

Gender Narrative and Political Movement in Iran After the Death of Mahsa Amini: An International Newspaper Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman from the Kurdistan region of Iran, sparked widespread protests and condemnation both domestically and internationally. These protests escalated into mass demonstrations across various regions of Iran and the global community. This article examines the role of international media and newspapers in shaping discourses that heightened global awareness of the ongoing human rights violations in Iran. The study employs gender theory and political movement theory as analytical instruments. The research methodology utilized is discourse analysis, with data obtained from news reports published on the official websites of international newspapers. The findings reveal that Mahsa Amini's death triggered both support and opposition regarding the dress code regulations stipulated by the Iranian government. The discourse constructed by international media further raised public awareness of human rights issues, particularly the discrimination against women, which reinforced the significance of the human rights violations surrounding Mahsa Amini's case. This tragedy underscores the necessity of reducing discrimination against women in the future, ensuring the achievement of the National Women's Policy 2030, and advancing the effective enforcement of human rights.

1. Introduction

Media language operates as a complex system of signs through which social realities, ideological meanings, and collective identities are symbolically constructed and interpreted. Within this semiotic landscape, news discourse and visual representation function together to encode events with significance that shapes public understanding and emotional engagement. The death of Mahsa Amini in police custody in September 2022 consequently emerged not only as a tragic socio-political incident but also as a powerful discursive moment constructed through international media narratives. Linguistic framing transforms private suffering into collective trauma, enabling transnational recognition and embedding individual cases in global cultural consciousness (Nafees, 2025).

In postcolonial feminist discourse, narrative structures function as political tools that challenge dominant discourses and re-center female subjectivity by linking personal experience to broader struggles over power and identity (Ali et al., 2025). Visual symbolism, intensified by digital media and platform politics, turns localized oppression into a transnational discourse on gendered oppression and human rights advocacy (Amaral, 2025). Debates on gender politics

show how counter-hegemonic frames emerge within and against state narratives, revealing the contested nature of feminism and oppression (Hou, 2024). Mythic reinterpretations and feminist readings further universalize narratives of resilience against socio-political hierarchies, positioning the case within enduring claims to empowerment and rights (Dey, 2025).

The sociopolitical context of Iran intensifies the symbolic weight attached to representations of women in public life, where veiling and public appearance function as central signals within both state discourse and social norms (Hosseini, 2021; Kuroda, 2021). Iran's legal framework, rooted in its historical trajectory and the post 1979 consolidation of Sharia based governance, imposes strict moral codes that regulate women's public appearance and social behavior (Kuroda, 2021). Contemporary scholarship on Islamic reform notes that emancipation is often pursued through reinterpretation of sacred texts within Islamic frameworks rather than through secular paradigms, a perspective that is central to debates among the moderate Islamic trend (Kuroda, 2021). An intersectional lens, as discussed by Ferree (2018), highlights how gender, religion, law, and political authority jointly shape these representations and intensify their symbolic significance.



Figure 1. A demonstration held by students at one of the universities in Iran

This tension between state authority and bodily autonomy is visually reinforced in Figure 1, which depicts university students staging a demonstration following Amini's death. From a semiotic perspective, collective gestures, spatial formations, and visible defiance of dress regulations function as visual signs of resistance that renegotiate power in controlled settings. Analyses of semiotic repertoires in mixed-gender research groups show how gaze, body positioning, and related sign systems claim space, sustain affiliation, and contest marginalization, while enjoining and interactional strategies in translingual negotiation enable women scientists to claim agency and resist oppression without severing professional ties (Sun & Canagarajah, 2024). Semiotic resources such as gaze, tone, and laughter thus enact resistance and affiliation (Sun & Canagarajah, 2024). Studies of gender representation in educational texts, such as Ekowati et al. (2021), show how images, gestures, and intertextual cues shape meanings of female agency, while theories of polysemiotics, including pantomimic to visual transitions, highlight that resistance signs traverse multiple modalities rather than being confined to gesture alone (Żywicznyński et al., 2021). Similarly, Figure 2, showing crowded protests in Tehran, symbolically communicates political solidarity, where the occupation of public space becomes a visible act of opposition to systemic repression.



Figure 2. A demonstration taking place on the streets of Tehran, the capital of Iran

A growing body of scholarship has examined

gender inequality and state regulation in Iran. Studies highlight how Islamic legal interpretations shape gender roles and reproduce structural discrimination within public and private domains (Puspitasari, 2022; Daud & Rosadi, 2021). Political analyses also demonstrate how authoritarian governance, economic instability, and state violence contribute to the emergence of collective protest movements (Khatam, 2023; Abdullah, 2020; Oktarina, 2021). These works provide important insight into the sociopolitical context but remain largely centred on structural and institutional analysis, offering limited attention to how meaning is constructed through international media language and visual representation.

Framing and discourse studies further reveal that media institutions shape public interpretation through selective representation and strategic emphasis (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Eriyanto, 2011; Muir et al., 2021). Gender theory also demonstrates how symbolic representation reinforces dominant ideologies and social hierarchies (Burns, 2007; Azizah, 2017; Lindqvist et al., 2021; Wolf, 2013). However, bibliometric mapping using Scopus and VOSviewer indicates a notable gap in studies that examine Mahsa Amini's case through the combined perspectives of gender narrative, political movement, and media semiotics. Few investigations explore how international newspapers transform this event into a symbolic discourse that merges gender injustice with political resistance.

Addressing this gap, the present study employs gender theory and political movement theory as its analytical instruments. Gender theory is used to investigate how women are represented within narratives of oppression, agency, and identity formation, while political movement theory provides a framework for analysing how media discourse constructs collective protest as organized resistance. The integration of these perspectives allows this research to explore how international media semiotically shape meanings of power, resistance, and gendered suffering.

This study adopts discourse analysis as its primary methodology to examine how language and symbolic imagery construct meaning within international news texts. By analysing coverage from Voice of America, Al Jazeera, and Russia Today, the research investigates how these outlets encode ideological positions through narrative framing, lexical choices, and visual representation. Through this approach, the study aims to uncover how media discourse transforms personal tragedy into a collective political narrative that influences global perceptions of Iran.

In conclusion, the death of Mahsa Amini emerges not only as a human rights tragedy but as a symbolic discourse event constructed through the interaction of language and imagery. The inclusion of visual illustrations of protest and resistance reinforces the

transformation of her story into a global narrative of gender injustice and political defiance. This study demonstrates the importance of examining media discourse as a powerful site of meaning making, offering significant implications for discourse studies, feminist scholarship, political communication, and the understanding of global human rights narratives.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design intended to interpret how gender representation and political movements are constructed in international media discourse following the death of Mahsa Amini. The qualitative approach is selected to facilitate a deep exploration of meaning, symbolism, and ideological positioning embedded in news texts. Through this design, the study examines discourse as a site where power relations, resistance, and identity formation are linguistically and semiotically articulated.

The descriptive nature of the design focuses on developing rich interpretive explanations of the phenomenon under investigation, grounded in empirical observations and supported by theoretical argumentation. These descriptions are analysed to produce analytical interpretations that reflect the complexity of media representation (Creswell, 2014; Sugiyono, 2018). This approach prioritises contextual depth and interpretative rigour rather than numerical generalisation.

