecting attention from the fact that no weapon of mass destruction were found in Iraq. The main reason that United States and United Kingdom intervened to Iraq [7].

Anthony DiMaggio in his book "When Media Goes to War: Hegemonic Discourse, Public Opinion, and the Limits" explains the American public position toward Iraq war according to its media coverage and the power of media in shaping the public opinion. He believed that the American media coverage of Iraq war was overwhelmingly nationalistic during 2003 and 2004. The coverage remained favorable to the war in late 2004, although many of media outlets argued about the changes in executive management of the war. During 2005 and 2006 with the increase violence against Iraqi people dominated media headlines and turned the public opinion against the war. In response to growing criticism among public the Bush administration planned a surge of troops which effectively silenced antiwar critics [8].

Piers Robinson focused on the governments control on the media during war time, because the media coverage influence public perceptions and reinforce the political consensus about the war. So the government management over the media shape the public understanding about crisis and make their perception of reality "elastic". In 2003 Iraq war the intelligence missioned to persuade American and British public that Iraq was WMD (weapons of mass destruction) threat. The UK and U.S press coverage of Iraq invasion supported the coalition military efforts and the official justification for war revolving. By the power of media in the United States the public opinion support for Iraq invasion was strong and in Britain majority support of war was like the troops went into the action [9].

Ilene A. Serine introduced the Iraq war as a postmodern war. He believed that, this war mixed the role of spectator and participant. The media coverage of war serve the political purposes and appeal American values such as the Rumsfeld doctrine that the speed and efficiency wins the victory over the enemies and introduces advertising to sell war on terrorism. The embedded reporting didn't cover the bloods or death and gave the news coverage an immediate and sanitized quality. The strategy of white house at the wartime was minimizing the horrors of war and using the power of media to gain the public support. By this coverage of war it entered to the home of Americans every times and every places [10].

Marie Hyklová believed that the news coverage of Iraq war was favorable to the bush administration rather than its opponents and the administration officials were referenced more than any sources. Even the TV reports cast the Iraq invasion more positive than negative way. Just in earliest month of war the opposition received attention but in the following the oppositions were completely marginalized. Information management used by the government as the "propaganda strategy". The embedded reporters presented the image of war as clean and bloodless war with professional soldiers. The Bush administration manages the media coverage in some way to gain public support of war and those who opposed to the war were regarded as unpatriotic both by public and government. The work of media-military relationship ensured that any unwelcome message about war would not reach to the public and the media became an effective strategy to affect public opinion [11].

The authors of "Understanding American Government" believed that the American leaders tend to uniform public opinion about their policies by interpretation of elites. In this manner they turned to translate their beliefs to their policies by using media. In the case of Iraq war the effect of the media coverage of war on public opinion was undeniable. The television, radio and printed news were overwhelmingly pro war and more than 71 percent of Americans were agree to the war. The media conveyed that there was a strong link between Saddam Hussein and 9/11 and also conveyed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. For the American people this narration of Iraq became primary justification for the war.

During the war the networks used special music; graphics and promotion of dramatize American patriotism. The American was reluctant to report negative news, the blood and the reality of war. The media were under the control of president administrations, reflected the government's lines in foreign policy and relied on government officials as the main sources for news [12].

Methodology

In this research, the researcher tried to focus on the content of the guardian newspaper and put them in "agenda setting" as the theoretical frame work to answer some questions.

Main questions that the researcher will try to answer them in this research are:

Q1: what is reflected about tony Blair and Iraq war in the Guardian newspaper?

Q2: what news elements have dominated in the Guardian news coverage of this subject matter?

Q3: what news values have dominated in The Guardian news coverage?

Q4: what adjectives had been used in The Guardian news coverage with regards to tony Blair? Are the dominate adjectives positive, negative or neutral?

Our study is based on the portrayal of Tony Blair’s position in The Guardian newspaper and the best way for understanding this subject is using content analysis as our research method. Content analysis is the method that provides a variety of tools to the study of media content. Bibe believes that content analysis is “particularly well situated to study the communications”. The content analysis is not limited to the message component only, the method provide use a situation to understand the communicators intention and receiver’s interpretation of the message. The content analysis helps use to be aware of communicators purpose and receiver’s interpretation. Because the method separates the messages into the constituent parts and make a large variety of variables visible and quantifiable [13].

