

#MahsaAmini: Discourse as Opportunity and X Posts as Capital

Lan Cheng

Master of Arts Program in the Social Science, The University of Chicago

Professor Marshall Jean

July, 19th, 2024

Abstract

This article analyzes the success of diffusion and internationalization of the Mahsa Amini protests' revolutionary discourse in the context of digital era. By reviewing the historical course of contemporary Iran, the leaderless nature and porous structure of the Mahsa Amini protests necessitate the factors outside the formal organizational structure for its nationwide mobilization and global resonance. 235 English posts with highest hit in #MahsaAmini on X (formerly Twitter) were collected to conduct discourse analysis based on Laclau and Mouffe's theory to explore its meaning system. Discursive opportunity structure and Bourdieu's field theory are utilized as theoretical tool to elaborate the finding in the process of coding and analysis. In this case, discursive opportunity structure reveals the framing and subjectively existing opportunity within the context of Iran and international society respectively. Bourdieusian perspective is applied to provide an insight of how protesters and their supporter managed to change the distribution of various types of capital through social media, especially X.

Keywords: Mahsa Amini protests; discursive opportunity structure; field theory; social movement

Introduction

In 2022, a nation-wide uprising in Iran was provoked by the tragic death of a young Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini. Amini's death while under custody for the *bad hijab* has been widely regarded as the result of the police brutality. Bad hijab mainly refers to the inappropriate ways of wearing hijab (not fully covering the hair, for example), and it is regarded as an openly deviant behavior to the Islamic guideline of the regime (Bayat & Hodges, 2022). In 2020, an Iranian activist got beaten and sentenced to 15-year-imprisonment for bad hijab, while Amini died from it this time (Iskandarani, 2020). From rural places to Tehran, women and other Iranians protested the killing of Amini on the street at the risk of their own life. According to the report by *The Iran Primer*, there were demonstrations reported in over 200 cities across all 31 provinces in Iran, which has already transcended the protests in 2018 (160 cities) and 2019 (at least 100 cities) (The Iran Primer, 2023). On the social media, especially X (formerly Twitter) which has been utilized by Iranians since 2009 (Kermani, 2023), Iranians were questioning and disputing the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic in public opinion. By October 2022, 52 million posts were published with #MahsaAmini (Naqvi & Zaheer, 2022).

Within this context, it became a question that how the online protest on the social media exerted influence on and intertwined with the Iranian uprising on the ground to transform it from a reformist protest to a revolution against the regime, and served as a political field where online protestors accumulate their capital to gain more support from the international community for Iranians protesting on the street. This question in the context of the 2022 Iranian uprising deserves further inquiry and the attention from the global society because it

involves pressing issues like human rights violation against protestors, gender inequality, the struggle for democratization within an authoritarian and theocratic regime, and the ethnic oppression faced by the Kurdish and other minority population in Iran. Also, despite the brutal crackdown by the Islamic regime, its success in mobilizing millions of Iranians to participate in various type of protests and its internationalization across the world both demand a close examination with the sociological perspective.

Despite the capacity of rapid communication and many-to-many interaction of social media, some scholars tend to hold skeptical attitude to the efficacy of social media activism because the ability to create strong tie and collective identity is in doubt (Ravanmoglu Yilmaz, 2017). Their distrust on the effectiveness of it makes sense because of the repressive reaction of the authorities on online protest and slacktivism demanding little effort. Such argument against social media activism is mostly presented in the context of the wave of the new social movement, which primarily dedicates advocating for human rights rather than controlling the state power. Nonetheless, in the case of the 2022 Iranian uprising, its goal encompassed regime change and the pursuit for human rights, gender equality and ethnic equality, so the critics on the social media activism as a part of new social movement may have less explanatory capacity in the hashtag activism, #MahsaAmini. When seen from the perspective of Bourdieu's theory of practice and discursive opportunity structure, the power dynamic and the set of rules different from other fields in social media as a political field (Kermani & Tafreshi, 2022), make it a potential and potent field of interaction toward the mobilization by evoking people to participate, forming identity and solidarity, and fostering agency by breaking up the monopoly authority's monopoly of mass media and public opinion

(Sohrabi, 2021). In this case, social media is an indispensable channel for Iranian demonstrators compared with other protestors in open society (Kermani & Tafreshi, 2022)

To answer the main question on how discourse and social media played a crucial role in the 2022 Iranian uprising under the authoritarian regime, this project intends to take closer look on this issue by combining the empirical qualitative analysis based on the data collected from #MahsaAmini and the theoretical framework of Bourdieu's field theory and discursive opportunity structure. In the following sections, this thesis will introduce the history of revolution in Modern Iran and conduct a discourse analysis on the popular posts with the method of Laclau and Mouffe and its framing to gain visibility and support. The analysis with field theory will show the redistribution of capital in the #MahsaAmini as a political field and how it has changed the power relation in the reversed landscape in public opinion. Based on the analysis and revolution history, this thesis argues that in a condition lacking political opportunity in an institutional level, Mahsa Amini protests managed to mobilize nationwide protest and gain solidarity from international community by recognizing the discursive opportunity in both Iran and global society. In other words, despite the regime left little channel for protesters and activists to call for a change and shape the political agenda in the governmental institution, advocators in English online sphere strategically reshaped their discourse based on the context in global public opinion.

The historical course of Iranian protest and revolution under authoritarian regime

Since the widespread demonstration of Mahsa Amini was not isolated from previous historical periods, there is a necessity to retrospect the modern and contemporary history of Iranian movement (especially Iranian women movement) and the progress of Mahsa Amini

protests. The retrospection will also reflect on how Mahsa Amini protests inheriting a culture of protest against authoritarian regime (Brinkhof, 2022). By focusing on an organizational perspective, this review will also discuss the organizational ability of social movement organizations of those protests to argue for the necessity of theoretical perspective of discourse and symbol.

The first wave of Iran's nationwide revolution

In the early 20th century, Tobacco Protest and Constitutional Revolution together composed the first wave of Iran's nationwide revolution (Povey, 2016). This revolution occurred during the reign of the Qajar dynasty, characterized by a porously and loosely knit authoritarian regime with a weak military and inefficient bureaucratic structure (Povey, 2016). Consequently, political power in Iran was concentrated among a few elite landlord families. Meanwhile, rapid urbanization and the absence of central authority facilitated the rapid growth of Iran's diverse civil society in urban areas (Povey, 2016).

In 1891, multiple social groups united to protest against foreign colonial powers' disregard for Iran's economic sovereignty. These groups included clergy (*ulama*), the middle class engaged in commerce (*bazaar*), intellectuals, and the lower classes, with significant organizational roles played by ethnic minorities and women within Iran (Povey, 2016). The victory of the Tobacco Protest led to the diffusion of "constitutionalism" across various social classes (Povey, 2016).

Subsequently, the Constitutional Revolution erupted in 1905 with the aim of toppling the autocratic rule and colonial oppression in major Iranian cities. Before being disrupted by tough foreign interventions, this revolution similarly mobilized diverse protest groups as

during Tobacco Protest. Throughout this era, Iran's religious organizations began to actively participate in these political movements. However, ideological divisions among religious figures led some to align with the dictatorial monarchy, while liberal religious figures tended to cooperate with protest movements against the Qajar dynasty (Povey, 2016). Women not only voiced calls for freedom and democracy but also emphasized issues of gender equality and violence against women during this entire revolutionary period.

During this historical period, while pre-modern gender issues such as early marriage and polygamy persisted, in terms of the practice of mandatory veiling, it was primarily restricted in the elite women of the Qajar dynasty (Povey, 2016). Women from lower social class did not need to veil. Iranian women who spontaneously engaged in and organized the boycotts realized their potential for their political involvement, and thereby established various secret societies aimed at discussing the women-related issues (Mahdi, 2004). From the perspective of external environment, due to the religious and political suppression on women's political status by the authority, Iranian women have no legitimacy for voting and establishing women associations (Mahdi, 2004). Therefore, grassroot based secret society were a better option than open association. Despite not being publicized and recognized as legitimate as official social movement organizations, Iranian women have begun the first pace of political practice of weaving inter-female social networks in the private sphere ushered by the influence of feminist's intellectuals and their writings (Mahdi, 2004).

The struggle under Pahlavi Dynasty

During the less than one hundred years of Pahlavi dynasty rule, we can clearly observe the relationship between the degree of democratization of the regime and the development of

social movement organizations and civil society (Zhao, 2012). This history of struggle can be roughly divided into three stages, with the political pressure exerted by the regime on society fluctuating across these stages. These fluctuations structurally affected the availability of political opportunities.

The rule of Reza Pahlavi from 1925 to 1941 was marked by significant efforts to centralize political power and modernize Iran, alongside a deliberate weakening of traditional religious and cultural practices through assertive authoritarian means (Povey, 2016). He implemented a series of reform policies aimed at creating a Westernized and hierarchical Iranian society, and these were done by diminishing the influence of traditional elites and religious institutions and prioritizing the male privilege in the law of marriage (Povey, 2016).

Reza Shah's tough governance was also characterized by the suppression of dissent and the civil society. To maintain the dominance of the Pahlavi family and the state, Shah outlawed strikes and unions, and also, he dissolved independent news agencies, political parties, and women's organizations and stripped parliamentary power (Povey, 2016). By the end of 1930s, social movement organizations (SMOs) were mostly spontaneously organized by grassroots under Reza Shah's dictatorship. Because of the intolerance of non-conforming women organization, the regime forcibly banned many civil-based organizations and constituted government-controlled women organizations. To operate officially and openly, many local SMOs or civil women organizations choose to ally under the umbrella of national women organizations (Mahdi, 2004). They continued to lobbied the political leader in the governmental institutions, but compromised to organized activities in depoliticized and educational style (Mahdi, 2004). In this historical stage, women's organization were

centralized, institutionalized, and bureaucratized by the authority, and all women activities needed to gain the legitimacy in the channel of government-controlled organizations (Mahdi, 2004).

