



State of Media in Iran During the Second Pahlavi Era and the Impacts of the Flames of Persia Documentary

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution and function of mass media in Iran during the Second Pahlavi era (1941–1979), arguing that state-led communication efforts failed to establish a coherent and meaningful relationship between the monarchy and Iranian society. Through an in-depth analysis of radio and television broadcasting, censorship practices, and the ideological objectives of the White Revolution, the study demonstrates how media became a central yet ultimately ineffective instrument of state propaganda. The Shah's modernization agenda, characterized by aggressive Westernization, selective historical narratives, and internalized Orientalist perspectives, exacerbated socio-cultural divides, alienated large segments of the population, and limited the inclusivity of the media. A detailed reading of the documentary *Flames of Persia* illustrates these contradictions and highlights the regime's persistent struggle for legitimacy in both domestic and international spheres. The findings suggest that the disconnect between media-produced imagery and everyday social realities significantly contributed to the legitimacy crisis that culminated in the 1979 revolution. This study also emphasizes the role of external influences, including foreign propaganda and political interventions, in shaping Iranian media policies. It argues that despite the state's extensive efforts to control broadcasting and public messaging, a coherent national narrative failed to materialize. By exploring the interplay between state propaganda, media control, and public perception, the paper sheds light on the complex dynamics that prevented the Second Pahlavi era from achieving its objectives. The analysis demonstrates that mass media not only reflected the political and ideological priorities of the regime but also inadvertently revealed its vulnerabilities, contributing to the eventual downfall of the Shah. Ultimately, this study underscores the critical importance of understanding media as both a tool of governance and a mirror of societal responses during periods of political transformation.

KEYWORDS

Second Pahlavi Era, Iranian media, propaganda, White Revolution, national identity, Orientalism, censorship, Mohammad Reza Shah, *Flames of Persia* documentary, modernization, legitimacy crisis, state broadcasting.



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Стан медіа в Ірані в період другої епохи Пехлеві та впливи документального фільму “Flames of Persia”

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СТАТТЯ	АНОТАЦІЯ
Дослідницька DOI: 10.70651/3041-248X/2025.12.09 Отримана: 04.11.2025 р. Прийнята: 07.12.2025 р. Опублікована: 18.12.2025 р. Авторське право © 2025 автора  Цей твір ліцензовано на умовах Ліцензії Creative Commons «Із Зазначенням Авторства – Некомерційна 4.0 Міжнародна» (CC BY-NC 4.0).	У статті розглядається еволюція та функціонування мас-медіа в Ірані в період другої епохи Пехлеві (1941–1979), стверджуючи, що комунікаційні зусилля, очолювані державою, не змогли встановити узгоджені та змістовні взаємини між монархією та іранським суспільством. На основі детального аналізу радіо- й телевізійного мовлення, практик цензури та ідеологічних цілей Білої революції дослідження демонструє, як медіа перетворилися на центральний, але зрештою неефективний інструмент державної пропаганди. Модернізаційний курс шаха, позначений агресивною вестернізацією, вибірковими історичними наративами та інтеріоризованими орієнталізмом, поглибив соціокультурні розколи, відчужив значні верстви населення та обмежив інклюзивність медіа. Детальний аналіз документального фільму <i>Flames of Persia</i> ілюструє ці суперечності та підкреслює постійну боротьбу режиму за легітимність як у внутрішній, так і в міжнародній площині. Висновки свідчать, що розрив між сконструйованими медіа образами та повсякденними соціальними реаліями значною мірою сприяв кризі легітимності, яка завершилася революцією 1979 року. Дослідження також підкреслює роль зовнішніх впливів, включаючи іноземну пропаганду та політичні втручання, у формуванні медіа-політики Ірану. Незважаючи на значні зусилля держави щодо контролю за мовленням та публічними повідомленнями, узгоджена національна наративна лінія так і не була створена. Аналіз взаємодії державної пропаганди, контролю медіа та громадського сприйняття висвітлює складну динаміку, яка перешкождала досягненню цілей другої епохи Пехлеві. Мас-медіа не лише відображали політичні та ідеологічні пріоритети режиму, а й невід'ємно виявляли його вразливості, сприяючи зрештою падінню шаха. У підсумку дослідження підкреслює критичну важливість розуміння медіа як інструменту управління та дзеркала реакцій суспільства у періоди політичних трансформацій.



КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

Друга епоха Пехлеві, іранські медіа, пропаганда, Біла революція, національна ідентичність, орієнталізм, цензура, Мохаммад Реза Шах, документальний фільм “Flames of Persia”, модернізація, криза легітимності, державне мовлення.

1. Introduction

In this paper, the exact date-to-date history of how mass media were established in Iran will not be examined; instead, we will explore how the relationship between the state and the people was shaped during the period between 1941 and 1979. Our main argument is that the correlation between both the state media and the media people never reached its goals during the second Pahlavi era. To understand the complexities of these relations, we will examine the process itself.

After Mohammad Reza Shah came to the throne, his first interaction with his people was through radio broadcasting. The tone of the speech was not that of a strong authoritarian leader, but rather that of a young man asking for the support of his people. His sudden elevation to a position of power was a determining factor in the rest of his rule, and the nature of his character as a ruler is still examined in many academic studies to this day. The speech on the radio was the starting point for the Imagined community [2] under Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

Numerous external interventions significantly impacted the political climate from 1941 to 1953. Little earlier, before this period, the approach to the Second World War by the first Pahlavi regime was reflected in the tone of the media in Iran. Propagandists sought to employ the idea of an ancient Aryan heritage to strengthen both national identity and the ruling dynasty's legitimacy [12].

If one wonders whether such a claim was mutual with the Germans, we can argue that it certainly brought the two nations closer during World War 2. Moreover, the Germans had the most influential foreign propaganda machinery in Iran. In 1940, British authorities recognized the impact of German propaganda and launched the BBC Persian service. This, of course, was a sign of the upcoming British occupation and a regime change in Iran. After his father's forced dethronement by the Allied powers, Mohammad Reza had a shaky foundation on which to build a strong nation. His struggle and yearning for legitimacy continued throughout his reign, and the media was the most important medium he tried to establish that with.

Beyond dispute, the 1953 oil crisis marked a significant milestone in the second Pahlavi rule. The course of events that led to a Coup, staged by MI6 and CIA, called Operation Ajax, was seen as the first major threat to the democratic nature of the Pahlavi regime. The elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh's efforts to nationalize Iranian oil had backfired. During this time, Shah had very little involvement, and he even left the country for the time being. At the time, the media was not being used very effectively in his favor. Things took a turn after his return; the threat to his authority was abolished, and he had the arena all to himself. Following the 1953 coup, the authoritarian nature of the second Pahlavi era emerged. The increase in the power of monarchical authority directly affected the state of media and propaganda. Recurring themes of modernization, progress, and the creation of a national identity first emerged during this period.

2. Problem Statement

Despite the extensive modernization and state-led reforms during the Second Pahlavi era, Iranian mass media failed to establish a coherent connection between the government and the public. Censorship, selective historical narratives, Westernized content, and state propaganda alienated significant segments of the population, contributing to a legitimacy crisis. The lack of effective communication and alignment between media messaging and societal realities created obstacles in fostering national identity, public trust, and support for the Shah's policies. Understanding these shortcomings is crucial to analyze the role of media in shaping political legitimacy and social cohesion.

3. Methods and Materials

This study employs a qualitative historical-analytical approach, drawing on primary and secondary sources, including archival documents, government reports, scholarly literature, and the documentary *Flames of Persia*. Methods include content analysis of radio, television, and documentary materials, comparative historical analysis of media policies, and critical examination of propaganda and censorship practices. The research also uses bibliographic and analytical methods to synthesize global scholarly perspectives and interpret the social and political impact of state-controlled media in Iran during 1941–1979.

