

## Communication Mechanism, Mobilization Network And Narrative Construction Of Digital Media In Women's Rights Protection Movement In Iran

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### Abstract

In recent years, the role of digital media in social movements has become increasingly prominent, especially in countries with strict government censorship, where their information dissemination, mobilization mechanism and narrative shaping capabilities are particularly critical. The women's rights movement in Iran has long been limited by legal and social structure, but the rise of social media has broken the traditional mode of communication and provided a new mobilization channel for women's rights struggle. This study takes the Iranian women's activist movement as a case to explore digital media such as How to shape the path of information dissemination, enhance the social mobilization ability, and construct the protest narrative on a global scale.

This study uses a multi-level data analysis method, combined with the theory of online social movement, Theory of resource mobilization, and Frame Theory, Focusing on the "White Wednesday" Movement and # MahsaAmini Protest cases, tracking the communication characteristics of social media transmission at different stages. Through the user interaction data of Twitter, TikTok and other platforms, the diffusion mode of topic tags, information flow path and the scale of protest are analyzed. The results show that digital media plays three core roles in the women's rights movement in Iran: First, social media breaks through the government information blockade and realizes decentralized communication, and the # MahsaAmini hashtag exceeds 200 million page views in a week, became the hot topic of global public opinion; second, the digital platform reduced the cost of protest groups, Telegram and Instagram became the main mobilization tools, the protest action expanded from Iran to more than 150 cities, and the Berlin rally was more than 80,000 people, Set one of the largest protests in Germany in recent years; third, social media shapes global protest narrative, visual symbols such as hair cutting and burning headscarf become the focus of international communication," Zan, Zendegi, Azadi (women, life, freedom) "slogan strengthens the global resonance of women's rights protection.

This study innovatively proposed the framework of "triple mechanism of digital protest", combines quantitative data and qualitative analysis, and reveals the specific mode of role of digital media in information dissemination, social mobilization and narrative shaping. At the same time, the research reveals the dynamic game of the government's digital repression and protesters' technology, providing a new perspective for the future research on the interaction mode of government censorship and social media struggle. The results not only enrich the theoretical research of digital media in social movements, but also provide practical inspiration for the struggle against women's rights on a global scale.

**Keywords:** Iranian women's rights protection, digital protest, network social movement theory, resource mobilization theory, narrative framework, # MahsaAmini, white Wednesday

### Introduction

In recent decades, the role of digital media in social movements has undergone profound transformation, particularly in contexts where authoritarian regimes impose strict

control over traditional channels of communication. Iran exemplifies such a case, where restrictions on women's rights are deeply embedded in legal frameworks, cultural traditions, and political institutions. Despite these barriers, the women's rights protection movement in Iran has continued to evolve, finding new strategies to resist oppression and assert claims to equality. Among these strategies, the adoption of digital media has become especially significant, as it not only provides alternative avenues for communication but also reshapes the dynamics of mobilization and the construction of protest narratives.

Global attention to Iran's women's rights struggle has intensified with the rise of movements such as White Wednesday and the #MahsaAmini protests, both of which demonstrate how digital platforms enable the circulation of powerful symbols, slogans, and images that transcend national borders. Hashtags, viral videos, and online campaigns have transformed local grievances into global concerns, fostering solidarity across countries and cultures. These cases illustrate the ability of digital media to bypass state censorship, expand participation, and frame narratives that resonate internationally—functions that are particularly vital under conditions of political repression.

The theoretical foundation for analyzing such phenomena lies in scholarship on online social movements, resource mobilization, and frame theory. Previous studies have emphasized the capacity of digital platforms to lower the cost of collective action, strengthen organizational capacity, and generate new collective identities through symbolic communication. Yet, the specific mechanisms by which digital media simultaneously enables information dissemination, social mobilization, and narrative construction in highly restrictive environments remain underexplored, particularly in the Iranian context.

This study addresses this gap by examining the women's rights protection movement in Iran through a multi-level analysis of digital communication. By focusing on the cases of White Wednesday and #MahsaAmini, and analyzing user interaction data across platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, Telegram, and Instagram, the study identifies how digital media sustains activism, amplifies global attention, and negotiates the contest between state censorship and popular resistance. Through this analysis, the research proposes the framework of a "triple mechanism of digital protest"—comprising information dissemination, social mobilization, and narrative shaping—which offers new insights into the evolving role of digital media in contemporary social movements.