During World War II, due to Reza Pahlavi's admiration for Nazi Germany and the increasing importance of oil, the Allies deposed him and installed his son as the new Shah. During this period, Iranian political parties and organizations experienced significant growth. Minority groups also began organizing within leftist, communist, and liberal political groups to fight for independence or autonomy. In 1951, a popular nationalist movement advocating for the nationalization of the oil industry, the introduction of press freedom, and granting women the right to vote successfully pressured the Shah to appoint Mohammad Mossadegh, the leader of the National Front, as Prime Minister (Povey, 2016).

Upon taking office, Mossadegh's first act was to pass the oil nationalization bill, which provoked dissatisfaction from both the United Kingdom and the United States. Consequently, with support from these two countries, Mohammad Reza Shah attempted two coups, and in 1953 successfully overthrew Mossadegh's democratically elected government (Povey, 2016). Following this coup, secular leftist organizations were severely repressed, and religious groups tended to remain politically silent. This continued until Ayatollah Khomeini emerged, leading the only domestic opposition that openly condemned the tyranny of the Pahlavi dynasty (Povey, 2016).

Post-revolution demonstrations

Since the participants in the Islamic Revolution included not only conservative and traditional religious forces but also more secular-leaning middle-class and urban residents,

there was considerable division within the revolutionary ranks. This division led to street armed struggles between the Khomeinists and their political rivals following the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty (Shahi & Abdoh-Tabrizi, 2020). Between 1992 and 2009, although urban riots and student protests occurred, these movements were quickly suppressed and did not pose a substantial threat to the regime (Shahi & Abdoh-Tabrizi, 2020). However, since the outbreak of the Green Movement in 2009, the scale of protests began to expand, and the security forces started using lethal violence and mass arrests (Shahi & Abdoh-Tabrizi, 2020).

Since the establishment of the theocratic rule of fundamentalist Islam in Iran, movements of various scales have been continuously organized by Iranian women to oppose the betrayal of the republic, since women and student were among the primary groups actively involved in the 1978 Islamic Revolution against Pahlavi Dynasty. However, after the victory of Khomeinist pursuing the total islamization of the Iran society, their demonstration suffered great setback and most women's organizations were again forced to shut down. Mahdi analyzed the failure of women's struggle before 1980s, and her point is still valuable when it comes to the case of Amini revolution. Her argument was that such failure of Iranian women movements was due to the internal divergence and the sociological characteristics. The division of political ideology reduce the solidarity of Iranian women as a whole. The leaderless and structureless feature of movement and the lack of network among protestors weaken the power to topple down the dictatorship (Mahdi, 2004).

The structure and strategies applied were highly related to the political opportunity and social context in the era of Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). During the term of Khatami administration (1997-2005), reformists' effort and the openness of the society created more

space for the activities of SMOs (Assoudeh & Salazar, 2017). In this period, SMOs were highly segmented, and they separate into secular and Islamic feminist groups (Assoudeh & Salazar, 2017). While during the term of President Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), when Khatami's reform policies was reversed, Iranian activists gathered to build a noncentralized, leaderless, but densely reticulated coalition, called OMSC (One Million Signatures Campaign to End Discriminatory Laws). In a high-pressure political environment, activist groups adjusted their strategy and turn to a polycentric and horizontal style of organization. They successfully established connection with Global West through Iranian diasporas to gain more support (Assoudeh & Salazar, 2017). In Bayat's work on Mahsa Amini protests, his elaboration suggested the continuity of such organizational structure and strategies in this impactful movement.

Earlier than the ignition of Mahsa Amini protests, Bayat introduced the concept of "non-movement" to name and elucidate the resistance of women in Iran and the Middle East under the stringent political repression (Bayat, 2013). Non-movement does not entail contentious politics; it lacks organization and is merely rooted in a collective idea of "being present," which motivated Iranian women to appear in public spaces such as university, gyms, and workplace, maintain a participation in public life without giving in to the fundamentalist gender norms (Bayat, 2013). Alemzadeh also proposed a similar argument in her analysis of Womavn, Life, Freedom movement as a feminist part of Mahsa Amini protests. She argues that Iranian women's pursuit of "normalcy" as the centrality of this movement "manifest its disorganization" (Alemzadeh, 2024). When Mahsa Amini protests escalated into the form of contentious politics, it continued the organizational style of OMSC (One Million Signatures

Campaign to End Discriminatory Laws), rendering the concept of non-movement not applicable. Thence, Bayat further proposes that although local leaders or ad hoc collectives exist during protest in various locations in Iran, this fluid, polycentric, and networked organizational mode endows the movement with flexibility, enabling it to avoid frontal repression akin to guerilla (Bayat, 2023). However, this organizational structure lacked a clear mechanism of accountability and leadership, which led to its incapability to serve as the potent alternative to confront and overthrow the incumbent regime and penetrating the power vacuums (Bayat, 2023).

When elaborating social structure, culture, and collective action, Zhao concludes that the commonality of totalitarian state is the extreme weakness of civil society independent from the state (Zhao, 2012). States with such regime can prevent the uprising by powerful security force, but meanwhile, such kind of suppression may radicalize the contradiction between the state and the civil society and make conflicts even more irreconcilable. Also, social movements in these countries may usually have larger scale, stronger spontaneity, but as well as weaker organizational ability (Zhao, 2012). Thereby, mainstream culture and emotion outweigh the organizational and mobilization strategy with relatively high spontaneity in the nature of these protests (Zhao, 2012). This premise is the reason why this study mainly focused on the analysis on cultural and discursive aspect of Mahsa Amini to examine its expansion of influence and global response on the Internet.

Theoretical framework and literature review

According to forementioned discussion on the organizational structure of Mahsa Amini protests, its characteristic of leaderless and the lack of SMOs with formal structure due to the

long-term suppression on Iran's civil society necessitate the analysis on its discourse and the culture influencing the formation of it. Also, the scarcity of political opportunity and the high spontaneity of mobilization make it crucial to pay more attention on the actors outside the political institution and the detail of their action and choices to change the power dynamic within this movement. Therefore, this section will introduce and review the theoretical frameworks, discursive opportunity structure and Bourdieu's field theory, that are of significant to the analysis of Mahsa Amini protests in the following section.

To be clear about the scarcity of political opportunity in this case, I would like to briefly introduce the concept of political opportunity, which is a part of theoretical origin of discursive opportunity structure. The precise definition of political opportunity has long been a debated issue within political sociology ever since its first use by Eisinger (Meyer, 2004). Given that it is a comprehensive concept and has been utilized as an analytical tool together with the political process theory for decades, Giugni's definition of political opportunity best fits in this discussion. In his work, *Political Opportunity: still a useful concept*, political opportunity refers to "those aspects of the political system that affect the possibilities that challenging groups have to mobilize effectively" (Giugni, 2011). To be more specific, political opportunities could emerge when the challenged political system becomes more vulnerable. For instance, conditions that can be recognized as political opportunities are probably the division within the political elite coalition, the loose repressive structure, and the increasing diversity in the political voice and electorate.

However, due to the definitional issues surrounding the concept of political opportunity, its inclusivity has made it prone to broad and generalized use (Zhao, 2012). Gamson and

Meyer's solution to this problem was to categorize different types of structural factors into a framework that includes stable, emergent, cultural, and institutional political opportunities (Gamson & Meyer, 1996). While emphasizing the cultural aspect, their refinement did not resolve the problem of fuzzy definitions but instead made the concept even more inclusive.

Another theoretical root of discursive opportunity structure is framing analysis theory as another mainstream social movement theory besides political opportunity theory. Traditional social movement theories, like political opportunity structure, have been criticized for their excessive focus on non-discursive factors and their neglect of the role of discourse in propaganda and mobilization. Thus, integrating Goffman's concept of framing alignment, Snow developed another school of thought that emphasizes frame analysis (Zhao, 2012). This school focuses on how leaders of social movements adjust and reshape their ideologies and discourse systems based on reality (such as the interests, beliefs, and ideologies of mobilized actors), aiming to garner greater acceptance and resonance for their discourse (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Both sets of theories encounter different challenges in empirical research. Apart from the problem of overly broad definitions lacking ontological significance, another issue with political opportunity structure theory is being “overly structural” (Amenta & Halfmann, 2012). Since the lack of discussion about structural conditions (such as political institution, social cleavage, and policies) of the discourse effects, theorists of frame analysis find it difficult to explain why similar frames or discourses can have different effects in different political environments (Koopmans & Statham, 1999). As a practice bridging the theoretical gaps and enhancing explanatory power, Koopmans and Statham introduced the concept of

discursive opportunity structure (McCammon, 2022). This concept, while emphasizing discourse itself, advocates analyzing the pre-existing contextual opportunities that facilitate the dissemination of discourse. After its inception, this concept was further developed by Koopmans and Ferree and has been applied by multiple scholars in empirical studies (Ferree, 2002; Koopmans & Olzak, 2004; Koopmans & Statham, 1999), including cases involving the contribution of social media (Molaei, 2015). In the analysis section, the definition and other important elements of discursive opportunity will be further discussed.

The concept of discursive opportunity structure aids this study in examining both the discourse itself and the structural factors faced by discourse, such as the already existing protest culture in Iran (Brinkhof, 2022). Bourdieu's field theory, on the other hand, allows for a systematic analysis by viewing #MahsaAmini as a political field where various actors (including activists, journalists, and protesters) cooperating and competing for power and influence on audiences. This analysis can reflect how social media not only provides a new arena for power struggles but also offers protesters more opportunities to accumulate leverage. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory enables us to temporarily move away from a structural perspective and focus more on the dynamics of power and relational analysis among actors.

As theorists realized the tendency of overly stressing the structural characteristic of political opportunity, the focal point shifted to non-state actors beyond the formal political system, such as the transnational company and media. Also, Ancelovici's interpretation on Merton's opinion on opportunity structure suggests the theoretical foundation of the iteration of the political opportunity structure with Bourdieu's theory. The changing distribution of

opportunity and how the dynamic allows the possibility for actors to foster their agency, and in order to take closer look at the process, as Ancelovici postulated, theorists could take advantage of Bourdieu's theory to develop an alternative approach (Ancelovici, 2019). Built on Bourdieu's theory of the field and habitus, scholars studied the emergence, mobilization, and the decline of protest by considering the social movement as the "field of contention" or the "field of protest" as a sub field to the "political field" in actual cases (Ray, 1998; Crossley, 2003). Other scholars also put forward the internal link between the participants in the movement and Bourdieu's work to assume the importance of Bourdieu's theory to provide insights when analyzing social movements (Schmitt, 2016). Given the potential capabilities to address the serious problem of political opportunity structure, Ancelovici developed the Field Opportunity Structure (FOS) as a novel attemptation. He listed the benefits for borrowing the lens from Bourdieusian perspective, but he also pointed out that the idea of field opportunity structure as a general hypothesis still remains to be validated empirically (Ancelovici, 2019).

