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Digital activism and the public sphere in Iran; A content analysis of Karzar-related discourse on Persian Twitter

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of digital activism and perceived civic influence within Persian-language Twitter discourse, focusing on tweets associated with the Iranian petition platform Karzar. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, the research investigates whether and how Twitter functions as a space for civic dialogue, participatory discourse, and collective demand-making. Using quantitative content analysis, 100 high-engagement tweets (i.e., those with the most likes) containing the keyword "Karzar" were analyzed in terms of content type, perceived influence, campaign category, and sentiment. The findings reveal that a substantial portion of users demonstrate medium to high levels of perceived influence, particularly in tweets framed as calls to action or expressions of support. While humorous or satirical content was largely devoid of perceived efficacy, politically and socially charged campaigns elicited polarized reactions, suggesting the emergence of a contested digital public sphere. Despite the limitations of the platform and dataset, the study highlights the potential of Persian Twitter to function as a hybrid space for digital civic engagement and deliberation in contemporary Iran. It also raises critical questions about the efficacy, limitations, and future trajectory of decentralized digital activism in restrictive media environments.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, with the expansion of communication technologies and the emergence of social media, new forms of civic participation and political activism have emerged, often referred to as "digital activism." Unlike traditional activism based on physical presence in public spaces, digital activism unfolds in online platforms and is characterized by speed, expansive reach, and the potential for simultaneous individual and collective action. This technological mediation of civic engagement raises important questions about how platform architectures shape participation. Recent studies highlight how digital systems designed to enhance accessibility may simultaneously introduce new constraints on human agency and democratic deliberation (Tomraee et al., 2024).

In contrast to traditional forms of activism that relied on physical gatherings and face-to-face interactions, digital activism enables the rapid

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production and dissemination of messages, the formation of simultaneous and diverse networks, and the creation of a sense of collaboration unhindered by geographical boundaries. In this context, the term “Karzar” (literally meaning “campaign”), widely used in comprehensive hashtags and online mobilizations, serves as a symbol of users’ efforts to organize demands and attract public attention.

Digital activism can be conceptualized as a phenomenon emerging from new media, often driven by user-generated content and user-controlled gatekeeping that invites tens of millions of viewers and readers to participate and engage with shared content. Digital activism encompasses a wide range of manifestations, thereby accelerating civic movements and social mobilization. As such, internet-based activism constitutes a form of social activism that can also reverberate in the real world (Khaniki & Basrian Jahromi, 2013). Yet this transformative potential exists in tension with platform architectures that may privilege sensational or simplified narratives. Just as traditional activism required media literacy to navigate mainstream coverage, digital movements now demand critical awareness of algorithmic amplification and viral dynamics to sustain substantive impact (Soroori Sarabi et al., 2020).

With the expansion of the internet and social networks, new forms of activism and citizen participation in political and social spheres have emerged. Voicing demands and staging civil protests no longer necessitate physical presence in the streets or reliance on formal media. Today, users with a smartphone and internet access can become part of a protest wave or advocacy movement, express their opinions, and participate in collective campaigns. This transformation has given rise to a new form of activism known as “digital activism”—action that is often spontaneous, polyphonic, and decentralized in online spaces but can exert significant social influence.

Among such platforms, "Karzar" has played a prominent role in the development and promotion of digital activism in Iran. Karzar is a social startup launched with the aim of facilitating civic advocacy and fostering social synergy. Since its inception in 2017, this platform has recorded millions of signatures and hundreds of successful advocacy experiences, making it one of the most recognized online platforms in Iran. Notably, the word “Karzar,” previously used mainly in literary or military contexts, is now commonly employed in public discourse in Iran as a localized equivalent of the term “campaign,” indicating the platform’s cultural and linguistic impact.

Karzar’s social media pages, complementing its website activities, have become active spaces for user engagement, demand dissemination, and dialogue on current issues. Users not only participate by liking, commenting on, and sharing posts, but many also feel they have a stake in the process of change and advocacy, even if that stake is small, symbolic, or limited.

Given that Karzar has become one of the symbols of digital activism in Iran, studying it can enhance our understanding of the mechanisms of civic participation in virtual spaces and the patterns of collective action in Iranian society. The purpose of this article is to analyze tweets related to Karzar to answer the question of how digital activism takes shape on this platform and to what extent citizens feel engaged and influential. It also aims to examine the capacities and limitations of this type of participation within Iran’s social and political framework.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Public Sphere

The concept of the “public sphere” is one of the most important theoretical notions in media studies and political sociology. It was formulated by Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher and theorist, in his renowned book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a social space in which citizens engage in rational and free dialogue about public issues and shape their opinions. This sphere is neither part of the state nor directly embedded in the market but exists between the two and provides a ground for the formation of collective will.