2.2 Analytical Framework

The study utilises gender theory and political movement theory as its primary analytical instruments. Gender theory is applied to examine how media discourse represents women in relation to oppression, agency, and identity construction, within contexts of power imbalance and social control. This theoretical perspective also incorporates the conceptual distinction between sex and gender, where gender is understood as a socially constructed system of roles and expectations shaped by ideological structures (Azizah, 2017; Burns, 2007; Lindqvist et al., 2021).

Political movement theory is employed to interpret how protests and collective actions are represented in news discourse. It provides a framework for analysing how media constructs demonstrations as expressions of organised resistance, solidarity, and political mobilisation in response to state repression. This perspective enables the study to identify how discursive practices shape public understanding of political struggle and resistance movements (Abdullah, 2020; Oktarina, 2021).

2.3 Identification of Research Gap

To identify the research gap, a bibliometric mapping process was conducted prior to the main discourse analysis. Articles related to Mahsa Amini were retrieved from the Scopus database and processed using VOSviewer. The results are visually presented in Figure 4, which shows sixty six items grouped into five clusters with six hundred and thirteen links and a total link strength of six hundred and twelve.

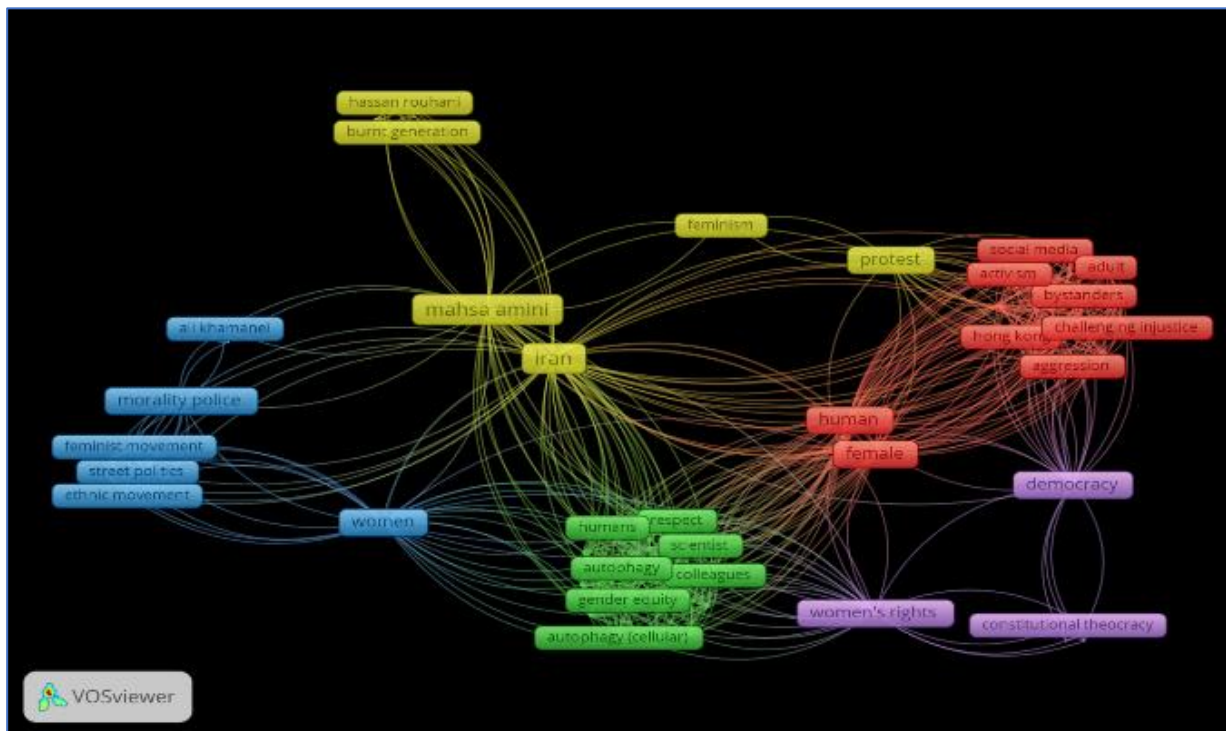


Figure 4. Research Gap

This visual mapping indicates that studies addressing framing and gender narratives in relation to Mahsa Amini remain limited. The illustration therefore supports the relevance and originality of the present study in focusing on discourse construction through gender and political movement frameworks.

2.4 Data Collection

The data consist of secondary sources in the form of news articles collected from international newspaper websites. Data collection was conducted through systematic library research by accessing digital archives and selecting articles relevant to Mahsa Amini's death and the resulting political protests. The selection focused on texts that explicitly address gender issues, media framing, and representations of resistance.

The time frame for data collection covered the initial publication period of Mahsa Amini related news and extended to two weeks after the first report. This period was chosen to capture the peak phase of discursive construction when public attention and narrative intensity were highest.

2.5 Data Sources

Three international media outlets were selected as the primary sources of data, representing diverse geopolitical perspectives. These include Voice of America, Al Jazeera, and Russia Today. The distribution and quantity of data are presented in Table 1, which shows that twenty one articles were collected from Voice of America, ten from Al Jazeera, and thirteen from Russia Today, resulting in a total of forty four news articles.

Table 1. News Sources

News	Website	Total News
VOA	www.voanews.com	21
Al Jazeera	www.aljazeera.com	10
Russia Today	www.rt.com	13

The use of Table 1 strengthens the transparency of data selection by clearly illustrating the volume and origin of the analysed corpus.

2.6 Data Analysis

This study employs discourse analysis as the primary methodological approach to examine how international media construct meaning regarding the death of Mahsa Amini and the subsequent political movements in Iran. The analytical process is guided by *gender theory and framing theory as the main interpretative lenses*, explicitly grounded in the works for gender theory, and Chong as well as Eriyanto for framing theory. Gender theory is applied to analyse how women are linguistically positioned in the discourse, particularly in relation to power, marginalisation, agency, and resistance, revealing how media narratives reproduce or challenge dominant gender ideologies (Azizah, 2017; Burns, 2007; Lindqvist et al., 2021; Wolf, 2013).

Framing theory, as articulated by Chong (2007) and Eriyanto (2011), is used to examine how international media select, emphasise, and organise particular aspects of the event in order to shape audience interpretation. This includes identifying dominant frames related to human rights violations, moral policing, political repression, and gender resistance. The data were processed using NVivo 12 to facilitate systematic coding and thematic categorisation. Sentiment analysis using the keywords positive and negative enabled the identification of dominant ideological tendencies. Through iterative reading and coding, the analysis reveals how media discourse constructs representations of Mahsa Amini and positions her death within broader narratives of gender injustice and political mobilisation, ensuring that the findings remain theoretically grounded, cohesive, and methodologically robust.