In another vein of interaction, the studies on the influence of social media on the mobilization and the structure of social movements started to pile up since the 2009 G20 Summit (Poell, 2014). To argue how social media have changed the strategies in social movement profoundly, scholars look into the historical roots and tactics widely used before the invention of the Internet, for example, public speech, storytelling, and distributing pamphlets (Lutrell, 2023). Other scholars, by analyzing how the available media and communication technology adopted by the participants shape the tactics utilized in social movements, contend the great potential of social media as a tool to build momentum for

activism. (Rozelle, 2023) To examine whether social media and hashtags could be fields for ethnographic research, scholars studied how social media served as a platform for marginalized groups to express their dissent and alternative discourse to the biased narrative toward their racialized body in the Ferguson case. (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015)

Studying the same case, hashtag activism #Ferguson#, Barnard took a different approach, Bourdieusian perspective. In the light of field theory, he figured out that Twitter has provided a platform for the hybrid of the field of journalistic and journo-activism, and thereby, plays a role in reporting on and bolstering social change (Barnard, 2015). As a classic sociological perspective, Bourdieu's theory of practice has been widely applied as an analytical frame to many cases of social movement on social media. Taking advantage of Facebook crawling of the Swedish field of culture, Lindell pointed out that the field theory provides an alternative approach to understand social interaction on social media to the social network analysis and could be the supplementary to the empirical field study (Lindell, 2017). On the other hand, online field theory combines the field theory and social network analysis as a novel method to study how online actors engage in issues and online collective actions (O'Neil & Ackland, 2019).

On Iran's case specifically, Sohrabi, argues that the emergence of new media has broken the monopoly and censorship of the mass media by the authoritarian government of Iran, and that the legitimacy of the regime is challenged by the capacity for agenda-setting and the efficiency with which they spread dissent that they carry (Sohrabi, 2021). The fragility of regime legitimacy can be seen as a political opportunity. He is equally convinced that the emergence of new media expands the space of the public sphere (Sohrabi, 2021), which, from

Bourdieu's point of view, is a change in the structure and rules of the field. Kermani and Tafreshi, starting from Bourdieu's field theory, the networked public is viewed as the agent and Twitter as the political field, and an inductive study is developed (Kermani & Tafreshi, 2022). In Kermani's latest work, he tried to discuss the root of #MahsaAmini and the struggle of online participants under the suppression of the authoritarian regime (Kermani, 2023). In the discussion of the relation between youth crisis in Iran and the uprising of Mahsa Amini protests, Khatam seen "youthfulness" as a habitus to describe young Iranian's mental disposition of society's structural irresponsibility and hopelessness for the future (Khatami, 2023).

Methodology

X, the former Twitter as one of the most prominent social media platforms for both political and cultural communication globally, has served as an important tool in non-western social movements. It allows the access to firsthand accounts, opinions, expressions, and symbolic behaviors in both real-world and online protests. Instead of broad keyword searching on X, the hashtag (#) has been one of the optimal locations for data collection for the following reasons. First of all, hashtags have been the main venue for online protests of Iranian and supporters from the international community. Then, the hashtag created a relatively bounded social field that can be separated from unrelated information. It can function as a boundary marker, delineating a specific discourse community focused on the cultural and political impact of Amini's death and the subsequent protests in Iran and other countries. Also, hashtags facilitate the documentation and quick digital retrieval for updated news and information (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015), making it easier to track the evolution of the

discourse over time.

Among the cluster of hashtags related to Mahsa Amini protests, I selected #MahsaAmini as the field because of Amini's symbolic significance to the whole movement. Also, this hashtag is the most critical rally point for online protests, and distinct from the Persian hashtag of Mahsa Amini protests, #MahsaAmini has been a hub for information covering protests related to Iran and other countries.

Data collection

The data collecting process was divided into two parts. For the first part, I gathered 114 English posts under the hashtag #MahsaAmini from the "top" section on X by utilizing MAXQDA's Web Collector tool. These 114 posts with top popularity were collected over a 6-month period from September 16th to March 15th, which coincided with the peak of the protest movement in Iran. As for the second part, I divided this period into six 30-day time blocks to analyze how discussions evolved within this time range. Then, by using X's advanced search function to sort out the most influential posts in each time block, I collected 20 English posts in "top" section and tried to avoid posts overlapped with those already collected. This strategy allowed for a systematic examination of the temporal progression of discourse related to #MahsaAmini, providing insights into how public engagement and the interplay of online and offline protest evolved during different phases of the movement.

Coding strategy

The coding process was structured into two separate cycles. For the first cycle, I took descriptive coding and in-vivo coding as the main coding method from a basic elemental perspective as focused filter (Saldaña, 2013). In the pre-coding process, I read through all the

posts and the attached videos to build the category list for the following coding work. By descriptive coding, all the topics and elements within a post, such as account, text, hashtag, @ (at sign) and attached image or video were summarized into a word or a short phrase. Since the posts covered diverse and large volume of data, descriptive coding provided a structure framework for organizing them into multi-level and meaning categories and help to have a holistic and comprehensive and clear grasp of the entire dataset. Also, in this process, more detailed subcodes were created to describe the very crucial topics such as “online protest”, “no-hijab presence”, “headscarves”, and “fire” under the code of “protest”. Meanwhile in the first cycle, in-vivo coding highlighted the original language in the posts by those users. This approach can preserve the authenticity of user’s voices and emotions, enhancing the nuance of the analysis.

For the second cycle of coding, a theoretical coding method was applied to interpret the data through the theory of Bourdieusian and discursive opportunity structure. In this cycle, I centered on and categorize the data from core categories for discourse analysis of those most influential posts in #MahsaAmini, such as religion, visibility, and violence. Also, I highlighted and coded those data that can be interpreted as cultural and symbolic capital to take closer look at the redistribution of capital in this political field. By focusing on the core coding identifying the main conflicts and issues (Saldaña, 2013), this process helps to bridge the empirical observation with theoretical concepts for the following analysis.

Discursive opportunity and “woman, life, freedom”

Referring to the modern history of revolutions and protests in Iran, we can argue that the success or failure of these movements is often related to the degree of democratization and

political freedom under the regime. However, Masha Amini Protest, as part of the social unrest from 2017-2019, faced the very similar political environment. Despite the lack of institutional opportunity, this protest, which began in Tehran and Amini's hometown, still garnered nationwide support and attention from many democratic countries. Even though this revolution did not end up with the successful overthrowing of the Islamic Republic, the political opportunity structure theory by Tarrow struggles to explain the large-scale mobilization without a unified and clear political movement organization and political opportunities, as well as the high level of spontaneity in this mobilization.

Using Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis method, and after analyzing the discourse of the 235 most influential posts under the hashtag #MahsaAmini, I argue that the discourse system of the Mahsa Amini protests has secured more visibility for the struggle and mobilization of this movement. In the following sections, this paper will first analyze the discourse, or framing, of the Mahsa Amini protests. After introducing the overall context of this discourse, I will use the Discursive Opportunity Structure (DOS) to analyze how this discourse system has brought visibility, resonance, and legitimacy to the movement on social media.

Revolution as discourse

In prior to analyzing Mahsa Amini protests discourse, I would like to briefly introduce the analytic method developed by Laclau and Mouffe. Following a structuralist tradition, Laclau and Mouffe examined discourse a meaning system, where nodal points as the core concept connecting and giving meaning to other elements. Elements are the signifiers conveying multiple potential meanings, which can involve the use of language, images, or

gestures. Articulation process is the practice to position the existing behavior or words as main element to the meaning system in order to give them the meaning (Jan, 2023). In this process, the multiple meanings of elements are reduced to partially fixed in the meaning system (Müller, 2011). In the otherization process, the discourse constructs the other as the outside, either an enemy with irreconcilable conflict or a legitimate competitor within a shared symbolic space. This method allows researchers to approach and analyze certain political discourse systematically and critically.

Nodal point: the revolt

Although the most widely recognized and influential slogan of the Mahsa Amini protests is "Woman, Life, Freedom," this slogan does not constitute the nodal point of the movement's discourse. According to coded data, the nodal point within the dominant discourse of this movement is revolutionary resistance against the regime.

Among those actively participating in the protests in Iran, it is not only the pioneering female protesters but also a significant number of men. Additionally, minority ethnic groups and religious communities that have faced structural discrimination in Iranian society for many years, such as Kurdish, Balochi, and Sunni Muslims, were also involved (Goodrich, 2023). On Twitter, the account *Kolbarnews English* focuses on the repression faced by Kurds in this movement. Moreover, the contextual factors contributing to the ignition of this movement across all provinces of Iran include not only the pursuit of gender equality and political freedom but also Iran's sluggish economy. The protests that erupted in 2019 and were violently suppressed were driven by issues such as state-controlled oil pricing and a long-standing unequal redistribution system (Shahi & Abdoh-Tabrizi, 2020). These enduring

unresolved grievances are reflected in other slogans of the Mahsa Amini protests, such as "This is the year Seyyed Ali (Khamenei) will be overthrown" and "Death to the dictator!" Among these various slogans, "Woman, Life, Freedom" serves merely as the most conspicuous banner.

