

Net Effect: Social Media as a Catalyst for Political Reform

Into the Age of Cyberspace Warfare-

Exploring the Revolutionary Narrative of Social Media

By

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine if there exists a discrepancy between popular Westernized notions about the role of social media and the notions of those affected by the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009 and assess how this might change the dominant discourse of cyber-utopia. The internet has most certainly transformed our lives in unforeseeable ways having various and unknown shifting effects but the purpose of this research is to view the dominant discourse of liberation in comparison with the perceived meaning and function of the internet and social media within anti-democratic regimes. The awareness of global misconceptions are imperative to move away from the popular norm and scope of research that uses framing tactics of liberation and democratization because the development, adoption and political consequences of any technological tool within any society will always tell a story. The net effect of social media was silenced soon after the Green Revolution and many Iranians are still experiencing the consequences of their actions. The dark side of internet freedom in authoritative governments will assuredly play a role in forming a more comprehensive understanding of the revolutionary narrative that is social media as well as contributing to the overall relationship of how the internet influences the political realm. Iran represents a unique situation to analyze due to its politically closed landscape and historical global misperception about Iranian society and its citizenry. Through the utilization of personal narratives of individual Iranians directly or indirectly involved within the movement and an overview of global trends of suppression of online speech, this research attempts to show that no

universal framework exists when it comes to the discourse about social media because the characteristics of a society will ultimately drive the forces that influence technological manifestation.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“[People] somehow assume that the Internet is going to be the catalyst of change that will push young people into the streets, while in fact it may actually be the new opium for the masses”*

*-EvgenyMorzov*

The promise and disillusionment of social media outlets has ignited an enigma that has raged throughout the global community dividing up camps of “Cyber-Utopians” who believe in the liberating political nature of these tools against the “Net-Delusionists” who unravel a dark and unexplored realm of internet freedom. There are many inconvenient truths of the internet that have slowly begun to surface to reveal the double edged nature of the viral world but in reality the Western fantasies of the internet as a machine of freedom and democracy might not match the experiences of those in authoritarian societies. This is not to say that the internet and social media outlets do not empower dissent and activism but it cannot be manifested as a freedom tonic especially in repressive regimes. Authoritarianism is linked to cyberspace warfare as the ability to track and trace messages of digital communication to repress dissent within manageable boundaries through the use of threats, arrests and other suppression tactics. The sophistication of internet controls by governments reinforces the idea that “all governments from dictatorships to democracies are learning to use the internet to defend their interests” (MacKinnon 5). The internet is indeed a complex and manipulative technology and the revolutionary narrative about social



media is one that is undetermined and transformative representing an anomaly of sorts when it is swept into nations of instability and conflict.

In the face of the Green Movement in Iran in 2009 and the Arab Spring in 2011, the world saw the evolution of the discourse about social media take form from nation to nation exemplifying tools of liberation and to some tools of suppression. This interplay made apparent the beginning of cyberspace warfare amongst the individual user and the authoritative governments but has it shifted to serve the oppressors more than the oppressed? The cyber-utopian world is said to stimulate emancipatory online communication among users but research has mainly focused on how the net effect of social media is “liberating” and the champion of political movements around the world, however slowly but surely we are beginning to see the dawning of the dark, unknown side of internet freedom. As writer and blogger, Evgeny Morozov, has examined the “Net Delusion” is a reality that has spread and the political and social implications are being thrown on to the table for activists, policymakers and governments. The democratizing nature of the internet can’t be pinpointed and perhaps may never be although the world shouldn’t make the mistake of overlooking the detrimental effects of social media in the age of what Morozov has called cyberspace warfare in anti-democratic regimes. Being one among many to examine from this perspective the impact of the internet on authoritarian states, Morozov indicates how it also entrenches dictators, threatens dissidents and makes it harder to promote democracy (vi-viii). The notion of democratization has been attached to social

media tools and inevitably suppressed societies will utilize these mechanisms whether it be to their advantage or not. The dynamic of expression under repression can still shed light on how social media usage has changed since the Green Movement protests to show how acts of expression have been suppressed and to what extent. There is always more to the narrative that society chooses to ignore and since cyberspace has no system of governance it easily allows repressive governments to champion over the individual user.

The vital questions that should resonate loudly within this narrative now is why does a deeper, more comprehensive understanding matter and how will this realization help us move forward in determining how social media interacts within different cultural, social and political atmospheres. The goal is to move past partial and biased conceptualizations and construct a discourse of analysis that is free of assumption and focuses on all elements of the net effect. In Manuel Castell's book, The Rise of the Networked Society, he makes it clear that, "our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the Self" creating conditions of "structural schizophrenia" between the perceived function and meaning against the actual function and meaning (3). The Net has most certainly transformed our lives in unforeseeable ways having various and unknown shifting effects but the purpose of this research is to view the "Net Effect of Social Media as a Catalyst for Political Reform" as the dominant discourse engulfed within the new age of cyberspace warfare which

undeniably changes the perceived function and meaning, according to Castells, of the revolutionary narrative of social media.

Focusing on the Green Movement in Iran in 2009 as a case study, all of these elements are apparent and even though the movement itself has ended analyzing the aftermath is imperative to understanding this new discourse of cyberspace warfare in the global networked society. The role and fate of the Iranian protesters who took out into the streets after the contested presidential elections will open a window into the struggles and consequences of the usage of social media outlets that has been covered up thus far by authoritarian regimes and more importantly unexamined by the international community who still inherently believe in prolonged social medias promise. The digital purge of labeled “deviants” after the 2009 protests led by Iran’s government cyber-crime teams begs the question of what happened next to the people, to the society and to the cyber-utopian banner of democratization?

The negative consequences of social media as a catalyst for political reform also do play an integral role in the narrative that the cyber-utopians and uninformed international community have yet to acknowledge. The tactics of liberation and suppression are the results of connectivity and the extension of labeling of “deviants” by the government for taking advantage of this connective network displays an intriguing relationship that will most certainly play a role in constructing and spreading the awareness of the Net Delusion. The global community has labeled social media outlets as “liberating” and “democratizing”

but are they really? As this revolutionary narrative develops only with time will the negative backlash and dark side be uncovered and the question of whether individuals armed with nothing but powerful technologies against their adversaries in the quest for liberation will surely be constructed as an imagined future of the past. To summarize, political reformation as a result of these social media outlets have been the dominant concentration since the Green Movement and Arab Spring in 2011 and undeniably framing tactics have greatly inflated popular expectations of what it could (and could not) actually achieve which has completely disregarded the double edged nature of these tools. As the global community is beginning to see the shapings of a cyberspace war between the individual dissidents who utilize the supposed benefits of the net effect against the cyber-crime team of Iran, one of the largest and sophisticated in the world, the Net Delusion assuredly will start to uncover itself and offer a different, more thorough framework of the discourse of social media by identifying a new discourse within the movement.

### 1.1.1 Purpose

*Cyber-utopianism is dangerous because it fails to recognize that the internet penetrates and reshapes all walks of political life, not just the ones conducive to democratization. The internet empowers dictators, demagogues and terrorists as much as it empowers democrats. How the internet interacts with politics and the particulars of how it is used for good and for ill vary drastically from country to country.*  
(Morozov)

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the complex nature of social media outlets displays a discrepancy amongst popular Westernized

notions about the role of social media against the notions of those engulfed within the movement of the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009. A more focal point would be to address why does it seem that society has overlooked an event in history that could help us to become more aware of the architecture of society entangled within a powerfully driven force of technology. Many overriding factors contribute to the assessment of how technologies are woven into society but keeping in mind what Langdon Winner has famously said, “no idea is more provocative about technology and society than the notion that technical things have political qualities...and can embody specific forms of power and authority” (19). This assertion and the fantastical qualities of social media outlets should not however blindfold us to how this relationship develops and transforms with time especially in an predominately closed networked society as Iran. The social and psychological behaviors exuded by individuals (Iranians) to a higher authority who may or may not threaten or suppress their right to freely express opinions, attitudes and beliefs toward that higher authority through social media outlets outlines the beginning of the Net Delusion and should lead society away from falling prone to popular misconceptions about the merits of social media. Perhaps the enumerable future of Iran may hold a more democratic future but many factors will contribute to this manifestation and historical misapprehensions should not shield us from seeing the true struggles individuals face to reach that point.

Further, cyberspace warfare is an unprecedented epidemic within social movements and understanding its short-term vs. long-term affects is vital to a

more comprehensive overview of the revolutionary narrative about social media. The advent of connectivity has reshaped the world we live in unimaginable ways and to fall captive to the construction of social media as solely “democratizing” and “liberating” makes it that much easier for the global world to overlook the labeling and punishing of individuals who use these tools for this very purpose. For the sake of argument, if we take a step back and make a distinction to what “democracy” means and what does it truly mean to be “free” and “liberating”, we should be aware that these are abstract terms in practice and what it means to be free on one side of the world could be quite different from someone in Western society. It is a misconception to view social media’s function and meaning as homogeneous in all contexts. Differences of socio-political and cultural context will impact the role social media plays and its ambiguous elements and trajectories must be critically analyzed.

Essentially, the net fad of the Web is hard to pinpoint and it will continuously fascinate us but the purpose of this study is to take a step back and assess the political ramifications of utilizing the internet for reform within an authoritarian government and see how this may have changed the discourse about social media and further expose Western thought up against the realities of those afflicted by the dark side of internet freedom.

## **1.2 Objectives**

This study aims to fulfill as best as possible the following objectives in regards to the revolutionary narrative about social media.

- Examine the relationship between social media and suppression of social media outlets
- Analyze discrepancies between Western and Iranian perceptions and awareness about the discourse of social media within a movement
- Reveal differences between older and younger Iranian social groups about the discourse of social media through alternative narratives of a movement
- Exhibit the consequences and benefits of utilizing social media outlets and their net effects on political reform and further democratization
- Understand the forecasting variable of short-term vs. long-term effects of cyberspace warfare

## **1.3 Problem Significance**

The technological future of mass communication is infinite when it comes to the challenges, affects and opportunities it fosters for the present time being and more importantly, the future. Taking this into consideration, technology and social media is now relevant to every single challenge in the world in some way, shape or form. It is also important to make the distinction that technology is now assumed to be part of every challenge in the world and also part of every solution in the world. It empowers people both for good and for ill forever changing the relationship between states and their citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The problem to be assessed is the “political power of social media” which is addressed in an article by Clay Shirky in *Foreign Affairs* published in early 2011 assessing how communicative technology will help promote freedom and at the same time the

transformative affects it will impose on the state versus the political actor which has been relentlessly debated by scholars, academia, governments and the media. We have already established though that a relationship exists in multiple intersections between the internet and politics but we have failed to truly decipher what sort of dynamic this constitutes in closed, authoritarian societies who have in some cases taken over this advantageous opportunity to control its populace and gain more power and authority. Many believe that the idea of new media as a political force is not compelling because it only stems as a tool for commerce, social life or self-distraction, however in the past two years alone it has ignited massive social and political movements from the Green Movement in Iran in 2009 to the Arab Spring in 2011. Now whether the phenomena of social media will be used for good or evil is what must be evaluated because now we have entered the age of virtual reality and seen its potential for growth.

The prevailing belief as social media advances is that governments will be caught off-guard when large numbers of their citizens, armed with virtually nothing but cell phones take part in mini-rebellions thus challenging their authority. The problem surfaces when political activism reaches new heights and becomes violent and dangerous to the political and apolitical actor. Shirky alludes to the fact that, “social media have become coordinating tools for nearly all the world’s political movements, just as most of the world’s authoritarian governments are trying to limit access to them” (28). Thus this becomes a battle between the public sphere and the governments who we have seen in many cases in the Middle East losing power and control to the advent of social media tools but have they really? Organizations and networks such as Global Voices, Global



Net Initiative, Threatened Voices, Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch and individual social media users have attested to the “wild fantasy” and these existing networks initiatives are indicators that there is a disconnect between cyber-utopia and reveals its paradoxical components by raising awareness of these practices through gathering annual reports of online suppression.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

With the progression of time, the revolutionary narrative of social media has evolved and the advent of cyberspace warfare in Iran during the Green Movement is one indicator of how social media in Iran can be depicted in many different lights whether we view it from the individual user, the nation or international community perspective. The perceived function and meaning of social media should always be viewed up against how it adapts, evolves and influences in different societies void from popular Western misperceptions.

Main Research Focus- How do Western perceptions and discourse on the role of social media about a political movement differentiate from those within or affected by the movement?

#### **1.5 Problem Background**

The background of the problem listed above should be viewed as short-term vs. long-term effects. In the long-run social media tools have a high potential of enhancing democracy and political freedoms, however in the short-term perspective particular dissident groups or individuals who advocate for regime change may be faced with serious consequences as political activists and at the same time their efforts may be viewed as ineffective on average. The more

promising view and way to think about social media is as a long-term tool that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere as a whole. However, in the present the spread of information and shared awareness of government actions of violence and human rights violations has posed many dangers for political activists who speak out against these occurrences. As Shirky again points out “authoritarian governments stifle communication among their citizens because they fear correctly, that a better coordinated populace would constrain their ability to act without oversight” (32). The key word here is “oversight” because now the international arena and its inhabitants have become aware of how political activists have been silenced and tortured just for simply utilizing social media and exercising their right to voice their opinions. The goal now is to develop a critique of social media and its relation to political improvement. As shown in the Arab Social Media Report in 2011 social media continues to grow by the numbers every day and since 2011 Facebook has over 677 million users as of April (with the Middle East constituting one of the regions that contributed the largest amount of new users. Its mobile users have exceeded 250 million subscribers. Twitter users also exceeded 200 million users at the end of March. Collectively, these users tweet about 4 billion tweets a month (Mourtada and Salem 4-6). Since this is a recent phenomenon that will continue to increasingly grow not just by numbers but through unprecedented challenges and scope it is vital to focus on the background of digital activism and its relation to political freedom presently and hypothesize what it could mean for generations to come.