Habermas uses the term “public sphere” to refer to a social realm where individuals, through communication and reasoning based on rationality, engage in normative orientations that have enlightening and rationalizing effects on the process

of exercising state power. However, contemporary scholars note that algorithmic systems in digital spaces may simultaneously enable and undermine such rational discourse, by personalizing access to information while reinforcing ideological silos (Toosi et al., 2024). In other words, individuals in the public sphere, through dialogue and deliberation under conditions free from coercion and pressure—and grounded in freedom, awareness, and equality among all participants—produce a set of value-oriented and normative behaviors and positions that ultimately serve as effective tools for influencing governmental behavior, particularly in rationalizing state power (Habermas, 2013 [1392]).

What drew Habermas's attention to the notion of the public sphere was its importance as the foundation for society's critique based on democratic principles. Accordingly, the public sphere is a domain where individuals come together to participate in open and free discussion (Habermas, 2013).

A key aspect of this process is that individuals' behavior in the course of public discourse is primarily grounded in speech acts devoid of coercion or domination and conducted under conditions that are just, free, conscious, and equal. This is what Habermas refers to as the "ideal speech situation" (Boustani & Pouladi, 2017 [1396]).

From Habermas's perspective, the public sphere is an intersubjective domain, a site of interaction between different ideas and minds, and a space for freely raising public issues and engaging in rational deliberation about them, ultimately shaping public will. The public sphere, as conceptualized by Habermas, lies between the formal state (public authority), which controls instruments of coercion, and the private domain of society (civil society). One of its primary purposes is to oversee the state and ensure transparency in political and administrative decision-making. To establish this role, rational legal principles must be institutionalized and universally upheld (Boustani & Pouladi, 2017).

The public sphere stages a "theatrical" scene in which political participation is enacted through discursive media. It is the space where citizens deliberate over everyday events, serving as the locus of institutionalized discursive interaction and the production of speech flows that are fundamentally critical of the state. In Habermas's sense, the public sphere is separate from the formal economy. It is not a marketplace for buying and selling, but rather a discursive space for debate and consultation (Boustani & Pouladi, 2017).

In his earlier views, Habermas, following fellow Frankfurt School theorists such as Marcuse, considered mass media as destructive to the public sphere. However, in his later works, he emphasized the positive and reconstructive potential of media in fostering and reinforcing the public sphere as a structured space for communicative action. According to Habermas, these structured public spheres still rely on concrete physical locations where audiences are physically present. The more these public spheres shift from physical presence to the virtual presence of dispersed readers, listeners, and viewers of mass media, the more pronounced becomes the abstraction that arises from transforming spatially situated interactions into a public sphere (Niazi, Sarhadi, Moradi, & Shahroudi, 2016 [1395]).

According to Habermas, the key features of the public sphere can be identified as follows:

- Free and equal access for all citizens
- Critical rationality in dialogue and exchange of ideas
- Independence from political and economic power
- The capacity to influence political decision-making processes

Habermas conceptualizes the public sphere as a model of norms and behavioral patterns that ensure the functionality of public opinion (Habermas, 2013). As Rauchfleisch and Kovic argue in their article *The Internet and Generalized Functions of the Public Sphere: Transformative Potentials From a Comparative Perspective*, the public sphere can best be described as a network for the transmission of information and viewpoints (i.e., opinions expressing positive or negative attitudes). In this process, communication flows are filtered and synthesized in ways that yield a set of context-specific public opinions. Their study identifies three distinct country groupings based on a theoretical model of the generalized functions of the public sphere. For all groups, the internet has the potential to contribute to public sphere functions, though the most prominent among the four possible functions differs for each group (Rauchfleisch & Kovic, 2016).

The End of the Public Sphere: The Formation of a Privatized Public Sphere

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas examines the emergence and decline of the bourgeois public sphere within its historical and social context. According to him, the public sphere emerged in 18th-century Europe as a space between the private domain (family and economic life) and the state, where independent and equal citizens could critique political power based on rational deliberation. However, this sphere gradually declined in the twentieth century due to structural transformations. Habermas interprets the end of the public sphere not as a collapse but as a gradual weakening of its critical capacity.