4. Results and Discussion

During the 1950s, the Iranian nation experienced the emergence of a planned and programmed radio broadcasting service. This decade laid the groundwork for the systemic reform process known as the White Revolution. It was also called the Revolution of the Shah and was initiated in 1963. Although the name suggested otherwise, the revolution was a set of reforms. These reforms encompassed land distribution and agricultural reform, privatization of government-owned institutions, national insurance, the extension of the right to vote to women, and the fight against illiteracy. Many of these intents were in accordance with the ideologies of the hegemonic powers of the time. Its primary objective was to redistribute land in the countryside to deter peasants from aligning with Marxist Leninism [7]. On one hand, this whole effort of the White Revolution can be regarded as an effort for an altogether leap into the developed state status; on the other hand, it can be seen as rushed modernization in a country that did not have the ready base for it. The Pahlavi state was at pains to win popular support for the White Revolution and for itself. In the next fifteen years, the state was unable to resolve the legitimization crisis. The state's condition determined its propaganda.

In the same year as the White Revolution, the Ministry of Information was established. This meant that all matters concerning the media were under the supervision of a systemic body, and its oversight was the responsibility of a select group of people appointed by the Shah administration. The objectives of the Shah administration regarding media navigation became more evident during this period. The Ministry of Information aimed to raise awareness of Persian culture among the people within and outside the country, to guide the public toward new concepts and ideologies, and to centralize all broadcasting and government publication activities [9].

A balance between education and entertainment was the goal in terms of programming. Television programming was divided into two groups to cater to the diverse needs of the Iranian public. The first one, called Program 1, was aimed at the general public and included people from the rural areas and less developed parts of the cities. The second one was Program 2, which consisted of content that was produced for a more sophisticated group of people, who mostly lived in big cities like Tehran, Shiraz, and Esfahan. Even this general separation had other sub-categories under it. For example, special programs for farmers or housewives made television broadcasting even more stratified. It is safe to say that Pahlavi State television policies didn't aim for the satisfaction of all groups of people and catch-all programming.

Moreover, the highly Westernized nature of such broadcasting also alienated some parts of the nation. Overall, we can say that the introduction of national broadcasting agencies, including both radio and television, in Iran had an agenda. Article 6 of the 1971 Act on the Establishment of National Iranian Radio and Television perfectly explains the mindset behind the programming: "Preparing and guiding the public intellectually toward national interests". So, it is safe to say that the process of establishing media was a curated process by the state. In this paper, the process of media development, educational, and guiding elements is considered a form of propaganda.

Concepts of the Pahlavi Propaganda

Returning to the alienating aspect of state broadcasting, its Westernized style did not appeal to a significant portion of the nation. Although, while producing the content, the socio-cultural background of Iranian society was considered to some extent, the understanding of it was not reflective of the country's facets. Westernization was a part of the modernization process in the Iranian context, and this, for the most part, was the main issue the religious opposition had with it. While the modernization process always implies rupture with the past, the "internal culture shock" in Iran was particularly rapid, brutal, and alienating [14]. The ideal Iranian pictured, who lived under the modern Shah state, presented through state-controlled media outlets was something so outlandish and a far reach for the people who lived in some parts of the country, that it alienated them from the state itself. In this environment created by the state, the question of Iranian identity became even more important, despite the intention to address this dilemma. We can say that the goal of creating an imagined community with modern tendencies failed on the propaganda part. The question of identity will be examined further in the upcoming pages.

Another concept that goes hand in hand with propaganda is censorship. During the second era of the Pahlavi dynasty, there were several key points that contributed to censorship and its accompanying deterioration of democracy. The first of these points was the coup plotted against then-Prime Minister Mosaddegh in 1953. His vision of nationalizing Iranian oil, similar to the Venezuelan principle, was not well received by American and British authorities. For this reason, Operation Ajax was put into action.

