

The Role of Rumors and Gossip in the Formation and Transformation of Personal Brands in the Political Landscape of Iran

UDC: 323(55):316.353

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Abstract

This research delves into the intriguing significance of rumors and gossip in shaping and evolution of personal brands within Iran's political milieu. It scrutinises rumors' unique role and regulatory mechanisms in political arenas across diverse historical epochs and geographical settings. Within Iran, a cultural inclination exists towards heeding rumors concerning an individual's reputation, exerting considerable influence on societal perceptions of personal brands, either bolstering or undermining them. The primary objective is to analyze the impact of rumors and gossip on establishing and developing personal brands in Iran's political realm. By elucidating the function of rumors, this inquiry aims to analyze their capacity to mold public sentiment and impact the fortunes of political figures.

This study adopts an integrative research methodology, including literature review, conceptual analysis, content analysis and case study. The literature review provides insights into the historical and cultural import of rumors in political spheres, while content analysis dissects the portrayal of personal brands in media and public discourse. Several cases from the contemporary political realm of Iran provide practical evidence of the role of rumors and gossip in political branding.

The findings underscore the pivotal role of rumors and gossip in shaping and nurturing personal brands within Iran's political domain. Rumors possess the ability to mold public perception, augmenting the stature of political figures or besmirching their reputations. The pronounced resonance of rumors within contemporary Iranian culture, a potent instrument for political manipulation and control, accentuates their potency and the urgency of understanding this phenomenon. These findings are crucial for understanding the dynamics of political branding in Iran and beyond.

This investigation augments existing scholarship on political branding by elucidating the distinctiveness of rumors and gossip within the Iranian context. The enhanced comprehension of the dynamics surrounding rumors deepens our understanding and empowers political figures to navigate the attendant challenges and opportunities more adeptly. Moreover, this research yields profound insights into the intricate social and political dynamics operative within the country.

Keywords: political branding, personal brands, personal brand formation, political rumors, gossip in politics, political brand strategy, Iran

Роль чуток і пліток у формуванні та трансформації особистих брендів у політичному ландшафті Ірану

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Анотація

Досліджується значення чуток та пліток у формуванні та перетворенні персональних брендів у політичному середовищі сучасного Ірану. Вивчено роль та регулятивні механізми, що керують чутками в політичних аренах на різних історичних епохах та географічних налаштуваннях. У межах Ірану існує культурна схильність приділяти особливу увагу до чуток, що стосуються репутації окремої особи, що, як результат, суттєво впливає на суспільні уявлення про персональні бренди, та провокує їх піднесення та занепад.

Основна мета даної роботи полягає в дослідженні впливу чуток та пліток на становлення та еволюцію персональних брендів у політичній системі Ірану. Вивчення функції чуток на прикладах окремих кейсів з іранського політичного середовища допомагає зрозуміти їхню здатність формувати громадський настрій та впливати на долі політичних діячів.

У дослідженні використано інтегративну методологію, об'єднуючи огляд літератури, концептуальний аналіз, аналіз контенту (соціальні мережі) та кейс-метод. Огляд літератури надає уявлення про історичне та культурне значення чуток у політичних сферах, тоді як аналіз контенту розбирає зображення персональних брендів у ЗМІ та громадських дискусіях.

У висновках підкреслено важливу роль чуток та пліток у формуванні та розвитку персональних брендів на політичній арені Ірану. Чулки мають здатність моделювати громадську думку, підсилюючи статус політичних діячів або підіриваючи їхню репутацію. Виразна резонансність чуток у сучасній культурі Ірану, перетворює їх на потужний інструмент політичного маніпулювання та контролю, підкреслює їхню силу та необхідність глибокого розуміння цього явища.

Розширено існуючу наукову базу щодо політичного брендингу, розкриваючи унікальність чуток та пліток в іранському контексті. Поглиблене розуміння динаміки, що оточує чулки, надає політичним діячам та їх командам можливість краще справлятися з наступними викликами та можливостями. Поглиблено уявлення про складну соціальну та політичну динаміку, притаманну сучасному іранському соціуму.