With the expansion of the welfare state, the growing influence of economic corporations, and the rise of commercial mass media, the boundary between public and private blurred. Rational deliberation gave way to passive consumption of media messages. In this process, advertising, public relations, and mass culture began to manipulate and direct public opinion, transforming the public sphere from a communicative space into a performative and controlled one. Thus, what Habermas describes as the "end of the public sphere" essentially refers to the erosion of its most critical feature—the possibility of free and rational citizen participation in political matters (Habermas, 2013 [1392]).

With the emergence of new virtual social networks, some theorists have analyzed this new condition, identifying certain similarities with the concept of the public sphere. For example, Papacharissi explains how users on online platforms such as Twitter, blogs, and Facebook engage in new forms of opinion expression, political participation, and dialogue. Although these forms may not fully resemble the classical public sphere, they can be seen as a kind of "networked and dispersed public sphere." In these spaces, users play active roles and, under certain conditions, are able to challenge official narratives through participation.

In contemporary democracies, where technology is omnipresent, the line between public and private is increasingly blurred, resulting in a hybrid state. Papacharissi argues that we are witnessing the privatization of public spaces and the return of the home as a political space. In digitally mediated environments, engagement with algorithmic systems is often shaped by a mixture of optimism and concern—particularly regarding transparency, ethical responsibility, and the adequacy of regulatory and educational support for users and institutions alike (Tomraee, Hosseini, & Toosi, 2022). Indeed, ethical participation in digital spaces cannot be assumed; even well-educated individuals may lack basic awareness of academic or civic norms unless these are explicitly taught and reinforced (Sabbar, Masoomifar, & Mohammadi, 2019). The Habermasian public sphere, as a space for social action, is no longer effective, since political discourse now takes place within the "digital private sphere." Her work focuses on new civic habits emerging from the interplay between democracy and technology, seeking to understand how technology reshapes personal relationships and generates new communication practices. In her view, the internet is a "public space" but not necessarily a "public sphere." The digital realm provides a platform for conversation, but this alone does not qualify it as a genuine public sphere. Thus, digital technologies create new hybrid spaces that blend the public and private. Within these spaces, the private domain becomes a new arena for political action, and citizen participation, far from reflecting apathy, can take the form of civil disobedience (Sebastião, 2013).

Activism and Digital Activism

Within this framework, **digital activism** can be regarded as a manifestation of the public sphere in the digital age—particularly when users are able to express demands, raise awareness, and advocate for policy changes or public consciousness online.

Activism is a relatively recent term closely tied to concepts such as social movements, resistance, advocacy, and protest. It can take many forms, emerge in various contexts, and stem from diverse motivations, which is why there is no single precise definition. Nevertheless, activism may be broadly defined as a type of informal political communication aimed at redefining, criticizing, or challenging existing social, economic, cultural, or political structures, and striving to replace them with more equitable ones (Abdollahi Nejad & Mohammadi Nousoudi, 2021 [1400]).

With the spread of the internet and social media, new forms of activism have emerged, collectively referred to as digital activism. Recent studies show that the integration of AI technologies into public-

facing systems has been met with broad societal acceptance, despite persistent concerns about algorithmic bias, data ethics, and institutional preparedness (Rahmatian & Sharajsharifi, 2021). Originating in online platforms, this form of activism typically aims to influence power structures, exert social pressure, and advocate for political or cultural demands. In this mode of action, users employ digital tools such as smartphones, apps, and social platforms to initiate or support social and political change.

A prominent feature of digital activism is the reduced cost of participation compared to traditional forms of activism such as street protests, strikes, or writing to official bodies. However, this technological democratization brings paradoxical challenges - while lowering barriers to entry, it also introduces new complexities around algorithmic visibility, equitable access to digital tools, and maintaining authentic human connection in mediated movements (Rahmatian & Sharajsharifi, 2022). Among these challenges is the fact that access alone does not guarantee participation. For groups such as the elderly, digital engagement often hinges on media literacy—training that develops both practical IT skills and critical thinking, and has been shown to improve inclusion and civic confidence (Sakhaei et al., 2024). Activities that previously required considerable time, effort, and financial resources are now facilitated through digital infrastructure. This is especially significant for movements with limited resources, as it enables broader and more inclusive participation (Abdollahi Nejad & Mohammadi Nousoudi, 2021). Yet as research on Iranian media institutions suggests, digital participation is shaped not only by access, but also by disparities in AI literacy, strategic readiness, and organizational adaptability—factors that can unevenly structure who participates and how effectively (Khodabin, Zibaei, & Piriyaei, 2023).