In order to understand how the Guardian newspaper presented Tony Blair during Iraq war, we started by searching the relevant news to Tony Blair during 2003 to 2007 in this newspaper. Regarding representing the frequency of the research variables in the Guardian news stories about Tony Blair (the news values like: impact, prominence, magnitude, conflict, oddity, proximity, and timeliness, news elements like: who, where, when, why, how, what and adjectives) we used frequency tables which are a way for summarizing data. These tables depict the number of times a data value occurs. The frequency tables in our study are created by three columns. One of these columns allocated to intervals and the amount of these intervals is determined by a range in data values. If the range in data values is great, the intervals will be larger and if the range in data values is not great, the range in data intervals will be smaller. It is important that the intervals are in equal size without overlap. The second column is created for tallied results. In this column we tally the number of times of data values from each interval. And in the last column we added the tally marks to determine the frequency results. And finally we entered our data to the SPSS software in order to gain the frequency tables and find out the special relationships between the variables.

Findings

In this part of our research the results of the study which conducted by the content analysis are presented.

News elements comparison

The following chart shows the news elements which are found in the Guardian news stories regarding Tony Blair and Iraq war. In order to find the results, the news elements were searched in three parts of each news (headlines, lead and nut par). Then the

number of the occurrence of each news element were counted in this three parts of news and compared to each other in order to find out which news element is dominant. The next table demonstrates the number of each news elements examined in the news stories about Tony Blair and Iraq war in the Guardian newspaper. As you can see, among the news elements who (that demonstrates the involved factors and individuals to the occurrence and appearance of an event) has the most frequency and it means that the Guardian news stories about Blair are mostly based on the individual’s representation specially Blair himself and their role regarding this war (**Table 1 and Figure 1**).

The following pie chart illustrates the percentage of news elements in the Guardian news stories that shows the dominance of whom and what among the other variables (**Figure 2**).

The chart shows that the news element of who (the involved factors and individuals to the occurrence and appearance of an event) is the most dominant element in the news stories by the 46%. The second dominant element is what (the nature of event that supposed to be news) by 24%. The next frequent element is where (the place of an event occurrence) by 17% and after that is when (the time of an event occurrence) by 10%. The least frequent elements were why and how that allocated only 3% of the of whole news elements to themselves.

This report reveals that the Guardian newspaper have focused on reporting the related news to key individuals who had important role regarding Iraq invasion and because of the frequency of the element of what this news were mostly about the occurrence of the events and accidents that were related to Iraq war. The low frequency of why in this news shows that those news stories are more descriptive than analytical and most of the Guardian’s efforts were to report all the related issues to the war.

News values comparison

The following table represents the frequency of news values in

Table 1 The number of news elements in the Guardian news stories.

Abbreviation	Wo	Wa	We	Wn	Wy	H
News elements	Who	What	Where	When	Why	How
Frequency	457	236	169	96	13	15

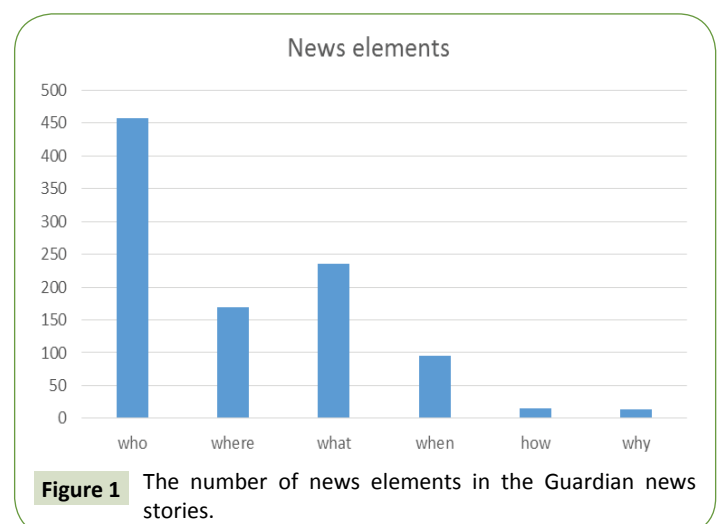


Figure 1 The number of news elements in the Guardian news stories.