Ключові слова: політичний брендинг, особисті бренди, становлення особистого бренду, політичні чулки, плітки у політиці, стратегія політичних брендів, Іран

Стаття надійшла / Article arrived: 23.03.2024

Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 25.04.2024

تا نباشد چیزی که مردم نگویند چیزها
*(Persian proverb meaning:
 People usually do not talk about
 the things that have not happened)*

Introduction.

The opening proverb in this article suggests an interesting perspective on how gossip is perceived in Iranian society. It conveys that people only discuss significant matters when more minor incidents occur. A simple socio-linguistic analysis supports that the general attitude toward rumors and gossip appears positive, as people typically avoid talking about non-existent events or events with a low likelihood of happening. Consequently, if a particular rumor circulates in Iranian society, it is plausible that individuals are inclined to believe there is at least some truth to it. The culture of “saving face” in Iranian society and the role of reputation Manata Hashemi has described in a detailed and colorful way (Hashemi, 2020, p. 40) that sheds more light on the influence of gossip and rumors on how the community perceives a person. Subsequently, a politician in the Iranian socio-cultural landscape may depend more on these unofficial and hard-to-control sources of public opinion as gossip and rumors than political figures in other societies. Historically, rumors and gossip have wielded substantial influence in shaping public opinion, particularly within the sphere of politics; in the nuanced landscape of Iranian politics, where personal branding holds considerable sway in garnering support and consolidating power, rumors and gossip assume heightened significance. This academic introduction seeks to delve into the intricate dynamics surrounding the impact of rumors and gossip on the personal brands of politicians in Iran. It examines their overarching presence in political discourse, political figures' strategic deployment of gossip to mold public perception and cultivate allegiance, and the consequential implications of gossip on the efficacy of political branding within contemporary Iran.

As specific phenomena are mentioned in this research, it is necessary to describe what will be meant in the current by ‘gossip’, ‘rumor’ and a ‘personal brand.’ Cambridge Dictionary defines rumor as ‘an unofficial exciting story or piece of news that might be true or invented and quickly spreads from person to person’ (Rumor, 2024). As for ‘gossip’, the same source provides the following explanation: ‘conversation or reports about other people's private lives that might be unkind, disapproving, or not true’ (Gossip, 2024). As a complex concept in sociology and political science, a personal brand may have different description dimensions. Here, in this article, the main focus is on the personal brand of politicians as a ‘mechanism that projects an authentic character to their target audience, which is distinct from rivals and competitors’ (Pich, Armannsdottir, & Dean, 2020, p. 418).

The potency of rumors and gossip as formidable instruments in political communication is unequivocal.

They can sway public sentiment, influence decision-making processes, and mould the narratives surrounding political figures. Rooted in a blend of factual underpinnings, speculative conjecture, and individual biases, rumors and gossip emerge as potent vehicles for shaping public perception. Within the framework of personal branding, politicians rely heavily on their reputation, image, and public persona to secure support and perpetuate their positions of authority. Consequently, discerning the nuanced interplay between rumors and gossip and forming personal brands within the Iranian political milieu is imperative.

Building on this preliminary assumption, the article will address the following questions:

1. *What is gossip and rumors' general place in politics, and how can they impact politicians' personal brands?*

The question explores the foundational role of gossip and rumors within political landscapes and their consequential impact on politicians' personal branding. Flourishing, particularly in environments characterized by opacity and restricted access to accurate information, rumors, and gossip, fills informational lacunae, proffering alternative narratives and interpretive frameworks. By scrutinizing the broader landscape of gossip and rumors within politics, invaluable insights can be gleaned regarding their mechanisms and potential ramifications for personal branding in the political arena.