George and Leidner (2019), drawing on Milbrath's (1965) hierarchy of political participation, which categorizes activism into "spectator," "transitional," and "gladiatorial" activities, propose a framework for online activism. Based on this framework, ten types of online and digital activism can be identified:

- **Spectator activism**: Clicktivism, engagement and reaction, broadcasting and dissemination
- **Transitional activism**: E-funding, political consumerism, digital petitions, botivism
- **Gladiatorial activism**: Data activism, whistleblowing, hacktivism

Clicktivism refers to liking a post, endorsing content, or following a social media account. Virtually anyone with a social media account, access to the internet, and a basic device can participate—regardless of skill level. While liking a post signifies support, it does not provide activists with a clear voice for their views and, due to its vagueness and impersonality, is considered one of the lowest forms of commitment and activism (Keshavarz, 2022 [1401]).

As such, this form of online activism is also referred to as slacktivism, or "armchair activism," describing virtual activities that give users a false sense of positive action. Nevertheless, on an organizational level, large numbers of clicks and likes can lend legitimacy and visibility to a cause (Keshavarz, 2022). Still, for such participation to lead to substantive civic influence, researchers argue that users must be equipped with critical AI literacy—encompassing algorithmic transparency, ethical awareness, and inclusive digital education—to navigate and shape these mediated spaces effectively (Khodabin, et al., 2024).

In their research titled *Digital Activism and Indignation Networks in Brazil: The Pressure Groups*, Cavalcanti and colleagues examine digital activism and argue that digital media facilitate public interaction, faster information sharing, and broader accessibility. However, they caution that these tools also enable political groups to pursue private interests before collective ones (Cavalcanti et al., 2019).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

How is digital participation understood in the Persian Twitter sphere, and have tweets related to the "Karzar" platform (especially those with the highest number of likes) succeeded in enhancing citizens' sense of influence? Furthermore, does this form of digital activism contribute to the formation of a Persian-language "public sphere" on Twitter—or are Karzar campaigns merely symbolic and limited tools?

To answer this question, this study uses a quantitative content analysis approach, examining 100 Persian-language tweets from the past year that contain the keyword “Karzar” and received the highest number of likes. The “like count” is used as a proxy for clicktivism, one of the most basic levels of digital activism according to George and Leidner’s (2019) typology. The objectives of this study are:

- To identify common content patterns in tweets related to “Karzar” (e.g., information sharing, calls to action, expressions of concern, criticism, etc.)
- To analyze the levels of perceived influence conveyed in these tweets (high, medium, low)
- To examine the relationship between the type of activism and the perceived empowerment in advancing demands
- To assess the role of Persian Twitter in shaping a “public sphere” and to determine whether this form of digital activism contributes to critical discourse and collective decision-making beyond likes and retweets

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative content analysis method to examine how digital activism manifests and how users perceive their influence on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), specifically in relation to the “Karzar” platform. The aim is to extract recurring patterns, dominant themes, and indicators of civic engagement from user-generated content.

Population and Sample

The study population includes all tweets published on the social media platform X within the past year that either directly or indirectly reference the “Karzar” platform or its associated campaigns. From this population, 100 tweets that received the highest number of likes were selected as the sample. The number of likes is treated as an indicator of attention and engagement, representing a basic form of digital activism—i.e., clicktivism. While this metric provides measurable engagement data, scholars caution that platform algorithms may artificially amplify or suppress certain content, potentially biasing visibility patterns independent of genuine civic participation (Sakhaei et al., 2024).

Sampling Method

A non-probability purposive sampling method was used. That is, from all tweets related to “Karzar,” those with the highest user engagement (as measured by likes) over the past year were selected. Data collection was carried out by searching for relevant keywords such as "Karzar" and filtering out irrelevant content (e.g., references to military campaigns such as the Russia–Ukraine war).

The unit of analysis in this study is each tweet, considered an independent message that may include text, images, links, or user reactions.