the news stories about Tony Blair in the Guardian newspaper during Iraq war. Firstly we counted the number of news values in the three part of each news(impact, prominence, proximity, timeliness, oddity, magnitude and conflict) and then compared them to each other in order to find the most important news value in this regard (**Table 2 and Figure 3**).

The next pie chart illustrates the percentage of news values that examined in the Guardian news stories (**Figure 4**).

Pie chart 2 shows that the most dominant news value was prominence (refers to the 'elite nations' or 'elite persons') by 47% represented by the color gray. The next frequent value was impact (relates or put impact on the everyday life of the audiences) by 19%. The other important values were proximity (relates to the events those occurred near the audiences both geographical and cultural) 16% and conflict (charge and countercharge, controversy and conflict) 12%. The least frequent value was oddity by 0.2%.

This chart explains that the majority of the Guardian news stories focused on Tony Blair's character and involved well known British individuals and politicians to shape the British public opinion in order to judge and make decisions about this people according to its political orientation. Another thing about this chart is that the Guardian gave a great emphasis to the value of conflict regarding its news coverage of Iraq war since it was reporting a war which was a remarkable conflict in the Middle East since the Second World War and had a great impact on global politics.

Adjectives comparison

The following charts represent the adjectives used in the Guardian news stories about Blair and Iraq war. The adjectives categorized in three groups; positive, negative and neutral (**Table 3, Figures 5 and 6**).

Both the column and pie chart reveal that most of the adjectives mentioned about tony Blair in the Guardian news stories are negative. 51% adjectives used by the Guardian about representing Blair's involvement in Iraq war are negative that reveals the paper's political orientation regarding this intervention and its efforts to bring British public opinion along this ideology in this regard.

The relation between prominence and conflict

In this part of our research, the correlations between the most dominant news values (prominence and conflict) and negativity (the negative adjectives, since they were the most recurring among adjectives) were examined according Spearman's Rho test, Kendal's Tau test and Pearson R test. The relation between these variables examined in two parts: first between the prominence and conflict and second between what and negativity (**Tables 4, 5 and Figure 7**).

Tables 4 and 5 illustrate the results of examining the relation between prominence and conflict. The researcher employed

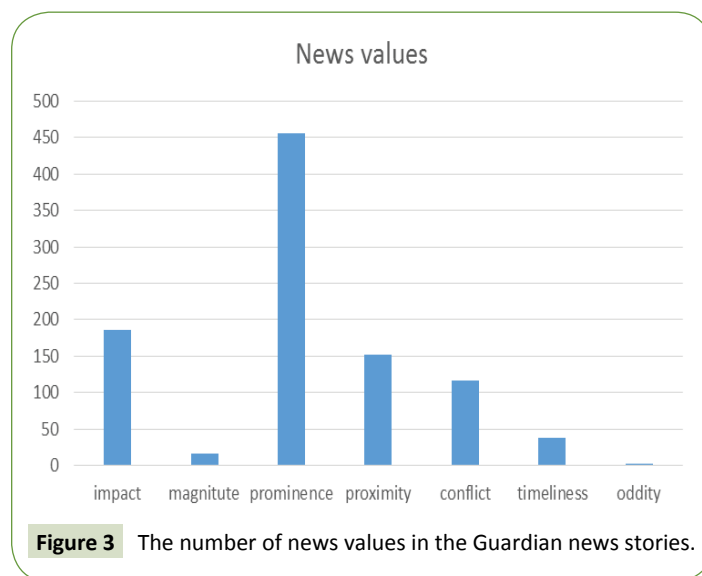
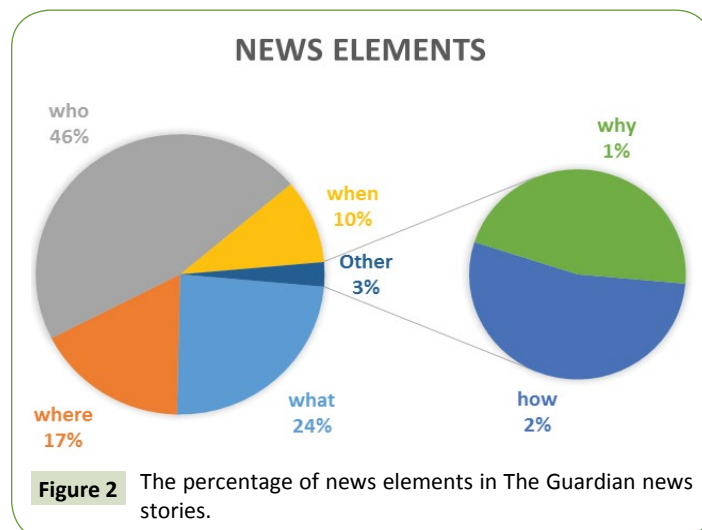
Table 2 The number of news values in the Guardian news stories.

