

Iranian Social Media Entrepreneurs: Navigating Digital Influence on Economic Activities

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer (Corresponding Author)

Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Okara

Email: akramzaheer86@yahoo.com

Dr. Zahid Bilal

Assistant Professor and Head of Media & Communication Studies Department at the University of Okara

Uzma Rana

Research Scholar at the Media & Communication Studies Department, University of Okara

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Abstract

In an era of technological advancements and ever-shifting global markets, these entrepreneurs have effectively harnessed the potential of social media platforms to establish and sustain profitable business ventures. The Iranian social media entrepreneurs also are maneuvering of economic activities through the strategic utilization of digital influence. The research investigates the multifaceted strategies employed by Iranian businessmen, encompassing innovative marketing techniques and strategic partnerships. Taking an interdisciplinary approach that integrates elements of economics, digital marketing and cultural studies. It sheds light on how Iranian social media entrepreneurs have ingeniously overcome economic constraints to thrive in an increasingly interconnected digital ecosystem. The paper provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of entrepreneurial activities in Iran.

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Introduction

In an era characterized by the rapid advancement of technology and communication, entrepreneurship has undergone significant transformations, largely due to the emergence of social media platforms. Within the dynamic global landscape of entrepreneurs, a particular group has raised to prominence Iranian social media entrepreneurs. Faced with a distinctive set of economic challenges rooted in their geopolitical context, these individuals have adeptly harnessed the power of digital influence to navigate and surmount obstacles that might otherwise have hindered their entrepreneurial ambitions (Jain & Muniz, June 24, 2023).

This exploration seeks to delve into the intriguing interplay between Iran's economic terrain, the digital sphere, and the creative process of its social media entrepreneurs. Through an analysis of their strategies, innovations, and the socio-economic impact they've achieved, we gain valuable insights into the transformative potential of digital platforms within a complex economic environment (UN, August 01, 2023).

This study not only illuminates the resourcefulness exhibited by Iranian social media entrepreneurs but also contributes to a broader understanding of how digital influence is reshaping the landscape of entrepreneurship in our increasingly interconnected world. In Iranian social media, much like their counterparts in the Western world, social media influencers leverage their accounts for sponsorship and marketing purposes. These influencers actively promote a wide range of products and engage in various forms of advertising, mirroring the trends seen on a global scale.

Iran's economic challenges

In recent years, Iran has grappled with a countless of economic challenges stemming from both domestic and international factors. These challenges, which include sanctions, inflation, and unemployment, have presented a complex landscape for traditional entrepreneurship to flourish. However, within these difficulties, a remarkable transformation has been witnessed with the emergence of digital platforms as dynamic avenues for entrepreneurial endeavors. The rise of social media entrepreneurs in Middle East has become a beacon of hope, as individuals adeptly navigate the digital sphere to create innovative businesses and Harness their digital influence to overcome economic obstacles (Khalil, Khaibani, Gaaubess, & Yasil, 2023, p. 298).

These visionary entrepreneurs are capitalizing on the power of social media to establish online marketplaces, offer unique services, and connect with global audiences, thereby carving out new avenues for economic growth and circumventing traditional limitations. As they pioneer this digital frontier, Iranian social media entrepreneurs are not only reshaping the nation's economic landscape but also redefining the very nature of entrepreneurship itself, illustrating the remarkable resilience and adaptability of the Iranian people in the face of adversity (Pride, Hugues, & Kapoor, 2013, p. 455).

Rise of Iranian Social Media Entrepreneurs

The emergence of Iranian social media entrepreneurs has marked a significant and transformative shift in the country's business landscape. In the core of economic challenges, these innovative minds have harnessed the power of digital influence to create new avenues of success. Leveraging platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram, Iranian social media entrepreneurs have defied traditional constraints and ignited a dynamic wave of creativity and commerce (Tajpour, Hossaini, Ratten, Behmen, & Solimani, 2023).

By cleverly navigating the complex economic terrain, they have not only established their brands and businesses but have also connected with a global audience, transcending geographical boundaries. Through strategic content creation, influencer marketing, and e-commerce ventures, these entrepreneurs have not only found resilience amidst economic adversity but have also become trailblazers, exemplifying the potency of digital platforms in reshaping entrepreneurial paradigms within Iran and beyond (Tajpour, Hossaini, Ratten, Behmen, & Solimani, 2023).