Ultimately, this research not only contributes to theoretical discussions on digital activism and women's rights but also highlights practical implications for understanding the interplay between government repression and technological resistance. By situating Iran's women's rights struggle within broader debates on global justice, this study underscores the transformative potential of digital media in amplifying marginalized voices and advancing gender equality.

## **Communication mechanism of digital media in the Iranian women's activist movement**

### **The communication characteristics and information flow mode of digital media**

The Iranian government has long exercised strict speech censorship and media control, making it difficult for the traditional media to report the protests objectively. In this context, social media has become a key tool for information flow. Through Twitter, Instagram, Telegram and other platforms, protesters can successfully bypass the traditional media censorship, quickly spread the protest messages, and attract global attention and support. For example, in the "White Wednesday" campaign and the Mahatha Amini incident, Iranian women posted photos and videos against wearing headscarves through social media, taking advantage of the decentralized nature of social platforms to break through government censorship. The use of the # WhiteWednesdays tag allowed protests to spread to other cities

and even overseas. Despite the government's blockade of multiple social platforms, protesters can bypass the blockade through VPN and post real-time protest progress on Twitter and Instagram, successfully building a global movement framework of "women, life, freedom".

### **Communication path of digital media and protest information diffusion mechanism**

The structured characteristics of digital media make the information spread rapidly through the network effects and present a multi-node connection mode. Take the #MahsaAmini tag as an example, which has quickly spread from Iran to the world on Twitter and attracted the support of many media, celebrities and politicians through interactive forms such as forwarding and comments. More than 200 million views of the #MahsaAmini tag within 72 hours of his death, showing the high efficiency and universality of information dissemination. In addition, visual content plays an important role in information dissemination. Protesters used Instagram and Telegram to generate global attention with images and videos of women removing their headscarves and cutting off their hair. Through the communication function of social platforms, these visual symbols further guide the support of international media and public figures, and expand the influence of the movement.

#### **Network structure and mobilization effect of digital media**

Digital media endows social movement participants with real-time response ability. In the wake of the Maqha Amini incident, Iranian social media users posted a lot of live protests in a short period of time, including live video and personal experience. This information not only helps more people understand the truth of the incident, but also promotes the internationalization of the movement. According to Twitter Analytics, the number of global tweets increased by more than 300 percent within 72 hours of the protests, demonstrating the strong influence of digital media among protest groups. Moreover, the interactivity of digital media enhances the cohesion of sports participants. Protesters and supporters interact through comments, retweets, live broadcasts and other forms to form a close social network, enhancing the sense of participation and consistency of the movement. This real-time response and interaction mode provides protesters with strong immediate transmission and collective action capabilities.

#### **Diversity and audience expansion of digital media**

The diversity of digital media makes information dissemination diversified and extensive. Protesters flexibly use different platforms to maximize the spread of movement information to a variety of audiences.

Twitter: As a global platform, Twitter has become the main channel for the global discussion of women's rights movements in Iran. The spread of the #MahsaAmini hashtag has put millions of tweets into a global focus, driving the international perception of the issue of women's rights in Iran.

Instagram: As a vision-driven platform, Instagram has unique advantages in image propagation and visual symbol shaping. Protesters showed the emotional and visual impact of the protest worldwide by publishing headscarves and photos and videos of the protest site.

Telegram: As an encrypted communication platform, Telegram has become an important tool for protesters in Iran. Especially when the government blocked other platforms, Telegram provided protesters with a safe and efficient communication channel, playing a key role in organizing gatherings and instant news dissemination.

### **Social mobilization of digital media in the Iranian women's activist movement**

#### **Network mobilization: a decentralized organization mode**

The mobilization of traditional social movements usually relies on centralized organizational structure, while digital media provides decentralized mobilization methods for

movements, enabling organizers and participants to mobilize more flexible resources and organize actions. In the Iranian women's rights movement, encrypted communication platforms such as Telegram have become the core tool for decentralized mobilization. Protesters used Telegram's group function to build multiple underground organizations and action groups, coordinate rallies, release protest messages, and maintain contact with supporters around the world. For example, when the government strengthened the cyber blockade, the Telegram provided the protesters with a safe information exchange space to quickly organize their actions and create widespread social mobilization effects. This decentralized mobilization not only breaks through the limitations of traditional media, but also enhances the flexibility and ability to withstand pressure.