This study is significant because it takes a step back to examine the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed in a moment in history that marked a pivotal point in Iranian social movements. The hype of the Green Movement in 2009 spread awareness around the world of a populace who up to this point were misrepresented and stereotyped but did it do anything else? Political movements in history should not be forgotten because they will play a significant role in the future, just as the 1979 Iranian Revolution has for the past thirty-three years. In decades to come the world may look at the fad that is liberating social media to topple the world's dictators as an urban myth that was never fully understood. In order to battle this construct, it is vital to reopen this pivotal moment in Iranian history and think about the social and psychological effects of the social media on the individuals, the society and the broader scope of the dynamic of the oppressed and oppressor and assess whether it differentiates from western misconceived perceptions about the nature of social media as a "political force".

In the west the global Western discourse paraded around the banner during the short three week period of the protests over the triumphing power of social media and the impossibility of authoritarian regimes silencing their people in the face of the liberating net effect. Esfandari believes the "Twitter Revolution" in Iran was an irresistible opportunity for media build up. She claims that, "western journalists who couldn't reach- or didn't bother reaching?- people on the ground in Iran simply scrolled through the English language tweets posted with tag #iranelection. Through it all, no one seemed to wonder why people trying to coordinate protests In Iran would be writing in any other language than Farsi"

(3). The conventional wisdom of the West about Iran has been proven to be wrong in many accounts. Another contributor to the Western hype of misperceptions about social media within Iran is author, Andrew Sullivan, who was heard declaring “the Revolution will be twittered” and was also heard saying:

*“as the regime shut down other forms of communication, Twitter survived... You cannot stop people any longer. You cannot control them any longer. They can bypass your established media, they can broadcast to one another, they can organize as never before. It’s increasingly clear that Ahmadinejad and the old guard mullahs were caught off-guard by this technology and how it helped globalize the opposition movement in the last few weeks”*(5).

The media indeed played a crucial role in perceptions and awareness but never took into account the real effects of the net in an anti-democratic regime. The broader scope should also take into account the serious and detrimental implications of the West’s incessant need to label and frame phenomena without a full scope of comprehension. We as human beings in this age have been conditioned to expect immediate returns but the promise of the net effect of social media provides evidence that is at best inconclusive. This means the global community should not fall prone to automatically accepting the cyber-utopian dream of democratizing the world because cyber-utopia is imperfect and the net delusion presents a window of what many Iranian activists, bloggers and citizens have been exposed to in the past three years following the movement. Understanding the internet’s underlying impact is essential to understanding this revolutionary narrative which almost ten years ago to this day was addressed in the book, Open Networks, Closed Regimes, that “in the absence of thorough analysis, unexamined assumptions about the internet’s likely impact have become conventional wisdom. Tales of wired dissidents toppling strong-armed leaders

have lent credibility to the idea that the internet inexorably undermines authoritarian regimes...this notion (has now) solidified into a truism” (Kalathil and Boas 203). This reality that the internet can undermine authoritarian regimes clearly doesn’t hold ground when governments are becoming increasingly tech savvy, so we must learn to move past blind optimism and popular Western misperceptions about social media.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Findings and Interpretations of the Past

All kinds of technologies have transformed our past and present and will continue to be impactful into the future. Scarcely a new invention is thrown on the table that one doesn't proclaim as the salvation of a free society (Winner 16). Fifty years from now the social powers of the internet may be irrelevant and a minute piecing of the past, yet in this moment in time it is being portrayed as an "avenue for change" but more importantly, an entrance into the mindsets, values and beliefs of people from all around the world. The literature written in the past decade on benefits of social media and cyber-utopia should always be traced back to the past to see what others have written about it and what may have been overlooked and unacknowledged. There will always be critical thinkers who foresee the shapings of a phenomena or focus on a particular event in history that could compliment something bigger than itself. This represents a testament as to why perceptions and awareness are key to analyze in its progression.

For example, the Green Movement in Iran may have caught worldwide attention in the moment but it died out as quickly as it began. Questions that should have been considered in the aftermath are why and what could it have meant then and in the future for Iranians, Iran as a state and the international community perception and awareness. Were there shifts in these realms and can new additions of this pivotal and unprecedented event add to the body of

literature surrounding the interplay of the internet and mass movements of protest? Alluding back to Winner in 1986, he hits strongly on the fact that “what matters is not technologies themselves but the social and economic system in which it is embedded” (21). It is a “universal” belief that technical systems of various kinds are woven into society but in addition it is vital to note the conditions of that society will determine how this technical system will evolve, operate and influence users. Again misperceptions are important to avoid because social media being defined as “liberating” in the United States may evolve and operate in a different way in a non-democratic society.

Keeping this in mind, different types of medias can function in societies for various purposes than otherwise intended as well. Small media in the 1979 Revolution as opposed to Big media (social media) used in the Green Revolution display two different, yet interesting dynamics. Small media in 1979 such as “audiotapes were used as an electronic extension of the religious institutions and photocopied leaflets were the preferred weapons of the secular groupings” show how media development has impacted our understanding of political dynamics (Mohammadi 26). Traditional oppositional technological networks of the past may not have been labeled as necessarily liberating by society because cassette tapes and pamphlets of photocopied statements didn’t seem as revolutionizing to a larger audience, however these small medias can be labeled as “highly innovative use of modern communication” and to date of the 1979 Revolution “the world’s most successful form of communication for mobilizing revolutions” (34). These

media technologies may have been seen as liberating in the sense that they provided an avenue for individuals to express and voice opinions which could have weighed heavily on people's perceptions and awareness just as the internet today can be seen as a mechanism to freely express one's opinions and beliefs just on a wider and more universal scale. Still whether a technology is simple or complex it cannot be mistaken and extended as a formula that induces democratic regimes, in other words, Mohammadi states "a public space of information between the opposition movement and the regime, small media are seen as integral elements to the developing and maintaining of an alternative history and fostering of solidarity"(14). This goes to show that even media of the past represented a more significant meaning that really meets the eye and when comparing to the big media that has taken over now we should not fail to make the same assertion. Ultimately we should become aware to how, as discussed, different media in different situational surroundings can evolve, adapt and influence in unknown ways. Stakes are higher now because political, social and economic problems are heightened but the oppressed has reached a point where they believe action with consequence outweighs inaction.

Technologies of the past are rampant all around us even if we are not conscious of them. The characterizations of technologies and what we make of them from their interactions with society at different stages reveal much more than what lies on the surface. Assuredly, social media will one day become a technology of the past but now, in this moment, it means something more than



what we ascribe it to be because it undeniably has varying outcomes in different environments. As Cohen in 2007 reveals “for young people, technology is first and foremost a means to express themselves, interact and shape a digital identity that may or may not be in sync with real life...rely on technology for autonomy...emancipation from the population” but what does it mean for others who are exposed to it directly or indirectly?” (111).

## **2.2 Findings and Interpretations of the Present**

Social media have come to be known as Janus, the Roman god with two faces, being “ironic, perverse and paradoxical” in practice (Golkar 53). In the past decade, there has been much contention and debate over the notion that communicative technologies promote freedom and further instill democratic structure and values in once oppressive regimes. Indeed the forecasting power of social media in the last five years has stretched across the global world and has shown its ability to predict, alter and influence real-world outcomes. The technological future of mass communication is infinite when it comes to the challenges, affects and opportunities it fosters for the present time being and more importantly, the future. Taking this into consideration, technology and social media is now relevant and assumed to be part of every single challenge in the world and also part of every solution in some way, shape or form (Shirky 2010, Mohammadi 1994). It empowers people both for good and for ill, forever changing the relationship between states and their citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The problem being assessed here is the “political power of social media” which stems from an article by Clay Shirky in 2011 in *Foreign Affairs* which addresses how different forms of communicative technology will help promote freedom and at the same time its transformative affects it will impose on the state versus the political actor. Many scholars around the world have forecasted our entrance into the age of cyberspace warfare in which the lines between public and private authorities become blurred in a dark, secret underworld. The ill-governed realm of cyberspace functions so “digital information can easily be traced and tracked, and then tied to specific individuals who then themselves can be mapped in space and time” and labeled as insurgents” (Deibert 44). So what must be critically analyzed is whether social media tools really enhance or impede democracy within social movements specifically in the case of Iran. If we look at the figure 1 below we can see that with Iran’s immense population internet penetration in Iran was only a mere 11 percent of the population, so social media cannot be realistically accounted for as the sole mechanism of influencing the election protests. However, heavy censorship, arrests and barriers even from the small penetration rates can signify something that should be broken down and analyzed. The ability of the government to track and trace individuals has indeed become increasingly easy and at the same time since 2009 internet penetration will have rise in numbers contributing to more arrests and threats from the government who is more keenly aware of what their up against. Perceptions and awareness of these

interplays will also have likely risen to display a more significant relationship that might have been overlooked due to the small internet penetration.

### Iran Internet Freedom

	2009	2011
<b>INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS</b>	<b>Not Free</b>	<b>Not Free</b>
<b>Obstacles to Access</b>	21	21
<b>Limits on Content</b>	24	29
<b>Violations of User Rights</b>	31	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>89</b>

POPULATION: 75.1 million  
 INTERNET PENETRATION 2009: 11 percent  
 WEB 2.0 APPLICATIONS BLOCKED: Yes  
 SUBSTANTIAL POLITICAL CENSORSHIP: Yes  
 BLOGGERS/ONLINE USERS ARRESTED: Yes  
 PRESS FREEDOM STATUS: Not Free

#### Freedom on the Net 2011: Iran

Freedom House  
2011

*Figure 1*

*Source:* Freedom House Report (2011)

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2011>

If we take this in comparison to the 2011 results compiled by Freedom House in the figure 2 below we do not see much of a substantial rise in penetration rates but a slight rise in population. However, according to both reports Iran was seen as the least free when it came to the internet and digital media usage.

	2011	2012
INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS	Not Free	Not Free
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	21	21
Limits on Content (0-35)	29	32
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	39	37
Total (0-100)	89	90

POPULATION: 79 million  
INTERNET PENETRATION 2011: 21 percent  
WEB 2.0 APPLICATIONS BLOCKED: Yes  
NOTABLE POLITICAL CENSORSHIP: Yes  
BLOGGERS/ ICT USERS ARRESTED: Yes  
PRESS FREEDOM STATUS: Not Free

\* 0=most free, 100=least free

*Figure 2*

*Source:* Freedom House Report (2012)

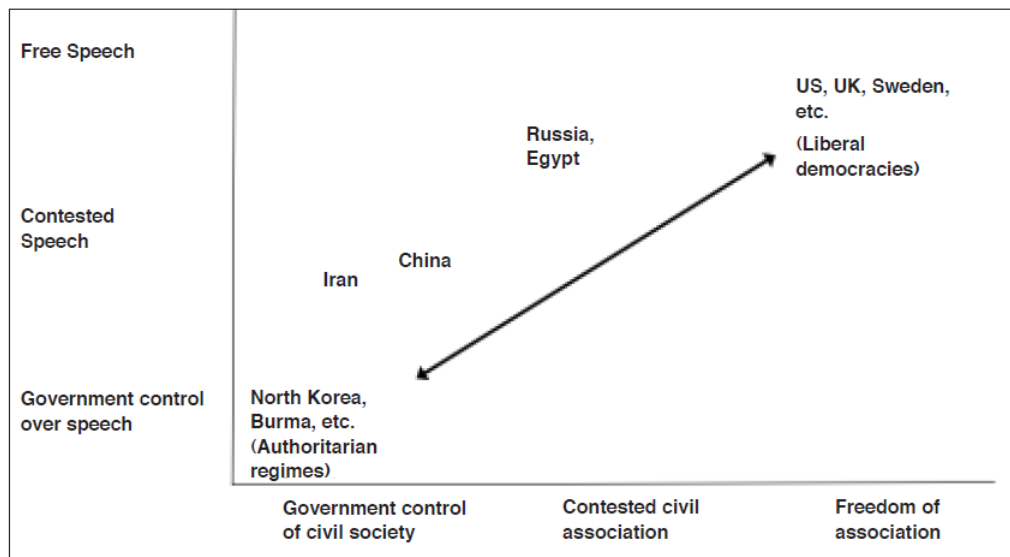
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2012>

Many believe that the idea of new media as a political force is not compelling such as Lerner and Deibert because it only stems as a tool for commerce, social life or self-distraction. However in the past two years alone, it has ignited massive social and political movements from the Green Movement in Iran in 2009 to the Arab Spring in 2011. Now whether the phenomena of social media will be used for good or evil is what must be evaluated because now we have entered the age of virtual reality and seen its potential for growth. According to Golkar in 2011, he assess that information and communicative technologies (ICT's) are significant in mobilizing political support of opposition parties but conversely have the potential of expanding political control of governments to suppress political dissents. He references to the "cyber optimists" who have been coined within the social media framework as individuals strongly believing technologies lead to political liberation and who have a "striking ability to the internet and other forms of liberation technologies that empower individuals, facilitate independent communication and mobilization, and strengthen an

emergent civil society” (51-52). Golkar shows how technologies are both liberating and suppressive in nature and it is imperative to make that distinction since the role of ICT’s in its formation and expansion in the political movement in Iran and others is a relatively new phenomenon.