The Shah was supportive of this coup d'état, orchestrated by the CIA and MI6, for different reasons. While the operation was taking place, the Shah left the country, similar to the events of the 1979 revolution. His interest in supporting the operation, or rather, not taking any action against it, was to establish a stronger imperial authority after Mosaddegh left. This is the first time that observed such a much stronger form of censorship dictated by the regime. Before this -especially the printed press- the media was fairly free to express opposition – to a certain extent, of course.

The fall of Mossadegh was also a turning point in Iranian life: it put an end to democratic government and national sovereignty, both replaced by imperial dictatorship and American hegemony [5]. Of course, this incident changed how the people received the Shah, and the negative discourse escalated until the Islamic Revolution. The second turning point in terms of state dictatorship and censorship happened after the White Revolution in 1963. The quarrel between the religious figures and the Shah state distinctly began after this point. The clergy opposed the idea of a Westernized mode of modernization or any form of change that might challenge their social standing. There was a three-day clash between the protesters of the White Revolution and the imperial army. Several thousands of people were affected and were killed.

This turning point also paved the path for the emergence of the imperial state as a police state. A secret police service called SAVAK was established in 1957, and in the years to come, it became the tool the government used to suppress any form of opposition. This, of course, was applied to any contradictory form of expression in the media. According to the press law in Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty, if a book, essay, or any cultural form of expression violated one of the following sanctities, it would be censored [11]:

- The political foundation that created the national unity;
- The faith of Islam;
- The Pahlavi dynasty;
- Public decency.

The third article clearly states that the Pahlavi dynasty was one of the untouchable subjects—however, the determinative factors of the subject change throughout the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty. Around the time SAVAK came into the picture, especially after the Shah's white revolution policies, also became a part of the untouchable subjects. A United States State Department Report in 1976 gave a damning testimony of the human rights violations perpetrated by the Iranian state during this period, and the Carter administration adopted a policy of encouraging Iran to respect human rights in 1977 [6]. It is difficult to determine the exact number of journalists and other media personalities affected by SAVAK, as it became a tool for the Shah regime to justify its harshness, providing a strong reason for the Islamic Revolution. This certainly occurred frequently enough to pose a significant problem for democracy.

To chart its future development, NIRT (National Iranian Radio and Television) undertook, in 1974-5, a national survey of the role of media in Iranian national development [16]. The survey covered various segments of society, including communication professionals, students, Islamic scholars, and workers. The ideologies the study group mostly identified with were types of Islamism and nationalism. The attitude they expressed was mostly unique to their social status. Ulama found the programming to be lacking in terms of religious programming, professionals found it premature, and workers wanted to see something from their lives on the screen.

There were no mentions of state rhetoric or the concept of propaganda. Although this study does not provide much insight into the methods of propaganda, it sheds light on the individuals who are on the receiving end of it. And it seems that throughout the second Pahlavi era, people did not label the state-controlled media outlets as propaganda while being subjected to them, referring to everyday people, like in most other cases from around the world. Nevertheless, it was not accepted as a fact either. It was something the state did, and people were mostly numb to it.

A group where imposing state ideologies was effective was school kids. The concepts imposed by the regime were a big part of the state-controlled education programs. This group was also the one who consumed television the most. It is an unfortunate thing on the regime's part, since the people who received the state's messages most were not active players in the turmoil they faced in the late 1970s. Another group that was able to internalize the Shah's propaganda easily was the one positively impacted by the reforms of the White Revolution. In this case, these factors were particularly important in shaping your perception of the Shah regime and its propaganda, including your background, age group, and daily activities. Although these national development plans brought about massive social and economic changes in Iran and accelerated the nation's modernization, the problem of mass education remains on the agenda [9]. And in theory, television was the tool for national education. While the state recognized

the potential of television, it was not utilized to its fullest. Educational content was not consistent throughout the second Pahlavi era, and the programming, which catered to different groups' varying options, did not help in creating a collective national consciousness.