#### **Transnational mobilization: global concern and collective action**

The global characteristics of digital media make the women's rights movement in Iran transcend national borders and form a unique model of transnational mobilization. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook enable protesters to quickly spread information around the world, attracting attention and support from the international community. In the case of Mahaxha Amini, the # MahsaAmini hashtag quickly became a call sign for a global rally on Twitter, attracting participation and discussion from millions of users. Supporters around the world organized demonstrations through social media, such as in September 2022, when protesters in Europe, North America and Asia took to the streets to support the Iranian women's activist movement. In addition, international human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have forwarded the protest messages through social media, calling on the international community to put pressure on the Iranian government. This transnational mobilization not only increases the external pressure on the Iranian government, but also enhances the social mobilization effect of the movement through global collective action.

#### **Platform Diversity: flexible mobilization and precise organization**

The diversity of digital platforms provides a variety of mobilization methods and strategies for the Iranian women's activist movement, enabling the organizers to flexibly select the target audience according to the characteristics of the platform.

**Instagram:** As a vision-oriented platform, Instagram plays a key role in mobilization. Protesters quickly struck a global emotional resonance by releasing visual content such as women's hair cuts and burning headscarves. These images and videos became the core symbol of the movement and attracted wide attention from the international community.

**Twitter:** The rapid propagation characteristic of Twitter enables the wide diffusion of motion information in a short time. The # MahsaAmini tag attracts political leaders, media and public figures, and many international politicians express their support through Twitter and put pressure on the Iranian government.

**Telegram:** As an encryption platform, Telegram provides a secure environment for protesters to communicate. Through local and transnational groups, protesters are able to adjust their operational strategies in real time and maintain precise control of protests everywhere

### **Narrative shaping of digital media in the Iranian women's activist movement**

#### **Construction of the core narrative: women, freedom and resistance**

The core narrative of the women's rights movement in Iran revolves around women's rights, freedom and resistance to oppression. Through extensive dissemination, digital media transform these narrative themes into demands for global identity and become the core symbol of the movement.



Women's rights and freedoms: Iranian women have long faced oppression such as headban law, educational restrictions and employment discrimination. After the Mahatha Amini incident, social media has become the main platform for discontent and protests. Through words, pictures and videos, the protesters repeatedly emphasized the slogan of "women, life, freedom" (Zan, Zendegi, Azadi), making it a central symbol of the movement. For example, images and videos of female hair cuts and headpads on Instagram and Twitter intuitively express the pursuit of freedom and have attracted wide attention from the international community.

Resistance to oppression: Digital media constructs an "anti-oppression" narrative by showing visual evidence of the protest scene. Pictures of conflicts released by protesters and videos of the government's violent response to the protests have enabled global viewers to directly feel the urgency of the protest, further reinforcing the justice and legitimacy of the movement.

### **Communication of the narrative framework: the multiple functions of the platform**

The diversity and interactivity of digital media platforms provide multiple channels for narrative communication, and different platforms promote the multi-dimensional expansion of narrative through their unique functions.

**Instagram:** As a vision-oriented platform, Instagram plays a key role in propagating symbolic images. Images of women picking headscarves and cutting hair have become the core symbol of global communication, crossing cultural barriers and triggering emotional resonance.

**Twitter:** Twitter Through the # MahsaAmini tag, quickly expand the movement narrative to the whole world. Short and easily disseminated tweets attract the participation of public figures, celebrities, and international organizations, further expanding the reach and influence of the narrative.

**YouTube And TikTok:** The video platform shows the scene of the protest and the women's heroic actions (such as waving a headscarf and cutting hair) through short videos, enhancing the visual impact and emotional appeal of the narrative. These contents further strengthen the global influence of the campaign through the sharing and discussion on the platform

### **Emotional resonance and identity: global support and solidarity**

Digital media for Iranian women's rights protection movement provides a platform of emotional expression, the movement can quickly reach the global audience, win international support and unity

**Global resonance:** Through visual narratives and emotional stories, protesters present the oppression of Iranian women to a global audience. The widespread spread of the # MahsaAmini tag allows the global audience to quickly understand the sports context and express support. For example, feminists in Western countries have linked the Iranian women's rights movement to global women's rights issues, forming a cross-cultural framework of global solidarity.