Now essentially as social media advances, governments will be caught off-guard when large numbers of their citizens, armed with virtually nothing but cell phones, take part in mini-rebellions thus challenging their authority (i.e. Arab Spring/ Green Movement). The problem stems when political activism reaches new heights and becomes violent and dangerous to the political and apolitical actor. The virtual world is being translated into the real world and Golkar introduces us to the internet as a battlefield and Iran, being one of the five largest cyber-space armies in the world, key partakers in this war. Abdo also agrees with Golkar in that “social media tools should be used as a forum of healthy encounter of different ideas” (878). Further, both scholars strongly agree that propagation and diffusion of anti-Islamic practices can’t be realistically avoided if communicative technologies are to be liberating. This then becomes a battle between the public sphere and the governments who we have seen in many cases in the Middle East losing power and control to the advent of social media tools. Thus, “like Janus, the internet can open the flow of information to closed societies and educate citizens. It can also be applied as a new ideological state apparatus to enslave the populace in new ways” (Golkar 64). Figure 3 below is a representation from *SAIS Review* of Summer-Fall 2010 of how Iran ranks as opposed to one of the most highly censored countries like China and the ultimate democratic champion like the United States. Iran is indicated as having highly

contested speech entangled within an high government controlled society. Etling, Faris and Palfrey envision a stalemate unless there is an advance devolution of power, increased civil liberties and concomitant restraints on government action (38). It would be interesting to see however how this relationship between government control and citizen freedom of association and expression would change once the internet penetration rate grows over time. Now that the penetration rate is so low in Iran, it makes it much more manageable for government censorship and cyber-crime trackings to occur which is followed by a plethora of political consequences as opposed to when penetration rates rise in the future governments may have a harder time.



Freedom of Speech and Association in Different Political Regimes

Figure 3

Source: SAIS Review of Summer-Fall 2010

[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sais\\_review/toc/sais.30.2.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sais_review/toc/sais.30.2.html)

Phillip and Muzzamil also acknowledge the political consequences of digital media in association with social movements and believe “digital media helped to turn individualized, localized and community specific dissent into a structured movement with a collective consciousness” (41). This sheds lights on the Green Movement in Iran and the Arab Spring in 2011 because it did just that, however as the authors mention it is “premature” to call these movements a wave of democratization simply because they are evolving as we speak now. Since this is a recent phenomena that will continue to increasingly grow not just by numbers but through unprecedented challenges and scope, it is vital to focus on the background of digital activism and its relation to political freedom presently and hypothesize what it could mean for generations to come. Phillip and Muzzamil outlined a useful guide of the story of digital media, first being the preparation phase following the ignition phase then the street protests then the international buy-in then the climax which leads to the follow-on information warfare phase which these social movements reside. This phase is key for the authors because “the various players are left standing to compete for the future course of events by gaining control over the revolutionary narrative” (42-43). Since the revolutionary narrative is pre-existing as the authors point out it makes it increasingly difficult to project how cyberspace war-fare between the political actor and governments will evolve. One could say in the long-run social media tools have a high potential of enhancing democracy and political freedoms, however in the short-term perspective particular dissident groups or individuals who advocate for regime change may be faced with serious consequences as political activists and at the same time their efforts may be viewed as ineffective on average. Inherently, there

seems to be a strong consensus that technology induced political action has changed the playing field, the way we communicate and has ignited the potential of unintended consequences and backlash. The authors sum up the technology revolutionary narrative by stating that “it is a mistake to build a theory of democratization around a particular kind of software or a single website...Nor does it make sense to argue that digital media can cause dictators to achieve or fall short of their goals. Technological tools and the people who use them must together murder or \break a political uprising” (46).

The short-term and long-term effects of political uprisings are vastly different and must be critically evaluated under different criterion. With both the Green Movement and the ongoings of the Arab Spring immediate goals of more democratic ideals and grievances with the current status quo were quite apparent, however, long term goals were not that discernible. Shirky further “demonstrates how difficult it is to weaponize social media to pursue country-specific and near-term policy goals” in the aftermath of social movements” (31). This is an important distinction because even though he is seen as possibly a “cyber optimist” believing that communicative technologies promote freedom, he also makes it quite clear that it will take awhile. Another important contribution Shirky makes to the field of social media addresses the question of how can censorship of these social media outlets impose danger and violence to individuals who demand and seek change in the political atmosphere? This goes back to the notion that social media can be repressive in nature because as he states “authoritarian governments stifle communication among their citizens because they fear correctly, that a better- coordinated populace would constrain their ability to act



without oversight” (32). The key word here is “oversight” because now the international arena and its inhabitants have become aware of how political activists and ordinary citizens have been silenced and tortured just for simply utilizing social media and exercising their right to voice their opinions. The goal now is to develop a critique of social media and its relation to political improvement and empowerment. However, in Iran’s situation this “oversight” has been exacerbated even more so leading to much more violence and human rights violation or in other words cyberspace warfare in order to silence collective action. Collective, coordinated action by the ICT’s brings up the debate in Shirky’s article between the realists and the idealists and the question of whether there is a such thing as short-term solutions in political uprisings. Shirky further alludes to the fact that, “social media have become coordinating tools for nearly all the world’s political movements, just as most of the world’s authoritarian governments are trying to limit access to them” (28). This emerging interplay between the users of social media for whatever means makes it clear that there is now a balance of power between the state and civil society. The only thing that remains unclear is where this dynamic is headed in the long-run as well as keeping in mind that it could mean and bring different situational scenarios for different countries.

It is vital to understand that the concept and norm of free speech is indeed political and not universally shared, but as Shirky points out the shared awareness internationally and domestically brought out from digital tools is key. Social media skeptics are rampant because they are filtering, dispersing and igniting different outcomes, consequences and reactions in relation to national

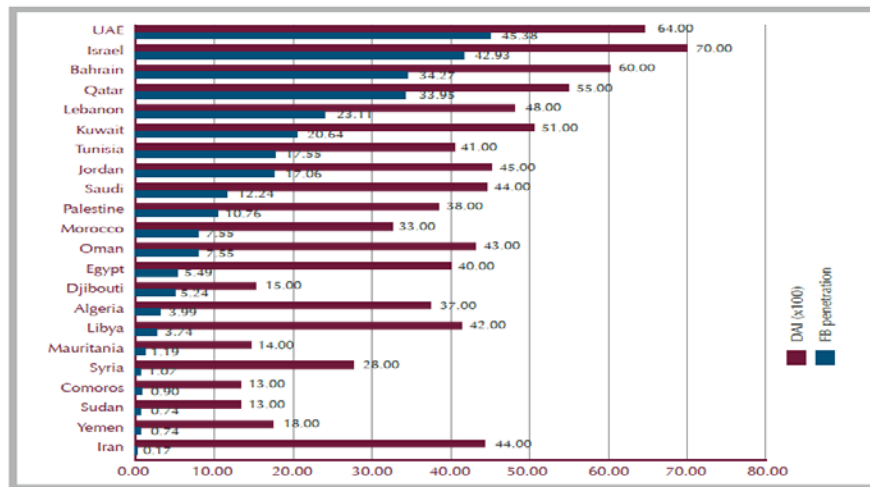
politics. This is seen as normative according to Shirky, who outlines two arguments in the social media debate, “the first is that the tools themselves are ineffective and second is that they produce as much harm to democratization as good, because repressive governments are becoming better at using these tools to suppress dissent” (38). Essentially, we can see that there is a direct correlation between social media usage and suppression of social media outlets. This can be increased or decreased elements depending on the dynamics between these two variables and on political atmospheres and governance. Kalathil and Boas also agree and point out that the internet does pose an insurmountable threat to governments but does not definitively undermine authoritarian regimes.

Nonetheless, more communicative freedom is good for more political freedom in any political atmosphere or governance. Sohrabi-Haghighat and Mansouri contend that political contexts that drive social movements circulate around “the multiplicity of independent centers of power within the regime, the regime’s openness to new actors, instability of current political alignments, availability of influential allies or supporters for challenges, and the extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim making” (29).

This is not disputed within historical political movements, however now the additional component that carries out reactions to these elements changes the outcome of achieving more liberation drastically. The authors discuss how the internet acts as a “enabler” within the domestic environment weakening a state’s repression machines. It would be interesting and beneficial if the authors would have elaborated more of how now the state’s repression machine is evolving in a new direction of cyberspace warfare. Arguably though, the revolutionary

narrative introduced by Phillip and Muzzamil in 2011 is creating an increased capacity of attaining democratic changes in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries, but Sohrabi-Haghighat and Mansouri strongly believe that “profound structural change requires additional forces far stronger than a mouse click” (35). The chart below shows that Iran does have a high Digital Access Index (DAI) but a low Facebook penetration. According to the DAI Iran has a medium DAI, so it makes it difficult to classify social media such as Facebook as one of the main contributing factors surrounding the Green Movement. It can be assumed, however that it contributed to a worldwide view into the events and traumatizing images from the movement itself.

Figure 12: Facebook Penetration and Digital Access Index in the Arab Countries\* (plus Iran and Israel) (Dec. 2010)



\* Excluding Iraq and Somalia; no data on DAI was provided.

Figure 4

Source: Arab Social Media Report (2010)

<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents>

In the United Kingdom’s Human Right House assessment of “Iran one year after Elections and the Importance of the Internet and Media” (2010) it is

expressed that social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter were more bridging than mobilizing mechanisms within Iran which is vital to take note of because the Green Revolution was more beneficial in bridging connection and shared awareness outside its boundaries. The idea of the masses mobilizing simply by a mouse click is difficult to fathom but as the assessment draws out it does create a foundation to build upon. The repressive nature of this foundation, specifically in Iran, led to cyberspace warfare in numerous threats, arrests and violent acts by the government who was now becoming more sophisticated and technically savvy (11). This assessment is interesting because it introduced the alternative of implementing “small media” alongside ICT’s. Small media is characterized by “distribution that is not prone to blockage, shareable information products, highly resourceful and networked individuals that reproduce sharable information products, and uses these social networks of highly resourceful and networked individuals to distribute sharable products to less resourceful individuals” (4). Fundamentally, this could eliminate the fact that some people are not connected in the digital age so, therefore are not a part of a social movement. Esfandari in 2010 also believed this could also be influential in conquering the ability of the Iranian government to silence punish and locate individuals who express their anti-Islamic views about government and religion on media sites. Avenues of progress are being made in many shapes and forms that bear in mind the complexity of openness, security and suppression in an networked authoritarian state. The likes of the “Green Wave”, the “Twitter Revolution”, and “Middle Class Revolutionaries” are all “dangerous designations that reduce the foundation and strides of the movement but this is how the world remembers this

event in history” (23). The mass arrests and uncertain disappearances and deaths are what lives beyond this event which has given rise to many cynics in the Iranian community towards the lack of “disinterest” from the international community. This invigorates an even more nuanced, multidimensional and complex Iran because we further ourselves from the realities that are not broadcasted. Figure 5 below ranks Iran as a top country of high executions behind China. (not taking count of unknown executions should also be taken into account). Sreberny and Khiabany in their analysis of the internet and politics in Iran fall along the cyber-realists of the discourse claiming that the Green Wave has shown how much can be achieved within a repressive context. But it has also shown that technologies in themselves are insufficient substitute for political strategies, goals and discourse.

## Countries with Highest Number of Executions in 2010

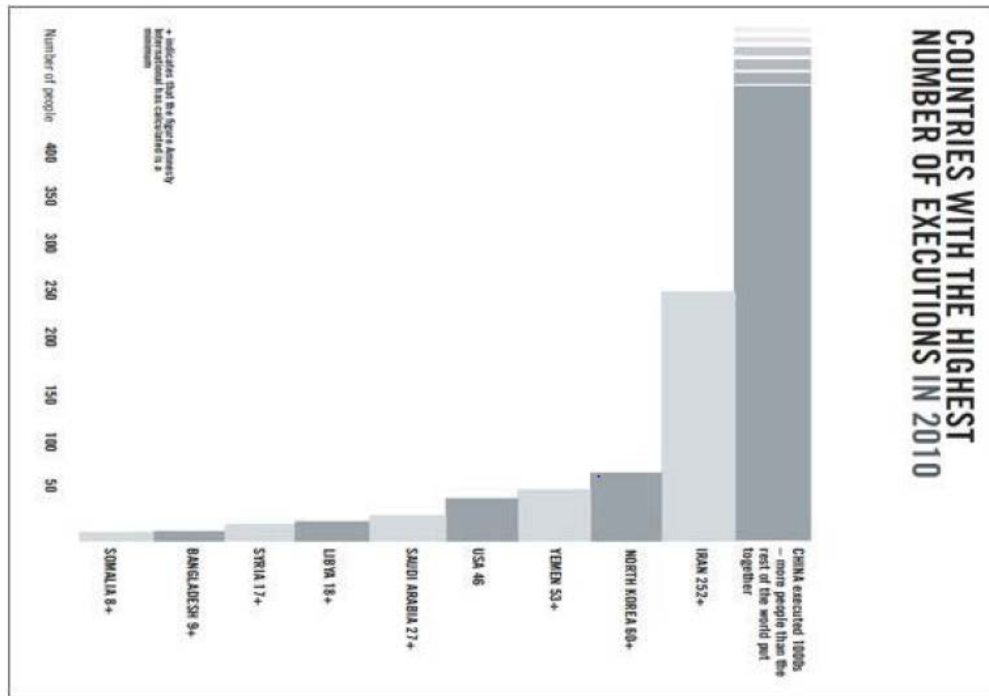


Figure 5

Source: Business Insider (2011)

[http://www.intellectualltakeout.org/library/chart-graph/countries-highest-number-executions-2010?library\\_node=70245](http://www.intellectualltakeout.org/library/chart-graph/countries-highest-number-executions-2010?library_node=70245)

Alternatives to deter repressive and violent action from authorities are scarce because cyber age of Web 2.0 is unprecedented. Carafano describes Web 2.0 as Facebook, Myspace, Wikipedia, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr and other social networking tools. Carafano outlines the objectives of Web 2.0 revolving around and supporting “journalism, mobilizing the Iranian Diaspora, organizing the activists and information warfare” (2). As presented in the article, Web 2.0 is rampant all over Iran who now have also one of the largest blogospheres in the world, so this enforces the notion that social media tools enhance democratic

ideals of open and free expression even inside repressive regimes. At the same time, Iran has also one of the most heavily censored cyber worlds where about 98 percent of websites are blocked. These indicators indeed reinforce Golkar's assertion that technologies are both liberating and suppressive in action. Another important contribution Carafano makes to the social media framework is that not only are technology tools continuously evolving but that "social networking tools helped dissidents overcome the limitations of the nation's technological infrastructure and that cyber issues begin with the premise that challenges a series of actions and counteractions between competitors and inquiring how these competitions might progress in the future" (5). This is where the gaps arise in all of the literature pertaining to the after effects of social media whether it be more democratization, more suppressive regimes or further unintended consequences is questionable.