A prominent example is Farhad Pez, an influencer with a substantial of 1.6 million individuals. Pez's activities involve not only endorsing food establishments like restaurants serving an array of dishes,

including the famous four-layer hamburger infused with cheese, but also introducing Iranian culinary offerings such as Tahchin. Pez's online presence extends to platforms such as YouTube, where his channel has garnered more than nineteen thousand subscribers (farhadsfood, 2023).

Notably, one of his videos has amassed an impressive count of one hundred and ninety-five thousand views. While Pez's primary source of income and audience engagement stems from Instagram, the exact mechanics of revenue generation for food influencers such as Pez remain somewhat enigmatic. It is believable that these influencers, in exchange for their posts, are provided with complimentary meals at restaurants and/or monetary compensation for content production. Mahdis Food, another food influencer with a substantial following of eight hundred and thirty-one thousand followers, employs personalized video advertisements. These ads encompass a diverse range of products and services, spanning from laser hair removal to hair extensions.

Remarkably, Mahdis Food interweaves these ads with content featuring delectable dishes, like fried chicken and traditional Iranian cuisine (Mahdifoods, 2023) such as Mirza Ghasemi. Collaborative efforts are also evident in the field, with couples like Mohammad and Fatemeh pooling their resources and creative energies. Together, they command an impressive audience of nearly 3 million followers, presenting fabricated video posts and personalized ads encompassing diverse goods, from Sony PlayStation 5s to saffron brands. Interestingly, video gaming has emerged as a lucrative avenue for income generation among Iranian influencers. Iranian youth are increasingly dedicating substantial periods of time to online gaming activities (Amir H. Pakpour, March 21, 2022).

With a burgeoning community of twenty-eight million gamers nationwide, gaming has transitioned from a leisure pursuit into a popular pastime across platforms like PCs, mobile devices, and dedicated gaming centers (Financial Times, July 22, 2023). Despite certain platforms being inaccessible, Persian gaming content has proliferated on various social networks, including Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Iranian gamers have also embraced live streaming of their gaming endeavors on platforms like Apparatus and Amazon's Twitch, albeit with circumvention tools. This transformation has enabled select Iranian gamers, such as Melina Blake, to transform their passion into a lucrative profession (Bangert, 2018, p. online).

Social Media's Advertising Power in Iran

Instagram's potential as an advertising platform is seized by Iranians, who employ it for both paid and free promotions. For instance, individuals like MaryamRouhani, the country's first female auto retailer, employ Instagram to showcase luxury vehicles like BMWs and Maseratis, often accompanied by rap and reggae music. Diverse entrepreneurs, from clothing to jewelry and home ware vendors, leverage their accounts to present their creations and offerings, often including contact information or encouraging direct messages for inquiries. She vends garments through her Instagram page and website to secure advertising space (Degres, January 2022).

Musicians like Halal Qeshm, for instance, possess a substantial following of 19,500 on Instagram, utilizing the platform as a means to promote their musical endeavors. Qeshm frequently shares videos of his performances on the oud and vocal renditions in diverse locales on his native Qeshm Island within the Persian Gulf (https://www.instagram.com/qeshm_music/?hl=en). Numerous eateries and cafes also heavily rely on Instagram for outreach (<https://www.instagram.com/musicians.mall/?hl=en>).

A case in point is Showcase Kitchen, boasting over ninety-five thousand followers, which regularly shares enticing imagery of pizzas and cheesecakes from its establishment in Tehran. Curiously, a significant number of restaurants opt to forgo a dedicated website, instead utilizing Instagram's direct messaging for reservations. This choice stems not only from Instagram's cost-effectiveness but also due to Iranians' proclivity for discovering dining establishments on the platform, often relying on food influencers' recommendations (<https://www.instagram.com/showcasekitchensct/?hl=en>).

An illustrative example of this trend is Tehran National College of Food Technology, which enjoys an audience of more than 54,000 followers on Instagram, strategically employing the platform to promote a spectrum of culinary courses ranging from confectionery to intricate watermelon carvings (<https://www.instagram.com/explore/locations/190602258503482/national-nutrition-food-technology-research-institute/?hl=en>). Similarly, Chef Mousavi, boasting an audience exceeding thirty-six thousand followers, leverages Instagram to showcase his delectable dessert creations (<https://www.instagram.com/chefmousavi/?hl=en>).

