How Does Social Media Affect The Freedom Of Press In Iran, Specifically With The Women's Movement?

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Literature Review

Women's movements in Iran

The journal article *Translation and feminism in post-Islamic revolution Iran: A sociological approach* by Ali Jalalian Daghigh, Mohammad Sadegh Kenevisi and Jariah Mohd Jan, follows a study on books for women's rights in a post-revolutionary Iran and provides information on the women's movements in Iran. (Daghigh et al. p.231) Deprivation of women's rights were first advocated and fought for in the Persian Constitutional Revolution from 1905 to 1911. (Daghigh et al. p.231) Some changes were made to womens statuses in Iran as they did not have basic rights, and experienced harsh discrimination in Iran. (Daghigh et al. p.231) This progress was slow but it was there. Women were granted many rights "such as access to education and employment particularly after the introduction of social and political reforms to modernize Iran" this came between the time of 1925 and 1979. (Daghigh et al. p.231). Clearly women in Iran have been fighting this battle for a long time, but slowly and surely they are making positive legal and moral change. Unfortunately change for women in Iran was not a one way process, and there were times where the progress went backwards rather than forwards. Sadly in the 1980's many rights that had been given to women were revoked.(Daghigh et al. p.232)

In the continuation of the struggle for democracy and equality in Iran, women face many battles, in religion, education, employment and roles in society.(Povey & Rostami-Povey p.1) Women deserve basic human rights and through movements like The Green Movement women are slowly gaining more recognition and more legislative change in Iran. The book *Women, power and politics in 21st century Iran* by Elaheh Rostami-Povey and Tara Povey, covers many things on women's rights in Iran, including the history behind the movements. For indigenous

women in Iran there have been countless steps forward for their rights since 1979. (Povey &

Rostami-Povey p.31) However in Iran there are more "laws and regulations on women's issues

than ever before"(Povey & Rostami-Povey p.31). This book explains how women are being

misrepresented in the indigenous movement and this book allows their own opinion and first

hand accounts of what is going on in Iran today to be shared. (Povey & Rostami-Povey p.32)

This source does not go into detail about the use of social media in Iran for the women's

movements but is important for those studying women in Iran as it provides background

information needed to study this topic.

Use of Media for Women movements in Iran

When exploring the women's movements in Iran, The Green Movement shows much

prominence. This movement unified women to rise against the leader of Iran, Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad, and aided in forming political resistance to this conservative Iranian leader (Antic

p.2). In the 2014 journal article *Transnational Iranian poetics of resistance: the Green Movement*

and Iranian women's agency in Sepideh Farsi's Red Rose by Marija Antic, Antic explores a film

called the *Red Rose* which shows the relationship between Iran's politics and women.(Antic p.2)

There are images in this film that show unified Iranian women wearing the color green which

symbolizes "unity and hope for a more democratic political future"(Antic p.2), hence the name

The Green Movement. Media is crucial for women in their fight for rights and against

discriminatory policies in Iran. In this article Antic writes that the film is, " inviting a feminist

interpretation of the filmmaker's main objectives: to assert Iranian women's agency, reclaim their

sexuality and, to a lesser extent, underline their influential role in the struggle for a progressive

Iranian society"(Antic p.2) A good example of media being used is film, to support women in

this moment and hopefully create change. Cinema is used to, " to interrogate the relationships between Iranian cultural identity and gendered discourses both in Iran and transnationally" (Antic p.1) Iranian culture and gender are used together to help challenge the Iranian government by opening the eyes of the consumers of this media. Without the media, people would not be aware and/or educated of the women's movement in Iran.

Iranian women have been fighting for their rights for many years now and have been using traditional media as well as social media as an outlet for recognition but in recent years social media, specifically, has become crucial in their movement (Lamensch, 2022). In past years, globally, in order to gain lawful change, groups had to form in person which only allows people who are there witnessing and experiencing everything to be the ones to protest and create change. The internet and social media allows young people to create a platform where they can gain recognition and connect with others around the globe, gaining more attention to the issue at hand, and increasing support in their movements. (Lamensch, 2022) Social media allows for raw unedited footage for outsiders to understand what is going on in Iran regarding women's rights. Lamesch in her 2022 article writes "In 2017, Alinejad launched the White Wednesday campaign, encouraging women to post photos and videos of themselves wearing a white veil or other item and to remove the veil in public" (Lamench, 2022) This specific act of protest is now seen in person and online, gaining more recognition than without the use of social media.