Essentially, there is no "technology, government policy, treaty, or program that can stop the acceleration of competition in the cyber universe" (Carafano 5). As discussed by Main in 2010 information technology even from its birth has been one to be revolutionary and feared because its limits are infinite and not predictive. The global information infrastructure outlined by Main could potentially evolve and narrow the poverty gap and further eliminate obstacles to prosperity and equality. Main could then be equated as a cyber optimist because she is forecasting what many other scholars continually try to do even without concrete evidence. The GII as she calls it is "decentralized" so one could say that even though now governments may have control and censorship over the internet, it is only for the short-term and long-term obstacles are up in the air. This presents

a impossibility of ever gaining full control over social media outlets which could lead to more democratically structured practices. For the time being, technology according to Castells in 2011 is simply a new “entry point in analyzing the complexity of new economy, society and culture in the making” (530).

Technology thus shouldn't be something that should be underestimated and taken for granted because without it the whole world would be in a sense faceless and not as advanced. Strijbos makes it clear that technology is our humanity's habitat and is unimpeded by national boundaries and that the “concept that society does not follow but rather determines technological development” holds truth (531).

Overall, there is an abundant amount of literature on social media and its affects and these scholars made the discourse about why the net effect of social media is seen as a catalyst for political reform. Now whether social media tools enhance or impede democracy within social movements is a broad and complex subject to forecast in the future but presently analyzing current practices sets an foundation for long-term endeavors. Technologies of liberation as discussed by Deibert and Robozinski in 2010 show that every day provides a new opportunity for technology combined with human ingenuity to further social change. What is more critical to examine about the social media revolutionary narrative is that, “no matter how restrictive the regulations or how severe the repercussions, communities around the world have exhibited enormous creativity in sidestepping constraints on technology in order to exercise their freedoms” (43). We indeed have a nuanced understanding of social media but what is also imperative from



the literature on the subject is that “linking technological properties to a single social outcome such as liberation or control is a highly dubious exercise” and is faulty (55). Where the age of cyberspace warfare is heading is indeed unknown but without the human capacity to form, drive and accelerate it, there would be no cyber age to analyze. There are many avenues to explore within the framework of social media but one medium that lacks due to the unprecedented nature and currently evolving narrative is whether threats , arrests and or suppression from authorities deter the use of social media for acts of freedom of expression? Taking this question back into context of this case study and further examining the changed perceptions and awareness of the different elements that surrounded the movement can supplement a deeper understanding of the literature on the subject. Kalathil and Boas and Sreberny and Khiabany believe that universalizing frameworks and approaches runs the risk of overlooking behavioral dynamics that are only relevant to an existing society, their media and ICT environments and falling prone to popular (westernized) assumptions from anecdotal evidence and isolated examples is injurious to individuals, their community and the international community. Essentially the short-term and long-term effects would be very interesting to explore but for now this can only be evaluated through hypotheses. All in all, “despite the importance of global imagery and the infrastructure of information and communication technologies, they are not the primary forces in the making of the global world. The primary creators of the global world are people, their value systems and the means they employ to

achieve their goals” (Strijbos 532). The power ultimately is in the hands of the people- not their computer mousers.

### **2.3 Findings and Interpretations- the Breakdown**

*“cyber-realists would believe that a world of bytes may defy the laws of gravity  
but absolutely nothing should also defy the law of reason”  
-EvgenyMorozov*

#### Cyber-Utopian Stance

The cyber-utopian camp has swept the world in less than a decade and ignited the belief system that internet is the global champion of instilling freedom for all regardless of social or political apparatus. The onset of the “Twitter Revolution” in Iran helped give rise to the western agenda of promoting democracy regardless of taking into account the unknown variables that could actually be counterproductive in nature in achieving liberation. The media swept in and paraded around achieving the likes of the self-fulfilling prophecy the cyber-utopians had envisioned, hardly taking a look back to the aftermath of such triumph once digital revolutions like the Green Movement in Iran were silenced.

Twitter, the “triumph of humanity”, (or bits and pieces of it) can still be found in the hearts in minds of those who still believe or rather choose to believe in its democratizing persona. These individuals can be tied up in the strings of the “Google Doctrine” which is simply “the enthusiastic belief in the liberating power of technology accompanied by the irresistible urge to enlist Silicon valley start-ups in the global fight for freedom (Morozov xiii). What may be at play here in deciphering why some may be so enthusiastically tied up in a cyber-utopia frenzy

are key interest players who market, sell and profit these tools of liberation. This is why it becomes imperative to critically analyze the cyber-utopian stance and see where information is being delivered from and for what hidden agendas. In the beginning, social media hypes in the wake of unprecedented movements in the Middle East may have been driven purely by individuals and groups taking advantage of the unknown factor. Were these protests built on the like of Twitter and Facebook or were they rather movements built up over time? The domino effect that was seen around the world was blasted by bloggers such as Andrew Sullivan and internet-centrist like Google executive, Jared Cohen, as the beginning of many toppling of dictatorships all due to the simple click of a mouse. At the Alliance for Youth Movement summit in Mexico in 2007, Cohen advocated that “any combination of digital tools allows for a greater chance of civil society organizations coming to fruition regardless of how challenging the environment” (Morozov 182). This statement is at the heart of the cyber-utopian movement and it may be true for the long-term but whatever happens in between to the relationships of individuals to their society and to the cultural, political and social discourse in that country is what lacks to be examined in the cyber-utopian stance.

There is also the widespread belief that authoritarian governments are too distant and not technically savvy to combat against the opportunities and weapons of the virtual world. This has been a common belief fueled by the media for quite some time but is there evidence to back up these statements? Are not the

authoritarian regimes of the world backed up with money, power and control able to match or possibly exceed the likes of the individual common folk? According to the State Department's Jared Cohen "the internet is a place where Iranian youth can operate freely, express themselves and obtain information in their own terms. They can be anyone and say anything they want as they operate free from the grips of the police- state apparatus....It is true that the government tries to monitor their online discussions and interactions, but this is a virtually impossible enterprise"(45). Many governments have tried to institutionalize a clean "halal" intranet but this doesn't seem plausible.

#### Net Delusionist Stance

*"social media is just one of the many arenas within which the struggle of society against an inhumane regime plays out. Without struggle, these technologies can even be of service to the regime"*

*-Hamid Tehrani*

Tracking and tracing everyone's digital footprints is indeed a virtually impossible enterprise but that's just like saying it's physically impossible to capture all the influx of drugs that come into the United States illegally, so lets scrape that initiative. Excessive cyber-utopianism can blanket the world from seeing only what we want to believe and can lead to dangerous, unforeseeable realities. By saying governments are not tech savvy to monitor and combat its citizens makes the global community seem not intellectually able and ignorant because they can especially when power is at stake. The dark side of internet freedom invites in technology's double life, one that has been growing quietly in the background since the revolutions and attempted revolutions of the past half

decade, tells a different story of the net effect. This new narrative reveals how many populaces of authoritarian states “fear that public spaces will be turned into opaques of state power” (MacKinnon 145). What is rather interesting is that the downside of internet freedom never received much coverage during or after many digital revolutions, once the social media craze settled down or was dismantled by networked authoritarians the world seemed to conveniently forget its significance and dust settles.

The Net Delusion has been present since day 1 and as much as the world naively believed in the Google Doctrine, social media as a catalyst for political reform is not a coherent worldview or viable initiative to democratizing the world because it simply doesn't take into account the social and psychological affects that are produced from such means. The construction of the “war on internet freedom” in and of itself seems problematic because we still do not understand the complexities of internet freedom from state to state and have not formulated a plan of how to govern cyberspace when it comes to privacy and security issues. The U.S. State Department, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Google and other enterprises, organizations and institutions cannot be entitled as the ultimate “internet guru” because the foundation and the diversity of the internet is complex and is becoming integrated into almost every aspects of our lives. By labeling the internet as solely “liberating” infects public discourse about seriously decontextualizing its present and future endeavors. Technologies are indeed never neutral as many don't make the connection between reality and virtual reality and

this is a “sign of how deeply internet-centrism has corrupted the public discourse that people who have a rather cursory knowledge of modern Iran have become the go-to source on Iran’s Twitter Revolution, as if a close look at all Iran-related tweets could somehow open a larger window on the politics of this extremely complicated country” (Morozov 295).

The bottom line is that technology is both liberating and suppressive but the biggest problem of what the global community must be conscious of is that predictions of technology today will most certainly be different from that of tomorrow. Whether the Green Movement was a “revolution” or whether the Twitter Revolution played a prominent role as the cyber-utopians believed are matters of the past, what really should raise an eyebrow now is how has social media changed in Iran since 2009 and what do networks such as Open Net Initiative, Threatened Voices and more importantly, the oppressed people of Iran believe social media has impacted them in the long run. Search engines on the web can become the most powerful tool of destruction in the hands of cyber-crime teams searching for dissenters of the government where as in western societies it is seen as a convenience tool or a means to cure boredom. The Net Delusion should teach us to become more of a cyber-realist.

### Cyber-Realist Stance

*“the internet of today is different from the internet of tomorrow and different from the internet of yesterday, even if we had all the data to produce a detailed snapshot of today’s internet as of its current social and political footprints”  
(Morozov 318).*

The evolution of the internet and censorship in Iran is fascinating because it has one of the most powerful and sophisticated cyber-crime teams in the world behind China. Statistics from the academic consortium devoted to the study of censorship, Open Net Initiative and the Committee to Protect Journalist speak loudly towards how users of social media and anti-governmental sites have been blocked, prosecuted and punished which attests to the presence of the Net Delusion. Virtual reality has taken over reality, as of March 2011, more than five million websites were blocked in Iran for one reason or another and as of 2010 Iran has tied with China as the top jailer of bloggers and journalists. These are terrifying statistics because still to this day there is not much concrete evidence of individuals who were imprisoned or just disappeared suddenly. The art of tracking and tracing messages has become just that easy and the ill-governance of cyberspace allows for this narrative to continue. As former CNN journalist, Rebecca MacKinnon has emphasized repeatedly in her field work of examining China’s censorship practices, “the internet is a new frontier, a territory to conquest. But it cannot be the Wild West, it cannot be a lawless place” (MacKinnon 197).

In August 2011, Iran announced their plans for “national internet” also called a “clean Internet” which constitute a network only comprised of objects or

actions that are only permissible under Islamic law. This is in direct conflict with the Global Net Initiative and should raise much concern throughout the international community because this could drastically change the quest for internet freedom. Iran's information technology minister, Reza Tappivour Anvari, outlines that the national internet will consist of a domestically managed e-mail service, national search engine and other services that will ultimately enable the government to better manage national emails and information gathering with the country to improve security. An outsider who is unfamiliar with the history of Iran may think that this plan is rubbish and not possible but this internal network could become a reality in a couple years. The narrative of social media outlets and internet freedom have resulted in authoritarian societies to succeed over the oppressed by having the means to evolve strategically to create an even more closed-networked society where the dreams of cyber-utopians could be shattered. Cyber-reality has shown that governments have indeed become more knowledgeable in locating and creating barriers for dissenters.. What this means on a larger scale for an individual's role towards social media networks still remains unclear but that is what this study seeks to expose and analyze what it could possibly mean for the future. This becomes a never-ending cat and mouse game given how much data in the internet can be harvested, analyzed and investigated at any given moment. The mindless embrace of the internet in solving all the world's greatest problems has shown to be contestable and camps of Net Delusionists and Cyber-Realists have acknowledged that, "by continuing



to flirt with internet-centrism and cyber-utopians, policymakers are playing a risky game” (Morozov 320). So are dictators winning in the quest for internet freedom? From the scope of literature currently surrounding cyberspace warfare, the theoretical foundation of this study seeks to address and reveal that there is a direct correlation between social media usage and further suppression of social media outlets. This can be increased or decreased correlation depending on the dynamic between these two variables heightened by political atmosphere and governance. Ultimately this relationship determines the landscape of social and psychological effects of individual users and their place in the debate against whether social media technologies are more liberating or suppressive in nature. Leading this broader analysis of the cyber-utopian, net delusionist and cyber-realist back to the real individual user and their personal narrative of the events during and after the contested Iranian elections can we begin to answer if individuals’ perceptions and awareness of the about the nature of social media as a political force being changed.