Beyond slogans, the revolutionary resistance as the nodal point is also evidenced by hashtags. I coded and categorized all hashtags appearing in the text of posts, excluding #MahsaAmini. Online protesters created new hashtags for those arrested or subjected to violence during the protests, as well as for artists and performers supporting the protesters. For instance, #SepidehQolliyan, a female Iranian political activist repeatedly imprisoned, and #HassanFirouzi, who was arrested and sentenced to death for participating in protests. The sporadic characteristic of protests across Iran necessitates exposure and documentation, prompting online activists to create hashtags for these events, such as #Isfahan, #Karaj, and #Tehran. According to reports, the Islamic Revolutionary Gard Corps (IRGC) attacks locations where protests have erupted or may erupt, such as Ekbatan or schools, and these attacked sites are also marked with hashtags. In the name of protecting the regime and Islamic Revolution, IRGC has been serving the political leaders to suppress the protests and dissents (Alfonch, 2008). Slogans related to the protest movement are used alongside #MahsaAmini, such as #MahsaAmini, #OpIran, #WalkoutIRI, #IranProtest, #WomanLifeFreedom, and #IranRevolution. Among the 235 posts, 15 used #WomanLifeFreedom, while #IranProtest and #IranRevolution appeared in 12 and 62 posts, respectively.

Therefore, because of the contextual factors of the uprising and participants' strong

desire to revolt made the revolutionary resistance against the regime serves as the central nodal point, shaping the movement's slogans, hashtags, and the broader narrative framework of the protests.

Main elements: the oppressed, protests, and secularism

The identity of the oppressed is a prominent element emphasized in these posts, and the Mahsa Amini protests itself originated from the death of Amini, a young Kurdish woman, and the mourning that followed. The movement is named after a victim, and subsequently, other victims who share a similar fate with her are continually highlighted within this discourse. For example, while reporting on the death of another female mountaineer, Ghazaleh Chelavi, who was shot by the police, Alinejad as journalist and activist, mentioned Chelavi's words in her post: "We are all Mahsa Amini (@AlinejadMasih, 2022)" Alinejad also referred to Chelavi as "another Mahsa" to remind the audience of the shared identity of Iranian woman as the oppressed(@AlinejadMasih, 2022).

While the Iranian people, especially women, are not directly defined as victims of the Islamic Republic's rule, many influential posts describe the cruel and unjust treatment of protesters and their supporters during the movement by the regime. These posts report 28 death cases, including those directly caused by police and security force brutality, executions, and shootings during the crackdown. Additionally, 20 posts document political prisoners sentenced to death after being arrested. Masih Alinejad, reported on Majidreza Rahnavard's public execution in Mashhad on X, commenting, "The regime's method of dealing with protests is execution (@AlinejadMasih, 2022)."

Out of the 235 posts, 111 contain textual information directly related to the physical

violence endured by Iranians and protesters at the hands of the regime's armed forces. Accompanied by photos and videos, these posts detail the regime's violent and unjust actions, including kidnappings, torturing, public beatings, murder, threats, attacks, imprisonment, mass arrests, and gender-based violence. The attacks not only include armed attacks on residential areas but also the poisoning of young female students with chemical gas, as they are the most active participants in the movement. Activist Amin Pouria shared a political comic revealing the regime's strategy of violent suppression (see figure 1): using ice cream trucks, ambulances, and helicopters to transport security forces to protest sites and even collective prayer gatherings to shoot people (@mamadporii, 2022).

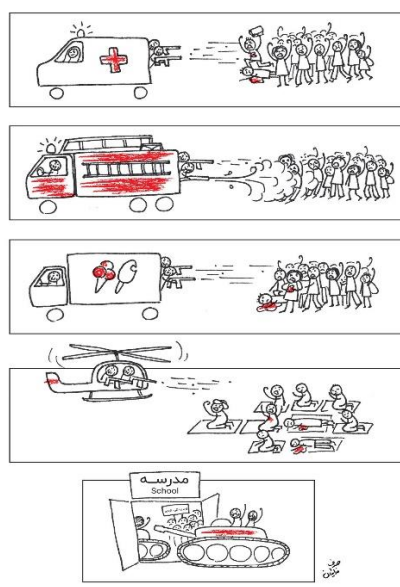


Figure 1

In addition to physical violence, posts also repeatedly mention the enforced silence imposed on Iranians when mobilizing. *NetBlock* confirmed on September 21, 2022, the restriction of access to social media platforms like Instagram and the interference with multiple internet providers (@netblocks, 2022). Furthermore, four posts address censorship and the surveillance on Iranian celebrities, and seven posts discuss the Iranian government's

implementation of internet blackouts within the country.

Besides to the emphasizing the identity as the oppressed of protesters resulting from violence by police or security force and internet blackout, another focus in the texts, images, and video information from the posts collected is the protests themselves. Due to the symbolic behaviors within the protests, these activities constitute a part of the revolutionary discourse. First, the most representative acts of civil disobedience are related to the hijab. As an over-determined garment, the hijab is considered by scholars to be an "empty signifier" lacking intrinsic meaning, thus being defined and imbued with significance differently in various contexts. Or say, the overdetermination, according to Althusser's definition, has been embodied by hijab because its symbolic meaning cannot be attributed to single cause but complex contexts (Hau, 2020). During the Pahlavi dynasty's rule, due to the Westernization and secularism policies concerning women's dress, women were prohibited from veiling in public. Therefore, during the Islamic Revolution, wearing the hijab represented resistance against the Pahlavi monarchy and solidarity with the revolution (Derayeh, 2011). However, after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, due to the regime's fundamentalist bent to Shiism, veiling became a legal obligation for women. During the Iran-Iraq War, the government intensified the punishment for "bad hijab" to divert attention from the deaths and fears of the war, hoping that focusing on the hijab issue would prevent demonstrations against the war (Shirazi-Mahajan, 1993).

Thus, in the popular posts under #MahsaAmini, female protesters' acts of unveiling in public, no-hijab presence, waving hijabs, and even burning hijabs signify dissatisfaction and resistance against the authoritarian rule of the Islamic Republic, its theocratic governance,

and the use of women's bodies as venues for body politics. According to polling by the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitude in Iran (GAMAAN), 84% of Iranians who oppose mandatory hijab want regime change (Aarabi & Shelley, 2022).

Another symbolic behavior frequently documented on the streets and posted under #MahsaAmini is hair-cutting. Similar to burning the hijab, hair-cutting is another form of rejection to the state's control over one's body. Unlike the hijab, however, this symbolic act has historical roots in ancient Persian and Kurdish traditions, where people used this ritual to express grief and mourning (Chafiq, 2022). Videos and photos of this political gesture posted on social media sparked a global movement, with many celebrities and politicians imitating the act to show solidarity with the protests and condemn the Iranian regime (Goodrich, 2023).

Reflecting a broader desire among protestors for political freedom, the demanding for the separation of religion from the state is also the main element of the Mahsa Amini protests discourse. Since the Islamic Republic is built upon the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih*, the Supreme Leader seized the power to control the governance in the name of sacred. Therefore, Activist Pouria calls the Islamic Republic as “Mullah’s regime”, and the Mullah is clerics of the Shia sect and has the right to interpret *Qur’an* and *Shari’at* (the Islamic law). Slogans used by online protestor clearly indicate the request to separate the state and religion as well. For instance, a scholar put a slogan in a post that “We are not the Islamic republic. We are Iran (@Sativa888, 2023)”. Also, together with comic depicting a scissors cutting off the Islamic regime from the Iran, a user supporting the Pahlavi family, chants that “Beware! WE are IRĀN (EARUN), Not the Islamic ReFucklic of Mullahs! (@KhosroKhonyagar, 2022)”

Under #MahsaAmini, artists and activists publish political comics reflecting the

secularism idea by applying elements from the design of the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the center of this tricolor flag, the red emblem of “Allah” in Arabic is set on the white band, reflecting the theocracy in Iran politics. In Sogand’s comic, which accumulated over 31,000 favorites and 11,000 of reposts, eight persons are trying their best to push the emblem in the white band out of the tricolor flag. In another comic posted by artist, @ghalamfarsa, the execution of protesters is depicted as the Islamic regime's harvesting of the lives of dissenters. In the illustration, one hand controls the protester's fist, while the other wields a bloody sickle to sever the protester's arm. Both arms are adorned with the emblem representing "Allāh" from the center of the Islamic Republic's flag. The only colors present in this cartoon are the red emblem and the blood on the sickle (see figure 2).

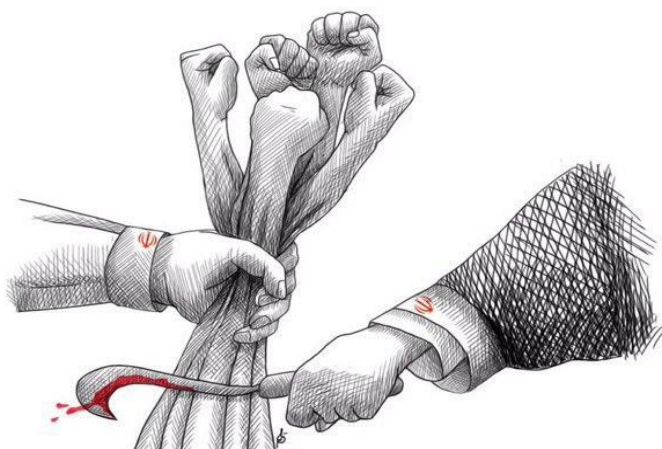


Figure 2

In the popular discourse in #MahsaAmini, users provide a handful of details about the violence of Iranian police and security and internet blackout to construct the identity of the oppressed Iranians, especially protesters in the street. Thereby, victimhood is sewed into the discourse to justify the civil obedience in the protests. The symbolic behaviors, such as cutting hair, waving and burning the hijab, are given the meaning of revolting to the

theocracy, the rejection to dictatorship, and the body politics onto the woman body practiced by the regime. Also, popular slogans and comics reflect the indictment of the bloody sin of the regime and the determination to separate religion from Iran politics.

Otherization: regime as the oppressor

The construction of the identity of the oppressed, derived from accusations against the Islamic Republic for its violent repression of protesters and ordinary citizens as well as its blockade of internet access, simultaneously fosters the construction of the 'other.' Given that the nodal point of the Mahsa Amini protests is regime change, this discourse is in complete opposition to Shiism, forming an antagonistic conflict.

Drawing on Carl Schmitt's view of politics, Mouffe asserts that the friend-enemy relationship forms the basis of antagonistic relationships, thus distinguishing between self and other (Jan, 2023). Based on the analysis of the main elements discussed earlier, in the #MahsaAmini discourse, users reflect the regime's hostility towards protesters and even innocent Iranians by describing and documenting the regime's brutal suppression tactics and methods. On the other hand, the documentation of symbolic actions by protesters and the praise for their courage indicate a clear denial of the regime's legitimacy by the Iranian protesters. In a comic published by activist Pouria with #MahsaAmini (see figure 3), the IRGC representing theocratic rule and the Iranian people stand opposed, with a mullah pointing to the slaughtered protesters and calling them the 'enemy.'