Abbreviation	I	P	PR	M	C	O	T
News values	Impact	Prominence	Proximity	Magnitude	Conflict	Oddity	Timeliness
Frequency	186	456	152	16	117	2	38

the Spearman's Rho test and Kendal's Tau test in this regard. According to the results of research, the correlation coefficient significance between these variables was 0.76 in Kendal's and 0.84 in Spearman's tests. The results indicate that there is a meaningful relation between prominence and conflict. According to this report we can conclude that lots of news which reported conflicts in Iraq war contained some information about famous individuals and places and their effective role in this war.

The relation between what and negativity

Table 6 and 7 demonstrates the results of whether there is a meaningful relation between two variables of what and negativity. In this case the researcher used Tau test and Rho test again. After the calculation, the amount of correlation between this variables was 0.55 and 0.58 in Kendal's and Spearman's test that shows the meaningful relation between what and negativity



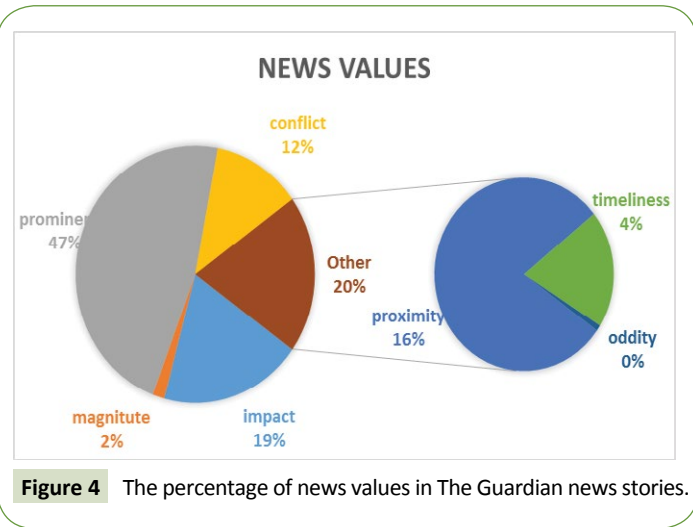


Figure 4 The percentage of news values in The Guardian news stories.

Table 3 The number of adjectives in the Guardian news stories.

Abbreviation	N	P	NE
Adjectives	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Frequency	57	32	24