What I seek to add to the literature on the net effect of social media as a catalyst for political reform, by taking a cyber-realist stance, is show how social media really does act within different political, social and economical environments. Indeed it is mentioned by many scholars that social media does evolve, adapt and influences in different ways but how and to what extent can this be shown to affect the individual user, the larger community and the international community perceptions and awareness of this dynamic? I seek to show this

interplay through the advent of cyberspace warfare during the Green Movement as an avenue to show how this could change the discourse about social media void for global misconceptions and then further how it may relates to the larger framework of the internet engulfed within politics.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Methodology Overview

This study will predominately take on a qualitative approach focusing on the personal narratives and experiences of individuals who have directly or indirectly been affected by the events of the Green Movement and further have a deep realization and understanding of Iran's historical past and present and can give their own insight to what the future may entail for Iran. What can be really revealing and complimentary to this field of research is speaking with individuals who have not been necessarily influenced by the propaganda of Western governments and media outlets about social media but nonetheless are aware of this public discourse and how it differentiates from reality. The awareness of global misconceptions are imperative to move away from the popular norm and scope of research that uses framing tactics whether intentionally or unintentionally due to the influence of external players. Sometimes being engulfed in this relationship and being seen simply as the observer or interviewer can create a powerful dynamic to construct the narrative of the interviewee to provide a deeper understanding into ones focus of research. It can also be interpreted and valued as a pedagogical tool that stands apart from the literary overview of a field of inquiry. One benefit of personal narrative research about perceptions is that no two individuals will view an event the same whether they were directly or indirectly involved meaning that each individual creates a snippet

of a story that tells much more than we would ever begin to imagine. There are no small players or contributors to reliving the past events of history and when brought together to supplement academic research that may be removed from the actual occurrences makes that research much stronger or may even correct a misconception. Although it is also essential to keep in mind that personal narratives are inherently subjective and that individuals just like the media and society are very powerful persuaders, so establishing a comprehensive outlook on a topic and its evolution should always be seen as the first step in doing personal and objective narrative research. Further perceptions and awareness are powerful conditioning tools and by constantly being fed propaganda that has been circulating about Iran since the 1979 Revolution makes us forget about the people of Iran and the role they play in constructing their own revolutionary narrative apart from the one we seek for answers now.

The evolution that of cyberspace warfare is of valued interest to further examine since the internet is such an integral part of our lives and because the individual user and authoritarian governments simultaneously have become increasingly tech savvy which could inevitably display a dangerous relationship in the long-run for the individual user, the society and international community. The case of Iran exhibits just how this dynamic has been developed and has become easy to overlook. The political environment is quite similar to other countries who have utilized these outlets and can stand as model to the Net Delusion that the global community has been conditioned to ignore. However, development,

adaption, political consequences and environment will always tell a different story

The Green Movement in Iran represented a victory of the people coming together in unity against a powerful oppressor but what the global community failed to see was what was the aftermath and consequences of Iranian net users actions would be. Realism of technological potential in the face of wishful thinking is what the international community lacked to grasp and the Iranian people were left with a notion of cynicism about the global community .Humanitarian violations were rampant and cyber crime teams were sent out to pinpoint and arrest individuals who went against the government by expressing their opinions and dissent on the web. Open networks in closed regimes are significant anomalies and as Sreberny and Khiabany disclose “had it not been for the international focus on Iran and the relaying of tweets and other information by the international media ,the interest in and coverage of the election in Iran probably would have matched the usually weak interest in and coverage of other elections in the world” (48). The “real” action and stories remain with the people who were truly affected by the progression of events. Essentially an analysis of how Iranian society, individually and collectively as well as directly and indirectly, view the discourse about social media up against popular Western misperceptions outside of the movement are key to understanding an more comprehensive overview of the net effect. By focusing on the evolution of narratives can open up many unanswered questions and viewpoints we have yet to consider or evaluate.

This study will focus on interviewing:

- Five young Iranian PhD students who have within the last year come to the United States to continue their studies and are individuals who have only been exposed to the installation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and only hear stories of the old regime under the Shah.
- Five older Iranians who were exposed both to the regime under the Shah and the Islamic Regime formed in 1979 and even though many have lived outside of Iran for quite some time, they all hold a significant love and connection to their county regardless of the tragic turmoil and hardships they once faced. These individuals represent a unique group of the Iranian Diaspora who have exposed their knowledge of Iran and the current struggles of Iranians through teaching in academia, publications, formation of international human rights organizations and initiatives and being political advocates who are well known throughout the Iranian community.
- Collecting and analyzing statistics from global network sites from Global Voices, Threatened Voices, Movements.org., Freedom House, OpenNet Initiative etc. between 2009 and 2012 to show how global trends of human rights have surfaced to show just how dangerous the net effect has become in anti-democratic societies

This vast array of interview participants coming from different backgrounds and experiences will most certainly bring about interesting perspectives and insights when divulging their personal narratives and perceptions regarding the revolutionary narrative of social media and its place within the historical present of Iran. Further this could also build upon the complex relationship of the net effect and political reformation within different networks. Many of the interviews were conducted telephonically and some were done face-to-face.

### **3.2 Constructing the Narrative**

The idea of pre-construction and construction of narratives presents a new way of studying and reporting back past events that will also piece together chains

of events that each represent a significant role in understanding the functionality and complexity of a discourse.

As Labov indicates:

Before a narrative can be constructed, it must be pre-constructed by a cognitive process that begins with a decision that a given event is reportable. Pre-construction begins with this most reportable event and proceeds backwards in time to locate events that are linked causally each to the following one, a recursive process that ends with the location of the unreportable event--one that is not reportable in itself and needs no explanation. Comparison of such event chains with the sequence of narrative clauses actually produced will help to understand how the narrator re-organizes and transforms the events of real time in the finished narrative. (3).

As established events in history are precursors to comprehending larger phenomenon's and how they fit into the ever-changing dynamics within society.

One society will invariably react differently than another to a phenomenon depending on their cultural, economic, political and social circumstances. The Green Movement didn't surface out of the blue but was causally linked to a series of events over time but can reappear through the process of communicating with those who have kept in touch with the historical and sociopolitical underpinnings of Iran.

Coding system of personal narratives are as follows:

Group A- Expatriate Iranians	Profession	Date Interviewed
A1- female	Academia, author	October (2012)
A2-male	Iranian nationalist writer and journalist	October (2012)
A3-male	Human rights advocate	October (2012)
A4-male	Academia, author	October (2012)
A5-male	Social media political activist	October (2012)

Group B- Iranian Youth	Profession	Date Interviewed
B1-female	PhD Student	September (2012)
B2-female	PhD Student	September (2012)
B3-female	PhD Student	October (2012)
B4-male	PhD Student	October (2012)
B5-male	PhD Student	October (2012)

\*have come to the United States in years following the 2009 movement.

Questions that were pre-constructed for the personal interviews are as follows:

1. In your opinion, what was the most significant takeaway, if any, from the Green Movement in 2009 whether it be pertaining directly to the individual, the larger society or the international community?
2. What role do you believe social media played, if any, in igniting the mass protests in Iran and what sort of relationship did that construct for the outside viewers whether it be the broadcast media or the citizens of the global community?
3. Do you believe perceptions and awareness of Iranians dating back to the 1979 Revolution up to the events of 2009 has changed and how so? Additionally how were these movements different in context?
4. As technologies become more integrated into social and political life, less and less attention is paid towards the social and political dimensions of technologies themselves. Do you believe the internet changes closed societies and in what ways?
5. The internet penetration in Iran in 2009 was only a mere 11 percent, how prevalent do you believe networked authoritarianism and the net effect is in Iran?
6. Do you believe in Iran's ability of creating a national clean ("halal") internet?
7. Do you believe framing tactics of social media as solely "democratizing" or "suppressive is detrimental to understanding how it truly affects societies and do you believe misconceptions are part of the problem?
8. Where do you see Iran's future being headed and what role do you believe the international community will play in this construction?



These questions were designed as a guideline to focus on one event, the Green Movement, which would hopefully develop into a more deep narrative of the broader arena surrounding the issues which are continuously overlooked in society. Social media was championed during the movement but when it died out so did its fervor. Not many stopped to consider what were the after effects of social media and what significance the movement had on different scales. There are many avenues to explore within the framework and these personal narratives are just one avenue in an attempt to explore how popular Western misperceptions about the discourse and role of social media within an movement differentiate from the perceptions of those within the movement group.

Another key component of this study will be to explore the trends in global human rights sights that have tracked the movement and arrests of activists from Iran. Websites such as [Humanrightswatch.org](http://Humanrightswatch.org) and [threatened voices.org](http://threatenedvoices.org) have done a tremendous and ground breaking job in tracking activists in countries who have been suppressed by authoritarian governments since the Green Movement and have shared their unique experiences. To analyze these data generations from activist networks will give more insight into the motivations, perceptions and awareness of different groups. There are many unknown stories that have yet to be reported but piecing bits and pieces together will shape our viewpoints and critical outlooks more broadly speaking. Further their stories will contribute to the revolutionary narrative of social media as it continues to evolve

and show just how sophisticated and dangerous the net effect has become in anti-democratic countries such as Iran.

## Chapter 4

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Historical Background

The historical political landscape of Iran is indeed multifaceted and complex but as many have envisioned the ascending forces of democracy are triumphing over the descending forces as the struggle for survival becomes more evident (Milani 2010, Kalathil and Boas 2003). The installment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 and the thirty-three year aftermath gives credence and urgency to this assertion due to the “split within the regime are in fact rooted in structural defects that lie in the heart of the regime: its economic corruption and incompetence, its ideological sclerosis and anachronism and its unwillingness to accept the fact that people want democracy” (Milano 201). Westernized misperceptions that every society should be inherently democratic cannot always be applicable but in Iran’s situation we are beginning to see the dawning and foundation of new democratic ideals that have been surfacing for some time in this authoritarian regime. Back in 1979, the Iranian people may not have been set on instilling an democratic foundation or thought to what the future entailed for generations to come but it signified an unusual array of domestic and international forces and relationships, more importantly the international arena of perceptions about the Iranian government and its people became one in the same. Abbas Milani’s book, The Myth of the Great Satan, outlining the turmoil of U.S. and Iran Relations since 1979 is simply one example of the plethora of

scholarship written about Iran's historical landscape. Naturally popular misconceptions will always play a pivotal role in functionalizing our perceptions and awareness of internal and external political, social and cultural issues but when it comes to such momentous events as the Green Revolution, the world saw Iran in a different light through the unprecedented media coverage and utilization of social media as a vehicle to broadcast real-time images, beliefs and dissents against the government.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 did indeed move the political tectonic plates of the region but internally it started to mold a nation of political, economic, social and cultural insecurity and instability, something much of the world hadn't seen. Many individuals who are uninformed about international relations tend to believe the propaganda as they hear it and pass it as fact. Myths and misperceptions are rampant and pregnant in the United States as well as globally and people tend to be distracted by "Iran's ominous nuclear war program or morbidly fascinated by (Iran's President) Ahmadinejad's outrageous comments questioning the historical veracity of the Holocaust" (Milani 20). However, the events that really matter and that are conducive to our understanding of the complicated historical foundation of Iran since the 1979 Revolution seem to only catch a minute frame within this medium.

The story of Iran is a struggle for liberation which can be seen in many different forms throughout the past thirty-three years as well as from the government who have tried vigorously to keep its populace shielded to becoming

exposed to the networked world. Although with such a highly educated and tech savvy populace it was only inevitable that the “oppressed” would soon stand up to the repressive nature of its regime and outsmart its oppressor. For example, the “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” as described by Paulo Freire can function as the citizenry (student) who had previously been brainwashed by a regime who is encountered with a vessel (internet) which would eventually fill them with new knowledge, passion and reflection. The framework would follow as oppression and its causes being reflected by the oppressed which would then lead to a necessary struggle for liberation. There will always be a breaking point and as discussed later, social media did not constitute the breaking point and realization but there were many events that led up to this crucial marker in Iranian history. Freire also makes clear to be objective and critical when it comes to events in history and misconceptions by claiming that “a mere perception of reality not followed by critical intervention will not lead to a transformation of objective reality- precisely because it is not a true perception” (18). This leading into the fallacy that ultimately social media usage leads to democratization of authoritarian regimes and that there is no “Net Delusion”. How we condition our perceptions and awareness of the world and events can help give us much insight to more than just what lies outside our backyard and what others who are distant from the ground issue want us to believe.

## 4.2 Overview

Taking a glimpse inside of someone's personal narrative and experiences can be very revealing and moving. All interview participants were asked the same questions but each answer led to a different viewpoint and always exposed something deeper. The Iranian Diaspora outside of Iran is significant and many have lived through both the era of the Shah and the beginnings of the Islamic Republic in 1979. What has always been interesting to observe through personal experience and through construction of these individual personal narratives is that many Iranians still love their country and always associate their memories and accounts towards the era of the Shah where they had freedoms equivalent to western society. Iran hasn't always been an Islamic Republic and even before global relations were dismantled people worldwide never got to see what environment Iran used to be. In the matter of thirty-three years the tables have turned and soon that vision of the "old Iran" will die out. What is also interesting to note is that many Iranians who fled the country still see Iran as their true home country, however the lines are divided when it comes for hope for change and new era for the Iranian people. The events of the Green Movement all meant something to each individual interviewed and this notion of hope and change in a society that has been around for a majority of the current generation of Iranians' lives all displayed something different when looking into the future.

The discussion to follow is based on oral narratives of personal experiences which are fundamental to the discourse of piecing together a broader

and more comprehensive framework of the net effect and its relationship towards networked authoritarianism but more importantly towards exploring how misconceived Western perceptions about the discourse and role of social media within a political movement differentiate from the perceptions of those within the movement group. The goal is to broaden the framework of an area of inquiry through the causal linkage of thoughts and notions of narratives. The question holds is “what is the inquiry from narrative inquiry” because it is hard to pinpoint and draw out what one will observe and take in from an interview especially when interviews are not face to face it removes a element of connecting to the individual telling their story. Non-verbal expressions and gestures and personal characteristics are removed but still drives a story and makes it notable remains whether an interview be done in person or telephonically. The quest for knowledge and a deeper understanding is what makes personal narratives worthwhile and intriguing. As Conle reveals narratives can be offered as a resolution to the tension of a history through the use of reflection and experience as the key methodology whether the emotion be resolved within oneself or a larger spectrum (191).