Coding Scheme and Variables

The coding form included the following variables:

Variable	Scale	Categories
1. Type of Content	Nominal	1. Call to action / expression of support2. Information dissemination3. Expression of concern / criticism / mockery4. Satire / humor
2. Level of Perceived Influence	Ordinal	1. High2. Medium3. Low4. No perceived influence5. Not applicable
3. Number of Likes	Ratio	Number of likes at the time of data collection
4. Reference to a Specific Campaign	Binary Nominal	1 = Yes, 2 = No
5. Type of Referenced Campaign	Nominal	1. Political2. Social3. Environmental4. Labor-related5. Cultural6. Economic7. Electoral8. Other
6. Name of Campaign	Nominal (Text)	Recorded if mentioned
7. Attitude Toward the Campaign	Nominal	1. Positive2. Negative3. Neutral4. Ambiguous

Operational Definitions of Variables

Type of Content

Definition: This variable indicates the nature of the tweet’s content, categorized based on semantic analysis conducted by the researcher.
Scale: Nominal *Categories:*

- Call to action or expression of support/ empathy
- Information sharing
- Criticism, concern, mockery, or hate
- Humor, satire

Level of Perceived Influence

Definition: Based on tone and content, this variable reflects how much the author sees

themselves or others as effective in producing social or political change.

Scale: Ordinal

Levels:

○ High (strong belief in personal/collective impact)

○ Medium (moderate belief)

○ Low (sense of relative powerlessness)

○ No reference to impact

○ Not discernible

Number of Likes

Definition: The number of likes each tweet received at the time of data collection. For analytical clarity, this variable was categorized into quartiles:
Scale: Ordinal

○ Low: 3,110 to 3,898 likes

○ Fairly Low: 3,899 to 5,588 likes

○ Fairly High: 5,589 to 7,535 likes

○ High: 7,536 to 18,555 likes

Reference to a Specific Campaign

Definition: Indicates whether the tweet refers—directly or indirectly—to a specific "Karzar" campaign.
Scale: Binary Nominal

○ Yes

○ No

Type of Referenced Campaign

Definition: If a campaign is referenced, its type is categorized as one of the following:

Scale: Nominal

○ Political, Social, Environmental, Labor-related, Cultural, Economic, Electoral, Other

Name of Campaign

Definition: If applicable, the name of the referenced campaign is recorded for qualitative analysis and frequency tracking.

Scale: Nominal (Text)

Attitude Toward the Campaign

Definition: Indicates the sentiment or stance expressed in the tweet toward the campaign:
Scale: Nominal

○ Positive (support, praise, call to participate)

○ Negative (criticism, opposition, attack)

○ Neutral (informative, no clear stance)

○ Ambiguous (unclear or contradictory tone)

Data Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

In the data collection phase, the Datami search engine (a platform for tracking Persian-language digital content) was used to gather posts on Platform X (formerly Twitter) that included keywords such as Karzar, #Karzar, campaign, collective demand, public request, #campaign, or petition. The time frame was from April 8, 2024, to April 8, 2025.

The following table summarizes the total volume of collected data related to the keyword "Karzar" and associated terms:

Metric	Count
Number of Posts	1,090,380
Number of Likes	5,702,128
Number of Retweets	910,822
Total Views	175,664,520

This data volume clearly reflects the significant presence and engagement surrounding the Karzar campaigns.

From this vast dataset, 100 tweets that received the highest number of likes and were contextually relevant to Karzar and Iranian social issues were selected and coded according to the previously outlined methodology. It is important to note that non-relevant data—such as tweets referencing "Karzar" in a military context (e.g., the Russia–Ukraine war) or non-Iranian political events (e.g., the Trump campaign)—were filtered out as noise and excluded from analysis.

Operational definitions of variables were documented in a formal codebook, and every effort was made to apply definitions consistently across all data. Given that the content analysis was conducted by the primary researcher within a clear theoretical framework, the instrument can be considered to have acceptable validity.

Pilot Coding and Reliability

To test coding stability, a pilot coding of 20 tweets was first conducted. As only one coder was involved, inter-coder reliability could not be calculated. However, to assess intra-coder reliability, the same 20 tweets were re-coded after a 48-hour interval.

The following table presents the Cohen's Kappa coefficients for each variable:

Kappa Coefficient	Variable
1.000	Type of Content
0.886	Perceived Influence
1.000	Reference to Campaign
1.000	Attitude Toward Campaign

These values indicate very high to perfect agreement, confirming the internal reliability of the coding instrument.

Descriptive Report

A total of 625,889 likes were recorded across the 100 analyzed tweets. The maximum number of likes received by a single tweet was 18,555, while the minimum was 3,110.