4. Result

The researcher collected data from Voice of America (VOA), Al Jazeera, and Russia Today using NVivo 12 software. The results are presented in the following table:

Table 2. VOA News

No	News Title	Publication Date	Positive	Negative
1	Iranian Woman's Death After Morals Police Arrest Sparks Protests	16/09/2022	1	9
2	Protests Erupt at Funeral of Iranian Woman Who Died After Morals Arrest	17/09/2022	2	13
3	Iranians Protest Mahsa Amini's Death Amid Growing Calls for Accountability	20/09/2022	1	14
4	UN Calls for Probe into Death of Iranian Woman Arrested by 'Morality Police'	20/09/2022	2	8
5	Iran Protests Against Woman's Death in Hijab Case Spread to 16 Provinces	20/09/2022	4	17

No	News Title	Publication Date	Positive	Negative
6	International Calls Grow for Probe of Iranian Woman's Death After Arrest by Morality Police	21/09/2022	4	11
7	Iran Cracks Down Violently on Nationwide Protests; at Least 6 Killed	21/09/2022	9	19
8	Iran's Revolutionary Guards Issue Warning as Protests Over Woman's Death Spread	22/09/2022	5	19
9	Women in Turkey Protest Iranian Woman's Death	22/09/2022	2	10
10	US Imposes Sanctions on Iranian Morality Police	22/09/2022	4	15
11	Calls for Iran to Free Female Photojournalist Detained at Protest	22/09/2022	3	16
12	At Least 9 Killed as Iran Protests Over Woman's Death Spread	23/09/2022	1	27
13	US Lawmakers Assail Iran on Death of Woman in Morality Police Custody	22/09/2022	4	11
14	VOA Interview: State Department Spokesperson Ned Price	22/09/2022	6	10
15	Iran Demonstrations Hit Home for Diaspora Women	22/09/2022	8	19
16	Violent Unrest Continues in Iran; State TV Suggests 26 Dead	23/09/2022	3	12
17	US Issues License to Expand Internet Access for Iranians	23/09/2022	1	3
18	Journalists Arrested in Iran, Warned About Protest Coverage	23/09/2022	7	21
19	Week of Unrest in Iran Leaves at Least 35 Dead	23/09/2022	7	25
20	Amini Death Exposes Rival Faces of Tehran	23/09/2022	3	15
21	UN Secretary-General Raises Human Rights Issues with Iran's President	23/09/2022	2	7
Total			79	301

Table 2 shows a strong sentiment imbalance in VOA's reporting on Mahsa Amini's death and the ensuing protests. Across 21 articles, VOA contains 79 positive instances versus 301 negative instances, meaning negative sentiment represents about 79 percent of all coded sentiment and appears roughly 3.8 times more often than positive sentiment. Negativity also concentrates at the peak of coverage: 14 of the 21 items were published on 22 to 23 September 2022, and these two days account for 210 of the 301 negative instances, indicating intensification as the narrative shifts from an individual death to nationwide unrest, deaths, arrests, and repression.

This imbalance is analytically meaningful because "positive" sentiment in VOA does not primarily signal optimism, but rather a discourse of action and legitimacy. Positive cues cluster around protest agency, international solidarity, calls for accountability, sanctions, and practical support such as expanding internet access, while negative sentiment anchors a crisis and responsibility frame that foregrounds state violence and coercive institutions as causal agents. Taken together, VOA constructs an escalation narrative in which sustained negativity produces moral urgency and continuity, and selective positivity functions as an authorised pathway for response, locating hope in accountability and transnational pressure rather than in an internal resolution within Iran.

Figure 5.1 presents a comparison between positive and negative sentiments. The results show that among the two, negative sentiment is significantly more dominant, even exceeding 50 percent of the total size of the chart. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 provide a visual representation of positive and negative sentiments in the VOA news article data that was collected. The results indicate that, on average, paragraphs containing positive sentiment make up no more than 20 percent. In contrast, for negative sentiment, the paragraphs containing negative sentiment account for nearly 50 percent on average, meaning that in each news article, almost half of the content conveys negative sentiment regarding the death of Mahsa Amini.

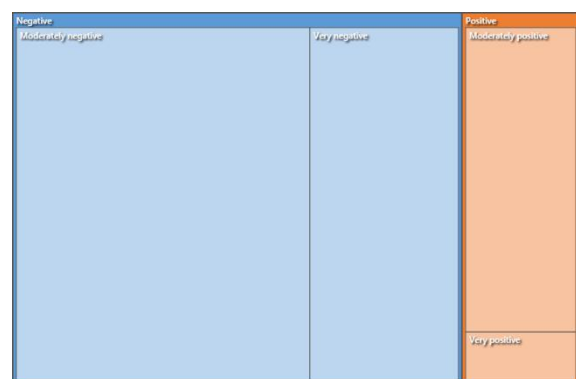


Figure 5.1 Comparison of Positive and Negative Sentiments in VOA News Articles

Figure 5.1 shows that negative sentiment strongly dominates VOA's coverage of Mahsa Amini's death, with negative evaluations appearing far more often than positive ones. This pattern suggests that VOA consistently foregrounds repression, state violence, and crisis, constructing the event as a human rights emergency rather than an ordinary political issue.

Positive sentiment appears only at the margins, usually in brief mentions of international solidarity or support for protesters, which limits space for more nuanced or dialogic readings. The following figures, 5.2 and 5.3, deepen this picture by detailing how these positive and negative stances are distributed across individual news articles.

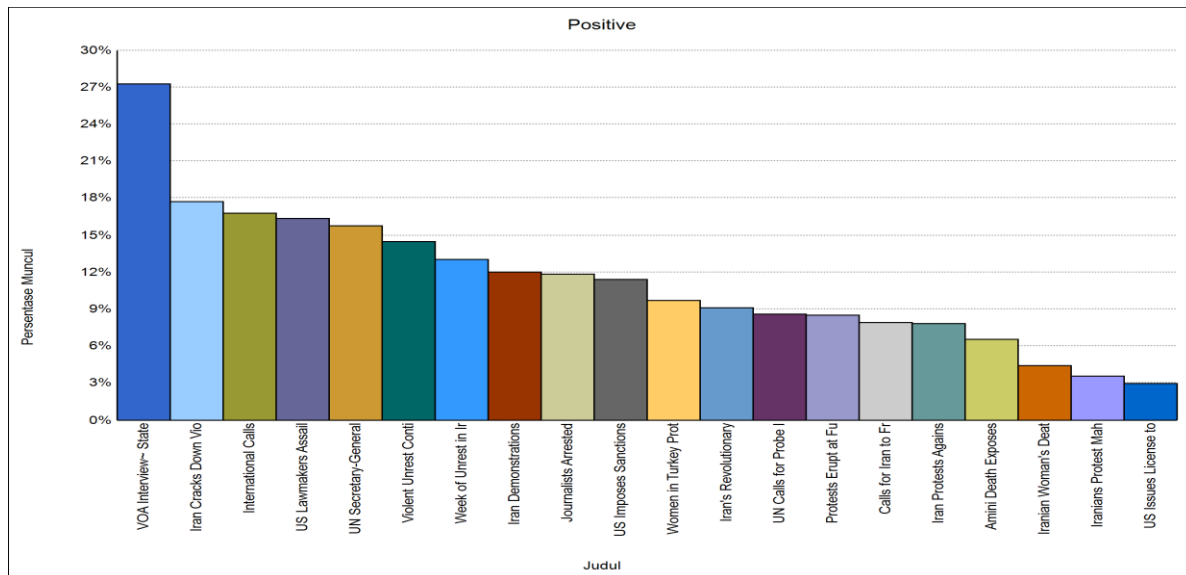


Figure 5.2 Visual Table of Positive Sentiments in VOA News Articles

Figure 5.2 visualises how positive and negative sentiments are distributed across individual VOA news articles, showing that the dominance of negative stance is not concentrated in a few extreme cases but recurs consistently throughout the corpus. Even in articles that contain some positive or sympathetic paragraphs, negative evaluations of state actors, security forces, and the morality police remain prominent and often frame the overall narrative arc, which reinforces the construction of Mahsa Amini's death as evidence of