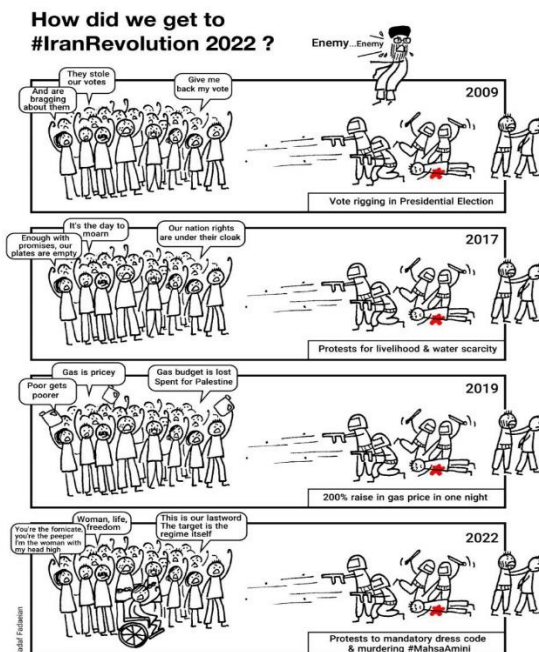


Figure 3

Therefore, within the discourse of the Mahsa Amini protests, a differentiation based on the friend-enemy relationship has been constructed—the brutal regime led by religious leaders and the protesters and victims fighting for freedom and equality. The Islamic Republic, as the constructive outside, is an indispensable existence for the entire discourse. It allows individuals from different social classes, genders, and ethnicities dissatisfied with the current regime to identify with their roles as resisters.

“Woman, Life, Freedom” as discursive opportunity

In today's era, the influence of mass media and social media is becoming increasingly important. A protest or social movement that receives no coverage or documentation is almost equivalent to having never occurred (Zhao, 2012). The widespread support for the Mahsa Amini protests discourse and the global dissemination of its iconic slogan, "Woman, Life, Freedom," have been greatly facilitated by social media. Therefore, in this section, this paper will analyze how the revolutionary discourse of the Mahsa Amini protests has utilized social

media by both protesters and international supporters to create discursive opportunities for the movement's dissemination and mobilization.

In *Discursive Opportunities and the Evolution of Right-Wing Violence in German*, Koopmans and Ozlak define discursive opportunity as “the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message’s chances of diffusion in the public sphere.” Koopmans and Ozlak, in their discussion of discursive opportunities, identify three fundamental components: visibility, resonance, and legitimacy (Koopmans & Ozlak, 2004). The following analysis will focus on these three elements to specifically examine how the revolutionary discourse within #MahsaAmini fulfills these elements.

Visibility

Because of the comprehensive censorship of mass media by the Iranian government, information related to local protests and strikes rarely got reported. Additionally, the leaderless nature of the Mahsa Amini protests lacks a national social movement organization with sufficient organizational capacity to continuously communicate messages to both protesters and the outside world. Therefore, in this context, social media, with its rapid transmission speed and diverse dissemination methods, has become an indispensable tool. Despite the government's interference with internet usage, by following the footsteps and recordings of individuals, we can see that protests have erupted in all provinces of Iran.

Similar to #Ferguson, the hashtags #MahsaAmini and those containing place names in posts can be used to both document and publish ongoing revolutions and create a political temporality. This allows people to not only follow the latest events of local protests but also show real-time support for the protesters within the hashtag community. Koopmans and

Ozlak's research on extreme right-wing racist violence was limited to the era of mass media, focusing on the distinction between gatekeepers and claim makers. Gatekeepers, such as journalists and editors have the ability to shape, select, and even restrict the dissemination of public discourse, thereby creating the most basic discursive opportunities. Claim makers, on the other hand, exist only as speakers in the media (Koopmans & Ozlak, 2004). However, with the popularizing of social media, the gap between gatekeepers and claim makers has been bridged. By attaching hashtags related to the Mahsa Amini protests in posts, such as #OpIran, #MahsaAmini, or #IranRevolution, individual voices can reach a global audience. In discussing the case of hashtag feminism, Clark-Parsons suggests that hashtags are a central element in the feminist media repertoire, as they enhance the visibility of feminist causes and issues by connecting personal stories to a global internet audience (Clark-Parsons, 2019).

Despite empowering ordinary people with a voice, the distinction between gatekeepers and claim makers is further blurred by key opinion leaders (KOLs) including activists with larger size of followers on social media platforms. These individuals are not engaged in the media industry and just express their views through posts as the behavior of making claims. Due to their influence in shaping discourse, they also perform the function of gatekeepers. Some KOLs have posted that they receive information from local protesters in Iran through their backchannels. To increase public awareness of the issue, they are willing to help these protesters by being their microphone to speak up. In later section, more attention will be paid to these key opinion KOLs who has the ability to shape and influence the whole discourse.

Resonance & Legitimacy

When considering the communication environment of the diffusion of certain discourse,

two discursive opportunity distinct from visibility emerge: resonance and legitimacy, which are related to other public actors. Resonance is crucial for the reproduction and dissemination of claim, while legitimacy represents the extent to which third parties support the claims. From this perspective, Zhao's view resonates, which is that "when a movement is poorly organized, what often determines the development of the movement is not the discourse and actions of activists, but the basic interpretative frameworks based on a social culture that are prevalent in the public mind (Zhao, 2012)."

Regarding the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom," which holds significant importance both within Iran and internationally, it has resonated with multiple groups both domestically and abroad. This resonance stems from pre-existing cultural constructs within the political environment. The slogan ("Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" in Kurdish) originated in the Kurdish women's movement and gained widespread dissemination through the Mahsa Amini protests. In fact, the deceased Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini was more commonly referred to as Jina, a Kurdish name meaning "life." However, since registering names in Kurdish or other minority languages is illegal in Iran, she also had a Persian name, Mahsa. Besides the capital city Tehran, one of the regions where the protest first ignited was Saqqez, Mahsa (Jina) Amini's hometown. Saqqez is a city located in one of the Kurdish-populated provinces within Iran, Kurdistan. Due to nation-state building efforts that began during the Qajar dynasty, non-Persian ethnic groups living within Iran were marginalized as minorities. These groups include Arabs, Kurds, and Baluchi, who were also religiously Sunni minorities. In the new regime established in 1979, Kurds also endured political marginalization and economic proletarianization. Consequently, the long-standing grievances and their century-long struggle

for national autonomy led the Kurds within Iran to quickly respond to this movement.

Although the discourse surrounding #MahsaAmini does not specifically emphasize ethnic issues, these posts also document the protests occurring in Kurdish-populated areas, marked with hashtags such as #Saqpez and #WestAzerbaijan.

"Woman, Life, Freedom" inherently embodies a feminist core, signifying the centrality of women in the fight for life and freedom and their victimhood under the theocratic regime (Sadeghi & Setareh Shohadaei, 2023). This slogan almost inevitably resonated among the female population in Iran, as women have been indispensable participants, often at the forefront and core, from the Constitutional Revolution over a century ago to the present Mahsa Amini protests. Moreover, since the theocratic regime took power in 1979, women have been thoroughly betrayed by the very government they supported. The government not only failed to address women's demands for democratization and gender equality but also imposed strict restrictions on women's activities from legal, economic, cultural, and political perspectives. Mandatory veiling is just one of many gendered practices; the government has also implemented gender segregation policies in public spaces. Legally, women's rights to inheritance, child custody, and freedom of traveling have been severely curtailed. The legal minimum marriage age for girls was lowered to nine in 1979, and within marriage, a husband could decide on his wife's ability to travel, work, and pursue education (Goodrich, 2023).

The success of the Mahsa Amini protests discourse, including the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom," on the internet and in the international community, stems from two key factors: the emphasis on visibility by claim makers and the influence of feminism and Islamophobia in the established culture of other countries.

As mentioned in the discourse analysis above, due to the government's internet blackout, Iranians became voiceless on the internet. Consequently, "voice" became a significant term that resonated with the audience and appeared frequently in the 235 posts analyzed. In the context of the internet blackout and the arrest and sentencing of protesters to death, activists often used phrases such as "world, do you hear us," "Be our voice," "Be his/her voice," "Be the voice of innocent Iranians," and "let their voice be heard" to mobilize the audience. International supporters also responded with messages like "we are your voice from #Montreal." This topic is not categorized under visibility because it emphasizes third-party reactions and interactions rather than the relationship between gatekeepers and claim makers. For instance, British writer J.K. Rowling, as a third party to the event, retweeted NetBlocks' report on Iran's internet blackout and commented, "the rest of the world needs to keep saying her (Mahsa Jina Amini) name" (@jk_rowling, 2022). This single repost garnered 1.6 thousand replies, 12,000 reposts, and 37,000 favorites.

In terms of feminism, the discourse of the Mahsa Amini protests resonates more with liberal feminism in Western democratic countries and on the internet, compared to Islamic feminism, which focuses on reinterpreting Islamic texts from a gender equality perspective and has more influence in the Islamic world. Liberal feminism, with its long history and significant impact on the development of feminist theory, is one of the "big three" alongside Marxist feminism and radical feminism (Maynard, 2006). In the United States, the first wave of women's liberation was rooted in liberal feminism. This movement advocates for individual rights and equality in legal and political spheres, aligning with the Mahsa Amini protests's emphasis on women's rights and gender equality. Although the revolution is rooted

in Iran's domestic issues such as economic inequality, political pressure, and oppression of minorities, the most frequently mentioned issue in #MahsaAmini is gender, which has the greatest potential to get broader resonance.