The following table presents the frequency distribution of the content types of the analyzed tweets:

Content Type	Frequency	Percentage
Information dissemination	12	12.12%
Satire / Mockery / Humor	21	21.21%
Concern / Criticism / Mockery	22	22.00%
Call to Action or Support	44	44.00%
Total	99	100.00%

Note: One tweet was excluded from categorization due to coding overlap or ambiguity.

This table illustrates the distribution of content types among the analyzed tweets. As shown, the highest frequency belongs to “call to action and support,” which, with 44 tweets, accounts for 44% of the entire dataset. Next is “expression of concern, criticism, or mockery”, with 22 tweets (22%), followed by “satire/mockery/humor” with 21 tweets (21.21%). Finally, “information dissemination” had the lowest share with 12 tweets (12.12%). This distribution indicates that a significant portion of user engagement on Twitter revolves around participation or support for campaigns, while neutral or purely informational content had a smaller share.

The following table presents the frequency distribution of perceived levels of influence expressed in the analyzed tweets:

Percentage	Frequency	Perceived Level of Influence
19.00%	19	High
53.00%	53	Medium
3.00%	3	Low
2.00%	2	No Perceived Influence
23.00%	23	Not Specified / Indiscernible
100.00%	100	Total

The highest frequency belongs to the “medium” level, with 53 tweets (53%), indicating that in a significant portion of tweets, a relative sense of agency and contribution to advocacy was conveyed—often indirectly. In 23% of tweets, no clear reference to influence was found, placing them in the “Not Specified” category. Tweets expressing a high sense of influence accounted for 19% of the total, reflecting trust and hope in the efficacy of public participation. These engagement patterns align with psychological research showing trait-based differences in civic participation—from cautious deliberation to persistent advocacy (Jamali et al., 2022). In contrast, only 3% of tweets conveyed a low sense of influence, and 2% lacked any perceived influence entirely. This pattern shows that a moderate level of civic efficacy is predominant among users, while expressions of hopelessness or perceived ineffectiveness were relatively rare.

Among the tweets analyzed, 69% made reference to a specific campaign, while 31% did not refer to any particular campaign.

The table below presents the topic distribution of the referenced campaigns:

Campaign Topic	Frequency	Percentage
Social	20	28.99%
Economic	3	4.35%
Electoral	11	15.94%
Political	18	26.09%
Labor-related	1	1.45%
Cultural	11	15.94%
Environmental	5	7.25%
Total	69	100.00%

This table displays the distribution of topics of the campaigns mentioned in the tweets. The highest frequency is related to social campaigns with 28.99%, suggesting that users were particularly sensitive to social issues. Next are political campaigns with 26.09%, followed by both electoral and cultural campaigns at 15.94% each. Environmental issues were also relatively prominent with 7.25%, while economic and labor-related campaigns had the lowest frequencies, at 4.35% and 1.45% respectively. This indicates that Twitter users were more engaged with social, political, and cultural topics, with less attention to other issues.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	34.006[a]	9	.000	.030		
Likelihood Ratio	17.844	9	.037	.016		
Fisher's Exact Test	18.445			.015		
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.180[b]	1	.004	.004	.003	.001
N of Valid Cases	77					

a. 11 cells (68.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .03.

b. The standardized statistic is -2.860.

In terms of campaign names referenced, a total of 38 different campaigns were observed. The "Mandatory Military Service for Women" campaign was the most frequently mentioned, accounting for 20.29% of all named campaigns, with 92% of related tweets expressing a negative attitude. The "For Iran" campaign ranked second with 10.14% of mentions, and all tweets referencing it were positive in tone. Other highly referenced campaigns included "Diana," "Freedom for Political Prisoners," and "Public Trial for the Crescent Case," each accounting for 4.35% of mentions, all of which also had positive sentiment.

Analytical Report

To examine the relationship between tweet content type and the perceived level of influence expressed by users regarding the campaigns, both the Chi-Square test and Fisher's Exact Test were applied. The results of the Chi-Square test indicated a significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2(9) = 34.006$, $p < .001$). However, because more than 68% of the expected frequencies in the contingency table were less than 5, the validity of the Chi-Square test was limited, necessitating the use of a more robust statistical test.