The following is an analysis of global trends in human rights networks pertaining to internet freedom and suppression followed up by a breakdown of ten individual interviews ranging from 15-40 minutes in length. Each will be presented as well as analyzed and then in the end, collectively, viewpoints and narratives will be brought together in an attempt to make final conclusions. Each

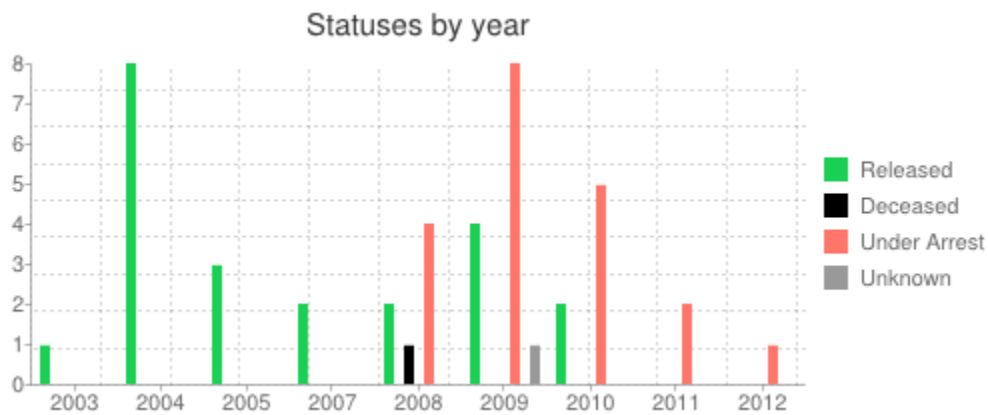
individual personal narrative will be summarized in their words, not my own, and explicitly put in quotations when a remark is made word for word.

### **4.3 Trends in Global Human Rights Networks**

The trends in global human rights networks is important to evaluate because it is an key representation of how the dominant discourse on the net effect as a catalyst for political reform is changing with the advent of cyberspace warfare and suppression tracking which ultimately changes the discourse about social media in some way, shape or form. The narratives to follow will also offer some insight to the importance of these trends and initiatives. There are many human rights organizations and initiatives that have been tracking suppression of online speech within anti-democratic regimes that additionally post cases of arrested and threatened bloggers. Many of these networks are collective networks that build on accumulating from the free flow of information of individualized users. Tracking and tracing these cases are quite difficult but it has built a mechanism for forming a larger international base in dealing with human rights issues. One of these networks is Threatened Voices which tracks suppression of online speech. Threatened Voices (TV) is a collaborative mapping project to build a database of bloggers who have been threatened, arrested or killed for speaking out online and to draw attention to the campaigns to free them. TV is a project of Global Voices Advocacy (a project of Global Voices Online) who seeks to build a global anti-censorship network of bloggers and online activists throughout the developing world that is dedicated to protecting freedom of expression and free



access to information online. The network is currently tracking 347 cases of threatened bloggers from around the world and when filtered by country Iran ranks as the top suppression country. The chart below shows a breakdown of year to year of arrested bloggers and we can see 2009 marked a heightened new beginning that was ever seen before.



*Figure 6: Blogger Arrest Statues by Year*

*Source: Threatened Voices (2012)*

<http://threatened.globalvoicesonline.org/>

If we look at a worldwide breakdown of how Iran compares to the rest of the world in Figure 7 below, the map has been tracking suppression cases since 2000 and shows by default how prevalent suppression of the internet is in Iran. The size of each red dot corresponds to the number of cases being tracked in that country, also a more interactive map is available online.

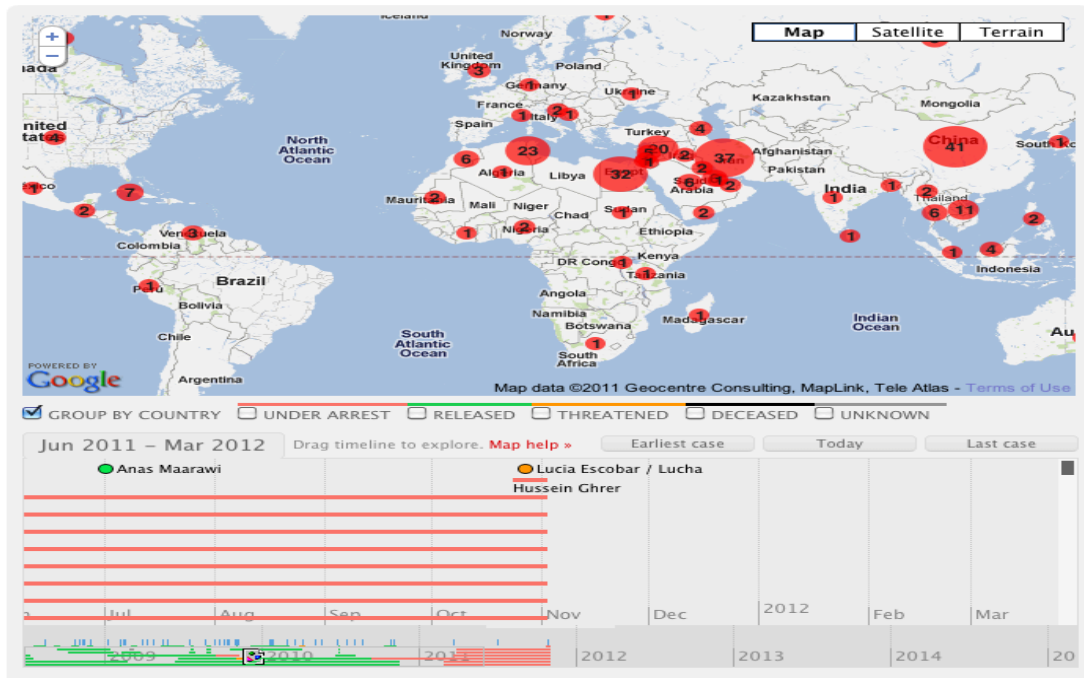


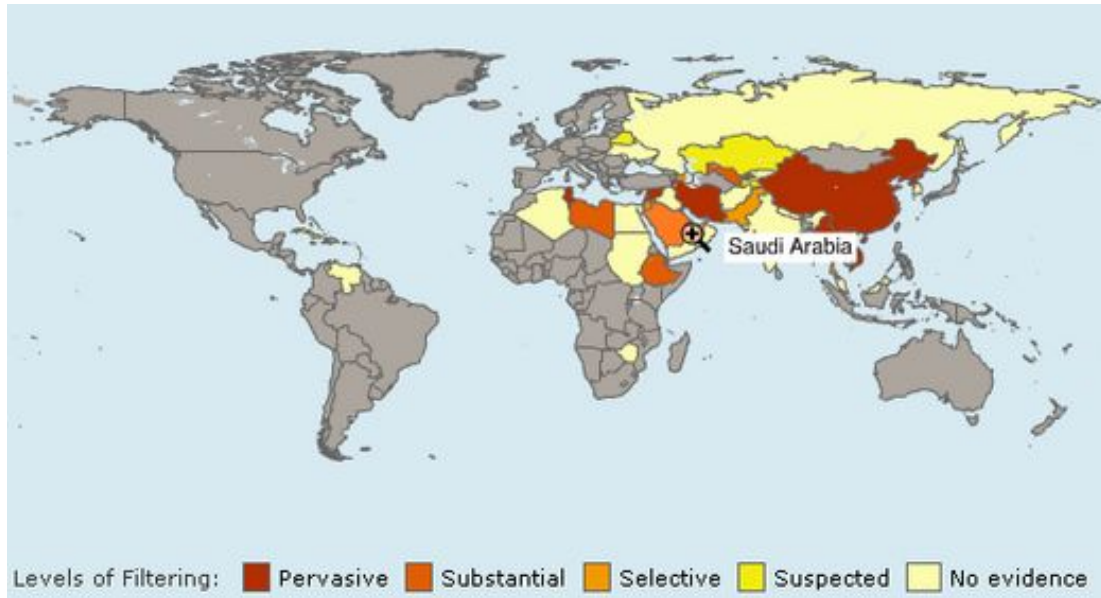
Figure 7: Tracking Suppression of Online Free Speech

Source: Threatened Voices 2012

<http://threatened.globalvoicesonline.org/>

Another influential network is the OpenNet Initiative which is an collaborative partnership between the University of Toronto, Harvard University and the Sec Dev group whom generates advanced solutions towards security and situational awareness in cyberspace. The ONI does a comprehensive regional overview and country profiles based on indicators of freedom of expression, human rights, minority rights, religious movements and opposition to current governmental structures. A study was done in 2009 by ONI indicating the prevalence of internet filtering in Iran breaking down through different indicators relating to transparency, political, social, conflict, security contexts and simply as a internet tool. Suppression of online speech is observed through various methods

of Internet filtering, the inherent limitations of filtering, and the OpenNet Initiative's methodology for the study of filtering practices. Below is the ONI global internet filtering map. We can see that Iran along with China have pervasive indicators leading to cases of internet filtering.



*Figure 8:*Global Internet Filtering Map

*Source:*OpenNet Initiative

<http://map.opennet.net/filtering-pol.html>

Another vital network is Movements.org founded in December 2008 summit of Alliance of Youth Movements, as a division of advancing human rights aims to empower digital activists in closed societies. Movements.org is dedicated to helping activists and cyber dissidents operating in closed societies build their capacity and make a greater impact on the world. By identifying, connecting and

supporting digital activists through relaying messages of blogs, how-to's, case studies and their annual summit to provide a platform of educational resources this organization helps to spread awareness of movements that operate under the majority of peoples' radars. Their network blog is designed to cover stories related to digital change, digital activism and generally how social media has impacted the 21<sup>st</sup> century in unimaginable ways.

Above are some of the key networks dedicated to universal free speech and digital activism. Additionally, there are many human rights networks such as Human Rights Watch, Global Net Initiative and Global Voices Advocacy whom all work individually and as well as collectively to raise awareness of online freedom of speech issues, and to share tools and tactics with activists and bloggers facing censorship on different parts of the globe. These trends in global human rights networks are something that has evolved within the last decade in response to the rise of suppression of online expressions around the world especially the Middle East region. Even though many of these networks may work under the radar, their efforts are groundbreaking and contribute to the universal goal of creating an open network for all individuals and as these collaborative teams grow by the numbers and more people become aware of these initiatives people will join in and give more support.

#### 4.4 Personal Narratives

##### **Historical Underpinnings- Movement Before the Movement**

One Iranian-American historian and author in his memoir, Tales of Two Cities, gives a chilling narrative of how “revolutions are caldrons of bewitching images that create the illusion of amity between a powerful ruler and an enthusiastic and otherwise docile and amorphous mass...revolutions seem tailor made for television” (Milani 196). This was in reference to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 where the people were enthused and ready to rid the reign of the Shah for something that has not only plagued Iranian society for decades and persistent longings of the past. Surprisingly all narratives began or during their interview alluded to transformation of Iran in the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and the events that led up to his overthrow and further resulted in the installation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The “old days” that are considered the time when the current older generation of Iran celebrated many freedoms and rights is something these individuals believe will die out and not be remembered. A3 (2012) believed the events that led up to the overthrow of the Shah were indeed planned and led to a masquerade that was institutionalized taking many people by surprise. These narratives gave a very thorough breakdown of why Iran is in its current state and why the international community has turned their back on the people of Iran. Respondent A1 (2012) saw the events following up to the revolution as forced due to the propaganda that was rampant around the regime of the Shah and viewed him as “the puppet of the United states” which further de-

legitimizing his governmental rule. False and outrageous promises were made and people became brainwashed in the hope for something they had yet to discover would change Iranian society forever. She claimed the simple mindedness of people fed into these new promises that would later be fevered by the ammunition of power and religion. A3 (2012) stressed that it is necessary to understand Iran's historical past before one can make sense of the Green Movement or any occurring issue in Iran. He referred many times back to the Algiers Accord that was signed in 1981 by the United States and Iran in order to resolve disputes after the 1979 Revolution and in conjunction for the release of the 52 U.S. hostages that were held in captivity for 444 days in the American embassy in Iran. The agreement signed by President Ronald Reagan was intended to ensure that it would be the policy of the United States not to intervene, directly or indirectly, politically or militarily, in Iran's internal affairs which is "hard to hold now when Iran is being heavily economically sanctioned which is only hurting the people of Iran more directly".

A1 (2012) made it quite distinct that the movement before the movement signifies that there is always more to the puzzle which we must always take into consideration when analyzing a discourse. The revolutionary narrative of social media within the framework of the Green Movement was only seen as a "snippet and fragmentary" to that of the narrative of Iran concerning social movements. As all the younger and older generations of Iranian respondents expressed social media did not set the stage for the uprising in 2009 but the economic and political

turmoil of the past set the stage for the movement. Furthermore, these younger Iranians identified the movement itself within the broader historical context that the older generations did, alluding back to the Islamic Revolution and current economic and political issues that have halted any noticeable progress from being made which is interesting since all of them grew up during the onset of the takeover of Ayatollah Khomeini. The perceptions of the younger generations Group B of Iranians when it came to the revolutionary narrative about social media is that they saw these outlets as a small snippet of a larger picture. All of them directed their answers pertaining to social media away from the discourse about it and focused on the more significant elements surrounding the movement and current issues within Iran. B2 (2012) stressed that individuals' perceptions and awareness of the complex nature of social media as a political force can be seen through how removed one individual is from an event and those affected by that event in time. Additionally, B1 (2012) saw the notion of "social media as a political force from the scope of outsiders weighing in on the situation as a world's difference to that of those engulfed within the movement and forces surrounding it". As A1 (2012) claimed "to say that social media championed the movement in all regards takes the focus off of the images, realities and histories that were lost within it". All narratives complimented this view in some way, shape or form by utilizing a comparative approach of the Green Movement up against the Islamic Revolution revealing that in both uprisings people wanted

economic freedom or less corruption but what made the Green Movement different is that many people didn't have a strategy to achieve their end goals.