Meanwhile, Farzaneh Panahi, commanding an impressive following of two hundred thousand, imparts insights on cooking techniques and offers guidance, including crafting Dalguna candy from the popular K-drama "Squid Game." The influence of Instagram has surged, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a more pronounced reliance on social media platforms for both personal and business purposes. In Iran, more than 80% of online transactions are conducted through messaging and social networking applications, most notably Telegram and Instagram, with Instagram emerging as a preferred alternative in the wake of Telegram's prohibition (Degres, January 2022). Furthermore, Instagram's potential for broader societal impact has become increasingly evident.

In the year 2018, Babak and his spouse, Ellie, launched an Instagram page titled "Elite Goods," focusing on kitchenware, attracting an impressive following exceeding sixty-four thousand. This entrepreneurial duo, residing in Mashhad, undertakes trips to Tehran to procure kitchen utensils online marking a significant departure from their previous professions.

Potential Earnings on Social Media

Moreover, financial success stories are not confined solely to gaming. Numerous Persian articles outline strategies to monetize Instagram (Bahrehmand, July 27, 2021, p. online). Eshanet, a Tehran-based social media agency, approximates potential earnings of 6 billion rials for influencers, although rates are individually set. For instance, each influencer with 100,000 followers can expect to earn approximately \$164 to \$197 per month (Degres, December 15, 2021, p. online). Content creator Tina Atziri, recognized for distinctive features like tattooed eyebrows and full lips, oversees two accounts boasting a cumulative following of 426,000. Atziri discloses her pricing structure, which includes 5.5 million rials (\$18) for a video clip on both accounts, 2.5 million rials (\$8) for a birthday post, and 3 million rials (\$10) for Instagram stories. Atziri commits to three posts per account and a daily article, earning her 10 million rials (\$32) (https://www.instagram.com/atziri_avila14/?hl=en).

A September 2020 report from the Young Journalists Club news agency delves into the world of Iranian advertising agencies, revealing insights into the compensation of celebrities and influencers. Karimpour, renowned for his sports-related video parodies and sporadic TV commercial appearances, reportedly garners monthly earnings ranging from 2 to 3 billion rials (\$6,583 to \$9,740). Meanwhile, Eazi, known for

his sports-themed video dubs and parodies, accumulates approximately 1.5 to 2.5 billion rials per month (Degres, January 2022). These impressive earnings stand in stark contrast to Iran's economic challenges, marked by soaring inflation and a sharply depreciated national currency. Against this backdrop, the declared average annual income for urban households is 764,746,000 rials (\$2,517), and for rural households, it is 420,470,000 rials (\$1,384) (Statistical Centre of Iran-, March 20, 2022).

Discussion: Digital Influence in Economic Independence

It is imperative to acknowledge that Instagram-based enterprises have also empowered Iranian women. Aida Pouriansab, a Tehran-based entrepreneur, collaborates with single mothers and homemakers, predominantly from the working class, providing an avenue for economic self-sufficiency. Often constrained by familial responsibilities or cultural norms, these women find solace in establishing home-based businesses through Instagram, channeling their creativity and skills to foster financial independence. Pouriansab affirms that these women derive not just monetary gains but also a profound sense of empowerment from their endeavors, a sentiment fostered by the capabilities facilitated by Instagram's ecosystem (Priyono & Hidayat, 2024, p. 06).

The significance of Instagram as a business platform is further underscored by the findings of a September 2021 report by SCI, which reveals that a substantial 83% of online enterprises in Iran utilize a combination of Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp, alongside traditional websites, to promote and distribute their offerings (LiT, July 21, 2023). Notably, this report underscores the role of social networks, particularly Instagram, in sustaining a staggering eleven million jobs across Iran. Beyond commerce, Iranians harness social media platforms for entertainment and personal expression, with a subset aspiring to capitalize on their online presence for eventual monetization.

