

Iranian Celebrities on the Internet

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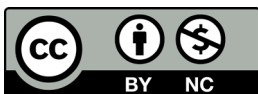
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Abstract

Celebrities have gained considerable influence in the last one hundred years or so, but the advent of so-called Web 2.0 technologies has given celebrity culture a new momentum. We are living in a world in which celebrities are striving to curve their place in every niche and hence we have to become more media literate in order to avoid being exploited by celebrity media and culture. We have to be aware that celebrities promote commodities that they will never use, that they are carefully working on their image to become pleasant to us, and that if they do humanitarian work, they are mainly doing it for their reputation, and not for a real and authentic cause.

Keywords: celanthropy, celebrity culture, digital literacy, Instagram, Iran, privacy.

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Perspective

Celebrities have always used publicity methods to expand their fandom base, but, over the last ten years or so, they have successfully utilized Web 2.0 technologies to boost their celebrity power (Ward, 2012). In the highly regulated cultural climate of Iran, celebrities have been able to enjoy the freedoms that are withheld from other celebrities even in the liberal world. At the time of writing, they are mainly active on Instagram, but they are well aware of the value of presence on multiple platforms and sometimes they disseminate different messages on different platforms according to affordances these platforms offer. In this presentation, I will focus on some aspects of Iranian celebrities' activities on social networks with a critical tone to show how this celebrity industry tries to lure an army of fans and followers behind them and convert their attention into money.

Humanitarianism. Like other celebrities all over the world (see for example, Kapoor, 2013 and Elliott, 2018), Iranian celebrities are well aware of the crucial role of humanitarian show-offs in creating publicity. Therefore, after the disastrous earthquake of November 2017 in Kermanshah, which perished hundreds of people, celebrities took this opportunity, were one of the first groups to reach this remote region and posted their selfies and other images on their social media pages such as Instagram. Their activities on social media created a very negative atmosphere about state bodies' relief and reconstruction activities and many people decided to give their money to celebrities, instead of government relief institutes. Indeed, they were not professional in relief and reconstruction and rumors about celebrities' embezzlement led the public to avoid paying them such a huge amount of money in flood disasters which took place 17 months later in Golestan, Lorestan, and Khuzestan.

Consumerism. Iranian celebrities on Instagram continually promote consumerism in one way or the other. I say Instagram because this platform seems to be the most suitable social media tool for promoting consumer goods, particularly in the fashion industry. Ironically, due to cultural and governmental codes which see consumerism as something harmful to the society, Iranian top celebrities are led to continually denounce consumerism in their public appearances; they do so, indeed, but what we see in action is that they are themselves enjoying a lavish life (and they are proud of that).

The value of the ordinary. While implicitly boasting about their "power of purchase" by showing their luxury houses, expensive belongings, lavish travels, etc., Iranian celebrities contradictorily insist

that they are ordinary people like every other citizen. Stories of the hardships they took to become such a “great Iranian citizen” can be seen in many of these celebrities’ biographies. They don’t want to seem so distant and so inaccessible and hence provide means for their fans to imagine themselves in these high-end lifestyles. In addition, celebrities have understood that the recent prevalence and availability of cosmetics and cosmetic surgery have made them less aesthetically valuable and therefore some of them present themselves in a more natural look in order to communicate their “authenticity.”

Never miss a chance. New social networking platforms have introduced affordances like “stories.” At first glance, it seems it is just another affordance that has been made possible by technology advancement, but, in fact, it is a way to further subjugate fans by keeping them alert of new postings (Abidin, 2018). The user is well aware that going offline might mean missing a live and intimate moment with one’s beloved celebrity; a moment that will be deleted and possibly lost forever.

Privacy. Iranian celebrities use the issue of “privacy” in a smart, and yet, contradictory way. In Iran, the privacy of individuals is strictly protected both by law and by culture; celebrities sell their privacy to the public in order to convert it into wealth, but, when they are stuck in scandals, they start preaching about the sacredness of one’s privacy in the Iranian culture.

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Biography

Ehsan Shahghasemi is Assistant Professor of Communications at the Faculty of Social Sciences at University of Tehran, and the executive board member of the UNESCO Chair on Cyberspace & Culture.

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