**Transnational identity:** The interactivity of digital media allows protesters to connect with supporters around the world. Feminists in Western countries have organized rallies and demonstrations through social media to call for global attention to Iranian women, further enhancing the emotional cohesion and international influence of the movement.

### **Challenges and Limitations of narrative shaping**

Although digital media plays an important role in narrative shaping, it also faces many challenges and limitations.

**Simplization and symbolization of narrative:** Although visual narrative and emotional resonance can attract attention, over-reliance on symbolic images (such as hair cutting and headscarf picking) may ignore the deep political and social problems behind the movement and limit the diversified development of narrative.

**Government censorship and repression:** The Iranian government's blockade and censorship of digital media and the violent repression of protesters have seriously affected the integrity and breadth of the narrative. Many protesters and information communicators face a crackdown, blocking the narrative spread.

### **Future development trend of digital media in the Iranian women's rights protection movement**

#### **The Future Development of Digital Media: Technological innovation and platform change**

Future developments of digital media will be driven by technological innovation and platform changes that may further influence the organization, dissemination, and expansion of social movements.

**Artificial Intelligence and Algorithms Recommendation:** Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies will play a bigger role in social platforms. Through data analysis and algorithmic recommendation, AI can help campaign organizers more efficiently locate potential supporters and disseminate core information. For example, in the Iranian women's rights movement, the algorithmic push on social media platforms significantly affects the effective effect of information dissemination. In the future, more complex algorithm mechanisms can optimize the information dissemination strategy, expand the audience scope, and help the organizers to adjust the action strategy through emotion analysis.

**Virtual reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR):** VR and AR technology will bring brand new forms of communication to digital media. Through an immersive experience, protesters can more intuitively demonstrate the emotions and actions of the movement. In the future, women's rights movements in Iran can use VR technology to allow global audiences to interact with protesters in a virtual space, enhancing emotional resonance and sense of participation.

**Decentralized platform and blockchain technology:** The decentralized characteristics of blockchain technology may provide new ways of information protection and circulation for digital media. Decentralized platforms (such as Mastodon) can avoid censorship and information manipulation of a single platform, and make movement information more compressive. For example, blockchain-based social platforms can ensure the free flow of information and reduce intervention in government scrutiny.

#### **The long-term impact of digital media on social movements: mobilization mechanism and social change**

The popularization and technological development of digital media not only provide a communication platform for social movements, but also may profoundly affect their long-term mobilization mechanism and the process of social change.

**Decentralization and grassroots mobilization:** Digital media provides a decentralized mobilization method for social movements, allowing participants to bypass traditional organizational structures and directly participate in action. For example, in Iranian women's activist movements, social media enables protesters to unite with global supporters through grassroots mobilization, a model that could have a profound impact on the organizational form of future social movements.

Globalization and transnational support: The global communication capacity of digital media enables social movements to transcend national boundaries and form a transnational support network. The Women's activist movement in Iran has attracted global attention through social media, and supporters in Western countries have built a transnational women's solidarity network through online solidarity and offline gatherings. This globalization support could further promote social change and even affect international policy.

The Accelerator of social change: Digital media accelerates the process of social change by rapidly spreading information, organizing large-scale gatherings, and advocating for policy change. The Iranian women's rights movement has attracted global attention in a short time, promoted the global consensus on the issue of women's equality, and promoted the implementation of policy and legal changes.

## Conclusion

This study explores the multi-dimensional role of digital media in Iran, combining the theory of network social movement, resource mobilization theory and framework theory. The results show that digital media provides strong support for women's activist movements in Iran by breaking through the information blockade, enhancing social mobilization and shaping the global narrative. However, the government's digital repression and technological confrontations also pose many challenges to the campaign. In the future, as technological innovation and platform change advance, digital media will play a greater role in social movements. The study suggests a further focus on the impact of technological innovation on social movements, while exploring how to respond to government censorship and repression to better promote social change.

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