The hope is that these "end goals" will be carried out by the future of Iran- its youth. Unlike the older Iranian Diaspora who has been far removed from Iran for quite some time, the younger generation are more in touch with the everyday realities of living in Iran. All five participants of Group B were born in Iran and each had a compelling outlooks on Iran's historical past, present and future. The demographics of Iran are very telling because in 2012, according to the CIA World Factbook, 70.9% of the population were between 15-64 years of age. Many of the Iranian youth have only lived in what is the Islamic Republic of Iran and only hear stories of the times of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi from their parent and grandparents. Over time there will be a shift and many people will only be left with the memories of what Iran constitutes now. The overthrow of the Shah and the following tragic Iran and Iraq war of the 1980's left and created an enormously dispersed Iranian Diaspora but those individuals who have only known Iran since 1979 can signify as the main agents of change to the conditions of living that has only deteriorated in their lifetime. They are the defining political force that will determine the evolution of their country's historical discourse.

### **Social Media Role**

Respondent A1 (2012) began her account by answering the questions of what significance did the Green Movement have, if any, and what key takeaways



can be attached to it. She saw this moment in history as “people being allowed to see themselves on stage once again and recognize their power and came to a realization of how much they really want to sacrifice”. She compared this distinction to that of the mindset that was prevalent during the 1979 Revolution in which people had many diverse opinions pertaining to what future and direction they wanted Iran to evolve in. However, now people have come together under the universal banner seeking opportunity and economic freedom. The movement, whether successful or not, gave people the lift that they can stand up to the State but at the same time the realization of how powerful the State was in the face of the movement. The movement also signified something more real and complex that brought together as more visible sense of freedom and rights that hasn’t even been seen before. It has been nourished and exacerbated for quite some time.

Now when it comes to social media and the role it played within the movement in a society that only consisted of a 11 percent penetration rating, there was indeed a general consensus that it did have an effect but not in the way western society framed it. A3 (2012) saw the acts as one of spontaneity and was more than just simply Facebook or Twitter but consisted of what was broadcasted inside of Iran on news networks because what many people saw from these mediums wasn’t actually what was happening on the ground. A1 (2012) saw the external media outside of Iran having a more profound effect on “the simplistic views and ideas people once had of the Iranian people and the Iranian government

being one in the same combined with the sentimental images of Neda's death, who became the universal banner exemplifying the turmoil of the movement, and others creating a different understanding of another Iran". However, she strongly believed it did not contribute to a more sophisticated reading and comprehension of the historical past of Iran but made outsiders see Iran as "pro-western" without really taking in the complexity of how the Green Movement really fit into the larger picture. A5 (2012) believed regardless of how large or small effect the internet really did have on the movement, it was powerful in giving people a sense of hope and even though people had different beliefs and views, they were all still experiencing the same predicament- lack of opportunity and economic strife. B2 and B3 (2012) directed that the way Iranians frame social media within the Green Movement discourse is vastly different than how the outside world saw social media functioning within the movement. All respondents reflected the notion that what matters are not technologies themselves but the political, economic and social conditions in which is embedded ignites a more comprehensive outlook. Essentially, the net effect as a catalyst for political reform can only be measured within the context of individualized movements and to these younger Iranians it wasn't the defining political force within the movement but indeed showed how it can work detrimentally to those it seeks to empower. B1 (2012) in the end that "technologies take the form of their own and there's no stopping them. Some will use it for good and others for bad".

If we take a step back and analyze the place of the Green Movement within Iran's history and the impacts, if any, it produced for the Iranian community and the world, A3 (2012) saw it as predominately an avenue "to send a signal to the freedom lovers of the world". He took the stance that the "world wasn't ready for the movement and neither were the people but social media was important but not in the way the world hyped it up to be". Essentially the evidence he said speaks for itself because a great deal of social media that was heard around the world many people in Iran never saw and naturally what was going on in the streets wasn't broadcast on Iranian news media. Propaganda is contagious and this propaganda has been accumulated since the Islamic Republic began. A4 (2012) made it explicitly clear that it is not about the elections or the people in power but what the people were fighting against during the Green Movement and have been fighting for decades is an ideology- "an ideology that doesn't contribute towards providing a will for the people to survive, an opportunity to succeed or the means of economic freedom". Going back to A2 (2012) point that indeed social media may have played a role but it is hard to determine with the low internet penetration rates because there were protests in many large and smaller cities, for example much of the high social media usage came from inside Iran's capital, Tehran.

This brought up the issue and effectiveness of framing tactics and tools that respondent A1, A2, and A4 (2012) explicitly touched on that led to an overall detrimental effect within society believing that misconceptions played a huge role

in piecing together a discourse of social media that was almost dismissive of the situational circumstances surrounding the movement. Further the media played an intricate role in the unraveling of this discourse because they changed the nature of the truth and lacked objectiveness in taking in all elements of what was happening on the ground. A5 (2012) noted that this was also a true predicament for people who were viewing the media inside of Iran claiming that “people who were disconnected from the movement were also affected by the stories, images and propaganda”. He believed it had a universal effect for Iranians but the roads led to nowhere at the same time because of the complexity and power holds within society.

When it comes to the net effect and its role within the uprisings being portrayed as the sole contributor to the uniting of the Iranian people that would lead to more “freedom and democracy”, A4 (2012) strongly believed there was not much evidence to substantiate this claim because the lack of research and serious work done in this arena shows how weak the discourse and assertions are in reality. He expressed that “it is very difficult to study the true effects of the net effect on a larger scope but the widespread impact it had on dispersing the traumatic aspects of the movement like the brutal shooting of Neda to the global community showed the expansive viral possibilities of social media and the internet”. People became exposed to images of brutal reality that was hardly ever portrayed in the media and outlets like Facebook, Youtube and others gave people

the chance to connect and support the Iranian people against an brutal government.

Group B believed popular western misconceptions are rampant in some way, shape or form and have been circulating for quite some time about Iranians in the global community and the Green Movement did shed light on new perspective on Iranian society but at the same time people saw a nation of vast instability. When asked why the government doesn't give an inch to the people in order to ensure hold on power B4 (2012) replied that "because history has repeated itself for the past thirty years or so, the people haven't represented a front the government would fear. The government in Iran has become so corrupt and omnipotent over the people they "don't care if their nation crumbles around them. They are uneducated and greedy". B4 and B2 (2012) noted that what is interesting to see in Iran is that everyone has become a politician from the ten year old girl to the seventy year old man. The people in Iran are highly educated about their own country and the world around them. The people are not easily prone to being brainwashed by the government because the people themselves educate one another and constantly discuss the ever-changing political discourse within Iran.

### **Social Media Pitfalls and Broader Realizations**

One important reality A1 (2012) discussed was the notion of the "dominant discourse" and we can indeed see that through how the outside world

defined the Green Movement was according to this discourse, however in Iran the labeling of it as “the Green Movement” or the “Twitter Revolution” was not the dominant discourse. She went on to further discuss that in Iran many “people called it green but had many different interpretations of what green meant” whether it be the green of the other election candidates, Mir Hossein Mousavi or Mehdi Karroubi, or the green of the people. People did unite but she emphasizes how important it is to understand the differences and divergences in belief internally. Another important reality of the Green Movement, according to A2 (2012) signified a cry for change but regardless showed that people are still afraid of the tenacious powers of the regime. He stated that “the fact that its main drivers are still under house arrest and many individuals are still imprisoned shows how crucial power ammunition is in Iran and to what lengths the government will go to secure their power hold indefinitely”.

“People don’t know what they want” or is it that “people don’t have a strong sense of direction”? These were some of the main divergences in opinions when it came to why people have not successfully lashed out against the government whether it be in reference to the Green Movement or broadly speaking. The inherent problem with the stagnant nature of Iran B5 (2012) argued is that “ye chez kerishaskarabbashe, hamechizeshkarabeh”. Simply meaning when the root of something is infected and broken, everything in between that comes out from this single root will follow in the same direction. There was a unanimous agreement amongst Group B that the regime entirely needed to be

scrapped but the lack of a precedent model and leader the people could truly believe in has still not formulated. Indeed the basis and foundation has been set that the people want a “new Iran”, however lack of coherency combined with a lack of power masks a visible direction or path to move forward. B3 (2012) complained that in Iran “all focus is placed on fixing one problem but that solution introduces an array of new problems and simultaneously the surrounding circular problems keep building”. Further she expressed that the economic, political, social and cultural infrastructure inside Iran is deteriorating but the government takes absolutely no focus. B2 (2012) claimed that “if the Green Movement or even the people of Iran had a strong sense of leadership many of these problems could be alleviated but currently the government has an upper-hand because they see the people’s movement as weak”. He and B3 (2012) stressed that the 2009 reformist candidates like Mehdi Karrubi and Mir HosseinMousavi were thrown into a position to “be the voice of the people that they weren’t prepared for” and because the government had total power they were able to silence these oppositional candidates from ever fighting back. They further strongly believed that Iran’s government is highly technocratic and has been training their army for quite some time which gives more validity for Iran in institutionalizing a clean “halal” intranet in the future.

Further A4 (2012) believed the dangerous and often ignored narrative of Cyber-jihad which suppress and tracked network users who may or may not have been using the net for political means during the movement showed how serious

of a threat social media represents to the existing regime. Massive amounts of money since then has been spent to silence the oppositional movement in Iran and restricting people from evolving into the role of the dissenter. Also since then Iran's initiative to institutionalize a national intranet to block any avenue for people to access restricted sites as not entirely inconceivable due to their vast expertise and cyber armies specialized in this medium. He asserts "Iran is not creating a national intranet for clean halal purposes because this has a religious connotation but Iran is doing this to solely protect their power". Indeed Iran has the ability to cut off access but in this event the United States plan to have satellite access around the world would stop this plan dead in its tracks.

As many other interview participants touched on, one of the biggest pitfalls of the movement itself was the lack of organization that drove the people to the streets. Social media did not have the will power to make up for this lack of organization and oppositional leadership that needed to be effective and have strong ideology followed by a sense of direction. Without the necessary knowledge and experience in strategizing and planning, all the people were left with is display of their inner emotions and frustration in the last thirty years. A1 (2012) claimed that presidential candidates such as Mehdi Karrubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi were just the "puppets" in a game they necessarily weren't prepared for. B2 (2012) believed the capacity to organize a front exists in a sense because the propaganda and news inside Iran are not quite as successful in influencing peoples' opinions like American news media because the "people



don't live in a bubble and when you live in a society of constant lies and corruption you train yourself to think outside the box". She believed the people then begin to form their own opinions and ideologies but there is something missing in uniting people on a larger scale. Some people want to completely scrape away the Islamic Republic for a secular society whereas others simply just want economic freedoms and improvement in the unemployment rate. Thus, "the divergences in belief have created a divide amongst the people and the strict restrictions in forming oppositional parties inside of Iran has made it almost impossible for people to unite in any discernible way".

Essentially, when it comes down to the gritty realities, what should be internalized as the real issues that affect the innocent people of Iran according to A3 (2012) is that the "international community seems to always turn their head the opposite direction. The prisoners of the Green Movement, the insurmountable human rights violations, economic problems and the list goes on and on are not even issues that are brought to the table". This dynamic repeats itself over and over again as A1 (2012) emphasizes which shows that the dominant discourse will always prevail over the weaker one that may gain considerable traction throughout the international community but dies just as quickly as it began. The key driver here is whose interests are being served. The personal narrative that B2 (2012) introduced was "our lack of objectiveness" is dead on to the realities of Iranian history leading up to the Green Movement and even three years later. The international community has always had mixed perceptions about Iran and

because many people weren't educated about Iran's historical past it gave the news media and propaganda networks the opportunity to prevail at configuring a false reality. Even now, "after people were strung by the vivid images and stories of the Green Movement through social media outlets and the struggles of Iranians, the main discourse now when it comes to Iran is solely on oil and the prevention of nuclear proliferation".

### **With or Without Social Media**

A1 (2012) alluded to the future believing, if another united front was unveiled, more coordination would be needed in engagement and confrontation against the State. However, looking deeper into the Green Movement A4 (2012) showed the realities of the never ending struggles people face will undeniably in the future form into an "ceding volcano that will most certainly erupt more but many people do not want a massacre like that of Syria and Iraq". He believed moving gingerly forth to avoid bloodshed is a priority because the people of Iran have been through so much sacrifice and war, they do not want a repetition of such events. However, the movement helped in "understanding characteristics and transitions to democracy and how they can be achieved". Respondent A5 (2012) saw the discourse of the Green Movement as evolving into the "party of the people" which is a balloon waiting on the sidelines to erupt. He saw the movement transforming to being an educating mechanism for people around the world about the republic because "three years later it means something more than the presidential candidates who were stripped of their positions because they were

not the symbolic leaders of the movement, the people were". Further, A5 (2012) emphasized that the leadership and lack of organization from the movement speaks for itself and currently the fervour that we once saw back in 2009 is still alive, living underground and waiting for a signal and momentum to return to their favour.

When it comes to the traditional notions of sovereignty, A4 (2012) expressed that we live in "a new age and the world stage is a new game. He believes slowly but surely Islam is dying out which goes against the stream of history but is absolutely essential to remain remotely competitive in the global community. We can see this through peoples' changed perceptions and interactions with the rest of the world whether it be because of the Green Movement or through the course of the last three decades. There is not much empirical evidence to determine this but anecdotally we can see this shift in outlooks about Iran and its people". Looking in to the future, A3 (2012) sees short-term evolutionary changed but events that eventually build up that will affect the future direction of Iran. He sees a vibrant and democratic Iran surfacing where there is freedom of religion and where women have more rights thus becoming a more focal point in the public domain. The barriers to achieving these goals need to be surpassed and will not be easy because the regime holds significant amount of the wealth and power within society and those who "support" the regime are afraid to hold their own ground for fear of persecution.

He hopes that another more powerful Green Movement will materialize and catch the government off guard but this time “a stronger, more centralized and effective leadership is formulated to go up against the regime”.