Use of Social Media for Women movements in Iran

One example of Iran using social media to aid women's movements in Iran is the use of Twitter. A journal article called *Can twitter change the Iranian legal landscape for women?* by Reilly Dempsey Willis, focuses on the use of social media, specifically Twitter, as the main

platform for the reform of women's rights in Iran.(Willis p.139) The author explores the effectiveness of social media campaigns when "seeking domestic legal change" for women's rights in Iran.(Willis 139) This journal focuses on two separate movements as two different case studies.(Willis 139) The first is the #stopstoning movement that was put into place to try and outlaw stoning as a punishment.(Willis 139) Stoning is a death punishment that is given to people in Iran mainly for committing adultery (Willis p.144) Twitter was used as the main tool for reform in this fight for women's rights against stoning. Causation cannot be sure between the removal of stoning as a punishment but there is a clear correlation between the Twitter hashtag and the removal of stoning.(Willis p.148) This is shown when Willis writes, "The spokesman for the Iranian Parliament's Justice Commission, Mohammad Ali Esfenani, told reporters that removing stoning from the Penal Code was explicitly linked to the negative international attention which stemmed from [...] the hashtag campaign." (p.148) In this case social media was successful for organizing change with long-term outcomes.(Willis p.140) This may not be true for all battles against the Iranian government but with the help of social media women would not have some of the rights they do now.

The Green Movement gained global recognition in the aftermath of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan.(Rajabi p.16) Agna-Soltan was fatally shot and killed at a peaceful protest in 2009 and her death was recorded and uploaded to YouTube without censorship.(Rajabi p.16) An article called *Social Media protest in Iran: Re-imagining the Iranian people* the author Samira Rajabi evaluates the use of YouTube in portraying protests in Iran.(Rajabi p.16) Agna-Soltan was protesting for the Green Movement which was the uprising against conservative political leaders in Iran.(Rajabi p.16) During this demonstration protesters remained peaceful but, "were met with unexpected force and violence"(Rajabi p.16) Iran used their power to attempt to shut down this

protest which resulted in more use of social media in this movement. YouTube is the social media platform used here, which provided the world with seeing the violence happening in Iran at this time. Rajani writes on page 16, "As the Iranian regime cracked down on physical forms of resistance, people moved to online spaces to express their grief, sorrow, and more importantly to protest not just the woeful fate of Neda, but of their entire country." (Rajabi p.16) Because this protest and death was presented on social media it created global recognition which is crucial to gaining support for women and The Green Movement in Iran. Social media may not have created legal change but there is more hope now for the Iranian women now that the issue is widespread.

Limitations

When dissecting the article *Gatekeeping and citizen journalism: The use of social media during the recent uprisings in Iran, Egypt, and Libya* by Sadaf R Ali and Shahira Fahmy, the focus will be on the first section which follows how social media gatekeeping is used in Iran after the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. (Ali and Fahmy p.56) Gatekeeping in media is a term that means to pick and choose what is presented to the public by those who produce and are in charge of media coverage.(Ali and Fahmy p.56) This article portrays the use of social media as un-coordinated or "disconnected", as not the most successful way of creating lawful and moral change. (Ali and Fahmy p.59)The results of gatekeeping limit the effectiveness of social media in social movements, and put into question the freedom of the press that is important when looking for social reform. Ali and Fahmy write, " In regard to the media, the Iranian government increased restrictions on domestic and foreign news outlets, making it extremely difficult to get uncensored news" (p.59) The Iranian government used and is still using their power to diminish and monitor this new use of activism making social media a lesser form of reform. (Ali and

Fahmy p.59) By restricting the freedom of the press Iran stays in control of what is put out to the world and decreases the amount of social change happening in this country. Despite this, some forms of social media are still successfully used to gain attention and hopefully legal change in Iran. As discussed previously, a Youtube video that spread, uncensored, and touched the hearts of many. This video was of a young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, who was killed at a peaceful protest. (Rajabi p.16) Given restrictions social media is still considerably a successful way of communication and mobilization for reform in Iran for the women's movement. Finally the authors wrote, "Interviews with social media advocates and Iranian experts suggest that no particular social media outlet was influential in getting people out onto the streets."(Ali and Fahmy p.61) This does not support the topic in question but is important to consider. Social media is successful in getting outside recognition and support but has not created substantial legal change in Iran because of the state of the government. Ali and Fahmey write, "The majority of social media users are from the Global North, whereas many social media campaigns, particularly around women's rights, target the Global South." (Willis 140)This forces us to take a step back and look at this topic more broadly. Is social media really the best way for these social movements in Iran to get recognition? Social media may be good for reform in the United States but what about in second world countries? Despite social media allowing more exposure of women's movements this cannot be generalized because of the lack of access to internet and social media around the globe.

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