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EXPLORING THE GROUP IDENTITY OF NATIONAL AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN PERSONAL BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF IRAN'S CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL-POLITICAL SPHERE

This study delves into Iran's political landscape, analysing personal branding dynamics and the influence of minority affiliations. Utilising scholarly perspectives, government policies, ethnographic materials, and surveys from Iranians in-country and abroad, it explores how individuals strategically communicate minority connections in their political and social personal brands.

Keywords: *political branding, personal brands, brand identity, personal brand attributes, minorities, Iran.*

Introduction. In recent years, the popularity or what Talaya Waller refers to as "likability" of particular personal brands [1, p.73] in society, large and small groups of audiences, caused a new wave of interest towards the methods, attributes, and proper mechanisms of building a successful personal brand and its effective maintenance. First, it is necessary to mention that in the given article, we refer to 'personal brand' as a phenomenon within the realm of personal and professional development of political figures and social activists in Iran. While not a traditional academic category, the idea of a personal brand has gained prominence in fields such as marketing, career development, and communication studies. It encapsulates the intentional construction and promotion of an individual's unique identity, emphasising values, skills, and overall image. The place of personal brands on the political landscape of separate countries, nations, regions, and the global world brings to political science new perspectives based on the functions and abilities of a personal brand, its agency in specific issues and the impact on the audience.

The academic exploration of personal branding also delves into areas such as psychology, sociology and communication, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of this phenomenon. A personal brand encompasses the distinctive image an individual intentionally constructs within a professional context, delineated by their actions, accomplishments, values, and presentation. It involves a strategic process of defining and promoting unique characteristics to establish a distinct and memorable identity. Critical components of a personal brand, or its attributes [1, p. 95] include the articulation of core values, the showcase of relevant skills and expertise, consistency in behaviour and communication, the cultivation of an online presence, active networking, authenticity, attention to professional appearance, and the cultivation of a positive reputation. In the contemporary digital landscape, one's personal brand is significantly influenced by online activities, including social media engagement, blog contributions, and other internet-associated content. Talking about personal brands in politics, such aspects as personal values, messages a brand conveys, and the strategies it utilises to win the hearts and minds of the target groups of the electorate is of the main focus. This paper's definition is that a personal brand is a public-facing nexus of a person's core identity, projected image, and value proposition', engaged in winning the minds and hearts of the target audience [1, p. 20].

Analysis of previous academic publications. The study delves into a multifaceted and intricate topic, inherently grounded in various interdisciplinary perspectives. The further paragraph is dedicated to a wide range of conceptions that have formed a theoretical framework for the article. It is necessary to emphasise that the topic has rarely been studied within the chosen formulation, which is why the previous publications will contain different aspects of the paper's topic, not the whole approach of analysing personal brands through their minority group affiliation.

The Iranian society under examination is highly politicised, a condition stemming from the numerous attempts at regime-change political movements within the country's modern history, particularly since the Islamic Revolution 1979. Existing scholarship on the politicisation of societies, exemplified by the works of Gordon Bailey and Noga Gayle [2], as well as Kari Palonen, Claudia Wiesner, Veith Selk, Niilo Kauppi, Hans-Jörg-Trenz, Claire Dupuy, Virginie Van Ingelgom & Philip Liste [3], contributes valuable insights. These studies illuminate how the discourse and trends in internal and international politics intricately shape the collective world perception, enabling politics to permeate every facet of political life.

In this contextual framework, the current research aims to grasp the social framework of modern Iran, providing a foundational understanding that, in turn, facilitates the exploration of perceptions regarding various political, social and cultural aspects through a politicised lens, as suggests Mirsajadi [4, p. 43]. The

research seeks to unravel the intricate interplay between political discourse, societal dynamics, and individual perceptions within the Iranian context by situating the study within this dynamic socio-political landscape.

The analytical exploration of personal branding within the realms of politics and the broader social fabric of a nation is underpinned by a methodological and contextual framework. Talaya Waller's seminal work on personal brands [1] is a foundational reference in delineating the conceptual landscape. Additionally, the research conducted by Aman Abida, Paul Harrigan, Shasha Wang, Sanjit K. Roy, and Tauel Harper [5, p. 319] delves into the intricacies of utilising social media in political contexts and the associated nuances of political branding.

