

Cyber social-networks and social movements

Case study: Tehran (2009-10)

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Abstract— while communication scholars suggest that cyber social networks can serve as an important resource for social movement communication, few studies examine which and how special features of these social networks actually can intensify social movements and weaken government's authority.

However, our study highlights the importance of various key factors affecting the interaction between cyber social networks and social movements. The most important factors are ongoing network leadership, user practices, and online –offline participation. Furthermore, we considered prominent factors of third space and virtual societies related to Tehran citizens that can lead cyber activism to social movements. This article also seeks for considering a key question for socio-political pluralists in the digital era and virtual societies.

Index Terms— socio-political movements, cyber social networks, virtual societies

1 INTRODUCTION

In the era of virtual communication, increasingly Cyber Social Movements (CSMs) seek for organizing and campaign online, the question arises how and which characteristics can bring about a new form of socio-political activism along with consequences for constituting social demonstration in real-physical public places. Here, at first, we will discuss some arguments for and against CSMs and the role of internet by this way. The CSMs, like many new technologies before it, has been imbued with a sense of optimism that can somehow go beyond the trends of politics. It is now home to a multitude of groups, races and religions dedicated to resist and campaign against particular issues and politics. Online public communications are parts of the process of realizing the public sphere – a space where democracy can enact – allowing us to analyze how democratic values and identification shared as democratic citizens are achieved and maintained; how socio-political cultures are generated – essentially, to imagine how civil society can organize democratically for politically progressive ends (Habermas, 1989). In addition, the multiplicity of groups and ideologies which present online permits the growth of much broader networks to create a vast web of oppositional politics and social changes. These social networks have become base to mediated activity that aims to raise people's awareness, to give a voice to those who do not have one, to offer social empowerment, to permit disparate people and causes to organize themselves and form alliances, and ultimately to be used as a tool for social changes. These new networks with its additive, interwoven, interactive and polycentric form have reinvented transnational cyber activism and can accommodate radically different types of political habits within various places in different times, offering a new type of socio-

political engagement. This apparently new mediated politics of the 21st century maintains a promise of political hope.

Similarly, Benkler (2006) claims that internet has a potential to change the practice of democracy thoroughly owing to its participatory and interactive characteristics. It allows all citizens to alter their relationship to the public sphere, to become creators and primary subjects, to become engaged in social production. In this sense the internet is ascribed the powers of democratization. Besides, Salter (2003) argues that the internet is a novel technological asset for democratic communications because of its decentred, textual communications system, most often with the content which is provided by users. On this basis, the requisite features of Cyber Social Movements are accorded with them which have grown out of a decrease in party allegiances and class alliances. CSMs are more fluid and informal networks of action than the class and party politics of past.

In this regard, according to Naomi Klein (2000) notion, the internet facilitates international communication among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and thus permits protesters to respond on an international level to local events while requiring minimal resources and bureaucracy. This may be through the sharing of experience and tactics on a transnational basis to inform and increase the capacity of local campaigns. As Rheingold (2002) notes, advances in personal, mobile informational technology are rapidly providing the structural elements for the existence of fresh kinds of highly informed, autonomous communities that coalesce around local lifestyle choices, global political demands and everything in between. These multiple networks of connected citizens and activists link diverse communities, providing the basis for

the possibility of a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics (Bennett, 2004).

On the other side, Breslow (1997) argues that the internet promotes a sense of sociality, but its anonymity and shortage of spatiality and density may be counterproductive to solidarity. Just as the same as, Van d'er Donk et al. (2004) states that the extreme simplicity of mobilization may devalue it as a socio-political resource that attracts public attention and respect. The internet may also be devalued by activists since out of some forms of collective protest can cause fun and adventure. Indeed online activism can be seen as lazy politics – it provides people with feeling good but does very little. It allows like-minded individuals and organizations to talk to each other. It can be criticized for further distancing people from each other and deepening already abstract social relations as well as increasing competition among organizations. Moreover, on the basis of Klein idea, the internet is an organizing model for a new form of political protest that is international, decentralized, with diverse interests but common targets. These themes of multiplicity and poly centrality recur throughout the literature and are assessed both negatively and positively.