The Western Influence

Iranian mass media have become a giant translating machine; its press is swamped by American articles chosen from conformist American papers, while its radio and television feed off American programs, whether news, documentaries, fiction, or (carefully selected) theatrical works [5]. This Western mode of culture was seen as useless for the modernization and development process, even by more secularized groups. The idealized and targeted economic and political model of the Shah regime, of course, reflected the American model.

According to "modernization theory", economic growth, consumerism, and the westernization of institutions and cultures were perceived to comprise key elements in transforming developing countries into modern societies [10]. Bringing such a big change in a span of a decade was a shock to the system, which had spread its roots far and deep. Therefore, the reception of it by the religious figures can be regarded as an adequate reaction, as Islam has and still has a central role in the established understanding of Iranian society. Throughout his reign, the Islamic Ulama were the most significant opponents to the Shah's regime. Matching reality with the facts was the problem with Shah's media policies. The struggle to create a platform for his discourse was reflected in the constant creation of new symbols for the nation.

To reach the level of superior Western nations, it was fitting to find parallels with them, or in other words, lean into the image they had of Iran as an Eastern country. The Shah regime, to have a place in the global picture leaned into orientalist tropes while seeing the Eastern civilization as the inferior one. This meant that, while recognizing modernization in the Pahlavi context, it also entailed leaving behind all things contradicting Western values, while simultaneously giving the states in this hierarchy the right to judge the development process and dictate what they wanted to see. This dilemma is something that most developing countries face, especially those that are direct subjects of Edward Said's concept: Orientalism.

The self-subjection of orientalism is not necessarily a willing choice on the Pahlavi regime's part since it is a much more complex issue related to colonialism. Still, internalized orientalism is a concept that the regime has become synonymous with. This notion is the main force behind the propaganda films of the second Pahlavi era. While the exotic and mystical lands of Persia, in desperate need of change, might be a comfortable image for Western audiences, it is certainly alienating for the Iranian people.

Rather than reinventing Western notions of Iran, the Shah's regime sought to return the Western imagination of the country to older Orientalist stereotypes through a number of documentary films [6]. This trope is very much alive in the documentary film we are focusing on, *Flames of Persia*. This now almost forgotten piece of history encapsulates all the complexities and struggles of an eastern nation trying to break through the constraints of underdevelopment and its struggle for identity.

Iranian Sensibility and National Identity

Like most nations, Iranians have their building blocks of identity. The two main pillars of this are Nationalism and Islamism. One could argue that the Iranian identity has never been coherent and has always been contentious in particular historical moments, leading to extreme shifts not only in terms of the regime but also in terms of national identity. Persian identity crisis' which swings between nationalistic and Islamic discourses and which in turn impacts strongly upon the wider Iranian national identity [13]. The Shah's creation of a pre-Islamic base for the Iranian identity is very controversial and important for the rivalry between two different ways of creating an Iranian identity.

That's why the religious leaders were opposed to the idea of Iran being even older than the emergence of Islam. According to them, this narrative was a Western invention; therefore, the shah was a product of Western interference. Nationalism under the Pahlavi dynasty was a state-led form of nationalism, according to Charles Tilly's classification, because it established a set of criteria for the people to identify with. "Persian pride" was something the state attempted to instill in its people through various channels at the time. This statement raises the question of what makes a person sufficiently Iranian to have Persian pride. Ironically, the historically dominant definition of what constitutes a "nation" among Iranians has been an ethnolinguistic one [4].

Nevertheless, one should note that we don't observe many mentions of the fact that Iran is heterogeneous in terms of racial differentiation by the Pahlavi rhetoric. We can examine this attitude in

the regime's approach to language. Accordingly, Farsi became one of the pillars of national identity, while an undeniable chunk of society has been speaking different languages. Purifying the language became one of the many goals of the regime in its effort to restore a national identity. This step might be one of the others that alienated some portion of society. On the other hand, we cannot unsee the fact that Farsi and all the things this language produced over the centuries had a hold on some parts of society.