Hadi Sohrabi's contributions provide valuable insights into the intersection of media, politics, and branding in the Iranian context. Sohrabi's work elucidates the role of media tools in shaping political narratives, delineating the contours of the public sphere, and illuminating the dynamics of political branding within the Iranian landscape [6].

The investigation into critical concepts within minority studies spans diverse perspectives within a chosen discourse. Ethnic minorities and related human rights studies are scrutinised through Ra'ees' research [7]. Behnaz Hosseini's examination focuses on ethnic and religious minorities in contemporary Iran [8], while Choksy explores non-Muslim religious minorities [9]. Rasmus Elling delves into the correlation between ethnicity and nationalism, Persian-centrism, and how it affects modern Iranian society [10, pp. 84–85]. RAND Corporation's analysis of ethnic policies in Iran [11] provides a multifaceted view of the ethnic landscape within the chosen discourse.

A separate line of inquiry in the present research revolves around the agency of art in democracy and protest movements worldwide and Iran and the role of different art forms in shaping national identity and political ideology, articulated by Parand Danesh [12, pp. 246–247]. This aspect resonates with analysing the political positioning of Iranian artists and celebrities based on «Iranian Popular Music and History: Views from Tehrangeles» [13]. This framework sheds light on the interplay between artistic expression and political stances and contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of public protest within the Iranian cultural context.

The aim of analysis and research questions. The several interrogatives delineate the research framework, which serves as guiding inquiries for the analysis. First of all, it touches upon the influence of Minority Group Affiliation. How does affiliation with a minority group influence the developmental trajectory and public perception of the personal brands of political and social figures within Iran's contemporary sociocultural milieu? Another focus is on the strategic Utilization

of Affiliation with minority groups. Do political and social statistics strategically leverage their affiliation with minority groups to their personal brands and within contemporary Iranian society? Does it influence the perception of the brands among the audience?

Methods. Methodologically, this investigation involves an in-depth analysis of the personal brands curated by politicians, social activists, media figures, and social media influencers. The overarching objective is to discern and comprehend the nuanced impact of the determinants above on the audience's perception of personal brands. The scholarly pursuit of understanding the influence of minority group affiliation on the definition of personal brands in contemporary Iran is driven by the intricate dynamics of sociocultural factors and identity construction. Given the diverse ethnic and socioeconomic composition of Iran, investigating the nuanced ways in which minority affiliations shape the development and perception of personal brands is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of individual identity within broader societal frameworks. This research aims to untangle the multifaceted aspects of identity formation, societal expectations, and strategic brand management, providing nuanced insights into the interplay of individual identities and minority affiliations in contemporary Iran. Eventually, the research aims to define how specific personal brands in the socio-political landscape of Iran use affiliation with particular minority groups to craft their image. For the given study, the following methods have been applied:

1. Content analysis:

Diverse media formats, such as scientific papers, social media posts, news articles, public chats and comments, have undergone meticulous analysis to scrutinise the portrayal and construction of personal brands within contemporary Iran. This methodological approach seeks to discern prevalent themes, narratives, and visual representations that pertain to political and personal branding, the minority group affiliations of specific personal brands, and the manifestation of economic inequality. Through this analytical lens, a comprehensive understanding of societal influences on personal brands is sought, enriching the research with a broader perspective on the nuanced dynamics at play.

The methodological framework for this research draws upon Maria Paola Faggiano's insights and guidance [14]. This strategic incorporation enhances the method's robustness. It aligns the research with established best practices, ensuring a nuanced and methodologically sound exploration of the multifaceted dimensions inherent in portraying and shaping personal brands within the Iranian socio-political context.

