



Spotlight on Iran



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Who do Iranians blame for the blocking of Samsung's app store in Iran?

Samsung announced last week that, starting next month, it intends to block its Iranian users from the company's app store. The reactions of Iranian news website readers and social network users to the reports on Samsung's decision show that the vast majority of them are focusing their anger at the company itself rather than at the Iranian regime, which is responsible for the nuclear policy that prompted the economic sanctions imposed on Iran.

In their comments, the web users lashed out at the company, called to boycott its products, and expressed reservations about sanctions that hurt the people. Only a few web users pointed the finger at the regime and blamed its policy for Samsung's decision, made as part of the sanctions.

It is unclear to what extent these online comments can be used to draw valid conclusions about the Iranian public's stance on the policy of sanctions. However, the views expressed by the web users corroborate other evidence indicating that the sanctions are perceived by the public in Iran as a manifestation of an ongoing effort made by the West to keep their country from realizing its rights and to offend their national dignity. Accordingly, many Iranians tend to accuse the West, and not necessarily the Iranian regime, of responsibility for the sanctions and for the escalating economic crisis in their country.

South Korea's Samsung announced last week that, starting next month, it intends to block its Iranian users from the company's app store. The company's announcement was delivered by an e-mail sent on its behalf to its customers in Iran. The announcement said that the company can no longer provide access to its app store in Iran due to "legal impediments". For now, it appears that there will be no impact on the imports of cell phones produced by Samsung.

In recent days a number of Iranian websites have reported on the decision made by the company. The report, titled “Samsung’s anti-Iranian action”, was also posted on social networks and Western Persian-language news websites. These reports drew anger from news website readers and social network users. The reactions posted by Iranians on the various websites show that the vast majority of them are focusing their anger at the company itself rather than at the Iranian regime, which is responsible for the nuclear policy that prompted the economic sanctions imposed on Iran.



Source: <http://www.penicillin.ir>

Following the release of the report in the Iranian media, a few comments were posted about it on a number of news websites, including Farda News (<http://www.fardanews.com/fa/news/259368/اقدام-ضد-ایرانی-سامسونگ>), Jahan News (<http://www.jahannews.com/vdcdfs0x5yt0jk6.2a2y.html>), and Afkar News (<http://www.afkarnews.ir/vdcawmnu649n6y1.k5k4.html>). Several dozen readers commented on the report on the Iranian website Narenji, dedicated to technology and telecommunications (<http://narenji.ir/11944-قطع-سامسونگ-اپز-ایران>). Most of the comments on Samsung’s decision were posted on BBC Persian Facebook page. The report posted on that page on Friday, April 26, received many dozens of comments from Iranian web users (<http://www.facebook.com/bbcpersian>).

The comments posted by web users on the news websites and social networks included the following main themes:

Samsung's decision is meaningless and the company's products are not of high quality:

A number of web surfers argued that Samsung's decision is meaningless since the Iranian authorities have numerous means at their disposal to bypass the new restrictions. Some web surfers noted that, in any case, the Iranians do not purchase the software produced by the company from its app store but rather download it in other ways, some of them even illegal. "Even if there is a power outage, the Iranians will find a way to log onto Facebook with a candle," said a web user on the BBC Persian Facebook page. Many web users argued that the company's products are not of high quality, and that there are better products on the market produced by Nokia, and even locally-made Iranian products.

Samsung will be more severely hit than Iran:

"Samsung should thank the Iranians for purchasing low-quality telephone devices... and if the Iranians do not purchase the devices, the company will go out of business in one month," one web user commented. Others argued that the company will be unable to implement its decision, since that would mean losing one of its most important markets in Asia and sustaining severe economic damage.