A notable example is Ghob Akhtar, an umbrella content creator with an audience exceeding twenty-one thousand, who shares lighthearted renditions of popular Western and Iranian songs, often incorporating comedic elements into his performances. Similarly, content creator Ryan Gray, commanding an audience of 130,000, specializes in crafting Game of Thrones-themed memes and satirical vignettes centered on Iranian and US politics (Degres, January 2022, p. online).

Numerous Iranian content creators leverage humor to navigate social issues encompassing family dynamics, education, and matrimony. One standout figure is renowned actress and comedian Mary Hem, boasting a staggering 2.4 million followers, who employs her platform to offer humorous takes on these societal themes. Another notable content creator, Saeed Shahba, with an audience exceeding 136,000, engages in dubbing Hollywood films, portraying football luminaries, and satirizing Iranian politicians, including their interactions (<https://www.instagram.com/saeedshahba/?hl=en>).

Notably, Instagram serves as a conduit for preserving and sharing cultural heritage, as exemplified by Iranian shepherd Mohammad, whose Instagram account, named after his late dogs Salar and Polad, garners more than thirty-two thousand followers. Through evocative posts, Mohammad offers glimpses into his pastoral life in the northeastern reaches of Iran. Notably, his journey began with the gift of a mobile phone from his sibling, financed by his inaugural paycheck following the completion of his doctorate in Tehran (<https://www.instagram.com/salarpolad/>; Tehran times, April 18, 2015).

With over eighty-three thousand followers, Mohammad employs his Instagram account as a platform to

disseminate concise documentaries showcasing Iran's rich heritage. His account bio encapsulates his vision, asserting that "Iran's enduring splendor is always at hand." Moreover, Instagram showcases nostalgic facets of Iranian television and popular culture, such as "Son of Ame," who has accumulated a following exceeding nineteen thousand. This curator reimagines vintage clips from the long-running "Red Hat" series, which has captivated Iranian audiences for nearly three decades (Samimi, May 24, 2013). Another avenue of artistic expression flourishes through animation, exemplified by a studio boasting an audience of 640,000. Renowned for its monochromatic cartoons, the studio interlaces its animations with advertisements, including endorsements for a cryptocurrency news website and a credit card company.

Instagram also acts as a haven for fan communities dedicated to Iranian, Western, and Korean musicians and bands, with K-pop sensation BTS as a prominent exemplar. Concurrently, the platform houses vibrant communities dedicated to popular comedies, such as the adult animated show "Rick and Morty" (Siu, April 27, 2017). Furthermore, Instagram cultivates spaces for health and well-being advocacy, epitomized by "End the Stigma," which garners over forty-eight thousand followers. Focused on mental health, the account's Farsi biography encapsulates its ethos: "Mental afflictions are inherently trying for sufferers; it is incumbent upon us not to exacerbate their predicament through stigmatization." Lastly, Bahare Ghaffari, boasting an impressive following of 2.5 million, serves as a nutritionist, utilizing Instagram as a platform to disseminate authoritative insights on health and nutrition in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (Denniss, Lindberg, & Mcnoughton, 2023, p. online).

Conclusion

The Iranian entrepreneurs have harnessed the power of social media platforms to not only overcome economic constraints but also to create new avenues of growth and opportunity (Ervin, July 07, 2023). Through creative content creation, strategic branding, and effective audience engagement, they have managed to carve out their space in the digital landscape and establish themselves as influential figures. Economic sanctions, limited access to resources, and a complex regulatory environment have posed significant challenges. Yet, these entrepreneurs have demonstrated a remarkable ability to leverage their digital presence to build networks, access global markets, and collaborate across borders, showcasing the transformative potential of the digital realm.

The Iranian social media entrepreneurs offer valuable insights for both emerging and established economies. Their stories underscore the importance of embracing technological innovation, fostering digital literacy, and cultivating an environment that encourages entrepreneurship. Moreover, their ability to effectively navigate economic adversity highlights the significance of resilience, creativity, and a forward-thinking mindset in the face of challenges. The interconnected world through digital platforms, the endeavors of Iranian social media entrepreneurs exemplify the profound impact that individuals can have on shaping their economic trajectories. As they continue to pioneer new strategies and inspire others, their journey serves as a testament to the boundless possibilities that await those who dare to harness the power of digital influence to overcome economic barriers and forge a path toward prosperity.

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