1. Ethnographic research:

In this qualitative research endeavour, ethnographic research is chosen to explore and comprehend the Iranian population, constituting the potential audience for the

analysed personal brands of politicians, social activists and celebrities. The research methodology involves establishing close communication with the community, encompassing those residing within Iran and the Iranian diaspora in Scandinavia, Canada, and Eastern Europe. In this context, ethnography aims to provide a profound understanding of the behaviours and perspectives prevalent within this group. The utilisation of ethnographic methods manifests in conducting interviews within focus groups and facilitating group discussions concerning the perception of personal brands. Through these qualitative engagements, the study aims to capture the lived experiences and social dynamics that intricately shape the phenomenon of personal branding within minority communities. This strategic congruence enhances the study's relevance and facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the specific demographic under investigation. A critical consideration in implementing ethnographic methods pertains to the challenges researchers face, particularly in interactions with focus groups and interviewees from Iran. The prevailing political regime in the country has cultivated scepticism and a lack of credence toward statistical and scientific organisations, including researchers, among Iranians both within the country and in the Persian diaspora. This trust issue, as emphasised by Gary Alan Fine in the context of researchers 'Selves' [15, p. 94], emerges as a pivotal concern that can significantly influence the overall outcomes of the study and nuances within individual perspectives. Addressing this challenge is imperative for ensuring the credibility and reliability of the research outcomes in a context marked by political sensitivities and trust deficits.

2. Survey-based research:

This research adopts a survey-based approach to systematically investigate and gather quantitative data on diverse personal brand perceptions within the contemporary landscape of Iran and the Persian diaspora. The survey design specifically targets variables related to minority group affiliations and the perceived influence of a personal brand's background on audience reception. This methodological choice facilitates comprehensive data collection and permits subsequent statistical analyses to discern significant relationships or correlations among these variables.

The selected survey methodology aligns with principles elucidated in 'Experimental Methods in Survey Research: Techniques that Combine Random Sampling with Random Assignment' [16, pp. 117–128]. This methodological framework ensures a structured and rigorous approach to data collection, fostering the identification of patterns and trends within the dataset and survey question design.

The survey participants, totalling 76 individuals, were strategically chosen to represent diverse demographics. This inclusivity encompasses various genders

(males, females, non-binary), participants with distinct educational backgrounds (ranging from school diploma to MA), and individuals falling within five distinct segments based on employment (encompassing students to CEOs of enterprises and heads of independent business entities). Geographically, the survey encapsulates respondents residing in Iran and individuals of Persian descent in Canada, Norway, Sweden, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania. The respondents also represented different religious groups, such as Muslims (Shia and Sunni), Christians (Armenian church), Jews and Bahai. This deliberate diversity in the participant pool enhances the study's applicability and generalizability to different demographic and geographic contexts.

3. In-depth interviews:

This study employed in-depth interviews with a carefully chosen cohort comprising Iranian residents and the diaspora, totalling 12 participants. The objective was to comprehensively understand their perspectives on the implications of minority group affiliation underpinnings of personal brands in shaping perceptual frameworks. The research explored the interviewees' attitudes toward a curated selection of personal brands, predominantly prevalent on social media platforms, and elucidated how the factors above influence these perceptions. The methodological approach employed aligns with the principles of topical interviews [17], emphasising a focused examination of specific subjects, such as the impact of selected characteristics of a personal brand on its image among the audience. This qualitative research methodology is chosen for its capacity to yield detailed insights into the intricacies and subtleties characterising personal branding dynamics in contemporary Iran.

4. Comparative analysis:

This study aims to compare perceptions and experiences of personal brands among individuals of Iranian descent, focusing on brands within a minority group. The methodology involves scrutinising how these brands benefit or incur losses based on the emphasis on their affiliation with minority groups during the construction of their images. Applying Comparative Political Thought (CPT) is instrumental for this purpose, as it provides a diverse range of analytical perspectives conducive to exploring social categories from an alternative standpoint. CPT, defined as "the joining up of the methods of political theorists and comparative analysts," proves central to intellectual engagement with marginalised bodies of thought [18, p. 274].

Results and Findings. During the content analysis process, a comprehensive array of informational sources was scrutinised, encompassing scientific papers, articles in online magazines, recommendations from SEO tools, ratings on media platforms, and discussions on Quora and Reddit. Additionally, evaluations of popular

social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok were examined. This expansive phase yielded compelling data on politicians, activists, and public figures whose personal brands are associated with minority groups, particularly regarding ethnic background and religion.