systemic injustice rather than an isolated tragedy. This granular pattern strengthens the earlier finding from Figure 5.1 that VOA's reporting foregrounds crisis and repression, while leaving limited space for more ambivalent or reconciliatory readings. The next subsection turns to Al Jazeera, as presented in Table 3 and Figures 6.1 to 6.3, in order to compare whether similar or different sentiment configurations emerge in another international news outlet.

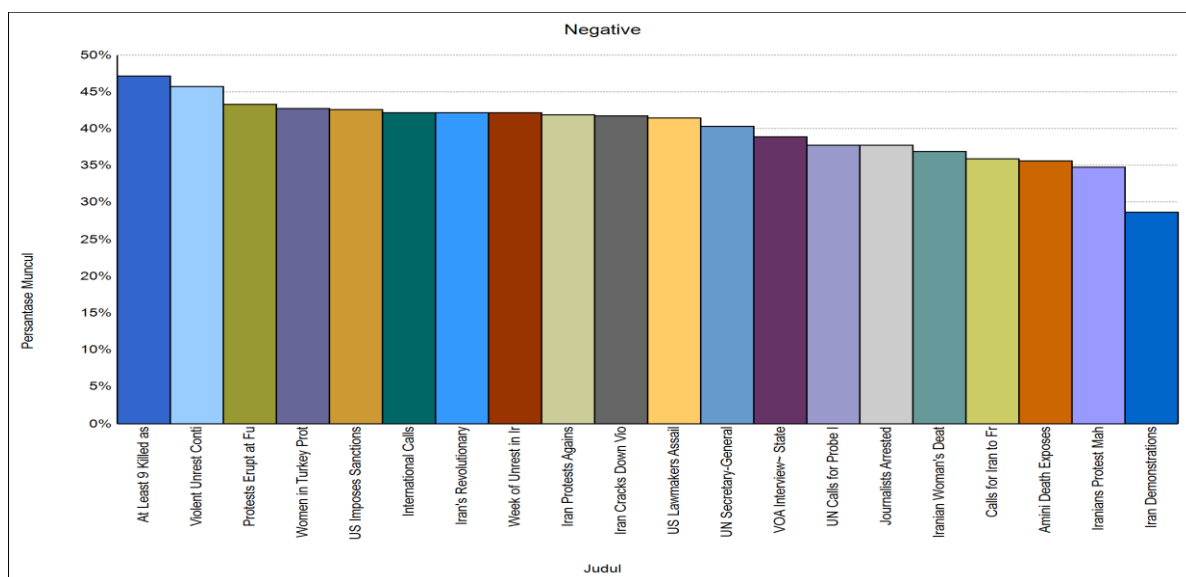


Figure 5.3 Visual Table of Negative Sentiments in VOA News Articles

Figure 5.3 sharpens this pattern by showing how negative sentiment paragraphs cluster densely within most VOA news items, often occupying close to half or more of each article’s textual space. Visually, positive evaluations appear as thin, scattered segments, while negative ones form thick, continuous blocks that

anchor the narrative around state violence, repression, and moral policing. This configuration suggests that negative sentiment is not merely frequent but structurally central to the way Mahsa Amini’s death is told, shaping readers’ affective trajectory from the opening to the closing of the reports.

Table 3. Al Jazeera News

No	News Title	Publication Date	Positive	Negative
1	Protests persist as Iran holds first court sessions for ‘rioters’	30/10/2022	5	22
2	Saudis tell US that Iran may attack the kingdom: Officials	01/11/2022	4	13
3	Iranian police launch probe after video shows man beaten, shot	01/11/2022	1	15
4	Iran denounces skater who flouted hijab rule abroad amid protests	07/11/2022	3	17
5	Iran arrests woman accused of links to UK-based TV channel	09/11/2022	2	14
6	Two more French citizens held in Iran, foreign minister confirms	11/11/2022	7	17
7	Iran pushes back against protest scrutiny at the UN	12/11/2022	4	15
8	Iran court issues first death sentence in protest-linked cases	13/11/2022	1	18
9	EU, UK sanction dozens of Iranian officials over rights abuses	13/11/2022	6	8
10	Iran football legend Daei will not attend World Cup amid protests	14/11/2022	2	11
Total			35	150

Table 3 indicates a clear sentiment asymmetry in Al Jazeera’s coverage. Across 10 articles, there are 35 positive instances versus 150 negative instances, meaning negative sentiment accounts for about 81 percent of all coded sentiment and appears roughly 4.3 times more often than positive sentiment. The distribution also suggests that negativity is not confined to a single story type, but is sustained across reports on court proceedings, arrests, beatings, and protest-linked punishments, with particularly high negative counts in items focused on coercive enforcement and judicial escalation, such as the first death sentence in protest-linked cases (18 negative, 1 positive) and the report on alleged beating and shooting (15 negative, 1 positive).

Analytically, the limited “positive” sentiment functions less as emotional uplift and more as a discourse marker for external constraint and collective response. Positive cues cluster around international diplomacy and countermeasures, for example sanctions by the EU and UK (6 positive, 8 negative), along with confirmation of detained foreign citizens, which tends to introduce institutional voice, procedural language, and diplomatic framing that slightly tempers the otherwise punitive tone. Overall, Al Jazeera constructs a narrative of governance through coercion, in which negative sentiment anchors an accountability and human rights frame, while positive sentiment punctuates the coverage with pathways of international scrutiny and repercussion, positioning external actors

and institutional arenas as the primary sites where pressure can be applied.

Figure 6.1 shows a comparison between positive and negative sentiments. As in the previous results, the data still indicates that among the two sentiments, the proportion of negative sentiment exceeds 50 percent of the total chart area, meaning that negative sentiment dominates the overall news articles. Figures 6.2 and 6.3 present the visualization tables for positive and negative sentiments in the *Al Jazeera* news articles collected. The results show that, unlike the previous findings, the average number of paragraphs containing positive sentiment does not reach 10 percent. In contrast, the average number of paragraphs containing negative sentiment exceeds 30 percent.