Smith and Smythe (2001a,2001b) note that the internet has revealed a socio-political space for the alternative political notice of this global social movement just as progressive cyber network communications has been described as serving as 'an alternative political realm' (Downing, 1989). Since the internet has not led to a greater integration within civil society due to the restrictive policies on external links adopted by civil society organizations and a lack of trust and solidarity (Kavada, 2005), this indicates the fact that new media technology itself does not cause to a brand new age of political collective radicalism. On the other hand, global network of nongovernmental organizations (NGO) is to do those whose mission is to empower and support organizations, social movements and individuals in and via the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to build strategic communities and initiatives for the purpose of making meaningful contributions to equitable human development, social justice, participatory political processes and environmental sustainability. (APC, March 2006)

In this way, Coombs (1998) argues that the internet may increase the power of grass roots groups because it can enable networks of citizens to challenge corporate control and can set up their constitution by suggesting new identity within new socio-political territory (Cleaver, 1998). This territory can account for what have been called postmodern tendencies away from static power structures by making a means for seeing how it has become more fluid and dispersed without necessarily losing strength (Hardt & Negri, 2004). To optimists, they also appear to have opened up new flexible spaces for public and private participation as well as wide public participation in political matters (Rheingold, 1993, 2002; Smith and

Smythe, 2001a; Van Aelst, 2002).

Our purpose is to undertake this subject which has two categories. Firstly, we tried to highlight and identify more important features for cyber social networks related to consequent social movements and collective identities. Though discussions of each of these features can be found in the existing social movement literature, we believe that more extensive consideration would be profitable. A secondary goal is to present a comprehensive and accessible account of an important recent example of cyber-activities which suggested it at different urban public places. Here, as a case study, we will show why and how people in Tehran are interested in using cyber social networks instead of other previous kind of communication in urban spaces. Also problems and opportunities which were brought by these networks will be discussed and criticized. In the next section, we provide a brief history of using cyber activism, locating it within the broader conflict between the protests and the totalitarian regime. The section that follows provides a detailed description of the cyber network communication system, demonstrating the utility of its various factors. Furthermore, we assume prominent factors of third space and postmodern cities related to cyber social networks that can lead activism to physical cities. In the end, we conclude with a brief discussion of the importance of our findings.

As it seems an introduction for collective identity and social movement can be useful to determine features of cyber social networks, we will begin with a brief definition of aspects.

2 COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Melucci (1996) sees collective identity as a continuous, dynamic and self-reflexive process defined by its multiplicity of interactions, negotiations and conflicts among fellow participants. The internet, relying as it does on a network of networks can assist collective identity and reinforce solidarity. It takes part in the process of meaning construction. The nature and scope of the technology affects not only the way the movement communicates its aims and objectives but also its geographical scale, organizing structure and collective identity. The decentralized, non-hierarchical modes of organizing allow for diverse political agendas and identities to exist.

Collective identity is a 'shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their actions as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their actions take place' (Melucci, 1989).

Collective identity defines boundaries of who is within the group, what the group believes, how the group sees the world and, ultimately, helps to establish trust, which is essential in getting members to take actions that may be time-consuming, uncomfortable or even dangerous (della Porta & Diani, 2000).

Collective identities are important because they help attract new members and sustain old ones; they are often what officials respond to and what make up the raw ma-

terials from which mainstream media representations will be constructed. Social movement identities are the 'process by which social actors recognize themselves and are recognized by other actors' (della Porta and Diani, 2000). Most of observers argue that the internet is increasingly enabling new collective identities aim to change cultural codes, social movements also create new identities which both help to recruit and sustain membership.

In terms of the connections between social movement, collective identities and the internet, scholars are still struggling to understand this phenomenon. Warkentin (2001), Postmes and Brunsting (2002) are all optimistic, discussing that the anonymity and isolation found on the cyberspace may actually enhance group salience, as actors focus on commonalities rather than differences. Indeed, they believe that unity among different groups happens by giving permission to social movement which can act more easily, attract more new members than it had been possible.

3 SOCIAL NETWORKS

Networks are open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network, namely as long as they share the same communication codes. Keck and Sikkink (1998) define networks as essentially 'communicative structures'. Podolny and Page (1998) argue that, unlike markets and hierarchies, network forms of organization are characterized by enduring relationships and exchanges based on trust, legitimacy and ethical behavior.

Social networks are important actors in democratic societies. They are key spaces for formulating, advancing and leveraging the interests of civil society against elites and authorities. As such, they serve as sites of public advocacy around social and political issues, which markets and states are more reticent to address (Mueller, 2004). In essence, social movements are social networks that engage in sustained collective actions, have a common purpose and challenge the interests and beliefs of those with power (Tarrow, 2005).

