



Campaign Targeting Paykan on Instagram Leads to Content Removal and Censorship

(Washington, D.C.) — Last week, an Instagram post by PaykanArtCar marking its participation in the Ai Weiwei Run For Your Rights Campaign was removed from the advocacy campaign’s hashtag #RunForOurRights in an apparently coordinated campaign to silence pro-Iranian LGBTQ+ voices.

A non-profit advocacy organization representing the LGBTQ+ community and human rights in Iran, PaykanArtCar joined the Run For Our Rights campaign on Instagram to stand alongside thousands of other activists globally. Run For Our Rights is a campaign promoting human rights and freedom of press, [initiated](#) by Chinese global artist-activist Ai Weiwei.



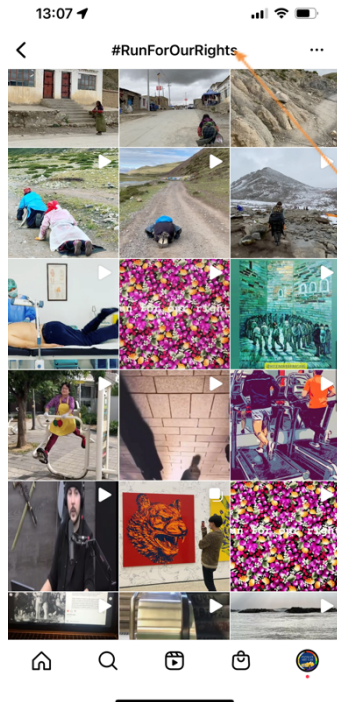
Aiww page on Instagram showing PaykanArtCar's animation

As part of the Run For Our Rights campaign, PaykanArtCar created a 60 second animation titled ‘Sohrab and Shaban Run for Our Rights’ in support of the LGBTQ+ community inside of Iran. PaykanArtCar’s animation was duly shared on Ai WeiWei’s [page](#) under the official hashtag and thus far has been viewed over 13,000 times.

However, while the post remains visible on Ai Weiwei’s profile, it has been censored from the [page](#) showing all posts using the hashtag #RunForOurRights, making PaykanArtCar’s post undiscoverable for wider audiences. It is believed that this disappearance is due to the post



being mass reported as 'inappropriate', despite its innocuous content which meets Instagram's content moderation guidelines.



PaykanArtCar's animation removed from the #RunForOurRights Campaign Hashtag

This latest instance of silencing conforms to a pattern of digital manipulation, with dissident and minority Iranian voices finding themselves repeatedly targeted on social media. Other outspoken members of the Iranian community - such as BBC World Service Presenter Franak Amidi who is vocal about women's rights in Iran - have similarly had posts removed from Instagram.

Manipulative mass reporting is used to overwhelm the algorithms implemented by Instagram to aid in monitoring for, and removing, content which is illegal and violates its community standards. While content is overseen by human moderators, the sheer volume of posts means that the platform relies more heavily on algorithms with only some being sent for [human review](#). Regimes and malevolent groups across the world can manipulate the system to push targeted posts across the 'violation' threshold, causing the platform to automatically remove them from view.

PaykanArtCar has reached out to Instagram's public policy team seeking clarification on the incident and requesting a meeting to discuss the platform's content moderation policies.

Malicious, coordinated mass reporting tactics adversely affect groups advocating on behalf of people with protected characteristics, groups that should benefit from additional attention and protection by content moderators. In the absence of adequate protections for minority



voices, Instagram and other social media platforms will continue to be purged of dissident voices, while human rights activists lose an essential advocacy tool.

PaykanArtCar Executive Director Hiva Feizi said:

“The removal of Instagram posts by Paykan and other activists, who speak out critically against repressive tactics and human rights abuses committed by the Iranian regime, is an act of censorship against discriminated groups.

The promise of social media was that it could become a platform for individual and community expression beyond the purview of surveillance of repressive regimes. Sadly, these same regimes have studied these platforms and devised a simple playbook of tactics designed to turn platforms’ rules against their users.

By failing to provide sufficient protections for persecuted minority groups social media platforms such as Instagram are complicit in a grave violation of freedom of expression.

These platforms and their parent organisations must do more to protect the voices of those who are silenced by Iran and other repressive governments globally. Iranian citizens must not be deprived of their right to free expression, whether they are home in Iran or abroad.”

Hiva Feizi is a public diplomacy and international affairs expert focused on Iran’s soft power and cultural diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa. Hiva holds a Master’s of Public Diplomacy from the University of Southern California and a Ph.D. in Government and Foreign Policy from the University of South Florida, where she was also an Adjunct Instructor of International Relations.

About PaykanArtCar

The PaykanArtCar unites the talents of contemporary Iranian artists with a beloved symbol of Iranian national pride — the Paykan automobile — to advocate for human rights and dignity in Iran. The non-profit, non-partisan PaykanArtCar is privileged to have acquired a historic Paykan Hillman Hunter limousine. Periodically, the PaykanArtCar will choose and commission an exceptional Iranian artist to use the vehicle as the canvas in support of the ongoing struggle in Iran for human rights. The purpose is simple: to use art and a beloved symbol of national pride to promote the rights of all Iranians no matter their race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. For more information, visit paykanartcar.com.