The initial selection of personal brands exhibited significant diversity, encompassing politicians (pro-regime and those of opposition), artists in Iran and exile, and media personalities. The list of politicians and social activists was selected, considering the strength of their personal brands and affiliation with specific minority groups. The artistic cohort included individuals active in the domestic show business industry and a substantial group of artists and celebrities of Persian descent residing outside Iran. An in-depth analysis of their social media activity was conducted, including post themes, attention to the main trends in society's social and political life, presenting specific social sentiments, and engagement with their target audience.

It is imperative to underscore that this research focuses on three distinct categories: 'permitted' artists with a clean reputation', 'permitted' artists actively engaged in social movement and political resilience against the official Iranian regime and those in exile. In Iran, «permitted» artists possess licenses from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, contingent upon adherence to specific terms. These terms primarily involve loyalty to the regime, adherence to hijab regulations, and alignment of artistic activities with the ideological censorship guidelines. Artists failing to meet these requirements are often relegated to the underground music scene in Iran [19].

Analysing the underground world of music and other arts, especially those clandestinely operating within Iran, poses significant challenges. The absence of online presence and limited media activity complicates their recognition and inclusion in this research. Furthermore, the research targets explicitly personal brands with heightened awareness and recognition, a characteristic not commonly associated with underground artists. Instead, a large cohort of artists have partially or entirely lost their 'permitted' status due to social and political activism, representing high research interest as their brands can shed light on the importance of agency in a personal brand's perception. After the outbreak of the new uprisings in Iran caused by the tragic death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman of Kurdish descent [20], a long list of more than 100 well-known Iranian 'permitted' artists have been exposed to political and legislative persecution due to participation in the street protests, creating artistic works to appreciate the 'Woman-Life-Freedom' uprisings or expressing the support of the movement on social media [21].

Turning attention to artists and media personalities in exile, this category encompasses individuals prohibited in Iran due to non-compliance with the system's

requirements, prompting them to reside outside the country, or Persian-descent individuals born abroad or who have never been to Iran. The latter group often diverges from the approved lifestyle within the country. Notably, female artists, particularly singers, face increased scrutiny from governmental institutions, reflecting a heightened pressure level due to their activities not aligning with the predominant cultural agenda of "permitted art" [22].

In the initial content analysis phase, ethnic affiliations, specifically those of Armenians, Iranian Jews, Iranian Kurds, and Iranian Turks (preliminarily Azeri), were discerned within top-rated personal brands. Consequently, representatives from these ethnic groups were purposefully incorporated into the cohort of survey participants. The primary objective was to ascertain the resonance of the selected personal brands among individuals sharing the same ethnicity and to discern whether a correlation exists between personal brand acceptance and awareness and the ethnic background of the surveyed individuals.

The prevailing consensus among respondents underscores the notion that the accentuation of ethnic background by certain personal brands is not merely instrumental in establishing connections with an audience of the same ethnicity. Instead, it is pivotal in articulating and representing distinct societal issues within the Iranian context from diverse perspectives. This strategic emphasis on ethnic background serves as a conduit for fostering a nuanced understanding among Iranian nationals and the global community regarding the collective solidarity of the multi-ethnic Persian society. This solidarity, thus illuminated, offers insights into the myriad challenges confronting society and underscores the imperative for collaborative efforts to address these challenges effectively.

Simultaneously, the affiliation with religious minority identity suggests that, particularly in politics, the strategic emphasis on specific attributes linked to religious minority affiliation can yield distinct outcomes in shaping an individual's public image. An illustrative case is that of Masih Alinejad, an Iranian journalist and political activist in exile. Alinejad's decision to alter her birth name from Masoumeh (signifying innocence without sins) to Masih (meaning Messiah and a component of Jesus Christ's name in Iranian tradition) serves as a manifestation and self-branding strategy. This nomenclature adjustment functions as a deliberate manoeuvre to underscore her brand's ethos of advocating for the vulnerable and undergoing a transformative shift from a predominantly Islamic image to one with broader international resonance.

Remarkably, the responses from individuals identifying as Christians indicate a perception that Alinejad's naming tactic is contrived and insincere. In contrast, Muslims and Bahais acknowledged the shift in the personal brand name yet, in most instances, expressed difficulty in fully resonating with its intended message. This

nuanced analysis reveals the intricate dynamics at play, wherein the reception of such branding strategies varies across religious affiliations, adding a layer of complexity to the understanding of personal brand perception within the context of religious minorities in politics.