Diani believes that 'recent scholarship points to the fact that interest in the relationship between social movements and social networks has grown both in the range of topics addressed, and the depth of research results' (2003: 1). Many of the authors in Diani and McAdam's book, *Social Movements and Networks* (2003), treat networks as a central feature of social movements.

Although transnational activist networks existed long before the internet (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), there is accumulating evidence that the internet accelerates network and social movement formation on local and global levels (Castells, 1996).

Commentators from a wide range of disciplines have noted that in recent years, society has become more network-based (Castells, 1996; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Similarly, leading theorists are beginning to recognize the prominence of networks in social movements (Diani, 2003; Gerlach, 2001). Although Keck and Sikkink (1998)

remind us that activist networks are far from new, Castells (1996) makes it clear that such a pervasive 'networking logic' is gradually supplanting earlier, more linear and hierarchical paradigms, which allows for more democratic processes.

4 FEATURES

New Social Movements share common characteristics with web-based communication: they lack membership forms, statutes and other formal means of organizing; they may have phases of visibility and phases of relative invisibility; NSMs may have significant overlaps with each other and are liable to rapid change in form, approach and mission. Furthermore, the ability of new communication technologies to operate globally and respond to global economic agendas in a swift and timely manner is a key to their contemporary capacity to mobilize against the vagaries of global capital. In these cases, Redden (2001) argues 'the Internet is used as a kind of metaconnection between more traditional local-level organizational activities such as meetings, telephone trees, leafleting, and posting flyers and stickers'.

According to Castells's (1997) notion, the three essential activities in which the cyberspace community engages to create a virtual nation are: working on a political project (behavioral); maintaining the signification of the nation (cognitive); and maintaining a sodality (affective). These elements should be present in the construction of a virtual nation.

To develop a design pattern of how social movements are affected by new ICTs, we must first understand exactly how and why activists acquire complex technical skills—or, alternatively, how and why technically skilled individuals or communities become activists.

4.1 BOUNDARY, CONSCIOUSNESS AND NEGOTIATION

Taylor and Whittier (1992) offer a framework for assessing collective identity in social movements, which they believe provides a "conceptual bridge linking theoretical approaches in the symbolic interactionist tradition with existing theory in social movements". Their three categories are: boundaries, consciousness and negotiation. Boundaries indicate the territory of the group – who belongs to the movement and does not. This means that the movement should establish distinctions between itself and other societal entities in a process of self-affirmation. Consciousness includes the creation of cognitive frames or schemas for interpreting reality. Finally, their analytical framework suggests that negotiation is a category of significance to social movements as members often must resist dominant evaluations of themselves and their values and offer alternative means of thinking and acting in both public and private spheres.

4.2 USER PRACTICE

One of the more effective features of social networks is user practices in technical changes. A large number of studies in the history of technology underline the fact that

extremely important shifts can be initiated not only by highly skilled designers, developers, and corporations but also by less-skilled users of technology (Bijker & Law, 1992; Fischer, 1992; Landauer, 1999). Since nowadays, democracy experience, social movements and collective identity are created in a daily practice through new media, it is essential to notice the specific ways in which activists put technologies into practice.

4.3 NETWORK LEADERSHIP

Leadership arises within communities of practice whenever people work together and make meaning of their experiences and when people participate in collaborative forms of action across the dividing lines of perspective, values, beliefs, and cultures (Drath & Palus 1994; Drath 2001)" (McGonagill & Reinelt, 2010). So no longer did you have a situation where blind commands were issued which the others obediently had to carry out. The leaders were now properly informed of the situation inside the country and any suggestions they made could be corrected by those "in the field." (Jenkin, 1995, Garrett & Edwards, 2007)

4.4 ONLINE-OFFLINE LEADERSHIP

Klein (2000) argues that the cyber social networks facilitate international communication among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and allow protesters to participate in socio-political events both online and offline. But the online participation is often about moving people to action offline (Fenton, 2008). It is about building relationships and forging community rather than simply providing information (Diani, 2001). Castells (1996) argues that the networking logic of the internet dovetails with network formation offline. This confluence greatly aided social movement groups such as the Zapatistas, who continue to wage an indigenous rights struggle in southern Mexico during the mid to late 1990s (Cleaver, 1998; De Angelis, 2000).

4.5 MODES OF INTERNET COMMUNICATION BY CYBER ACTIVISTS

Denning (2001) recognizes five general modes of internet communication by social movement activists and in a similar way, Ronfeldt and Arquilla (2001) offer a useful model for understanding the non-hierarchical structure of the cyber social network (Pickard, 2006).