2. *How do Iranian political figures strategically use gossip to shape public perception and gain support?*

The question is devoted to dissecting the strategic deployment of gossip by political actors in Iran to sculpt public perception and engender support. In Iran's intricately centralized and meticulously regulated political landscape, navigating the intricacies of alliances, rivalries, and power dynamics necessitates adroit maneuvering. Politicians adeptly harness gossip and rumors as tactical instruments to sway public opinion, undermine adversaries, and fortify their positions of influence. By elucidating the stratagems and machinations adopted by Iranian political figures, a more profound comprehension can be attained regarding the instrumental role of gossip in the realm of personal branding within the Iranian political context.

3. *To what extent does gossip contribute to the success or failure of political figures' branding in modern Iran?*

The focus is on the consequential impact of rumors and gossip on the efficacy of political branding within modern Iran. Given the pivotal role of personal branding in political ascendancy within Iran, politicians rely extensively on their public image to garner support and perpetuate their authority. Through meticulous examination of pertinent case studies and rigorous analysis of the ramifications of gossip on political branding, an appraisal can be made regarding how much gossip influences the fortunes of political figures within Iran.

Analysis of previous research and publications.

Within the scope of current research, Karen Adkins' comprehensive analysis (Adkins, 2018) delves into the intricate nuances of the gossip phenomenon, elucidating its multifaceted implications within societal, cultural, and individual frameworks. Adkins explores how gossip serves as a mechanism for societies to introspect on ambiguous phenomena, events, and interpersonal dynamics, thereby influencing the formation and deconstruction of existing social filters. Additionally, Adkins establishes correlations between gossip and structures of power, drawing from detailed case studies in political history. Examining gossip's impact on reputation and its intersections with gender, racial, and minority issues underscores the imperative for further interdisciplinary inquiry into gossip across various dimensions. Moreover, Niko Besnier's analysis (Besnier, 2009, pp. 192-194) scrutinizes the role of gossip within public politics, particularly in shaping the public performance of political actors and everyday political discourse. Besnier elucidates the concept of agency inherent in gossip and its emotional resonance in individuals' engagement with political affairs. By elucidating how gossip engenders pleasure and shame in its dissemination, Besnier highlights its profound influence on societal dynamics within specific political contexts. Carolina Moulin's examination of the place of rumors in international and local politics offers a nuanced perspective on their function within social communication. Moulin defines rumors as a 'mechanism of social communication in which those who have no part can take part' (Moulin, 2010, p. 351). Essentially, rumors serve as a conduit through which individuals, irrespective of their direct involvement, can engage in the discourse surrounding political affairs. Moulin's definition underscores the significant role of rumors, gossip, and unverified information in bridging the gap between politics and individuals. These elements imbue individuals with a sense of participation and influence, fostering the illusion of agency in decision-making processes and interaction with broader political institutions. However, it is essential to recognize that this perceived influence may diverge from the actual reality of individuals' impact on political affairs, which often operate independently of their actions.

Indeed, rumors and gossip have permeated political discourse since antiquity. Cristina Rosillo-Lopez's study illuminates Roman emperors' historical utilization of rumor and gossip strategies, as documented in various historical sources. Cicero's endorsement of incorporating gossip into reports on Senate proceedings underscores its perceived significance in shaping political narratives, as he advocated for comprehensive accounts inclusive of factual information and gossip (Rosillo-Lopez, 2017, p. 79).

In contemporary times, political rumors have garnered increased scholarly attention owing to heightened accessibility to information among potential audiences

and segments of a global society. The proliferation of information poses challenges to individuals in effectively discerning truth from falsehood, as elucidated by Berinsky, who notes that misinformation in media and political discourse substantially threatens democratic processes (Berinsky, 2023, p. 2). Additionally, Adam Belinsky's research delves into the psychological mechanisms underlying individuals' propensity to believe rumors, suggesting that even staunch believers may not genuinely endorse the veracity of the rumors they propagate, instead exhibiting primarily expressive responses (Berinsky, 2023, p. 44).