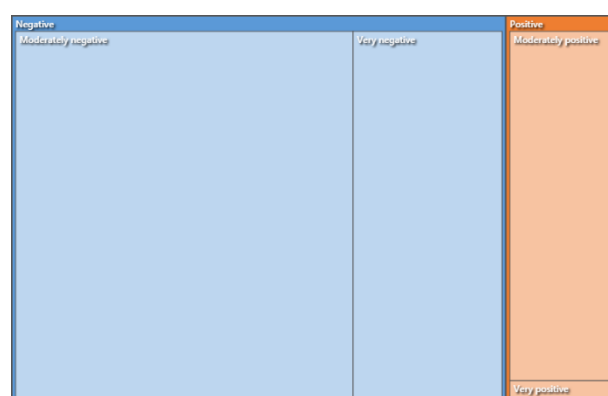


Figure 6.1 Comparison of Positive and Negative Sentiments in Al Jazeera News Articles

Figure 6.1 confirms that Al Jazeera’s coverage of Mahsa Amini’s death is also heavily skewed toward negative sentiment, with paragraphs expressing negative evaluations outnumbering positive ones by almost five to one and occupying more than half of the overall chart area. This pattern suggests that Al Jazeera similarly foregrounds frames of repression, human rights violations, and political crisis, yet with an even narrower space for positive or hopeful discourse, since

on average positive sentiment does not reach ten percent of paragraph distribution while negative sentiment exceeds thirty percent. In other words, Al Jazeera’s reporting reinforces a critical reading of Iran’s handling of the protests, but does so through a sentiment configuration that is slightly less saturated with negativity than VOA, while still clearly aligning with a narrative of systemic injustice.

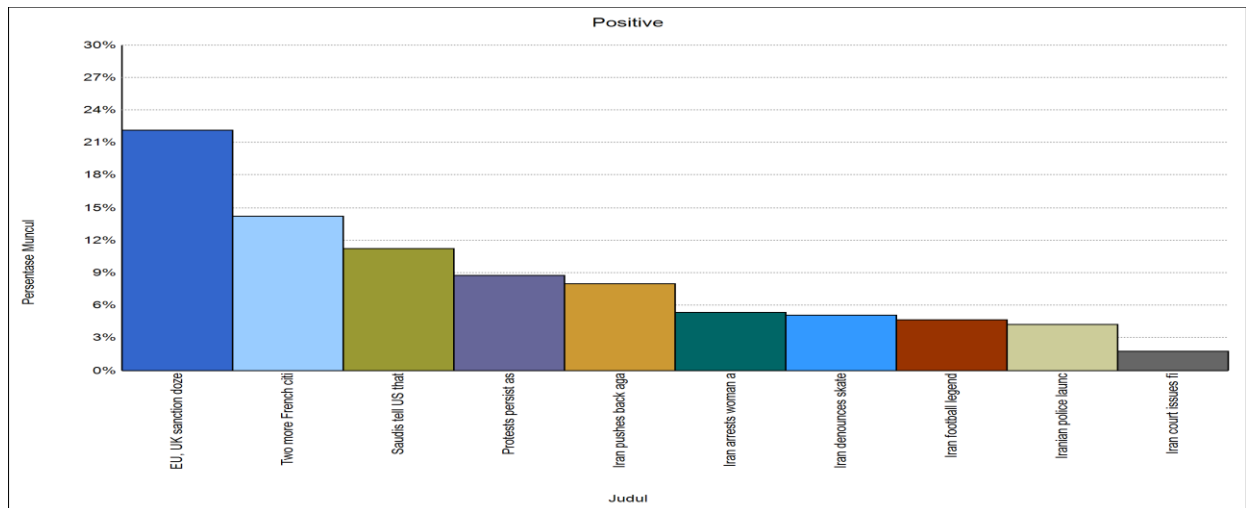


Figure 6.2 Visual Table of Positive Sentiments in Al Jazeera News Articles

Figure 6.2 further shows that negative sentiment is distributed across almost all Al Jazeera articles rather than concentrated in a small number of especially critical reports, which means that a pessimistic or crisis oriented tone is a recurring baseline rather than an exception. Even in articles that register some positive or sympathetic evaluations, such as references to international support or calls for accountability,

negative paragraphs still dominate the overall sentiment balance and frame the main storyline around state repression and moral policing. This pattern suggests that Al Jazeera constructs Mahsa Amini’s case as part of a continuing structure of injustice, while leaving only limited narrative room for more ambivalent or reconciliatory positions

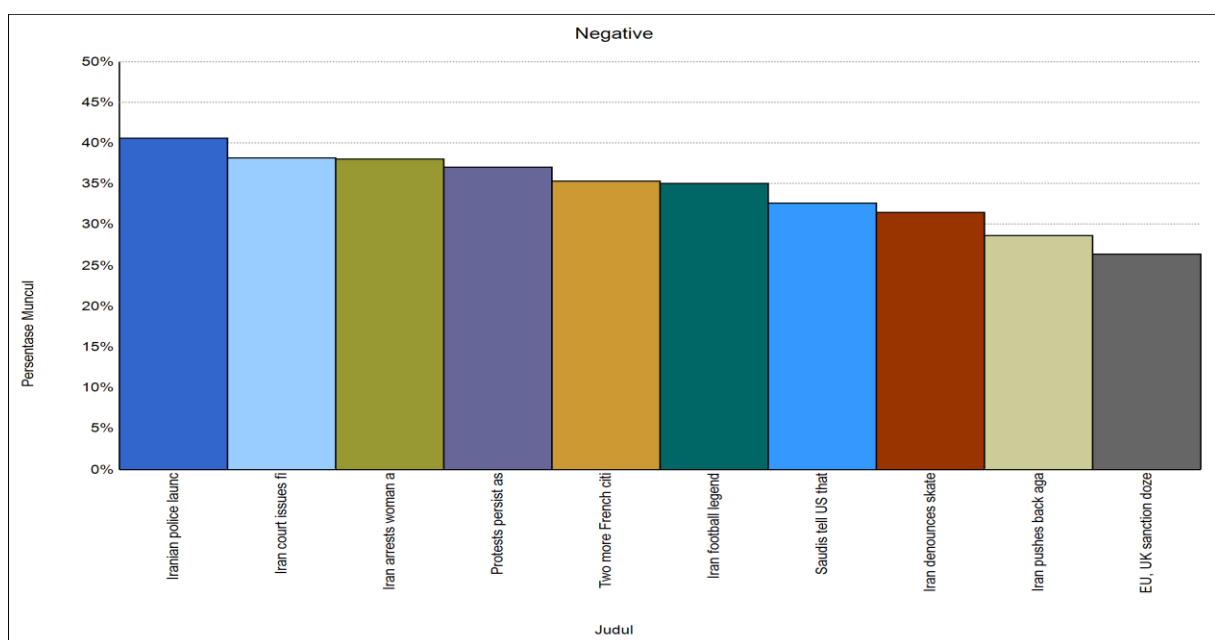


Figure 6.3 Visual Table of Negative Sentiments in Al Jazeera News Articles

Figure 6.3 visualises how negative paragraphs in Al Jazeera's reports tend to appear in sustained sequences, often concentrated in the opening and closing sections of the articles, where the overall evaluative framing is most strongly established. Positive sentiment, by contrast, is usually confined to short, scattered segments that soften rather than overturn the dominant tone, such as brief mentions of

international solidarity, human rights advocacy, or hopes for accountability. This pattern suggests that Al Jazeera leads and ends its coverage with a clearly critical stance that anchors Mahsa Amini's case within a wider narrative of repression and structural injustice, while allowing only limited and carefully positioned moments of cautious optimism.

