



Article Type: Research paper

A Vulnerability Analysis of the Role of Social Networks in Hybrid Warfare against Iran: A Case Study of Instagram

***Mohammad javad Moosanezhad¹, Mahsa Tatari², Afshin Motaghi Dastanai³, Samaneh Movahedi⁴**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Sciences, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran.

2. PhD Student in Political Geography, Faculty of Geographical Sciences, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran.

3. Associate Professor, Department of Political Geography, Faculty of Geographical Sciences, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran.

4. PhD student in International Relations, Allameh Tabatabaee University, Tehran, Iran.

Article Info.

Received: 24/11/2025

Accepted: 5/9/2025

Available Online: 11/9/2025

Extended Abstract

With the increasing expansion of communication technologies and the increasing presence of users in cyberspace, social networks, especially Instagram, have created a fundamental transformation in human social, cultural, and political interactions. Instagram is considered one of the most widely used social networks in Iran and the world due to its diverse capabilities, visual appeal, and interactive features. However, along with communication and information opportunities, this network has also caused significant damage to human societies. The present study, using the pathology model and Levine force-field analysis, has identified and analyzed the positive and negative pressure forces of Instagram within the framework of a hybrid war

Mohammad javad Moosanezhad, Ph.D.

Address: Assistant Professor, Department of Political Sciences, Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin, Iran..

E-mail: mousanejad@soc.ikiu.ac.ir

How to Site:

Moosanezhad, Mohammad Javad and Tatari, Mahsa and Motaghi Dastanai, Afshin and Movahedi, Samaneh. (1404). A Vulnerability Analysis of the Role of Social Networks in Hybrid Warfare against Iran: A Case Study of Instagram. *Fundamental and Applied Studies of the Islamic World*, 7(2), 53-56.



Authors retain the copyright and full publishing rights.

Published by Iranian Association of Geopolitics. This article is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

against Iran. The results show that despite the filtering of this network in Iran after the events of 1401 AH, Instagram is still widely used by Iranian users and plays an effective role in shaping public opinion in creating social and political tension. In this regard, this network, as a tool at the disposal of the hegemonic system and political opponents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has helped to transform some social demands and protests into internal crises and psychological warfare by directing protests and conducting psychological operations on public minds. In addition, the lack of media literacy of users, the dissemination of biased news and information, and the inability to properly analyze content have exacerbated the damage and negative impact of this network on culture, social cohesion, and fundamental issues of Iranian society. According to the research findings, the negative pressure forces of Instagram in Iranian society operate beyond the positive pressure forces and have played a decisive role in creating social and political challenges, which reveals the need for intelligent management, promotion of media literacy, and the development of countermeasure strategies to reduce its negative effects.

Today, social networks in cyberspace are one of the main platforms of human social life. As users of these networks, individuals are present in social networks using their smartphones and are in contact and interaction with human societies and play a role (Vorderer, Kohring, 2013; Matthes, 2022: 7). Cyberspace social networks have attractive and special features compared to other media, including the ability to interact and participate. This has led to their superiority and advantage, general popularity and great dependence of citizens of human societies on them. In the current situation, these networks have occupied a major and main part of gaining awareness, informing and entertaining people of human societies. As a result, these networks play a pivotal and effective role in human life and social developments (Mohammadi Khanghahi, Rezaei, 2019: 195). Since 2000, with the expansion of cyberspace, the global community has entered a new era of social life. The shock of the Covid-19 pandemic forced all people in human societies to enter the space of these social networks, and as a result, an important part of people's social life migrated to cyberspace (Haji Heydari, 2022: 26). One of the most popular social networks today is Instagram.

Given the popularity of this network, this platform is used for various purposes, such as political purposes. Politicians and rival powers seek to create and launch Instagram accounts to attract people to their political campaigns (Liebhart, Bernhardt, 2017; Kwon, 2020: 2). Instagram, as a tool at the disposal of the hegemonic system, promotes the beliefs and thoughts accepted by this system and is used in hybrid wars as a tool in the service of media, information and psychological warfare against the target actor or country. Using this tool (Instagram) as a war tool is much less expensive than military tools and helps a lot in achieving the desired goal of the hegemonic regime and political opponents, in such a way that this regime uses this tool to bombard the target actor or country with information and imagery. In addition to publishing extremist literature, understatement and excerpts of information, this network uses prominent individuals, who are called celebrities, to give public opinion a direction in accordance with its goals. Therefore, the use of this tool by users of the target country also brings social, cultural, moral, ideological and political harm. By recognizing these harms and trying to increase user awareness, target countries can mitigate these harms. Therefore, these unresolved issues of Iranian society have become one of the main topics discussed in cyberspace social networks, especially Instagram, in such a way that this social network has become one of the main centers of command and direction for public opinion. Users and political opponents publish numerous posts and stories in this space daily and direct public opinion. The purpose of this research is to identify the damages of social networks, especially Instagram, in the hybrid war against Iran. As a result, in this research, the damages and weaknesses have been identified by identifying the positive and negative pressure forces of this platform regarding Iranian society. The scope of this pathology includes addressing the components of a phenomenon and examining its problems and dilemmas. Through this pathology, the problems and issues created by this platform (Instagram) are identified and then examined. As a result, the main and fundamental goal of this research is to take a step towards solving the problems and reducing the effectiveness of negative pressure forces by identifying the issues and problems of Instagram and preventing the problems from escalating.

According to the quantitative findings and the approach (field-force analysis)

of this research, the negative pressure forces from this network on Iranian society have caused the positive pressure forces of this network to weaken. Also, according to the approach of Levin's field-force analysis, the negative pressure force exerted on Iranian society by this platform is greater than the positive force, therefore it has led to an imbalance of pressure and a more pronounced negative characteristics of this platform in Iranian society. In this regard, in order to overcome the challenges and reduce the impact of negative forces and establish balance, appropriate approaches need to be adopted so that the negative forces reach their minimum level of impact. Considering that the most important negative pressure force of this network is cultural aggression, as a result, this tool in the hybrid war has initially targeted Iranian-Islamic culture and by influencing public opinion, especially the youth, has increased the influence of the ruling system and opposition groups in Iran, and has created a deep gap between the individuals of society and led to its division. Instagram, as a tool, has a butterfly effect on the minds of Iranian society and distances the society from its original values. It will also replace American culture with Iranian culture over time. In this regard, conscious measures need to be taken to neutralize these attacks. These measures must be of the same nature as these attacks themselves. In other words, for the measures taken to be effective, they must be soft measures. Such attacks cannot be resisted with hard and physical action. In any case, smart technologies require smart users. By being aware of how this space works, we can act more intelligently against future attacks.

Key words: Hybrid Warfare, Social Networks, Instagram, Vulnerability Analysis, Iran.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.