Contemporary branding strategies, spanning corporate, political, and personal domains, increasingly hinge upon digital platforms, complicating the delineation between verifiable truths and disseminating rumors and gossip. This proliferation of digital channels has posed formidable challenges for traditional media outlets, such as television and newspapers, competing with the prevalence of unverified information propagated by purportedly 'black' radio stations, channels, and social media accounts. Sian Rees underscores the criticality of transparency and integrity in the discourse and actions of brands. However, the pervasive presence of rumors and gossip within the media landscape engenders a precarious environment wherein even reputable news agencies, exemplified by the BBC, confront difficulties in substantiating the authenticity of the information they disseminate (Rees, 2021, p. 134).

Scholarly discourse and practical references underscore the ambivalent impact of gossip and rumors on personal branding. The ubiquitous nature of media coverage allows personal brands to augment their visibility, thereby enhancing their recognition among the general populace. Mateusz Grzesiak posits that audiences often prefer immersing themselves in rumors, gossip, and scandals concerning public figures. From the perspective of brand public relations and the cultivation of popularity, unverified 'sensations' about the private lives of celebrities and public figures wield considerable influence over audience perception (Grzesiak, 2018, p. 40). This perspective suggests the strategic utilization of rumors and gossip in enhancing personal branding, including that of political figures. In the current research, the complex influence of general public opinion on social life and the role of gossip in public relations and propaganda has also been studied widely. Wimberly underlines the mechanisms suggested by many communication strategists for using information, often unconfirmed and even consciously wrong. They start with Walter Lippmann and continue up to his current 'successors' to form a necessary discourse and motivate the 'proper' action in public masses (Wimberly, 2021, pp. 173-175).

Another crucial dimension of the following research is the general analysis of the political culture in modern Iran. Complicated by nature within a general misconception

of a fully religion-cantered political system, in reality, contains a unique political and social ecosystem where an individual is an active particle of it, and the interpersonal relations along with the influence of the individual beliefs and values, as Ali Pirzadeh suggests, is significantly vivid (Pirzadeh, 2019). Alongside a general perception of politics and social norms within Iranian society, a separate focus of the research is on the place of rumors and gossip in the individual value system and the community. Here, the focus is on the research paper of Maryam Ajodani and Mandana Saniee on the impact of gossip on social life (Ajodani, & Saniee, 2019), along with the practical insights into the complex perception of rumors and unapproved information of the formation of general attitude to the media sources, also political, on the example of young people in a big and populated city of Yazd (Ghalebzade, Afshani, & Eslami, 2022).

While studying the main components of the current research question from different perspectives, the overview of the complex Iranian social landscape with multiple rumors and gossip impact, provided by Manata Hashemi in her 'Coming of Age in Iran: Poverty and the Struggle for Dignity' has also been considered, to help with understanding of how exactly the power of gossip and rumors shape an individual's image in society, and how significant their impact is (Hashemi, 2020).

Results.

The personal brand exists apart from the personality of the person who owns it. A personal brand is a category, a complex image of what qualities and characteristics of the natural live person are selected to form a brand. Some personal brands, depending on the extent of openness to the public, have specific characteristics demonstrated bolder, and others that are irrelevant permanently or temporarily are not highlighted in the media, interviews, or official biographies. A personal brand can possess unrealistic characteristics as a mutual product of a personality and its audience, provided the intention is to upgrade or downgrade the brand or bring the personal brand closer to a specific audience.

In the dynamic world of politics, personal branding has become a critical tool for politicians to connect with constituents, influence public opinion, and shape their image. Rumors and gossip cannot be underestimated in this pursuit. While rumors and gossip can wield significant power in building personal brands, they pose considerable risks that can either enhance or tarnish a politician's reputation.

Imam's Face on the Moon. Rumors and gossip hold a unique allure in personal branding for politicians. They have the potential to create intrigue, evoke emotional responses, and capture the public's attention in a crowded media landscape. When strategically harnessed, rumors can help politicians project a particular image, whether of strength, scandal, relatability, or even vulnerability. This carefully curated image can influence how the public perceives a politician, thus shaping their personal brand.