The survey phase of this research was executed by utilising templates within private groups on WhatsApp and Telegram, spanning several structured stages. Initially, participants were presented with a list of 30 personal brands previously identified during the content analysis phase. Their task was to rank these brands based on perceived interest, ranging from the most compelling to the least engaging or completely unknown. Participants were allowed to exclude five brands from the provided list and introduce two new brands of their choice. The outcomes of this stage yielded noteworthy results, revealing a substantial degree of consensus within the focus group. A notable 72 % of respondents proposed the same personal brands for inclusion, while 53 % uniformly excluded particular brands from consideration.

The current research, concentrated on minority affiliations, precisely delimits its focus to ethnic and religious minorities, with LGBTQ minority affiliation deemed deserving of a distinct review and analysis. Moreover, findings from surveys and interviews indicate a notable absence of emphasis on LGBTQ minority affiliations by respondents. Strikingly, 87% of respondents, encompassing all survey participants residing within Iran, where LGBTQ affiliation is legally prosecuted, express an unexpected inclination towards personal brands associated with the LGBTQ community, particularly those of social activists. Notably, although Reza Farahan (a media figure from Los Angeles) and Cyrus Veyssi (a Persian non-binary blogger) failed to register high recognition or political and social activity among respondents, both were subsequently excluded from the study. This research segment underscores the significance of the agency concept, with 79 % of respondents highlighting the prominence of active social and political stances. The study reveals that mirroring the prevailing trends within Iranian society, participating in protest movements, and advocating for increased awareness regarding social inequality and economic challenges faced by vulnerable segments are perceived as fundamental attributes of successful and popular personal brands. This is particularly pronounced among individuals within the artistic and media spheres, establishing a compelling allure for domestic and international audiences, encompassing Iranians within and outside the country.

Incorporating social and political advocacy into a personal brand in the highly politicised context of the everyday life of Iranians is crucial for several reasons. It establishes a meaningful identity, fostering a connection with like-minded audiences. This commitment enhances authenticity, building trust with followers who appreciate socially conscious figures. Moreover, advocacy broadens the brand's

impact, allowing individuals to use their platform for positive change and influence. Integrating advocacy into a personal brand contributes to purposeful identity, trustworthiness, and societal implications. That is why, in practice, the personal brands of non-politicians are more appreciated if they represent a specific social agency.

The primary emphasis on minority groups' association with personal brands is directed towards their ethnic and religious backgrounds. The insights gleaned from interactions with respondents predominantly illuminate this dynamic in the contexts of Bahaism and Christianity. The religious minority background constitutes a salient attribute of Parivash Rohani's brand as an eminent political and social activist. Rohani has devoted her entire career to raising awareness regarding the Iranian government's policies against the Bahai faith. Respondents identified her brand as an exemplar of Bahai representation within political branding, acknowledging the scarcity of prominent figures from this religious minority, partly attributed to government policies in education [23, p. 545] and other instances of oppression. Notably, the level of recognition of Rohani's brand among non-Bahai respondents is noteworthy, with 61 % displaying familiarity and providing detailed insights into her political and social endeavours. Persistent rumours circulate regarding the alleged affiliation of Iranian-French actress and political activist Golshifteh Farahani to the Bahai religion, as indicated by respondents and various online sources. The absence of an official statement from Farahani on this matter prompts some respondents to propose that pro-government entities may employ these rumours to cultivate negativity among their audience by attributing specific characteristics to her image. Offering a reflective perspective, Farzaneh, a Bahai MD from Oslo, posits, "For years, the policy of making Bahais enemies of the state has been brainwashing the minds of pro-regime Iranians. That is why I believe it could be a strategic step by such groups and individuals to exaggerate the negative image of Golshifteh by associating her with Bahais".