From a religious perspective, the issue of Islamophobia and secularism prevalent in the media biases of Western democratic countries can serve as a discursive opportunity. Multiple scholars, through framing analysis and other methods, have identified that media coverage of the Mahsa Amini protests often contains Islamophobic and Orientalist depictions of Iran (Naqvi & Zaheer, 2022; Horner, 2022; Mubarak, 2024). After violent events such as the 9/11 attacks, the 7/7 London bombings, and the Madrid bombings, Western media has tended to portray Islam as a violent religion, constructing an image of Muslims as "fundamentalist, violent, fanatic, uncouth, barbaric, extremist, and terroristic." In the 235 posts analyzed, the term "barbaric" appeared seven times to condemn the Islamic Republic's repression of protesters. While the word "violent" was used only twice to describe the regime and its armed organization, IRGC, the term "terrorist" appeared seven times. The hashtag #IRGCterrorist was used 22 times. Although it cannot be definitively stated that these claim makers view the Islamic regime as inherently barbaric terrorists, their language aligns with an Islamophobic discourse that is popular in Western press.

The hijab, almost ubiquitously present throughout this movement, serves as a prominent symbolic act of protest within the context of the Mahsa Amini protests. It represents the oppression imposed by the authoritarian government and Islam, and its removal symbolizes resistance. This form of resistance aligns with a prevalent yet highly Orientalist interpretation of the veiled woman in Western feminism. In Bilge's analysis, there are two dominant

feminist interpretations of veiled women. One liberal interpretation sees veiled women as symbols of lost agency and oppression under political power; the other, from a postcolonial perspective, views veiling as a form of resistance against Western hegemony, posing a threat to Western modernity and culture of freedom (Bilge, 2010). Whether perceived as victims or threats, the underlying secular premise of this dichotomy is that religion, particularly Islam, signifies "pre-modernity, tradition, and backwardness," while feminism stands for "modernity and secularism (Bilge, 2010)." The secularism and the symbolic significance of the hijab as highlighted in the discourse analysis of the Mahsa Amini protests align with this mainstream approach, which has substantial influence across various political sites (Bilge, 2010).

The discourse of the Mahsa Amini protests has garnered a unique form of resonance known as *consonance*. Koopmans and Ozlak (2004) define this supportive resonance as the support expressed by established political actors. This consonance is not uncommon in the 235 posts analyzed. For instance, Jeremy Corbyn, an Independent Member of Parliament of the United Kingdom, expressed his support for the movement on X: "Solidarity with the many brave women and allies in Iran and around the world protesting for freedom and rights today (@jeremycorbyn, 2022)." In this post, he also shared a poster encouraging London residents to join a protest outside the Iranian embassy. Reza Pahlavi, the crown prince of the former Iranian regime and leader of the exiled government in the United States, wrote a letter to the United Nations requesting a Commission Inquiry to investigate human rights abuses in Iran. He posted this letter on X, and the post received 15,000 favorites and 7,100 reposts (@PahlaviReza, 2022). Jake Sullivan, the National Security Advisor of the United States, also posted a White House statement on X, in which he stated: "The United States stands

staunchly with the Iranian people and their demands.” In this statement, Sullivan warned the Iranian regime against violent repression of protesters and affirmed the stance of the United States (@NazaninBoniadi, 2022).

Based on the collected English posts with most hit in #MahsaAmini, a brief discourse analysis on the Mahsa Amini protests is conducted with Laclau and Mouffe’s method in this section. With the regime change as the nodal point to its discourse, the discourse articulates the main elements of identity as the oppressed of protesters, the symbolic behaviors in the protests, and secularism into its meaning system to justify the nationwide uprising. By providing detailed information about the violent crackdown and strategies to cope with protests by the regime, posts highlight the hostility against Iranian protesters and even those who did not participate in the rebellion. Such constructing of the friend-enemy relationship between protesters (and their supporters) and the brutal regime, as well as the antagonist conflict between the protesters supporting the secularization of the politics and the Islamic regime ruling with Sharia law, leads to the otherization of regime as an oppressor. This discourse gained support both domestically and internationally for the widespread of itself and its crucial slogan, “Woman, Life, Freedom”, on the social media, where the distinction between gatekeepers and claim makers is blurred. It managed to garner resonance because in Iran, for it echoes with the long-term oppression on Iranian women and sexual minorities, the grievance of Kurdish and other ethnic and religious minorities, and the trend of secularization in Iran in post-revolution era. Besides its emphasis on the visibility of this cause, in global society, the discourse of Mahsa Amini protests was welcomed by the press and public opinion of Democratic countries for its framing aligned with liberal feminism, islamophobia, and

Orientalism. Mahsa Amini protests successfully provoke the consonance from the politicians in the United States, the United Nation, and European countries, which also count as a form of discursive opportunity.

Bourdieuian and the power dynamic within #MahsaAmini

The Mahsa Amini protests, as a hybrid movement combining street demonstrations and online activism, saw social media platforms become a crucial battleground for Iranians and their supporters. However, in contrast to the continual setbacks faced by street protests, Iranian protesters and their supporters achieved an overwhelming and unequivocal victory in the court of public opinion on X (formerly Twitter). The interconnectedness of online and offline protests makes this reversed power dynamic worthy of exploration and analysis. While scholars of social movements often employ Bourdieu's comprehensive field theory and its complex set of concepts to discuss power dynamics within a political field in detail, this section will focus more specifically on the concept of capital to conduct the analysis. It is arbitrary and incomplete to draw conclusion about the power relations within a field solely based on the amount of capital. Nonetheless, in this case, focusing on this singular concept allows the influence of #MahsaAmini and social media to become clearer. Thus, in the following, I will discuss why #MahsaAmini can be viewed as a political field and the distinct distribution of various forms of capital within this online political field contribute to the gain of legitimacy of the discourse of Mahsa Amini.

A field, as a structured space with relatively clear boundaries, serves as an arena where multiple actors engage in power struggles through the accumulation, exchange, and monopolization of different forms of capital (Swartz, 2016). Using this as an analytical tool

allows us to quickly grasp the power dynamics and capital distribution within the field.

According to Bourdieu's typology, he categorized capital mainly into four types: economic capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, and social capital. This concept can help researchers inventory and understand the types of capital accumulated in the internet's discourse battles, which are used to gain international public support.

Economic capital

From the perspective of economic capital, one of the key actors in the street protest field, the regime's rulers, especially the Supreme Leader, possess a monopolistic advantage. Iran's economy is heavily reliant on its oil and gas industry, but "more than 80 percent of Iran's economy is controlled by the clerical regime." Additionally, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) provides military and violent support for this control. With the help of the IRGC, the regime holds a significant portion of the state-owned sector, controlling about one-third to two-thirds of the GDP (Dagher). Consequently, they can invest in expensive internet surveillance systems and the National Internet Network to isolate Iranians from the global network. The Supreme Council of Cyberspace can even manufacture and supply fake VPNs to monitor and gather information. Furthermore, in the early stages of the Mahsa Amini protests, the Iranian government employed a cyber army to try and control the discourse within the #MahsaAmini space but failed because this cyber army lacked the cultural and symbolic capital needed to dominate this online political field.

In contrast, the protesters led by young students and women, had minimal economic capital. External sanctions, high internal inflation, low wages, and high unemployment rates among the youth are economic issues primarily borne by them. Simultaneously, 80% of

Iranian internet users need to access the internet via VPN services, and during the Mahsa Amini protests, the demand for VPNs increased by 30 times. Thus, given their unfavorable economic capital situation, the cultural, social, and symbolic capital they accumulated helped them gain an advantage in the discourse.

Social capital

For Bourdieu, "the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected (Bourdieu, 1986)." On the streets, due to the lack of leadership from social movement organizations, people's communication is often disrupted by the government. However, as long as they can access the internet, through #MahsaAmini, people can quickly find an online community. By emphasizing gender politics and human rights, the issues faced by the protesters and their demands can quickly connect to the international community, especially the Iranian diaspora, which has always been concerned with Iran's democratization process.

Moreover, with celebrities who have many followers expressing solidarity with Mahsa Amini online, this social capital can be accumulated more quickly and converted into symbolic capital. As mentioned in the previous analysis, renowned British author J.K. Rowling has shown significant concern for this movement. Among the 235 collected posts, 10 are from Rowling, with the most popular one receiving 53 thousand likes. Additionally, 34 of these posts include support from celebrities for the movement, including artists, writers, actors, and singers, such as British musician Roger Waters, singer Shakira, and Tehran-born

actress and activist Nazanin Boniadi. Roger Waters, a co-founder of Pink Floyd, played videos related to the Mahsa Amini protests during his 2022 tour in the United States, calling for attention to the movement. He also posted the concert videos on X to amplify the impact (@rogerwater, 2022). Through #MahsaAmini and other social media platforms, Iranian protesters have connected with parts of these celebrities' networks, making it one of the assets the protesters possess.

Cultural capital

Although in Bourdieu's work, this concept, which encompasses a variety of cultural resources, is primarily used to discuss social, particularly educational, inequalities, it has been widely applied to various studies due to its explanatory power (Swartz, 2018). In *The Forms of Capitals*, Bourdieu lists three forms of existing of cultural capitals: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutional state (Bourdieu, 1986). All three states of cultural capital were accumulated during the Mahsa Amini protests on social media.

First, cultural capital in the embodied state refers to the culture, knowledge, skills, or "know-how" an individual acquires through learning and socialization (Bourdieu, 1986). Among the 235 posts analyzed, 54 were published by activists or related to activists participating in offline protests. This category also includes a post from a human rights lawyer and 12 posts by activists' networks. The contributors from the news media include ex-TV hosts (e.g., Sima Sabet), journalists (e.g., Masih Alinejad), analysts (e.g., Rana Rahimpour), and commentators (e.g., James Melville). This indicates that when entering the #MahsaAmini field, they already possess the knowledge and skills to shape discourse and mobilize audiences. For online protesters inside Iran posting in English, they know how to

use VPNs to access the global network and have the ability to express their political requests, emotions, and information in English. This cultural capitals is fundamental yet crucial.

Cultural capital in the objectified state represents capital in the form of material objects or media, such as artworks, writings, archives, music, etc (Bourdieu, 1986). Based on the analysis of 123 posts with images and 81 posts containing videos, the objectified cultural capital accumulated by the Mahsa Amini protests on social media mainly falls into two categories: documentations of street protests, executions, political prisoners, and cases of deaths due to violent repression, and revolutionary artworks continuously created around this protest.