Table 4. Russia Today News

No	News Title	Publication Date	Positive	Negative
1	Iranian police respond to woman's death in custody	19/09/2022	1	8
2	Iranian official pins blame for deadly unrest	21/09/2022	0	9
3	US sanctions Iran's 'morality police'	22/09/2022	1	9
4	Iranian leader's interview cancelled over head scarf – CNN	23/09/2022	2	4
5	US partially lifts Iran sanctions	23/09/2022	0	5
6	Iran summons Western envoys	25/09/2022	1	9
7	Hijab of contention: Death of a young woman has sparked mass protests in Iran. What's next?	27/09/2022	11	30
8	European citizens arrested in Iran – authorities	01/10/2022	1	5
9	Iranian activists want their country banned from World Cup	01/10/2022	3	5
10	19 killed in Iranian police station attack	01/10/2022	2	8
11	Iran blames US and Israel for riots	03/10/2022	0	9
12	Cause of Mahsa Amini's death revealed by Iranian coroner	07/10/2022	0	8
13	UK sanctions Iranian 'morality police'	10/10/2022	1	9
Total			23	118

Table 4 shows that Russia Today's coverage is also dominated by negative sentiment, but with a different internal pattern from VOA and Al Jazeera. Across 13 articles, RT contains 23 positive instances versus 118 negative instances, meaning negative sentiment represents about 84 percent of all coded sentiment and appears roughly 5.1 times more often than positive sentiment. Notably, four articles contain no positive sentiment at all, and these zero positive items cluster around attribution and official blame narratives, such as "Iranian official pins blame for deadly unrest" and "Iran blames US and Israel for riots," as well as institutionalised fact setting around the coroner's report. This suggests a genre effect: when RT foregrounds official explanations and causal claims, the discourse becomes more unidirectionally negative, with little textual space for solidarity, reform, or accountability language.

At the same time, RT's positivity is highly concentrated in one long analytical feature, "Hijab of contention...What's next?" which includes 11 positive and 30 negative instances and accounts for nearly half of all positive sentiment in the RT sample. This concentration implies that RT's "positive" sentiment is not distributed as recurring cues of collective empowerment or international pressure, but rather appears when the outlet shifts into interpretive commentary and future oriented speculation. In this configuration, negativity remains the dominant frame,

anchoring conflict, violence, and disorder, while limited positivity functions as a rhetorical device for positioning, narrative closure, and plausibility building rather than for legitimising protest or foregrounding rights based accountability. Overall, RT constructs a problem narrative that is intense but less interventionist. It privileges official accounts and geopolitical attribution, so the crisis is framed through blame allocation and external causality rather than accountability or protest legitimacy. This emphasis reduces space for mobilising positivity, making cues more sporadic and more likely to appear in commentary than reporting, unlike the more action oriented positivity in VOA and Al Jazeera.

Figure 7.1 presents a comparison between positive and negative sentiments. The results remain consistent, showing that negative sentiment occupies more than 50 percent of the total chart area, indicating that negative sentiment dominates the overall news articles. Figures 7.2 and 7.3 display the visualization tables for positive and negative sentiments in the *Russia Today* news articles. The results show that paragraphs containing positive sentiment are very few, and some articles do not contain any positive sentiment at all. This differs from the previous two news outlets, VOA and Al Jazeera, where each article contained at least one instance of positive sentiment. In contrast, for negative sentiment, the average proportion of paragraphs containing negative sentiment approaches 40 percent.

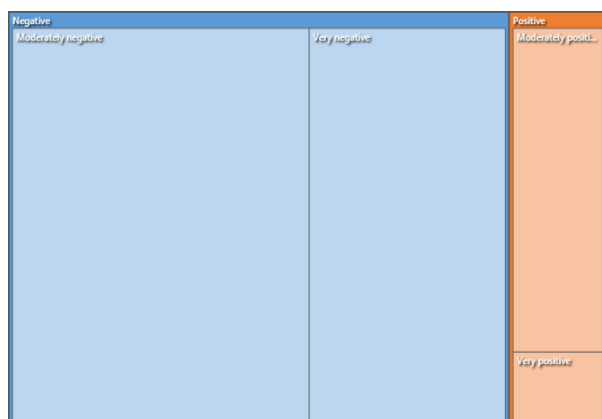


Figure 7.1 Comparison of Positive and Negative Sentiments in Russia Today News Articles

Figure 7.1 reveals a markedly different sentiment configuration in Russia Today's coverage, where negative evaluations of Iran's authorities and morality police are present but far less dominant than in VOA and Al Jazeera, and are counterbalanced by a substantial proportion of neutral and mildly positive paragraphs. This distribution suggests that Russia Today frames Mahsa Amini's death less as clear evidence of systemic state repression and more as a contested event embedded in geopolitical tension, with greater space given to official statements, security concerns, and narratives of external interference. In this sense, the outlet's evaluative stance appears more ambivalent and occasionally protective of state sovereignty, softening the critical edge that characterises the other two corpora.