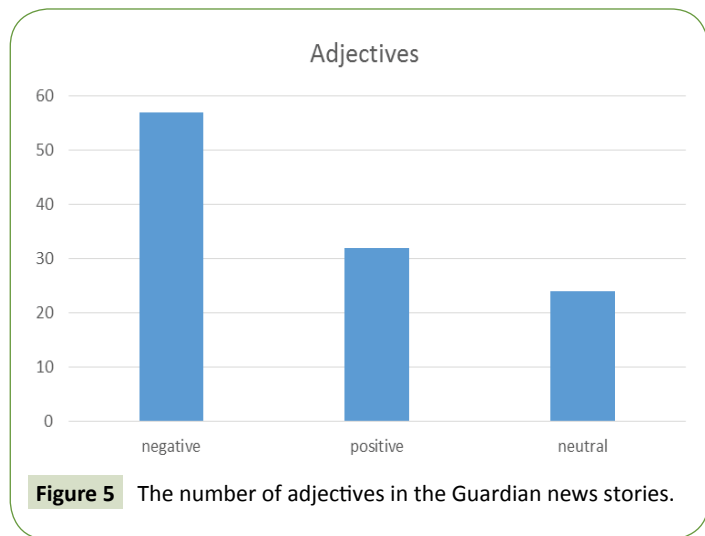


Figure 5 The number of adjectives in the Guardian news stories.

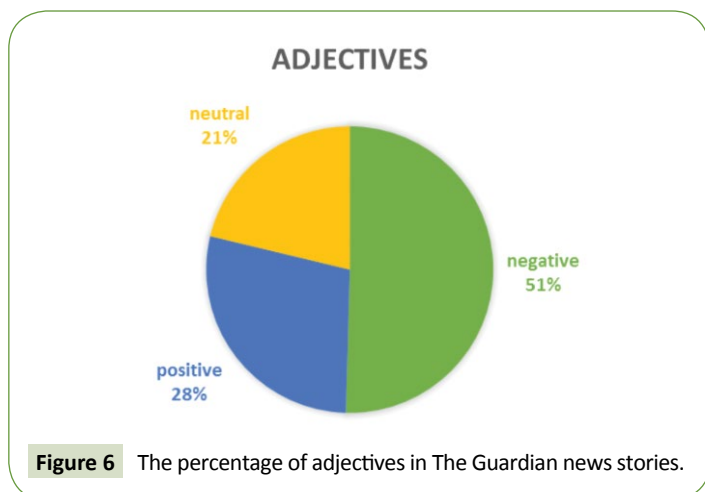


Figure 6 The percentage of adjectives in The Guardian news stories.

Table 4 Correlation between prominence and conflict (pearson).

Correlations			
		Prominency	Conflict
Prominency	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.092
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.476
	N	62	62
Conflict	Pearson Correlation	-0.092	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.476	
	N	62	62

Table 5 Correlation between prominence and conflict (Kendall, spearman).

Correlations				
			Prominency	Conflict
Kendall's tau_b	Prominency	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.03
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.762
		N	62	62
	Conflict	Pearson Correlation	-0.03	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.762	.
		N	62	62
Spearman's rho	Prominency	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.025
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.847
		N	62	62
	Conflict	Pearson Correlation	-0.025	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.847	.
		N	62	62

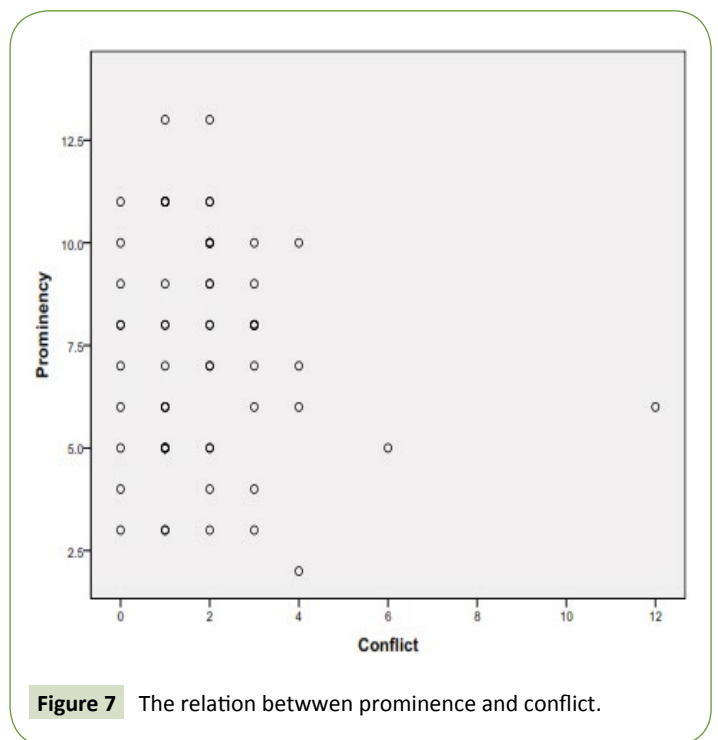


Figure 7 The relation between prominence and conflict.