Due to strict censorship of mainstream mass media, information related to protests is either ignored or depicted as conspiracies and subversions orchestrated by foreign forces. Therefore, most records of protests and bloody repression (such as videos and photos) rely on local protesters' cameras and their subsequent uploads. The atrocities suffered by protesters and their heroic acts are documented and interpreted, presented in concise yet informative posts on social media. Similarly, information about political prisoners who suffered abductions, arrests, and unjust penalties is posted within #MahsaAmini, easily accessible through a simple search.

The most famous artwork from this movement is undoubtedly the song "*Baraye*" ("Because of"). This song was composed by young Iranian musician Shervin Hajipour, with lyrics entirely sourced from discussions on X about the protest (Goodrich, 2023). In this online discussion, Iranians explained why the Mahsa Amini protests was inevitable in Iran with "Baraye" as the start of each sentence, and Hajipour created "*Baraye*" based on their

answers. Due to censorship of artistic works, the song was initially released on Instagram in 2022. Although it was quickly removed, it became the anthem of the protesters and was widely sung. Within just two days, the song garnered over 40 million views. From within Iran to Iranian diaspora communities around the world participating in protests, this song has been continuously utilized. It was broadcasted on radio stations, television channels, and social media, and its English version was sung by Rana Mansour on a German TV show (Goodrich, 2023). In 2023, Shervin Hajipour won the Special Merit Award for Best Song for Social Change for "Baraye" (Goodrich, 2023). Besides the song, the popular posts I collected include posters, 10 political comics, artistic performances, and dance works. For instance, hip hop artist Morteza Ghaderi recorded his dance video in front of Iran's Azadi (Freedom) Tower to express his support for and solidarity with the Mahsa Amini protests. After posting the video, he was arrested and sentenced to 43 years in prison, all of which were documented and reported within #MahsaAmini (@drninaansary, 2022). Furthermore, I believe that the numerous protest slogans used in this movement, such as "Woman, Life, Freedom," also constitute a form of cultural capital.

As for the institutionalized state of cultural capital, Bourdieu defines it as cultural capital that is institutionally recognized, mainly in the form of academic qualifications or diplomas (Bourdieu, 1984). This is also a form of cultural capital that many key opinion leaders or journalists bring with them into the field. For example, as mentioned earlier, Sima Sabet introduces her educational background in her X profile as "PhD Political Science | MA International Relations." Additionally, some supporters come from higher education institutions or think tanks, or are PhD students, which they also display in their profiles. With

“the power of instituting”, these speechmakers can gain more belief and recognition in the field (Bourdieu, 1986).

Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital is a special form of capital that has expanded its application scope with Bourdieu’s formalizing of the concept of the field (Lebaron, 2014). It is often used to refer to legitimacy, recognition, status, and reputation, and it can not only be converted with other types of capital but can also generate power in certain specific fields (Crossley, 2002).

Bourdieu’s most well-known empirical application of this concept is his discussion of the political field (Lebaron, 2014).

Masih Alinejad as an active advocator for Iranian’s political requests exemplifies the key opinion leader with symbolic capital. On Facebook, she started and ushered an online women’s movement, *My Stealthy Freedom*, by posting her own photo with her unveiled appearance and set up a Facebook page for local Iranian women to post photos of them not wearing the hijab. *My Stealthy Freedom* movement aimed at encouraging Iranian women remove their hijab in the public space, and its Facebook page helped establish a international community for protesters and their supporters. In 2015, Alinejad was granted the Women’s Rights Award for her support and contribution to muted and marginalized Iranian women’s cause for basic human rights and gender equality. Although Alinejad was criticized for the Orientalist element in her speech, she remains as one of the leading figures among Iranian activists and diasporas for the recognition and popularity in the international public opinion.

Besides the support and solidarity from celebrities, scholars, activists, and media journalists who already possess social and cultural capital, the sources of symbolic capital

also come from their opinion and description of the protesters. In all posts, the publishers consistently hold attitudes of recognition, praise, and respect toward the protesters. For example, when describing the pioneers of the Mahsa Amini protests, young female students, writer Elif Shafak expressed: “Iranian young women and girls have played a hugely important role in nationwide protests against bigotry and oppression. They are brave and amazing” (@Elif_Safak, 2023). Other terms used to describe the protesters include "fearless" and "courageous." After female activist Qolian was released from prison and immediately re-arrested for chanting slogans against the Supreme Leader outside the prison, a user referred to her as the "definition of bravery (@lisallo10165235, 2023)." Because of their heroic protest actions, these protesters are depicted on X as opponents of dictators, fighters and even martyrs for freedom and equality, powerful and brave revolutionaries with artistic creativity. The consonance from established political actors mentioned in the previous section also exemplifies the flow of symbolic capital to the protesters. An interesting case of granting legitimacy to protesters within Iran is that of Iranian police officer Behnam Zarei, who refused to arrest a woman not wearing a headscarf because he believed that “as a policeman, he has the duty to defend the lives, property, and honor of his compatriots, and that clothing type is a personal matter (@F_karamizand, 2023).”

Nonetheless, according to Bourdieu's research, symbolic capital is not only embodied as recognition and legitimacy granted by actors or third parties outside the field but can also take the form of stigma and discrimination (Lebaron, 2014). This negative symbolic capital is also a reflection of capital distribution and power dynamics within the field. In analyzing the main elements and otherization process of the Mahsa Amini protests discourse, we have

already found that while articulating the victimhood of the protesters, the enemy-friend relationship has led to the regime being otherized as terrorists, violent suppressors, human rights violators, and institutional roots of gender oppression. This negative figure signifies that negative symbolic capital has flowed to the side of the regime.

Limitation and discussion

Although posts in #MahsaAmini provide valuable data for exploring this online sphere and tracking the discursive dynamic within it, the method of data collection in this study limits the content available for discussion and leads to certain bias of the finding.

The first limitation is that posts analyzed were all mined from English hashtag #MahsaAmini, but Persian hashtag #مهسا_امینی was not the focal field despite its importance for Iranian protesters in the streets. As I have argued in the section elaborating the discursive opportunities in the international community's public opinion, activists and journalists recognized the opportunity to advocate and popularize their revolution discourse, and thereby reshape the original discourse widely accepted in Iran as a process of framing. The sole focus on English hashtag #MahsaAmini and language barrier restrict the study from examining the public opinion in Persian online sphere despite some popular English posts were translated from Persian posts by diasporas and media. Also, since only posts with most popularity in English online sphere were discussed, those Persian posts with less popularity and visibility were almost excluded from the discussion while they were indispensable part of the whole complex discourse as well.

Another limitation undermines the generalization of the finding is about the users and claim-makers of these posts. They entered this political field with cultural capital and

symbolic capital, and even those Iranian protesters who were unknown to the world were usually younger, better educated, and equipped with the English literacy and the access to less censored Internet sphere (and some of them were Iranian diasporas). Also, since they were more likely to be exposed to international public opinions shaped and influenced by Western media, they tend to be supporters of a secularized regime and life style, which distinct from those senior Iranians devoted to Shiism.

Therefore, the suggestion for future research on Mahsa Amini protests discourse is that a comparison between the popular discourse in Persian hashtag and other online spheres will help take a closer look at the transform of the discourse during its internalization. Moreover, interview with online protesters in Persian hashtag or observation in this online field will deepen our understanding in protest strategies applied by those participate in both online and offline demonstrations.

Conclusion

This research seeks to provide an insight to the inquiry of the significant role of social media and hashtag in the public communication process of the Mahsa Amini protests. Despite the scarcity of political opportunity in Iran's political environment under authoritarian governance, protesters recognized discursive opportunity within the social issue and media bias to frame and shape its discourse for the support from international community. By considering the Mahsa Amini protests' discourse as a meaning system, I argue that the core meaning of the popular discourse of this nationwide uprising is regime change as the ultimate goal for the revolting. The main elements articulated into this meaning system by the nodal point are protesters' identity of the oppressed, protests and the symbolic behavior advocating

gender equality and political freedom, and secularism. Meanwhile, as an important process of discourse building, the regime was otherized as the enemy and oppressor to Iranian protesters. The discourse, together with its crucial slogan “Woman, Life, Freedom”, successfully garnered attention and support through three type of discursive opportunities: visibility, resonance, and legitimacy. Social media and hashtag activism played an indispensable role in the recognizing and seizing of all three types of opportunities, such as the blurring of distinction between gatekeepers and claim makers in the gain of visibility. Bourdieusian perspective, especially the concept of capital, addresses the lack of power dynamics and analysis on power relations in the discursive opportunity structure, demonstrating the contrasting power relations between actors within the #MahsaAmini online political field and in reality. In the real political field, the Iranian government holds a monopolistic advantage in economic capital. However, protesters and their supporters have gained extensive social capital through social media (support and participation from celebrities), cultural capital (the spread of revolutionary artwork on social media), and symbolic capital (the positive portrayal of protesters and the criticism of the regime).

Reference

- Abdolmohammad Kazemipur. (2022). *Sacred as Secular*. McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP.
- Ahmadi, F. (2006). Islamic Feminism in Iran: Feminism in a New Islamic Context. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 22(2), 33–53. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20487863>
- Alemzadeh, M. (2023). Revolutionary politics of the normal. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 55(4), 724–728. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020743823001381>
- Alfoneh, A. (2008). The Revolutionary Guards' Role in Iranian Politics. *Middle East Quarterly*, 15. <https://www.meforum.org/1979/the-revolutionary-guards-role-in-iranian-politics?gclid=CPDS8amUjpsCFSRPagodggNUpQ>
- Alinejad, M. (2022a). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/AlinejadMasih/status/1573217092228509697>
- Alinejad, M. (2022b). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/AlinejadMasih/status/1602156314729512960>
- Amenta, E., & Halfmann, D. (2012). Opportunity knocks: the trouble with political opportunity and what you can do about it. *Contention in context: political opportunities and the emergence of protest*, 227-239.
- Ancelovici, M. (2019). Bourdieu in movement: toward a field theory of contentious politics. *Social Movement Studies*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1637727>
- Assoudeh, E., & Salazar, D. J. (2017). Movement structure in an authoritarian regime: A network analysis of the women's and student movements in Iran. *Non-State Violent Actors and Social Movement Organizations*, 137–171. <https://doi.org/10.1108/s0163-786x20170000041021>

Barnard, S. R. (2017). Tweeting #Ferguson: Mediatized fields and the new activist journalist.