- Collecting and providing information;
- Publication of information; assists action and mobilization;
- Dialogue; makes lateral linkages;
- Coordinating action; serving as an outlet for creative expression; and
- lobbying decision-makers.

Furthermore, Gibson and Ward (2000) utilize a similar typology that includes:

- Information provision;
- Campaigning to recruit voters;
- Generating resources;

- Building links between organizations; and
- Promoting participation in political processes.

As it can be seen, we have five major steps which are used by cyber activism that play an effective role.

Collecting and providing information

Cyber social networks allow for the dissemination of information regarding movement identity, views and issues to interested recipients both inside and outside the movement.

Publication of information; assists action and mobilization

CSNs serve as instruments of mobilization, defined as the organizing of collective action and initiatives aimed at producing specific outcomes. These networks can coordinate initiatives and action (Barlow, 1988; Kessler, 1984, Stein, 2009) and spread viewpoints designed to galvanize action, a process referred to as 'consensus mobilization' (Tarrow, 2005).

Dialogue; makes lateral linkages

CSNs function as relatively autonomous sites of interaction and dialog. According to Fraser (1993) such spaces are necessary to further participatory parity between dominant and subordinate groups within larger spheres of discourse. Moreover, Downing (2001) adds that the internal dialog these spaces permit, which often involve shared processes of meaning construction between activist producers and particularly active audiences, help movement participants to arrive at common understandings of their problems and strategies.

Cyber activists use these networks to communicate laterally and build networks among movement members. The alternative media can link social change activists by making them aware of one another's views and interests and by uniting communities of interest across national and transnational space (Barlow, 1988; Kessler, 1984; Steiner, 1992). CSNs can function as a site for creative expression. As Downing (2001) points out, political communication does not always take the form of rational argumentation. Emotion, imagination and aesthetics are central aspects of much political expression, taking such forms as satire, irony, cartoon, caricature, slander and pornography (Downing, 2001).

Lobbying decision-makers, fundraising and resource generation

People use CSNs, have more chance to succeed at presenting their issues to decision-makers. They use bureaucratic advocacy to influence the agenda, however at a slower pace.

Also social movements can use the CSNs to engage in fundraising and resource generation. Movement groups attempt to raise financial support and resources through a variety of means, including requests for donations, sale of merchandise, building member databases and recruiting new members, personnel and volunteers (Costanza-Chock, 2003; Van Aeist & Walgrave, 2002).

Since architecture has been a significant part of a repertoire of cultural symbols that political and cultural elites have used to 'flag' the nation (Billig, 1995), 'invent tradition' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) and 'discursively

construct' identities (Wodak, 1999), it can be useful for designing these virtual environments. In the next section, we investigate the features of "third space" and postmodern urbanism experiences in creating real public spaces which can be useful for designing cyber social networks.

5 THIRD SPACE

"Third space" in Soja's eponymous work (1996), defined as 'a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings'. Soja sees first space as having been explored chiefly through its 'readable texts and contexts', and second space through 'its prevailing representational discourses'. Third space is to be explored spatially, 'to improve the world in some significant way'. The concept of third space can be broadly used to highlight the 'othering' of geographical space and social spatiality. In addition, Oldenburg (1999) identifies some of the specific characteristics of third places:

- They are on neutral ground;
 - They are a leveler;
 - Conversation is the main activity;
 - They are accessible;
 - As a home away from home, they have 'regulars';
- and
- The mood is playful

The lack of third places and the fragmentation of local communities have implications for democratic political involvement, the safety and security of communities and the overall quality of life of citizens. Unfortunately, the vast suburban infrastructure, demanding work roles and consumer lifestyles of the post-industrial culture dramatically impede the development of third places. Without centralized 'town squares' or downtowns and with traditional neighborhoods abandoned for more private subdivision developments, third places are difficult to build and sustain. So some scholars point out virtual third space as a practical way for communication.

In order to enhance the virtual third-place experience, the CMC participant should feel present or 'immersed' in the environment or virtual space. Ideally, the environment promotes 'the perceptual illusion of non mediation' via immersion (Riva, 1999). 'Virtual third place' offers a distinctive concept that better accounts for the unique characteristics of computer-mediated social interaction.