In the socio-political landscape of contemporary Iran, particularly in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution 1979, a pervasive and iconic rumor has persisted: the purported sighting of Imam Khomeini's face projected onto the Moon. This rumor has entrenched itself deeply within Iranian society, becoming a ubiquitous cultural phenomenon. This rumor's precise origins remain in mystery, with its emergence and dissemination occurring organically and without a discernible starting point.

Examining this narrative through the lens of strategic personal branding presents a complex challenge. While numerous scholarly works have explored the authentic leadership and charisma of Imam Khomeini as the first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, scant attention has been devoted to analyzing the deliberate communication strategies employed by Khomeini and his inner circle to craft his image as a transformative leader and architect of the new regime.

Olmo Gözl, in his research, draws attention to the recollections of individuals interviewed, recounting instances where, shortly after Khomeini's triumphant return from exile in France, anecdotal reports emerged of ordinary citizens claiming to have witnessed his reflection on the Moon (Gözl, 2017, pp. 231-233). Gözl highlights the significance of these anecdotes within the broader context of heightened media coverage and the fervent revolutionary fervour gripping Iranian society at the time. In this atmosphere of adulation and reverence towards Imam Khomeini, the mere suggestion of his celestial manifestation reinforced and magnified the prevailing sentiments of admiration and devotion.

The anecdote of the Moon's purported illumination with Khomeini's visage illustrates the intersection of collective imagination, media influence, and socio-political dynamics in shaping perceptions of leadership and authority. It underscores the potency of myth-making and symbolic gestures in bolstering the legitimacy and cult of personality surrounding figures of power. Also, it provides a good example of rumors' role in shaping a political and personal brand and raising its popularity.

While traditional analyses of Khomeini's leadership often focus on ideological doctrines and revolutionary ideology, his supposed lunar apparition invites a deeper exploration of the multifaceted strategies employed in constructing and projecting his public persona. This episode serves as a poignant reminder of the intricate interplay between perception, symbolism, and political communication in shaping the leadership narrative in contemporary Iran.

Imam Is Still Alive. The perpetuation of rumors surrounding the continued existence of Ruhollah Khomeini's post-mortem bolsters the enduring popularity of his personal brand within Iranian society. Despite Khomeini's passing in 1989 at the age of 89, whispers persisted among Iranians, particularly during the formative years of those born a decade later, regarding alleged sightings of Khomeini during prayers in various

mosques across Iran. These rumors gained particular traction as they appeared in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, a period characterized by the regime's need for additional ideological mobilization to maintain power and popularity, particularly among its initial followers and broader society.

Central to understanding the resonance of such rumors is examining the concept of *Imam Zaman* within Shia Islam, which holds significant theological and eschatological importance. Imam Zaman, also known as Imam Mahdi, is believed to be the 12th and final Imam, currently alive and active, but his identity is concealed. He will reappear to establish justice and peace (Mohseni, & Sagha, 2022, p. 5). While contemporary clerics and ideologists of the Islamic Revolution have not officially claimed the embodiment of Imam Zaman within figures such as Khomeini or Ali Khamenei, rumors have circulated.

The conceptual overlap between the immortal stature of Khomeini and the belief in the potential reanimation of Imam Zaman has contributed to the enduring influence of these rumors long after Khomeini's death. This prompts speculation regarding the strategic utilization of the immortality myth to perpetuate the value of Khomeini's personal brand and capitalize on his enduring popularity among Iranians, particularly in the initial decades following the Islamic Revolution. Such strategic manipulation of myth and symbolism may have served to bolster the regime's legitimacy and maintain its hold on power in the face of evolving socio-political challenges.