Accordingly, Fisher's Exact Test was also conducted. The results showed a significance level of $p = .015$, confirming the existence of a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. These findings indicate that the type of user reaction to campaigns—whether support, criticism, humor, or information—correlates meaningfully with the perceived impact of the campaigns. In other words, users' different responses on Platform X are significantly associated with their beliefs about the effectiveness of digital activism.

Cross-tabulation: Content Type × Perceived Influence

To better understand how different content types correspond to perceived levels of influence, a cross-tabulation was created. The results are summarized below:

Content Type	High	Medium	Low	No Influence	Not Specified	Total
Information dissemination	17%	58%	0%	8%	17%	100%
Satire / Mockery / Humor	0%	0%	5%	0%	95%	100%
Concern / Criticism / Mockery	14%	73%	9%	5%	0%	100%
Call to Action / Support	32%	68%	0%	0%	0%	100%

This table shows that content type significantly affects the user's perceived influence:

Call to Action / Support tweets had the highest share of "high" perceived influence (32%) and no

tweets in this category lacked a sense of influence—suggesting that users engaging in supportive or mobilizing discourse were most confident in the effectiveness of collective action.

Satirical or humorous tweets were almost entirely devoid of any reference to influence—95% of them fell under "Not Specified," and only 5% expressed a low sense of impact. This suggests a detached or skeptical tone toward activism in such content.

In the concern/criticism category, the majority of users (73%) expressed a medium level of influence, but some variation was observed, with 14% expressing high, and 9% expressing low perceived influence.

Correlations

			ehsas tasir gozari	tedad like
Spearman's rho	ehsas tasir gozari	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.178
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.121
		N	77	77
	tedad like	Correlation Coefficient	-.178	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.121	.
		N	77	100

Information-sharing tweets were generally neutral, with a 58% medium-level influence, but 17% expressed no discernible view, and 8% had no perceived influence.

These findings show that the type of discourse used by users on Platform X is meaningfully associated with their belief in the effectiveness of activism—especially in the case of supportive or mobilizing content, which is clearly linked to a stronger sense of efficacy.

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	77.217[a]	18	.000	.007		
Likelihood Ratio	19.407	18	.367	.143		
Fisher's Exact Test	24.654			.163		
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.103[b]	1	.147	.160	.080	.014
N of Valid Cases	68					

a. 23 cells (82.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

b. The standardized statistic is 1.450.

influence, both the Chi-Square and Fisher's Exact Test were again applied. While the Chi-Square test suggested a statistically significant relationship (χ^2 = 77.217, df = 18, Sig. = 0.000), the result was statistically invalid because more than 80% of cells had an expected frequency below 5.

As a result, Fisher's Exact Test was used for a more accurate result. This test showed that the relationship was not statistically significant (Exact Sig. (2-sided) = 0.163). Therefore, it cannot be confidently concluded that the type of campaign correlates with users' perceived level of influence.

To assess the relationship between the perceived level of influence and the number of likes received, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was applied. The results revealed a weak and negative correlation (Spearman's $\rho = -0.178$), which was not statistically significant (Sig. = 0.121, N = 77). Therefore, we cannot claim that an increase or

decrease in the number of likes correlates meaningfully with users' sense of civic efficacy.

To explore whether the type of campaign influences users' attitude (positive, negative, neutral, ambiguous), both the Chi-Square and Fisher's Exact Test were applied. The Chi-Square test produced a Pearson value of 25.144 with a significance level of p = 0.121, which is not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. However, given the violation of Chi-Square assumptions (numerous cells with expected counts below 5), Fisher's test was used for accurate interpretation.

The Fisher's Exact Test yielded a significant result (Exact Sig. = 0.011), indicating that the type of campaign is statistically related to users' attitudes. In other words, the nature of a campaign influences whether users respond positively, negatively, neutrally, or ambiguously.

Total	Negative	Positive	Ambiguous	Neutral	Campaign Topic
100.00%	65.00%	30.00%	5.00%	0.00%	Social
100.00%	22.22%	66.67%	5.56%	5.56%	Political
100.00%	18.18%	81.82%	0.00%	0.00%	Cultural
100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Environmental
100.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Economic

According to the data, social campaigns received the highest share of negative attitudes (65%), while only 30% of responses were positive—suggesting a critical or disillusioned tone among users toward these campaigns. In contrast, environmental, economic, labor-related, and cultural campaigns received mostly or entirely positive responses (close to or at 100%).

Political campaigns, while receiving the highest number of positive responses overall (66.67%), also attracted 22.22% negative reactions, reflecting a more polarized reception. Electoral campaigns were overwhelmingly positive (90.91%).

