

An Online revolution: #MahsaAmini and the #WomenLifeFreedom movement

On September 16, a 23-year-old Mahsa Amini, a Kurdish Iranian women, died under suspicious circumstances while in police custody. This spurred a social movement of epic proportions both on social media as well as offline ; a social movement led by the slogan WomenLifeFreedom (Zan, Zendegi, Azadi in Persian and Jin, Jiyan, Azadi in Kurdish).

Iranian users took to Instagram and Twitter expressing their sadness, anger and demanding justice for Mahsa using the hashtag #MahsaAmini. This was followed by months of continued street protests across all major cities in the country and increasing arrests and police force leading to further deaths. #MahsaAmini became a symbol of resistance and accumulated over 1.7 million hashtags.

Scholars such as Slavoj Žižek have claimed what was happening in Iran holds world historical significance because it is very different to #MeToo movements in Western Countries for it mobilizes millions of ordinary women and is connected to the struggle of all and does not have anti-masculine tendencies (Zizek, 2022).

Through a semiotic approach to social media discourse analysis (Jancsary, Höllerer & Meyer, 2016; KhosraviNik & Unger (2016), this paper presents the semiotic and discursive trajectory of this movement on the most used social media platform among Iranians: Instagram. What were the visual discursive themes used? And how did Iranians strategically mobilize social media to keep the movement alive through measures of solidarity and exerting social pressure? The paper will shed insight into one of world's most significant women's movement through the lens of Iranian social media users.

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