In the realm of top-ranking personal brands with Christian minority affiliations, notable instances include Andranik Madadian, widely known as Andy, an Iranian-Armenian renowned singer, songwriter, and social activist, and Manook Khodabakhshian, a journalist and political activist in exile. Madadian, transparent about his Armenian heritage, engages in multifaceted activities, including social media presence and composing songs in Persian, English, and Armenian that laud the beauty of Iran and its diverse cultures. Furthermore, he openly articulates political viewpoints and actively supports charitable endeavours for the Iranian populace. His collaboration with Jon Bon Jovi in 'Stand by Me' resulted in a chart-topping song acknowledged as an anthem for the peaceful and amicable aspects

of Iranian culture, contrasting with the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Rashid, a Sunni mechanical engineer from Western Iran, asserts, "Andy is one of the greatest representatives of Iran and our people, demonstrating our authentic attitude toward the world, particularly Western countries".

Manook Khodabakhshian has contributed significantly to political discourse through reports on oppositional television channels and his personal social media platforms. Through these channels, Khodabakhshian has played a crucial role in providing a deeper comprehension of the Iranian regime and the intricate socio-political landscape of the nation. Posthumously, he is now recognised by many respondents as an educator, enhancing Iranians' understanding of internal politics and offering insights into potential avenues for addressing the challenging socio-political circumstances. A testimonial from Hussein, a medical student in Iran, exemplifies the impact, stating, "We call him Uncle Manook in our family. Though initially disinterested in politics, his interviews, as a judicious representative of students in Iran, have enlightened me on numerous concepts previously unfamiliar to me".

An intriguing case within the realm of minority group membership is exemplified by the personal brand of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who is of Azeri descent through his father. While the strategic use of this affiliation remains indiscernible, respondents consistently recognise him as a prominent example of an Iranian Turk in politics. Another poignant illustration is that of Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish woman whose tragic demise, attributed to the harsh actions of the moral police due to a perceived violation of hijab norms, is analysed within the context of the modern concept of martyrdom and public agency [12, p. 246]. Despite Amini's lack of explicit engagement with political issues during her lifetime, her brand, as portrayed by respondents, embodies the genuine image of contemporary Iranian youth and garners top-ranking recognition within the study.

Amini's untimely death becomes a symbol within the research, epitomising the perceived unjust treatment of Kurdish minorities, particularly those of the Sunni sect, deemed separatists by the government [24, p. 47]. Although Amini's political stance remains unspecified, the socio-political movement spurred by her passing, coupled with the resonant slogan 'Zan.Zendegi.Azadi' (Woman.Life.Freedom in Persian), parallels the impactful 'Jin, Jiyan, Azadi' in Kurdish. Reflecting on Amini's influence, Manizhe, a social worker of Azeri descent from Vancouver, notes, "When I think of minorities and personal brands that represent them, I always think about Mahsa (Amini) as the first and mainly the most influential not only for us, Iranians, but globally. This is the message of how unfair the state policy has been towards one of the noblest and most honourable Persian nations, the Kurds.

I am happy the whole world showed solidarity with us, but Mahsa"s life and the lives of other young protesters is such a high price".

Following the generation of a revised list of personal brands, the research progressed into the phases of group discussions and interviews. In the group discussions, except for the primary objectives of minority affiliation, the new aspect was distinguished, such as the extent to which the identified personal brands either adhered to or deviated from prevailing societal norms and expectations, particularly those about economic inequality or the state norms of moral codes, forming a majority culture. As an experimental view of the concept of disobeying the state moral codes, such as hijab policies, behavioural norms regarding attitude to nudity, attitude towards marriage, and interpersonal relations, the 'cultural minority' was suggested as a phenomenon of the Iranian socio-political context.

The proposition for introducing a new term stems from the contention that acts defying societal norms in Iran, particularly as a protest against specific government policies, defy conventional categorisations of deviance, marginality, or vandalism. They are classifying behaviours such as selecting a particular dressing style or revealing or cutting hair as deviant, which is deemed challenging and incongruent with the perceptions of most respondents, who predominantly view these acts as expressions of personal choice. This novel term, «rem», emerges from the narratives extracted during interviews and survey responses, characterising Iranian personal brands with explicit political stances, particularly those in exile or advocating a secular perspective, constituting a distinct minority – specifically, a cultural one.