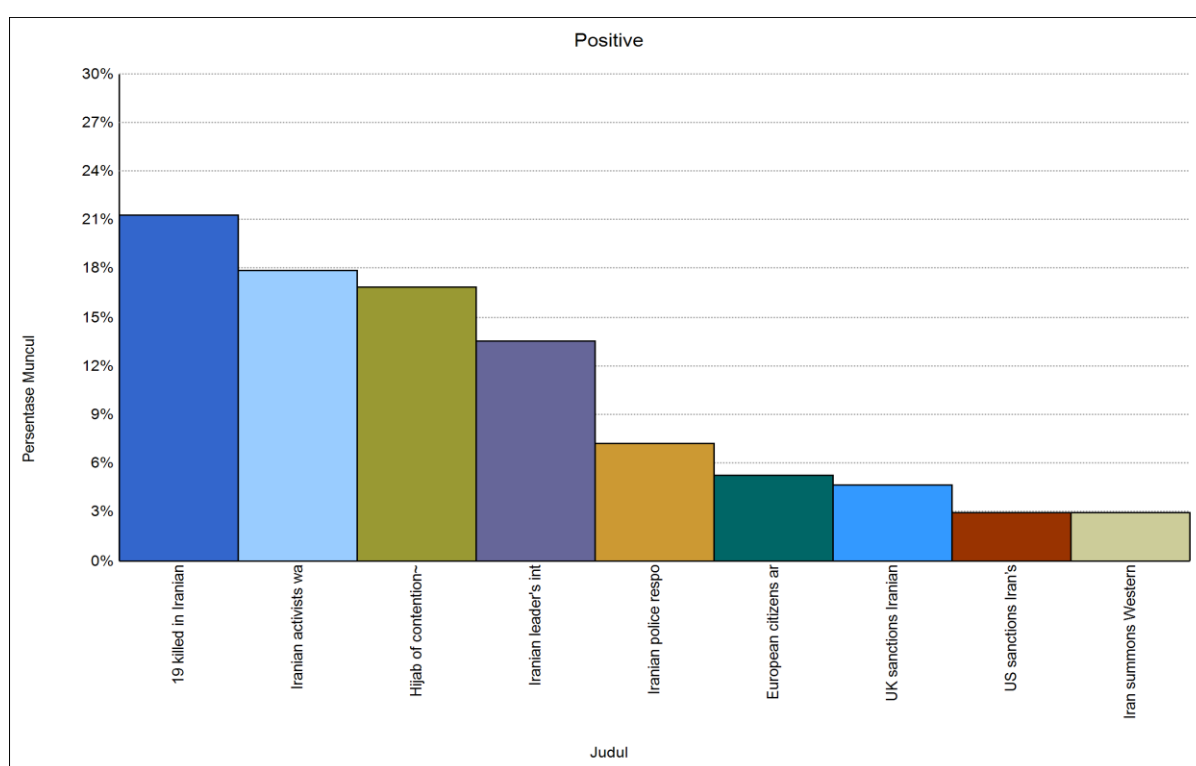


Figure 7.2 Visual Table of Positive Sentiments in Russia Today News Articles

Figure 7.2 indicates that Russia Today's negative sentiment does not accumulate steadily across articles, but instead appears in concentrated bursts that are frequently separated by extended neutral passages. In items framed around official narratives or diplomatic developments, short critical segments are embedded within longer stretches that restate government claims, describe procedural investigations, or present event sequences in a reportorial, low evaluation mode. As a result, the overall affective force of negativity is intermittently softened, not because negative topics disappear, but because they are textually buffered by neutral narration and institutional voice.

This distributional pattern is analytically significant because it suggests a different stance

management strategy from VOA and Al Jazeera. Rather than sustaining a consistently adversarial framing toward Iranian authorities, Russia Today appears to calibrate critique through alternation, acknowledging controversy while preserving interpretive space for state legitimacy and geopolitical explanation. An original interpretation is that neutrality here operates as a legitimising infrastructure: by surrounding negative evaluations with procedural and attribution focused reporting, the outlet reduces the perception of direct condemnation and subtly reorients audience attention from rights based accountability toward order, causality, and state centered rationalisation.

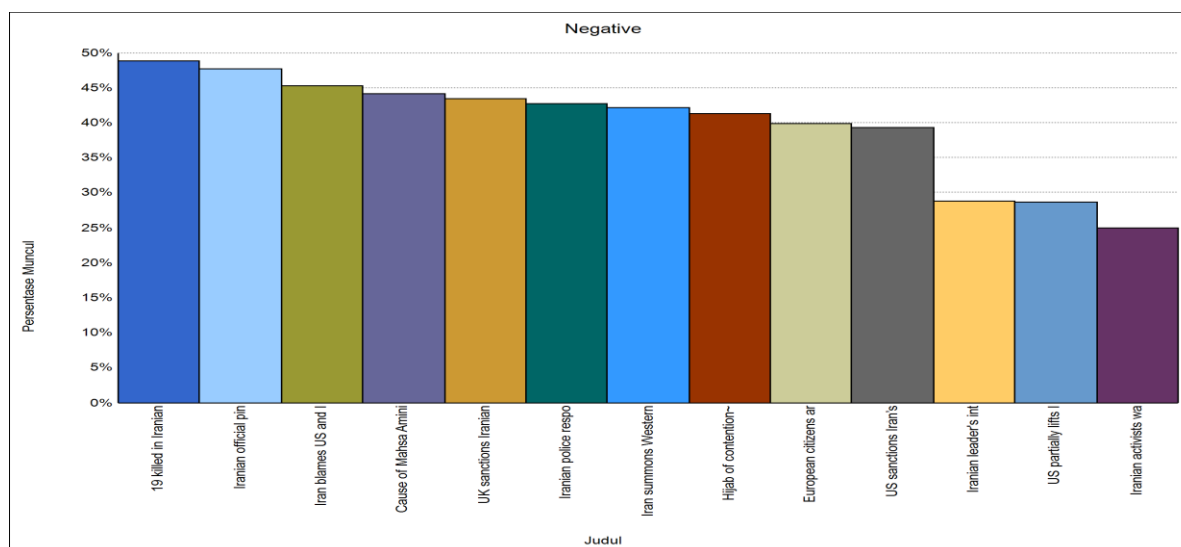


Figure 7.3 Visual Table of Negative Sentiments in Russia Today News Articles

Figure 7.3 makes this pattern more visible by showing how neutral and mildly positive paragraphs often frame the beginning and end of Russia Today's articles, while more critical or negative evaluations tend to appear in shorter clusters in the middle sections. This sequencing means that explicit critique of Iran's authorities is frequently cushioned by opening moves that emphasise official statements or procedural accounts and closing segments that stress stability, order, or geopolitical sensitivities. As a result, the evaluative trajectory of many reports leads readers back toward ambivalence or cautious acceptance rather than sustained indignation, in clear contrast with the consistently critical arcs observed in VOA and Al Jazeera.

The description of language above, along with attention to context and cultural influences that may affect language use, can be considered a common theme in different discourse approaches. Discourse analysis can be defined as "how stretches of language, considered within overall textual, social, and psychological contexts, become meaningful and coherent for their users." Among the three news channels, VOA was the fastest in reporting Mahsa Amini's death and consistently maintained extensive coverage of the news. As shown in the table data, from the first article released on September 16, 2022, VOA published a total of 21 news articles within the following week. On some days, it released up to five articles related to Mahsa Amini. This was intended as a strategy by VOA to package the news in a way that retained attention on the issue of Mahsa Amini's death, which at the time was considered unusual and problematic. The negative sentiment conveyed by VOA aimed to frame the image of the Iranian government as anti-critical and authoritarian. Most of the news coverage focused on demonstrations and protests, as large-scale protests took place over the

three months following her death in major streets of Tehran and other regions. These three months transformed Iranian society into a state resembling cultural upheaval. Regardless of how these protest movements may influence future political developments, many people will no longer engage in social relationships in the same way as they did before these movements reshaped their lives.

5. Discussion

The key findings of this study show that international media overwhelmingly construct Mahsa Amini's death through a dominant frame of repression, state violence, and gendered human rights violations. Across VOA, Al Jazeera, and Russia Today, negative evaluations significantly outweigh positive ones, and news articles consistently emphasize brutality, crackdowns, and moral policing rather than more ambivalent or reconciliatory angles. For example, in reports such as "At Least 9 Killed as Iran Protests Over Woman's Death Spread," Iranian security forces are portrayed as actors who "routinely employ violence to suppress peaceful protesters," which directs audience interpretation toward a narrative that positions the Iranian state as the primary agent of coercion and injustice. This emphasis foregrounds human rights violations while leaving limited room for emotional complexity such as grief, hope, or ambivalent public sentiment, and it also tends to minimize the role of provocateurs or other non-state actors in escalating unrest. In line with framing theory, these patterns illustrate how selection and emphasis organize reality, privilege particular causal stories, and marginalize alternative interpretations of conflict escalation (Caiani, 2023).