The people of Iran who all seek change within society can be labelled as “messengers of freedom” A5 (2012) claims because almost everyone in society is a journalist and active within the political realm. He believed “it is ironic because the government can’t take this passion and association with the love of their country away from the people. Peoples’ eyes and ears are open actively seeking the light at the end of the tunnel that will end this struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran”. Even though internet penetration is low within small cities in Iran, a strong connectivity of networking and knowledge building of what is going on never rests. People are always active participants in the political realm in voicing their dissidence and opinions even though they are actively shut out and threatened by the government.

As time goes by the events of the Green Movement for Group B seem like an distant point of the past. B1 (2012) was hopeful that maybe another uprising like the Green Movement will occur in the future but for now only can sit and hope. B2 (2012) mentioned that “no two Iranians will look at the movement in the same light or perspective as another. For each individual it meant something but to truly understand its significance and place in Iranian history one must have been a part of it not just be an outsider looking in. Only time will tell where Iran is headed but really at this point in time it is truly impossible to predict if

it will be for the better or for the worse”. B5 (2012) claimed that, “having the ability to view the events of the past three years outside of Iran has given me new viewpoints but for individuals who have lived inside of Iran all their lives it is hard for them to remove themselves from the everyday hardships and uncertainty, and say I want a more liberal, democratic, western society because all they merely want is the opportunity to live their lives without constraints”.

### **Global Discourse into the Future**

Bringing everything together, the movement had an overall negative effect according to female respondent A1 (2012) because it presented the Iranian people with a more “cynical view of the world. The discourse of dissent was put in place by the people but at the same time the vast imbalance of power relations also become more evident than ever”. She tied this relationship nicely into Iran’s initiative of creating a national clean intranet due to their immense power hold on internet connectivity under the Ministry of Information. Only the wealthy are able to surpass Iran’s ability to halt individuals from gaining access whether it be by cutting off signals or making it impossibly slow to download sites. Their ability to hack and trace dissenters is prevalent and if individuals inside or outside Iran seek to match the government’s expertise they must be either heavily funded or be able to have access to the ground to see what is actually going on. She also alludes to the fact that it’s not just about political dissenters anymore because the government now goes after just about anything and everything. There does not

need to be a valid reason to seek action against someone because their power hold tells them they simply don't need one. This is very telling because the reality shows people who weren't really supporters of the government lean over to their side because there is no way to maneuver around them or even against them. This goes back to the notion that without direction and organization people don't have the ability to form a new ideology for others to follow and give support for. This can be summed up by stating that this is not the defeat of a movement for the reason that "all movement go through a cycle, people lose hope, they gain hope, this is not the end of it. The memories of the past (for the people) will not fade" but for the rest of the world may be a different story". Simultaneously, she recognized that the movement also created a "sense of defeat and deep cynicism that wasn't as apparent before". People became optimistic and thought if they make that move and break out into the streets it would open up space for the movement and the goals of the people. The movements abrupt end and silencing of the protesters showed just how powerful and unwilling the government was in backing down from their ammunition of power. She made the connection to how social media outlets in practice being seen as "the double-edged sword being played out in reality. The most important thing perhaps that came out from the Green Movement events was the world forming a more conscious and sophisticated view of the Iranian society through the role that social media played causing people to surpasses the time of the Iranian Revolution in Iran and the U.S.

hostage crises”. Yet, she makes the sad association of the United States being plagued with a “sense of amnesia when it came to the sentimental images of the movement which can easily be passed by and forgotten”.

What it all came down to in the end, according to respondent A3 (2012) is capital and what brings capital is oil and “the real issues of humanitarian violations during the Green Movement, the threats of the cyberworld, the internal economic crisis within Iran and the will of the people mean absolutely nothing to the global community because there are larger issues circulating and all that matters is nuclear power”. He referred to oil as the “blood of the people” and because of this powerful relationship the people of the world will never begin to understand and take a second look of how much the people of Iran are suffering. In essence, he believed Green Movement or no Green Movement whether social media was revolutionary or not is not the crux of the matter because all the people want is opportunity and the ability to succeed academically and economically. He kept connecting the new Iran with the old Iran and just how economically superior the Shah’s regime was and how much employment and opportunity would rise year by year, something which has been absolutely non-existent in the last 30 years. Essentially, he believed “perceptions and awareness will always be biased. Not tackling the heart of the issue will always be put on hold until the international community can break away from the ammunition of power which has been from some time, even dating back to 1952, with the big players of nuclear power”.

Broadly speaking, according to A2 (2012) , “freedom has become an oversight” because the international community is currently so pre-occupied with the dominant discourse of maintaining nuclear power and monopoly. He sees that we have come to see the strategy of enforcing economic sanctions due to Iran’s perceived nuclear program only hurting the people and what the United Nations, the United States and other governments fail to see is that Iran will do what Iran wants to do because they simply can. Everything else is thrown off the table and as sanctions are piled on, only the people will pay the price. When asked if power ammunition was such a strong hold for the existing government, why doesn’t the government give the people the economic freedom they need and yearn which could result in less dissenters and a stronger hold on power, he further emphasized “that power is omnipotent and that in the last thirty years nothing surprises me in regards to the Iranian government”.

Interviewees emphasized that the human rights discourse in Iran is lacking and a stronger foundation of human rights needs to be enforced because there are many petitions that shed light on the rampant human rights violations inside Iran but this is merely one avenue that unfortunately doesn’t span as far as a international effort would do. Additionally many political prisoners inside of Iran are labelled as drug dealers in justifying their arrest and in many cases their hangings. Hangings have become an everyday thing within Iran but these acts of cruelty and brutality aren’t made visible to the global community. Perceptions and



awareness of these issues and many still imprisoned individuals from the 2009 uprisings are unknown and this is quite troubling.

Meanwhile, A5 (2012) constructs the international community as pivotal players in setting the foundation for the long-term prospects of Iran. He believes the nuclear problem and the Israeli situation must be resolved and until the global community recognizes that in order “to solve these problems it must join a collective effort to create a more stable, democratic and peaceful Iran the current status quo will continue to prevail. It cannot, however, be forced but desired just as it has been for the last 100 years. The right direction needs to be paved by the new generations of Iran to bypass a generations of Iranians who have been torn apart by their country and its politics”.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

The Green Movement of 2009 represents a different personal narrative for each and every Iranian and whether the net effect of social media as a catalyst for political reform fits into their story as a significant element is debatable but doesn't really get at the painful and traumatic past of the Iranian people. The traditional Iran of the past has evolved into a country that has for quite some time been continuously torn apart by its politics, corruption and religion. As Milano manifests in his narrative "exile is when you live in one land and dream in another" (118). The people in Iran have been living in their own physical and mental internment for far too long dreaming of an imagined future that is distant and unreachable. As narrative A3 (2012) stressed that the evolution of the "party of the people" has evolved to symbolize something stronger and more unifying than it had originally intended and this is signified through the government's realization that the wonders of the internet driven by the people are indeed an insurmountable threat to the current authoritarian regime. Since the summer of 2009 the Iranian government has initiated a front of suppressing dissenters and building their base of cyber armies in fear of losing power ammunition and the above personal narratives only reinforce this assertion. Indeed individuals' perceptions and awareness of the discourse and nature about social media as a political force within the movement differentiated from misconceived western

perceptions and this was seen through the actual powerful role of dispersing real images and connections between the Iranian people and the rest of the global community. People were exposed to something more illuminating than the revolutionary discourse of social media and that was simply just seeing the discourse of Iran's historical past and present which was driven by the function of social media outlets. All parties involved in this revolutionary narrative were somehow affected by the net effect, however there is no discernible way to classify a universal framework for what social media constitutes in anti-democratic societies simply because each case has a diverging past and present history.

Essentially, the goal of this paper was to seek, conceptualize and explore the revolutionary narrative of social media within this social movement not to gauge and label whether social media outlets have become more liberating or suppressive to the individual user but to analyze perceptions about the discourse and role of social media within an movement and how it differentiates from the perceptions of those distant from it. Each narrative directly or indirectly saw the Green Movement as significant in some way shape or form and more importantly each were mindful in making it clear that the movement didn't happen in isolation and was part of an escalation of events and societal grievances. The movement was a testament to preconceived notions of the Iranian people that have been piled on since the 1979 Islamic Revolution because social media brought to the international community the gritty and disheartening images that Iran had worked

so hard to shield from the rest of the world. The movement also constituted a deep sense of cynicism within Iran itself because the world who had then been so moved by the uprisings turned their heads the other way once the media hype died out. Additionally the movement served as a key precedent in making people aware that in order to form a successful oppositional front, effective leadership and a uniting ideology is essential. Finally, the Green Movement discourse since 2009 has signaled that the Net Delusion is real and in order to create a more free, democratic and peaceful Iran the United States and the global community need to come together in addressing the vast amount of human rights violations that have occurred in the past thirty-four years.

As former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami once said, “freedom of expression and freedom of thought are the preconditions of a democratic society. But freedom does not mean chaos”. In order to achieve the above end there must be a collective effort in becoming aware of the unique landscape that set Iran apart from the rest of the world and the strides that must be made to combat a technologically powerful and advanced government. Being distracted by labeling an event or tool as “liberating” or “democratizing” takes away from the materialization of knowledge and we as a society become preoccupied with agendas, beliefs and values that are pre-constructed to divert our attention from the reality. Open networks that reside within closed regimes “need a clear-eyed realism that separates facts about the technology’s potential from the froth of wishful thinking...this then may lead to a more informed, and thus more useful,

optimism about what the internet can accomplish in opening closed regimes” (Kalathil and Boas 23). The journey of information through the free flow of public space can challenge and empower collective opposition but at the same time according to many of the narratives express the onset of the global net initiative does have much promise but as it continues to span into repressive regimes the international community can’t be misguided about the complexity dynamics of power, control and freedom across a global internet. According to a study done by the United States Institute of Peace in 2010, the Iranian government has forcibly regained absolute control over the most rebellious sectors of society whether it be through mass detentions of young activists, expulsions from universities or widening the span of its own young paramilitary forces. Even though Iran does have one of the most politically active and well-educated populaces in the Middle East the dark side of internet freedom in authoritative governments assuredly play a great deal in the revolutionary narrative that is social media.

Blind optimism in institutionalizing a democratic and free Iran without analyzing and taking into account all the complex elements of the past and present will lead to a disastrous future. As one narrative, A1 (2012) mentioned, what the Green Movement meant on the surface and a more broader scale is that “people were allowed to see themselves on stage once again and recognize their power and come to a realization of how much they really want to sacrifice”. The narratives also stressed divergences in beliefs for either more reform within

the government or a change of government entirely has left the people divided even though they seek the same goals of more economic freedom and opportunity. Social media played the role of uniting individuals in some respects but there is not much empirical evidence in truly assessing its significance overall. However, the net effect can't be ruled out just as the changed perceptions and awareness of the people and the international community about media outlets and a country's historical past must always be taken into account.

This study is significant because it takes a step back to examine the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed in a moment in history that many have already been forgotten. The hype of the Green Movement in 2009 spread awareness around the world of a populace who up to this point were misrepresented and stereotyped but did it do anything else? Political movements in history should not be displaced because they will play a significant role in the future, just as the 1979 Iranian Revolution has for the past thirty-three years. In decades to come the world may look at the fad that is liberating social media to topple the world's dictators as a urban myth that was never fully understood. In order to battle this construct, it is vital to continually reopen this pivotal moment in Iranian history and examine the discrepancies between perception and awareness of the global community up against individuals engulfed within the movement in order to assess social media as a "political force". Also as all the narratives noted, the dominant discourse should become more conclusive on not just focusing on one issue in isolation but form a more comprehensive overview

of the driving forces affecting a discourse. Case in point, the Green Movement cannot be viewed in separation from Iran's historical past and present or through mistaken misconceptions or without analyzing the broader effects of the movement on the individual user, the Iranian society and the international community. No two individuals will have the same exact perceptions as one another because they will always have their own unique personal narrative whether they be directly or indirectly involved. The world and society moves just as quickly as the viral web and we are continuously fascinated by the technological advancements and historic phenomena that occur every day around the world but it is always important to take a step back, register and make sense of narratives and events that pass us by.

Iran has one of the most rich and illuminating histories and most certainly the re-collections of the old Iran will die out just as the preceding empires but the goal is to create a more peaceful and democratic environment for the future generations of Iran who one day might look back on the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Green Movement of 2009 and wonder what kind of world it was back then and why the international community didn't take a stand in helping the people defeat suppression and power struggles that went on for decades. As one of the most celebrated Persian poets of the Medieval Period, Saadi Shirazi, once said, "human being are members of a whole, In creation of one essence and soul. If one member is afflicted with pain, Other members uneasy will remain. If you've no sympathy for human pain, The name of human you cannot retain".

**For Future Researchers:** What the other regions of the world and the international community should learn about the case of Iran and its relationship towards social media is that it wasn't the defining political force within its social movement but the broader scope of the internet and political discourse is indeed interrelated in every society. When examining the dominant discourse of the Net Effect as a Catalyst for Political Reform within any anti-democratic regime, new theoretical frameworks such as cyberspace warfare are important to consider when analyzing the discourse about social media and realizing that no universal ideology can determine the evolution of social media technologies. Additionally, it is significant that social media always be viewed in the context of how it affects the individual user, society and international community perceptions and awareness on differing levels. As Mohammadi states, 'media developments have radically altered our understanding of political dynamics' (3). Furthermore, personal narratives and perceptions of this study were not representative but a snippet that provided a window into the discourse about social media which surprisingly led to a historical evolution of Iran's past and how it paved the way for the Green Movement. In the end, connecting with the past histories of any social movement is key during the journey of understanding the complexities of technological effects on social change and without this mindset, we are left with incomplete models of assumptions. In the future, the discourse about social media should not be viewed in isolation to one perspective or domain theory because it



will always change as individuals assign new function and meanings to them, so this study should be one that is never exhausted.

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