In the course of interviews, the term is conceptualised as a community within the broader societal context, characterised by unique cultural attributes, including language preferences (Persian languages or the languages of the countries to which the personal brands are affiliated), liberal and cosmopolitan viewpoints, and values such as respect and responsibility in representing Iranian people and advocating for vulnerable groups. This conceptualisation delineates the identity of this group, positioning it as distinct from the mainstream culture within the pro-government socio-political context. While acknowledging the potential idealisation inherent in this description, it offers a foundation for future investigations into personal brands in Iranian politics and social life. It provides insights into audience expectations regarding the responsibilities of personal brands, the messages they convey, and the imperative of embodying a conscious representation of diverse Iranian ethnic, religious, and other minority groups to achieve national representation.

Conclusions. This study aimed to explore the role of minority group affiliation in personal branding within contemporary Iran's social and political sphere.

By examining the strategies employed by individuals in emphasising their minority affiliation, as well as the perceptions and experiences of individuals belonging to different minority groups, this research has shed light on the significance and implications of minority group affiliation in personal branding.

The findings of this study indicate that minority group affiliation is not merely a means of gaining more followers within the same minority group. Instead, it serves as a form of specific political and cultural pluralism within Iranian society. Individuals strategically emphasise their minority affiliation to navigate the complex socio-political landscape, establish their personal brand, and exert influence within the larger Iranian society. By aligning themselves with a particular minority group, individuals can tap into that group's collective identity, experiences, and aspirations, enhancing their personal brand and increasing their effectiveness in the socio-political arena.

The research findings also highlight the emergence of a new term, namely 'cultural minority', which encapsulates the responsibilities that individuals should shoulder to become successful and influential personal brands in the Iranian socio-political arena. Surveys and interviews revealed that individuals identifying as cultural minorities recognise the importance of promoting intercultural understanding, fostering inclusivity, and challenging dominant narratives. They are seen as agents of change, working towards a more inclusive and diverse society and leveraging their brand to amplify the voices of marginalised communities.

These findings significantly affect scholars and practitioners in personal branding and minority studies. Firstly, this study challenges the conventional understanding of personal branding as a purely individualistic endeavour. It highlights the interconnectedness between personal branding and collective identity, demonstrating that minority group affiliation can be a powerful tool for individuals to establish their personal brand and exert influence within the socio-political sphere.

Furthermore, this study's findings call for a broader exploration of minority group affiliation and personal branding on a broader scale. While this research focused on contemporary Iran, the insights gained can be applied to other contexts where minority groups (religious and ethnic) face similar challenges and opportunities. Comparative studies could provide a deeper understanding of the role of minority group affiliation in personal branding across different socio-political contexts, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

Practitioners in the field of personal branding can also benefit from the findings of this study. The identification of the concept of cultural minority and the associated responsibilities can inform individuals seeking to establish their personal brand

within minority communities. By understanding the expectations and aspirations of these communities, individuals can develop strategies that align with their values and effectively engage with their target audience. This can lead to more authentic and impactful personal branding efforts, fostering meaningful connections and facilitating positive social change.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The research was conducted within a specific time frame and geographical location, focusing primarily on the Iranian context and two major minority perspectives: national and religious. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings may be limited to similar socio-political contexts. Moreover, the study relied on self-reported data from surveys and interviews, which may be subject to biases and limitations inherent to these methods. Future research could employ mixed-method approaches, incorporating quantitative data and objective measures to complement the qualitative findings.

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ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ГРУПОВОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ НАЦІОНАЛЬНИХ ТА РЕЛІГІЙНИХ МЕНШИН У ПЕРСОНАЛЬНОМУ БРЕНДИНГУ: НА ПРИКЛАДІ СУЧАСНОЇ СОЦІАЛЬНО-ПОЛІТИЧНОЇ СФЕРИ ІРАНУ

*У статті осмислюється динаміка особистого брендингу в політичному ланд-
шафті Ірану, зокрема вплив міноритетної ідентичності особистих брендів на сприй-
няття їх авдиторією. Для цього розглянуто наукові праці щодо іранської політики
відносно релігійних та етнічних меншин, проаналізовано етнографічні матеріали
з теми та проведено опитування серед іранців у межах країни та за кордоном, щоб
зрозуміти, як індивіди стратегічно комунікують приналежність до національних
та релігійних меншин у своїх особистих брендах.*

*Ключові слова: політичний брендинг, особистий бренд, ідентичність бренду,
атрибути особистого бренду, політика меншин, Іран.*

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