Empirical work on protest coverage helps explain the affective and cognitive consequences of this framing. Media accounts of demonstrations can

generate complex intergroup emotions that shape public judgment beyond simple categories of support or opposition (Stamps & Mastro, 2019), while cognitive research on reference frames shows how particular framings recalibrate perceived causality and responsibility, often in interaction with preexisting narratives about a state or regime (Schultheis & Carlson, 2015). In the case of Mahsa Amini, the persistent portrayal of the morality police and security apparatus as violent and unaccountable encourages readers to interpret the protests as a morally justified reaction to systemic abuse rather than as a multivocal political crisis. Narratives around truth seeking and legitimacy further highlight how such framing can polarize audiences and legitimize certain forms of resistance while casting alternative interpretations as suspect, even though the cited work on broader social movements and emotional responses attends more generally to the dynamics of conflict and reconciliation than to this specific case (Hearty, 2022).

A second key finding concerns the uneven intensity and timing of coverage across outlets, which is closely tied to media ownership structures and geopolitical alignments. VOA reported most rapidly and extensively, releasing twenty one articles within a short period and maintaining a consistently critical tone toward the Iranian government. In contrast, Al Jazeera and Russia Today displayed delayed and more selective engagement, with fewer articles and a slightly more restrained evaluative pattern. These discrepancies resonate with scholarship that treats media discourse as deeply embedded in national interests and power relations rather than ideologically neutral (Kojola, 2015; Vesa et al., 2015; Luengo, 2017). VOA's funding by the US Congress and the historically tense relationship between the United States and Iran help explain the strong alignment with frames of repression and authoritarianism, whereas the comparatively less conflictual ties between Qatar or Russia and Iran appear to inform Al Jazeera and Russia Today's more cautious or ambivalent stance. Framing and agenda setting research further shows that media select issues, mobilize bias, and shape policy trajectories in ways that privilege dominant state or corporate interests rather than simply representing events in a descriptive manner (Vesa et al., 2015; Yuan & Lin, 2025). In this context, coverage of Mahsa Amini's death not only informs audiences but also participates in wider geopolitical contests over legitimacy, sovereignty, and human rights (Yuan & Lin, 2025; Luengo, 2017).

Beyond institutional positioning, the findings show that Mahsa Amini's death functions as a catalyst for political mobilization and feminist consciousness. The slogans, street protests, and transnational campaigns that emerge in the media data are consistently represented as expressions of resistance to systemic gender discrimination and moral policing. From a gender perspective, this moment activates strategic gender needs that target structural

transformation, including legal reform, political inclusion, and the challenge to institutionalized inequality (Sen, 2019). Feminist advocacy has long been central to the successful articulation and pursuit of such strategic needs, shaping party politics and expanding women's political representation (Celis et al., 2016). Legal gender equality and supportive institutional frameworks are also crucial for women's economic opportunities and broader empowerment agendas, as indicated by evidence linking legal gender equality to women's economic outcomes (Kim, 2022). At the same time, practical gender needs that overlap with general socio economic concerns are present implicitly, particularly for marginalized groups who experience economic precarity alongside gendered repression. Mahsa Amini's case therefore appears in the media both as an acute human rights crisis and as a symbolic turning point in feminist political awareness within Iranian society (Sen, 2019; Kim, 2022).

The academic significance of these findings lies in demonstrating how discourse operates as an ideological instrument that simultaneously amplifies gender narratives and political resistance (Balan, 2024). By combining sentiment analysis with framing and gender perspectives, this study shows that Mahsa Amini is discursively positioned not only as an individual victim but also as a symbolic figure representing systemic gender oppression and defiance against authoritarian control (Shirazi, 2025). This configuration supports the broader argument that gender is deeply embedded in political action and social hierarchy, shaping both representation and resistance in media accounts (McKay, 2020; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Verhoeven & Wasserbauer, 2022). The novelty of this research lies in integrating gender narrative, political movement theory, and media discourse analysis within an explicitly international corpus, thereby extending previous work that has tended to focus on legal, institutional, or domestic media perspectives on her death (Arafat & Khamis, 2025; Nartey & Yu, 2023). In doing so, the study contributes to discourse studies, feminist scholarship, and political communication by showing how transnational media simultaneously encode human rights advocacy, geopolitical interests, and gendered meanings.

Despite these contributions, several gaps and limitations remain. The analysis is restricted to three international outlets and therefore does not include Iranian domestic media, regional news channels, or diverse grassroots digital platforms, which may articulate alternative frames of resistance, religion, and national identity. The reliance on textual data further means that the visual and multimodal dimensions of coverage, such as images, video sequences, and social media affordances, are only indirectly addressed. Visual semiotic resources are highly relevant to the construction of protest and gendered embodiment, yet they remain underexplored in the present study. In

addition, the research design focuses on a relatively short time frame surrounding the initial outbreak of protests, which limits insight into the longer term evolution, normalization, or fading of particular narrative frames.

Future research could therefore build on these findings through longitudinal and comparative designs that track how gendered and political narratives surrounding Mahsa Amini evolve over months or years and how they intersect with broader debates on human rights and democracy. Comparative work involving Iranian domestic media, regional outlets, and transnational social media would provide richer insight into counter narratives, indigenous discourse production, and feminist digital activism. Further exploration of visual semiotics and multimodal protest representation is needed to understand how images, video, and platform specific affordances construct symbolic resistance and emotional identification in different cultural contexts. Studies that combine discourse analysis with audience reception research or ethnographic inquiry would also be valuable for examining how various publics interpret, negotiate, or resist these media frames, particularly in relation to transnational human rights advocacy and feminist political mobilization.

6. Conclusions

This study explains how news media channels can influence public opinion to frame a country through specific events and how discourse serves as the instrument for this process. The research collected sample data from three international news channels: VOA, Al Jazeera, and Russia Today. The results show that VOA was the fastest and most extensive in reporting Mahsa Amini's death, particularly during the week following its first article. The speed of reporting on Mahsa Amini's death is indirectly related to the ownership of the news channel. VOA, funded by the U.S. Congress, is an American news outlet that sought to frame negative sentiment toward the Islamic regime in Iran. The historically strained relationship between the United States and Iran indirectly motivated VOA to cover Mahsa Amini's death quickly and extensively. In contrast, Al Jazeera from Qatar and Russia Today from Russia are based in countries that do not have as tense a relationship with Iran as the United States does, which may explain their slower coverage.

Moreover, political movements frequently emerged as expressions of support against the discrimination faced by Mahsa Amini. The slogans and campaigns used in these movements became an important framework for packaging news about her death as a form of oppression against women's human rights. Strategic gender needs are often associated with feminism, emphasizing the importance of raising gender awareness in society. This awareness provides an opportunity to advance the feminist movement in addressing future gender-related issues.

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