If we were to list the three core elements of monarchical nationalism considering the concepts we have explored, they would be: modernity, "Persianism", and "Ancientism" [13]. These three concepts were also the main themes that were prominent in the *Flames of Persia* documentary and other propaganda works produced by the regime.

Iran is a country with a rich past, and its folkloric and poetic nature is undeniable. During the second Pahlavi era, new centers and institutions were opened that focused on this esoteric and ancient side of the Iranian past. The Centre for Iranian Anthropology was established in the early Pahlavi period, but its revival coincided with the years surrounding the 2500th year celebrations. Although it seemed, on the surface, like another propaganda machine for the monarchy, people who worked in this field were genuinely interested in the subject. Most researchers at the center were primarily interested in Iranian culture and had no political intention of supporting the Shah's state. However, to get its budget, the center had to extend its loyalty to Shah. Some of the center's publications are listed below and demonstrate the influence of government propaganda:

- Kings and monarchy in Iranian attitudes according to the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi;
- "Velayetahdi" (Crown princship) in ancient Iran;
- "Shah va Sepah" (King and army);
- "Shah va Mardom" (King and people);
- Coronation ritual in ancient Iran;
- "Ayin Shahriyari dar Iran" (Royal customs in Iran).

Legitimation Crisis of the Pahlavi Regime

In 1971, the Iranian government presented a replica of the Cyrus edict to the United Nations as a step in the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's image-building process in the West. The Addict of Cyrus is a declaration made by Cyrus the Great concerning the preservation of human rights in occupied cities after his capture of Babylon in 539 B.C [18]. This is an example of how the Shah was aligning himself with the figures from the past of the Persian empire. The shah depicted himself as Cyrus's true heir [8].

Especially in the early seventies, the discourse around ancient Persia was more popular than ever. Historians and journalists were encouraged to produce writings on the subject, and Persian history had greater coverage than ever in the press and school curricula. As the empire approached its 2500th anniversary, the Shah had to establish a place for himself. The period since 1963 has been characterized by rapid modernization and economic growth, internal political stability, and a dynamic foreign policy that has elevated Iran to a leadership role in the region. Iran's success was symbolized by the coronation of the Shah in 1967 and the celebration of the 2,500th Anniversary of the Persian Empire in 1971 [17].

On the morning of 26 October 1967, the Shah crowned himself and his queen. Every aspect of the event was designed to convey the idea that the shah was at once traditional and modern; the custodian of a 2,500-year-old tradition of monarchy, and revolutionary [15]. How he came to power and dealt with the crisis were the main obstacles he had to rise above to become a strong ruler. His accession to the throne and the coup of 1953 painted a picture of the Shah as dependent on outside intervention. So, changing this image and creating a new one where the Shah had the full power, wisdom, and fairness of Cyrus the Great, and the choice of cooperation with the West was crucial. The period between the late sixties and early seventies was when the monarchical campaign was at its peak. He was no less majestic than his European counterparts [1] as a picture-perfect representation of authority. But a ruler without the full support of his people showed some cracks in the ways and ideologies of the image-building process.

Documentary: Flames of Persia

Flames of Persia is essentially a documentary film produced by the National Film Board, showcasing the 2500th celebrations of the Persian Empire. Shahrokh Golestan directed it, and the film had two versions: one in Farsi and one in English. Orson Welles narrated the English version. The film heavily relied on a very decorated language and a self-orientalist perspective. The film's rhetoric attempts to capture the audience's attention, making them feel as though they are witnessing a historic moment. And it is not entirely untrue, the event itself does not repeat itself. Representatives from

around the world are the subject matter the audience is witnessing. This classic documentary might best be described as imperial overkill, Shah's version of history in the form of a Cecil B. DeMille-style parade, serving as propaganda for Western eyes [3]. There are no signs of trouble or conflict. Everybody participating in the celebrations is a model Iranian person.