New Media & Society, 20(7), 2252–2271.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817712723>

Bayat, A. (2013). FEMINISM OF EVERYDAY LIFE. In *Life as Politics: How Ordinary*

People Change the Middle East (2nd ed.). essay.

Bayat, A. (2023). Is Iran on the verge of another revolution? *Journal of Democracy*, 34(2),

19–31. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2023.0019>

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An

overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 611–639.

Bilge, S. (2010). Beyond subordination vs. resistance: An intersectional approach to the

agency of veiled Muslim women. *Journal of intercultural studies*, 31(1), 9-28.

Brinkhof, T. (2022, December 14). *Iran's protest culture - JSTOR DAILY*. Iran's Protest

Culture-JSTOR Daily. <https://daily.jstor.org/irans-protest-culture/>

Bonilla, Y., & Rosa, J. (2015). #Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the

racial politics of social media in the United States. *American Ethnologist*, 42(1), 4–17.

<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/amet.12112>

Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital* (pp. 241–258).

https://home.iitk.ac.in/~amman/soc748/bourdieu_forms_of_capital.pdf

Chafiq, C. (2022, October 22). In Iran, “cutting hair is a symbolic gesture rallying rebels

against the Islamic regime.” *Le Monde.fr*.

[https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2022/10/22/in-iran-cutting-hair-is-a-](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2022/10/22/in-iran-cutting-hair-is-a-symbolic-gesture-rallying-rebels-against-the-islamic-regime_6001351_23.html)

[symbolic-gesture-rallying-rebels-against-the-islamic-regime_6001351_23.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2022/10/22/in-iran-cutting-hair-is-a-symbolic-gesture-rallying-rebels-against-the-islamic-regime_6001351_23.html)

- Clark-Parsons, R. (2019). "I SEE YOU, I BELIEVE YOU, I STAND WITH YOU": #MeToo and the performance of networked feminist visibility. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(3), 362–380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1628797>
- Crossley, N. (2002). *Making sense of social movements*. New Delhi Rawat.
- Derayeh, Minoo. 2022. "The Myths of Creation And Hijab: Iranian Women, Liberated Or Oppressed." *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan* 18(2):1-21
- Fact Sheet: Protests in Iran (1979-2020)*. (2023, May 30). Iranprimer.usip.org; The Iran Primer. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/dec/05/fact-sheet-protests-iran-1999-2019-0>
- Ferree, M. M. (2002). *Shaping abortion discourse: Democracy and the public sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge University Press.
- ghalamfarsa. (2022). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter).
<https://x.com/ghalamfarsa/status/1612696978701553664>
- Gamson, W. A., & Meyer, D. S. (1996). Framing political opportunity. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, 275–290.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511803987.014>
- Goodrich, N. (2023). Chapter 8 "Say Her Name, Mahsa Amini!" An Overview of the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran." In Y. Kamalipour & J. Pavlik (Eds.), *Communicating Global Crisis*.
- Giugni, M. (2011). Political opportunity: Still a useful concept? *Contention and Trust in Cities and States*, 271–283. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0756-6_19

- Hau, S. (2020). Overdetermination. *Springer EBooks*, 3388–3390.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_613
- Honor, B. (2023). The Mahsa Amini Revolution. *UC Riverside Undergraduate Research Journal*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.5070/RJ517162170>
- Iskandarani, A. (2020, March 12). Iranian woman beaten for wearing loose hijab, fights back and goes viral. *The National*.
<https://www.thenationalnews.com/opinion/comment/iranian-woman-beaten-for-wearing-loose-hijab-fights-back-and-goes-viral-1.991834>
- Jan, Z. K. (2023). Sacred suffering and the construction of political spirituality in the Iranian Shiism discourse. *Critical Research on Religion*, 11(2), 171–186.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/20503032231174205>
- Jørgensen, M., & Phillips, L. (2002). Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208871>
- Karamizand, F. (2022). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter).
https://x.com/F_karamizand/status/1624455721403154432?lang=en
- Kermani, H. (2023). #MahsaAmini: Iranian Twitter Activism in Times of Computational Propaganda. *Social Movement Studies*, 1–11.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2023.2180354>
- Kermani, H., & Tafreshi, A. (2022). Walking with Bourdieu into Twitter communities: an analysis of networked publics struggling on power in Iranian Twittersphere. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2021.2021267>

- Khatam, A. (2023). Mahsa Amini's killing, state violence, and moral policing in Iran. *Human Geography*, 16(3), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786231159357>
- Koopmans, R., & Olzak, S. (2004). Discursive Opportunities and the Evolution of Right-Wing Violence in Germany. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(1), 198–230. <https://doi.org/10.1086/386271>
- Koopmans, R., & Statham, P. (1999). Ethnic and civic conceptions of nationhood and the differential success of the extreme right in Germany and Italy. *How social movements matter*, 10, 225.
- Lebaron, F. (2014). Symbolic Capital. *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, 6537–6543. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2961
- Lindell, J. (2017). Bringing field theory to social media, and vice-versa: Network-crawling an economy of recognition on Facebook. *Social Media + Society*, 3(4), 205630511773575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117735752>
- Lloyd, L. (2024). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter). <https://x.com/lisallo10165235/status/1636037730336481281>
- Luttrell, R. (2023). HISTORICAL ROOTS AND MODERN MOVEMENTS. In *Strategic social media as activism: Repression, resistance, rebellion, reform*. essay, Routledge.
- Marks, E. J. (2023). The Role of Social Media in Iran: Finding Community Through the Death of Jina (Mahsa) Amini. *COMPASS*, 3(1), 20–27. <https://doi.org/10.29173/comp74>
- Mahdi, A. A. (2004). The Iranian women's movement: A century long struggle. *The Muslim World*, 94(4), 427–448. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2004.00067.x>

- May, L. (2024). *Media and Feminist Protest in Iran*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Maynard, M. (1995). Beyond the “big three”: the development of feminist theory into the 1990s. *Women’s History Review*, 4(3), 259–281.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029500200089>
- McCammon, H. (2022). Discursive Opportunity Structure. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 1–3.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm073.pub2>
- Mohamedi, F. (2010, October 11). *The Oil and Gas Industry*. Iranprimer.usip.org.
<https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/oil-and-gas-industry>
- Molaei, H. (2014). Discursive opportunity structure and the contribution of social media to the success of social movements in Indonesia. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(1), 94–108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2014.934388>
- Mubarak, F. (2024). Riots or revolution? A framing analysis of the Mahsa Amini protestss in U.S. and Iranian media. *Media Asia*, 1–25.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2024.2370120>
- Müller, M. (2011). Doing Discourse Analysis in Critical Geopolitics. *L’Espace Politique*, 12.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.1743>
- Naqvi, S. F. H., & Zaheer, A. (2022). Mahsa Amini and the Anti-Hijab Protests in iran: A Post-Truth Analysis. *Regional Studies*, 40(2), 36-57.
- NetBlocks. (2022). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter).
<https://x.com/netblocks/status/1572591771284115457>

- O'Neil, M., & Ackland, R. (2019). Online field theory. *Second International Handbook of Internet Research*, 445–467. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1555-1_9
- Poell, T. (2013). Social media and the transformation of activist communication: Exploring the social media ecology of the 2010 Toronto G20 protests. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(6), 716–731.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2013.812674>
- Pouria, A. (2022a, November 6). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter).
<https://x.com/mamadporii/status/1589265266705256448>
- Pouria, A. (2022b, December 13). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter).
<https://x.com/mamadporii/status/1602702258273148928>
- Povey, T. (2016). *Social Movements in Egypt and Iran*. Springer.
- RAVANOĞLU YILMAZ, S. (2017, July 13). *The role of social media activism in new social movements: Opportunities and limitations*. *International Journal of Social Inquiry*.
<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/ijisi/issue/30400/328298>
- Ray, R. (1998). Women's movements and political fields: A comparison of two Indian cities. *Social Problems*, 45(1), 21-36.
- Sadeghi, F., & Setareh Shohadaei. (2023). From Women's Revolution to *Jiyanist* Democracy. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-10815679>
- Sativa. (2023). *x.com*. X (Formerly Twitter).
<https://x.com/Sativa888/status/1635825670579273728>

- Saldaña, J., & Miles, M. B. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers + qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook*. Sage Publications.
- Schmitt, L. (2016). Bourdieu meets Social Movement. *Social Theory and Social Movements*, 57–74. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13381-8_4
- Shahi, A., & Abdoh-Tabrizi, E. (2020). IRAN'S 2019–2020 DEMONSTRATIONS: THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL PROTESTS IN IRAN. *Asian Affairs*, 51(1), 1–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2020.1712889>
- Shirazi-Mahajan, F. (1993). The politics of clothing in the middle east: The case of Hijabin post-revolution Iran. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 2(2), 54–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10669929308720032>
- Siraj, S. A., & Nawaz, H. (2023). Chapter 9 The Stereotypical Portrayal of Islam in the Western Press. In *Communicating Global Crises: Media, War, Climate, and Politics*. essay, ROWMAN&LITTLEFIELD.
- Smith, W. (2014, September 3). *Flag of Iran*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/flag-of-Iran>
- Sohrabi, H. (2021). New media, contentious politics, and political public sphere in Iran. *Critical Arts*, 35(1), 35–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2021.1887311>
- Swartz, D. (2016, April 28). *Bourdieu's Concept of Field*. Obo. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0164.xml#obo-9780199756384-0164-div1-0016>

Swartz, D. (2018, January 11). *Cultural Capital*. Obo.

<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0209.xml>

Tahmasebi-Birgani, V. (2010). Green Women of Iran: The Role of the Women's Movement

During and After Iran's Presidential Election of 2009. *Constellations*, 17(1), 78–86.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8675.2009.00576.x>

赵鼎新. Dingxin Zhao. (2012). *社会与政治运动讲义 / She hui yu zheng zhi yun dong jiang*

yi. She Hui Ke Xue Wen Xian Chu Ban She.