A call to boycott the company's products as an expression of "Iranian national pride":

The most notable reaction to the company's announcement from web users was a call to boycott its products. A reader on the Farda website said that Samsung products should be boycotted in response to the "disrespect and abuse" shown by the company towards its Iranian customers. The BBC Persian Facebook page was flooded with numerous comments from Iranian web users calling for a boycott of the company as an expression of their national pride. "If the Iranians had pride, they wouldn't be purchasing the company's products," one web user wrote. Another noted that even though he had paid 1,700,000 tomans for a Samsung device, he was "willing to turn it off and buy a Nokia device" to hit the company and prevent it from doing any more "such nonsense" in the future. A number of web users took issue with the indifference shown by Iranians as they are being continuously offended by Iran's enemies in the West. One of them posted a comment on the BBC Facebook page saying that it is impossible to remain silent over the company's "open insult" to the Iranians, while a reader on the Afkar News website said that, as an Iranian, he is tired of the Iranian indifference towards the world and the enemies of his country. He expressed his hope

that Iran will behave like a strong, powerful country, and that the Iranians themselves will block Samsung's access to Iran.

Reservations about sanctions that harm the citizens rather than the regime:

In response to the company's decision, one web user posted the following comment on the BBC Facebook page: "And then they say that it is not the citizens who are the target of the sanctions." Another web user stressed that even though he is not a supporter of the Iranian regime, Samsung and Apple cannot behave this way towards the people of Iran.

Condemning South Korea and expressing support for North Korea:

Referring to the ongoing conflict in the Korean Peninsula, a number of web users expressed their support for North Korea and its leader Kim Jong-un. One of them called on the North Korean leader to "take the air out of the South Koreans and teach them a lesson". Another even called on North Korea to bomb its neighbor to the south, "which sucks up to the Americans".

Accusing the Iranian authorities and showing understanding for Samsung's decision:

As already mentioned, most web users focused their anger at the South Korean company rather than at their government. However, some of them expressed their understanding for Samsung's decision and a few of them (on the Narenji website and on the BBC Persian Facebook page) even directly blamed the Iranian regime, whose policy, they said, has led to the increasing isolation of their country. One reader on the Narenji website argued that Samsung's decision was to be expected, since South Korea is required to comply with international laws. He noted that the measure taken by the company hurts the people of Iran but makes the Iranian authorities happy, since they are not interested in the development of their country, as is the practice in the West. A few web users posted curses against the regime and the "clerics" on the BBC Facebook page, saying that their policy has led to the international sanctions imposed on Iran.

Some web users did not directly put the blame on the regime but complained about the difficult economic situation in the country. One of them argued that Samsung's decision is meaningless when the price of oil is going up by 35 percent and the price of meat is going up by 65 percent. Another said that he can understand the company's decision

and argued that no foreign company is willing to do business in Iran in such economically unstable conditions. Yet another web user wrote that the company did the smart thing because nobody in Iran can afford to buy new products anyway given the current levels of inflation.

The reactions provoked by Samsung's decision from Iranian news website readers and social network users deserve a critical and qualified examination. It is unclear to what extent these online comments can be used to draw valid conclusions about the Iranian public's stance on the policy of sanctions against Iran, and to what extent the web users represent Iranian public opinion. What is more, in most cases it cannot be conclusively determined whether the web users who posted comments reside inside or outside of Iran.

However, the views expressed by Iranian web users in response to Samsung's decision corroborate other evidence indicating that the Iranian public tends to accuse the West, and not necessarily the Iranian regime, of responsibility for the sanctions. A telephone poll conducted by the U.S.-based Gallup in December 2012 – January 2013 to examine the feelings of the Iranian public about the sanctions and their effects showed that 47 percent of the public blamed the United States for the sanctions, 9 percent blamed Israel, 7 percent blamed European governments, 7 percent blamed the U.N., and only 10 percent blamed the government of Iran. The findings of the poll are also supported by the argument brought up by a number of journalists and scholars who have visited Iran in the past several years, according to which there is a growing tendency among the Iranian public to accuse the West of responsibility for the economic crisis brought about by the sanctions. The sanctions are perceived by many Iranians as a manifestation of an ongoing effort made by Western countries to keep their country from realizing its legitimate rights making scientific and technological progress, and as an offense to their national dignity. They even strengthen feelings of victimization harbored by Iranians, thus making them more likely to lay the blame on Western countries than on the regime, whose nuclear policy led to the sanctions imposed on Iran.