The times when real Iranian people were shown on camera, they were depicted as the classic orientalist tropes of primitive people with wild instincts.

In the last part of the film, the visuals come closer to the image that one might easily recognize as propaganda. Bridges, dams, roads, schools, and farms are depicted as the products of the Shah's White Revolution. With massive resources behind him, Golestan documented the Iranian regime's spectacle to familiarize the Shah's rule, using Orientalist tropes, and his country's modernization to gain validation and sympathy from the Western public [6]. It's a way of saying how far we have come from the orientalist tropes while recognizing the inescapable image cut out for the Iranian nation.

Another interesting fact about the list of guests is that there are minimal participants from the Iranian government. The food and the tent city built for the guests are imported from France, and the guests themselves are flown all over the world. Preparations started over a year ago for the celebrations. The location of the event, Persepolis was once nothing but a desolate desert. The preparations did not take place only at the location only but all over the city of Shiraz. There were not even hotels in the city for the press to stay in.

The coverage of the event in international media mostly focused on the lavishness of the celebrations. The Today Show's Barbara Walters anchored live from Persepolis, where the event took place. She used these words to describe the shah's position; "Imperial majesty Shah Han Shah (king of kings), he is one of the richest men in the world, his country is a constitutional monarchy and the shah has full power, he appoints the prime minister, he can dissolve the parliament, he can control the army, he can declare a war, very little criticism of him is allowed, his word indeed is the law". We can say that the attempt to portray the Shah as a leader with the wisdom to guide him failed; instead, he was a typical Eastern ruler, a dictator far from the principles of democracy.

The film, which premiered in October 1972 to coincide with the anniversary of the Imperial Celebrations, was shown five times a day for five days in thirty-one cinema houses across Tehran and forty around the country and was subsequently distributed by Iranian embassies in foreign countries [7]. The film was only shown for a week, and it wasn't received well by the public. The main issue was the budget spent on the celebrations. This created an environment of resentment among people because of the failing land reforms and high inflation. For this reason, the celebrations are seen as a pivotal point in the creation of a strong opposition against the Shah regime and, consequently, the Islamic Revolution.

Due to its visual qualities, television was considered a significant medium in the propagation of Pahlavi's national ideology. It was through this new medium that, in October 1971, the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire was broadcast live for both national and international audiences. Therefore, the coverage of the celebrations was accessible to people who were unable to see the film in cinemas.

Another factor contributing to the refusal of the narrative surrounding the celebrations created by the Shah administration was the opposition from well-respected religious figures. By this point, the Islamic Ulama had a network of people who spread the negative discourse against the Shah. In this case, too, their impact was evident.

6. Conclusions

Throughout the second Pahlavi era, the state utilized broadcasting, publishing, and documentary-style films to legitimize its mode of existence. In theory, propaganda or legitimization through media should be the backbone of a state such as Iran in the sixties and seventies, since with the white revolution, massive changes were happening. Promoting the changes and convincing people will determine the faith in the reforms. But in the case of the Pahlavi state, it did not achieve success. The disconnection between the ruler and the people was also evident in how the *Flames of Persia* documentary was received by the public. If an approach to propaganda alienates large groups of people from discourse, it is challenging to predict a successful outcome. This was also the case during the second Pahlavi era. People identifying themselves with the images and ideology of propaganda is a factor that determines its believability.

It is challenging to determine the success of a propaganda campaign in the end, even after fifty years, but in this case, the measure is how much society adhered to or even believed some part of the prompted ideologies. As many have argued, the fall of the Shah was the turning point for the Middle East

of today. Going by this argument, his approach to media and propaganda, therefore, was the start of this fall among his people. And the fall began when he and his administration lost touch with the everyday lives of the people.

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