Imam, the Son of a Foreign Intelligence Agent. The examples above illustrate strategic political rumors that shape a positive image of a political figure, such as Imam Khomeini. However, during the years following the Islamic Revolution, particularly amid rising dissatisfaction with the current political regime, negative rumors about Khomeini, the creator of Iran's current government, have also emerged. This shift in attitude towards Khomeini's personal brand has prompted various individuals or groups to potentially benefit from spreading rumors about him being the son of a spy. These entities include political adversaries, foreign actors, dissidents, and competing ideologies. Such rumors undermine Khomeini's reputation, erode public trust in his leadership, and destabilize the government by sowing discord and confusion. It is crucial to critically evaluate the sources and motivations behind such claims before accepting them as factual. Despite the lack of credible evidence supporting these allegations, the persistence of such rumors underscores the complexity of political narratives and the potential for misinformation to shape public perception. Social media accounts, particularly those on X (previously, Twitter), and a long list of accounts on Reddit and Quora are the main places of generation and spreading these kinds of rumors. Notably, this anecdote fits better in the concept of gossip as it has a particular intention to harm the personal brand of the First

Supreme Leader of Iran. At the same time, compared to the previous rumors aiming to divinize Khomeini, this particular gossip fits into the trend of disappointment of the Iranian society in the regime of the Islamic Republic and tends to reshape his image.

Khomeini as Foreign Intelligence Agent. The phenomenon described in the passage can be analyzed through the lens of several sociological concepts. One pertinent term is *historical revisionism*, which is the reinterpretation of historical events to fit a particular narrative or agenda (Krasner, 2019). In this case, the frustration and disenchantment felt by segments of Iranian society lead them to revise their understanding of the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979. Rather than acknowledging the complexities and internal factors that contributed to the revolution, they *externalize* the entire concept, attributing its origins to other countries, notably the United Kingdom and France. This process can also be understood as *scapegoating*, where the blame for the perceived failure or disillusionment with the revolution is shifted onto external actors or influences. By portraying the revolution as 'imported' from foreign powers, these individuals and groups absolve themselves and their society of responsibility for the outcomes of the Islamic Revolution. Additionally, by scapegoating the regime formation, they create distance from the current political situation, framing it as a mistake imposed from outside rather than an organic development or choice made by Iranian society.

Furthermore, the propagation of such narratives through social media and microblogs illustrates the concept of collective memory, whereby societal perceptions of historical events are shaped and reinforced through shared narratives and discourses. Despite the lack of historical evidence supporting these claims, the widespread dissemination and reception of anecdotes, such as the one about French Intelligence Services training Ruhollah Khomeini during his stay in Nofel Loshato, contribute to their acceptance as part of the collective memory surrounding the Revolution. These anecdotes garner significant attention and reactions on social media platforms, further reinforcing their influence on public discourse.

Ayatollah Khamenei is Either Dead or Terminally Ill. Over the past two decades, rumors surrounding the health status of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Iranian Supreme Leader, have proliferated, particularly gaining traction following the conclusion of the Iranian Green Movement in 2010. This movement sought to challenge the existing regime, spurred by suspicions regarding the outcomes of presidential elections and the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Factors contributing to the spreading of such rumors include Ayatollah Khamenei's advancing age, numerous reports in both state and opposition media detailing his health challenges, and speculation regarding the succession of leadership following his eventual passing. The resultant landscape has become a ground for

conjecture regarding Ayatollah Khamenei's actual health condition. Social media platforms have become conduits for disseminating purported 'breaking news' regarding his demise, accompanied by conjecture on potential post-Khamenei scenarios. These speculations range from headlines speculating on the Islamic Revolution Guardian Corps assuming power to the prospect of the Assembly of Experts (AOE), the official body empowered to designate a new Supreme Leader, selecting a successor from a predetermined list of candidates.

It is worth considering that beyond expressions of dissent against the regime, such rumors may also stem from Iranians attempting to anticipate potential shifts in power dynamics following Ayatollah Khamenei's passing. However, this study's specific interest lies in analysing the responses of social media users to such posts. These responses gauge the Supreme Leader's popularity or lack thereof among the populace. Moreover, examining footage from street protests during the aforementioned Green Movement reveals a notable shift in perceptions of Ayatollah Khamenei's brand. Protestors, in their chants and slogans, often invoked Khamenei while demanding protection of their rights, thereby distinguishing between the roles of the President and the Supreme Leader and characterizing them as representing opposing moral values. However, under the current climate of speculation regarding Ayatollah Khamenei's health, social media users increasingly depict him as either deceased or incapacitated due to terminal cancer, contributing to a broader perception of him as emblematic of a despotic regime, indistinguishable from other members of the Iranian government.