Table 6 Correlation between what and negativity (Pearson).

Correlations				
			What	Negative
What	Prominency	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.03
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.762
		N	62	62
Negative	Conflict	Pearson Correlation	-0.03	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.762	.
		N	62	62

Table 7 Correlation between what and negativity (Kendall, spearman).

Correlations				
			What	Negative
Kendall's tau_b	What	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.068
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.551
		N	62	62
	Negative	Pearson Correlation	-0.068	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.551	.
		N	62	62
Spearman's rho	What	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.071
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.583
		N	62	62
	Negative	Pearson Correlation	-0.071	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.583	.
		N	62	62

that reveals the Guardian's opposition to British government specially policies in Iraq and the way they choose for entering Britain in this indeterminate conflict (Tables 6, 7 and Figure 8).

Conclusion

Considering the findings of the study, the reasearcher claims that the Guardian portrayed Tony Blair's position toward Iraq war in a negative way since most of news about him contained negative adjectives. Another report related to this analysis was that the most recurrent news values was prominence and the reasearcher claims the Guardian main's focuse was on the Blair's policies and his role and also the key politicians and individuals in this war.

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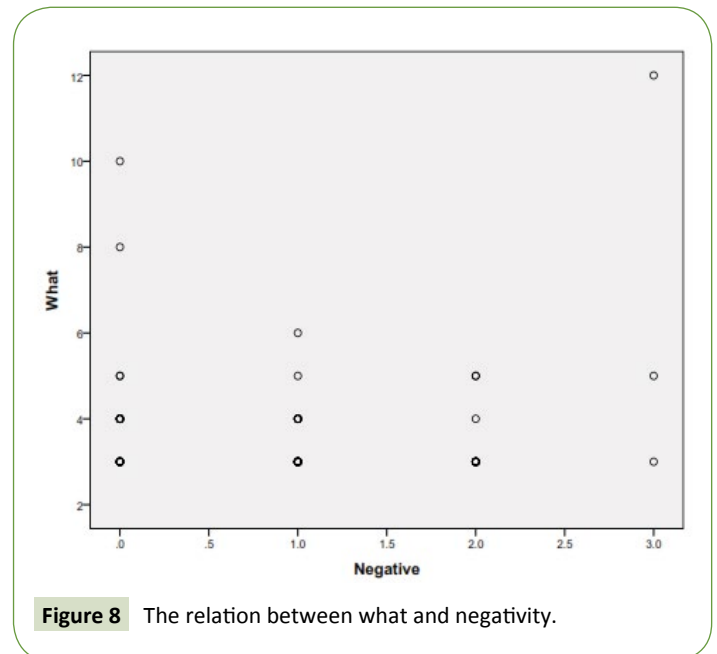


Figure 8 The relation between what and negativity.

According to the findings related to the analysis of news values, the next strongest news values was conflict in the Guardian news stories and most of news contained this value in their reports. The reasecher belives that the Guardian's coverage of Iraq war was also based onreporting conflicts and important war events, since this value was one of the important elements in their news.

Another result of our study reffers to the dominant news elements about Blair regarding Iraq war. As we observed the highest frequency of news elements in the Guardian news blonged to who and what that shows their emphasise firstly on who saidand secondly what is said in news stories regarding Iraq war.

Finally, the researcher argues that the Guardian focused on the stories that had more newsworthy than the other stories and reported events and issues related to the British national interests wich was very important to the people andcan be followed by them. The Guardian also tried to introduce Blair as a responsible ofIraq war and criticize him and his policies regarding this involvement.

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