The campaign with the highest negative response was the "Mandatory Military Service for Women", followed by political campaigns (22% negative). Campaigns in other domains were mostly supported by users.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research show that a significant portion of users on Persian Twitter have reacted to online campaigns. Specifically, 72 percent of the examined tweets conveyed a medium to high level of perceived impact from the campaigns.

This volume of responsiveness and user participation can be analyzed through the lens of Jürgen Habermas's "public sphere" theory. According to Habermas's view, the public sphere is a space where individuals can engage in dialogue and discussion about public issues freely and without political or economic domination. Persian Twitter, particularly concerning social campaigns, reflects a digital manifestation of this public sphere. The dual-edged nature of digital systems—simultaneously enabling greater coordination and introducing new vulnerabilities—underscores the need for balanced integration strategies that include robust risk management and user preparedness (Soroori Sarabi et al., 2023). Many campaigns, even those lacking official backing, have gained attention and sometimes become trending and important topics precisely because of the conversations occurring on social media.

Another notable point is that most tweets were either calls for or support of campaigns, or criticisms of them. This, in itself, indicates active user activism on Twitter. Even those tweets written humorously or satirically can be seen as evidence of the users' awareness of the concept of campaigns. This kind of symbolic participation often mirrors broader cultural dynamics, where ideals of identity and collective expression—while sometimes empowering—are also shaped by normative pressures that may carry emotional or psychological weight (Nosraty et al., 2020).

Topics such as the 2024 presidential election, compulsory military service, and campaigns like the approval of conscription for girls were among the issues that generated multifaceted and significant reactions. The campaign related to female conscription, despite being officially registered on the "Karzar" platform and receiving signatures, faced widespread opposition from Twitter users. The fact that a campaign surrounding a social issue received the most attention over the past year and provoked various responses suggests that digital activism is shaping a new social space. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a social space where citizens freely and rationally discuss public matters and shape their opinions.

It seems that platforms like Karzar are increasingly gaining user attention and strengthening their position in digital political engagement. Although most campaigns are centered on social, economic, or cultural goals, political reactions are also clearly visible on Twitter. This situation may indicate a gradual transition of citizens from traditional participation models to newer and less formal ones — a model in which digital tools serve as the primary medium for voicing demands, discussion, and even social mobilization. Yet the effective use of such tools demands more than mere access; it requires continuous education, professional training, and ethical readiness to ensure responsible engagement in dynamic, high-stakes environments (Hosseini et al., 2021). Recent scholarship on AI literacy underscores the importance of fostering ethical, civic, and empowerment-oriented understanding of digital systems—arguing that informed engagement depends not just on access, but on reflective and pedagogically grounded interaction with technology (Khodabin et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the study's limitations must be considered. The present analysis focused on only one hundred tweets, and this limited scope calls into question the generalizability of the results to the entire user community. Expanding the data volume would allow for more precise analysis of user behavior patterns and discursive differences among various groups. Moreover, broader-scale qualitative analyses could lead to deeper understanding of users' logic of action, meaning-making processes around campaigns, and influential networks in promoting or weakening them.

Additionally, examining temporal patterns, accompanying hashtags, media links, and the role of key actors (including influencers, journalists, or institutions) in reproducing and expanding campaigns could reveal hidden dimensions of social dynamics in social media networks. Future research combining quantitative and qualitative methods could result in a more profound understanding of digital campaigns and the mechanisms through which they influence public opinion. As recent scholarship suggests, strategic investment in public education and digital literacy fosters not only operational resilience but also empowers individuals to meaningfully engage with complex systems and uphold shared values in fast-evolving environments (Zamani, Hosseini, & Rahmatian, 2024).

Overall, the findings suggest that online campaigns in Iran — especially on Persian Twitter — have become a relatively effective tool for attracting public attention, raising social issues, and creating a space for dialogue. This tension between formal structures and grassroots participation reflects a broader societal dynamic—where systems gain legitimacy not through coercion alone, but through perceived efficacy and alignment with collective values (Aghigh et al., 2022). Digital activism's capacity to surface disconnects between institutional frameworks and public sentiment may partly explain its growing role in shaping discourse. Although Iran's cyberspace faces certain limitations, the data analysis in this study testifies to the social dynamism within this space and underscores the need for greater attention to the phenomenon of digital activism and participatory democracy.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of Interest declared by the author.

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