Ahmadinejad's Ethnicity Shifts. Rumors regarding Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's ethnicity, mainly speculation that he has Jewish ancestry, have circulated sporadically over the years. These rumors often arise from various factors, including Ahmadinejad's controversial statements, geopolitical tensions, and historical context. One notable instance occurred during Ahmadinejad's presidency when some Western media outlets and commentators suggested that he had Jewish roots, based on his last name's (Sabourjian) resemblance to Jewish surnames and his family's background in the Aradan region of Iran, where there had been a significant Jewish population historically. However, these claims lack substantive evidence and are often dismissed as unfounded or politically motivated attempts to discredit Ahmadinejad and his administration. In 2009, following the dissemination of rumors regarding Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's purported Jewish heritage across various Israeli news platforms, The Guardian published a comprehensive analysis countering such assertions (Javedanfar, 2009). It is essential to approach such rumors with skepticism and critical analysis, considering their potential to perpetuate stereotypes, misinformation, and political agendas. Without concrete evidence, claims about Ahmadinejad's ethnicity remain speculative and

should be treated with caution. These rumors, his already controversial statements, and geopolitical tensions may have fueled mistrust and polarization, especially after the occurrence of the articles claiming he had no Jewish roots. Overall, they added complexity to his public image and the challenges during his presidency, highlighting the role of media narratives and political agendas in shaping perceptions of global political figures.

Benjamin Netanyahu Has Iranian Roots. A very similar case to the one of Ahmadinejad deals with his strict opponent in the region, Benjamin Netanyahu. Claims suggesting that Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, shares an Iranian heritage akin to Moshe Katsav, one of the presidents of Israel, lack credible evidence and factual substantiation. While it is true that Moshe Katsav was born in Iran, Netanyahu's lineage is well-documented, predominantly tracing back to Eastern Europe, particularly Lithuania. These assertions about Netanyahu's ancestry appear to be unfounded and speculative. However, it is noteworthy to mention that such rumors have occasionally circulated, potentially impacting perceptions of Netanyahu's brand among Iranians.

Interestingly, disseminating rumors suggesting a connection between Netanyahu and Iran may have inadvertently led to some positive perceptions of Netanyahu among Iranians. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors, including the potential for shared cultural heritage or the perception of Netanyahu as a bridge-builder between Iran and Israel due to his supposed Iranian roots. In a region marked by longstanding geopolitical tensions, the idea of an Israeli leader having Iranian ancestry could challenge stereotypes and foster a sense of commonality or understanding between the two nations.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to approach such claims cautiously, recognizing the complexity of identity politics and the potential for misinformation or manipulation. Without concrete evidence to support these assertions, they should be regarded as speculative and subject to critical scrutiny. Additionally, the impact of such rumors on Netanyahu's personal brand and diplomatic relations remains uncertain, highlighting the importance of accurate information and fact-checking in shaping public perceptions and international discourse.

Barak Obama is an Iranian. Rumors alleging that Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States, has Iranian heritage under the name "Barak Abmal" lack credible evidence and are largely dismissed as unfounded speculation. Obama's family background is well-documented, with his father, Barack Obama Sr., of Kenyan descent and his mother, Ann Dunham, of predominantly English and German ancestry. No substantive information or historical record supports the claim that Obama has Iranian roots or that he ever used the name 'Barak Abmal.' These rumors may have emerged due to Obama's engagement with Iran during

his presidency, particularly regarding diplomatic efforts such as the Iran nuclear deal. However, attributing Iranian heritage to Obama based solely on his political actions or policies is a baseless assumption and does not align with factual evidence. On the other hand, the suggestion can be made that the family connections of John Kerry, the U.S. Secretary of State under Obama, hypothetically influenced these rumors. Regarding John Kerry's connections to Iran, it is crucial to separate fact from speculation. While John Kerry played a pivotal role in negotiating the Iran nuclear deal, there is no evidence to suggest that his actions were motivated by personal connections to Iran (his son-in-law was Iranian). Kerry's diplomatic efforts were driven by U.S. foreign policy objectives and the Obama administration's strategy for addressing the Iranian nuclear issue.

Despite the circulation of these rumors and speculation, their impact on U.S.-Iran relations and perceptions of Obama among Iranians was likely minimal. Like people worldwide, Iranians generally form their opinions of foreign leaders based on their policies, actions, and diplomatic relations rather than unsubstantiated rumors about their background. The broader context of U.S.-Iran relations during Obama's presidency, including the Iran nuclear deal and other geopolitical dynamics, likely played a more significant role in shaping perceptions of Obama among Iranians. Therefore, while rumors about Obama's supposed Iranian heritage and speculation about Kerry's connections to Iran may have circulated in certain circles, their influence on diplomatic interactions between the two countries and perceptions of these individuals among Iranians was likely marginal compared to broader geopolitical factors.

Hassan Rouhani and Iran's Territories. Rumors alleging that President Hassan Rouhani of Iran engaged in the sale of Iranian islands to China or ceded portions of the Caspian Sea coast to Russia could impact his personal brand. Although lacking credible evidence, these rumors could have undermined public trust in Rouhani's leadership and tarnished his reputation domestically and internationally. On the other hand, the decrease in his popularity during the second term of his presidency and the reimagining of his personal brand by the Iranian populace can be observed through the rumors mentioned earlier.

For Rouhani, who has sought to position himself as a moderate reformist and advocate for diplomatic engagement with the international community, spreading rumors about territorial concessions could have been damaging. The gossip portrays him as weak or willing to compromise Iran's sovereignty for political or economic gain. In a political landscape where national pride and

sovereignty were highly valued, such allegations could erode Rouhani's support base and credibility among segments of the Iranian population skeptical of foreign relations initiatives.

Moreover, during his second term, Rouhani faced increased scrutiny and pressure from conservative factions within Iran, which opposed his efforts to pursue diplomatic overtures with Western countries. Rumors about territorial concessions could have fueled existing criticisms of Rouhani's policies and provided ammunition to his opponents, further complicating his ability to implement his agenda.

Conclusions.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the intricate interplay between gossip, rumors, and the formation of personal brands within Iran's political landscape. Exploring the research questions revealed several key findings.

Firstly, gossip and rumors occupy an essential place in Iranian politics, serving as pervasive tools that can significantly impact politicians' personal brands. Flourishing within environments characterized by informational opacity, these phenomena fill gaps in knowledge, offering alternative narratives and interpretive frameworks that shape public perception.

Secondly, Iranian political figures, their opponents, and often separate communities within the political milieu strategically leverage gossip to manipulate public opinion and bolster their support base. Within Iran's meticulously regulated political environment, politicians adeptly maneuver through alliances and rivalries, utilizing gossip as a tactical instrument to undermine adversaries and solidify their positions of influence. The articles analyze several cases to show the detailed dynamics of this phenomenon.

Lastly, the study highlights the substantial contribution of gossip to the success or failure of political branding in modern Iran. With personal branding playing a pivotal role in political ascendancy, the influence of gossip on public perception directly impacts the fortunes of political figures. Through in-depth analysis, this research provides valuable insights into the mechanisms through which gossip shapes the trajectories of political careers within Iran's dynamic political landscape.

In essence, this study underscores the critical importance of understanding the role of gossip and rumors in shaping personal brands within the context of Iranian politics. By illuminating these dynamics, policymakers and political actors can better navigate the complexities of political communication and public perception, ultimately enhancing their effectiveness in the political arena.

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