More specifically, Douglas Schuler (1996) scrutinizes the similarities between third places and virtual communities. In his research, CMC contexts share key characteristics with Oldenburg's third places. Generally, CMC contexts such as third places emphasize conversation, humor and play, are on neutral ground, provide a home away from home and involve regular members. Primarily, computer mediated environments often emphasize playful conversation via informal talk (Schuler, 1996). In fact, Oldenburg's (1999) description of third places echoes the interaction typical of many chatrooms and online discussion forums: 'Conversation's improved quality in the third place is also suggested by its temper. It is more spirited than elsewhere, less inhibited and more eagerly pursued'. As in online discourse, in discussions in third plac-

es 'consciousness of conditions and time often slip away amid its lively flow', Based upon the detailed analysis of discourse online (Baym, 1995).

Danet (2001) argues that the contemporary conditions of CMC such as interactivity and identity concealment promote a playful form of interaction. By masking their identity or using alternative personae, people feel less inhibited and online conversations are often highly spirited and lively. Thus, third places and CMC environments often share a comparable jocular, energetic and spirited conversational tone or mood. At contrast, for Turkle (1996), traditional third places differ from computer-mediated contexts in one important respect: the 'realness' of the interaction or dependence upon simulation. In particular, three key characteristics differ dramatically between traditional third places and social interaction online:

- (1) Third places emphasize localized community;
- (2) Third places are social levelers; and
- (3) Third places are accessible.

Oldenburg (1999) prominently and strongly advocates a return to geographically localized communities. He explicitly states 'the first and most important function of third places is that of uniting the neighborhood'. As Doheny-Farina (1996) illustrates: 'a third place cannot exist separate from a locality because it exists only in comparison to its neighborhoods, to local work, play and family life, to the institutions and formal rituals that encompass daily life.

Also, Oldenburg found MUDs, Usenet conferences, mailing lists where conversation is the only activity and where characteristics such as non-hierarchy and playfulness are quite analogue to third places. These virtual places also have a high accessibility – always 'open', always crowded because of its global participants.

Postmodern theorists celebrate fragmentation because it allows the recognition of diversity in political desires acknowledges difference between individuals and debunks the myth of homogenous political units leading ultimately to liberation. They focus attention on the multiple, fragile, complex, fluid, and fragmented processes that compose individual identities (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987; Rosenau, 1992). There is, according to this view, no true self, and people do not exhibit personal characteristics. Rather, as Goffman (1959) pointed out some years ago, the self is constituted differently through a variety of "performances" in different times and places.

6 PROBLEMS

In spite of the optimism that are around the above assessments that focus largely on exploring potential use of the CSN as a free global space for social dialogue and international activism there are of course effective counter arguments that can be arranged in three main categories: (1) government limitations of use; (2) structural forces of capital organized either nationally or globally; and (3) the problems of fragmentation.

Through communication processes are integral to their success (Atton, 2003; Downing, 2001), research shows that cyber activists experience several difficulties communicating through these networks. These networks often

systematically distort, negatively cast or ignore social movement viewpoints. They may deny social movements access or representation at critical moments in their development (Raboy, 1981), employ message frames that undermine or weaken public perceptions of a movement's legitimacy (Gitlin, 1980; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Shoemaker, 1982), or tacitly encourage cyber activists who seek coverage to cater to the questionable values of mainstream reportage on social activism, including a heightened interest in violence, emotionality and slogans (Kielbowicz & Scherer, 1986; Gamson, 1990; DeLuca and Peebles, 2002;).

Some Pessimistic observers acknowledge the power and potential of the internet but caution against overestimating what it can do (Clark and Themudo, 2003). Pessimistic observers look to a broader social context, arguing that the patterns of internet control suggest that the dominance by a handful of companies over much of the world's communication system is merely replicated on the internet, while suggesting that the internet in no way guarantees grass roots participation or more widespread democracy (McChesney, 1998). In terms of power, reliance on the internet may well privilege certain groups, languages, genders or countries to the exclusion of others (Clark and Themudo, 2003; Kole, 1998; Kramer and Kramarae, 1999). Surveillance is an increasing concern as some corporations are monitoring movement internet usage, and law enforcement, intelligence and other agencies are logging on to monitor social movements, actors and others that challenge the status quo (Coombs, 1998; Kahn and Kellner, 2004). For example the Chinese Government is reported to employ around 30,000 internet police to control the web so that it can be used by businesses and not by its political opponents (The Guardian, 2005). In addition, face-to-face connections remain important, and failing to focus on human contacts in favor of technology may mean diverting precious resources from other areas (Carlsson, 1995; Danitz & Strobel, 1999).

For Castells (1996), the globalization of the capitalist system does not open up the possibility of a labor-led emancipatory project. Taking Castells' view, the fragmented nature of new media does limit the capacity of NSMs to create coherent strategies due to the increasing individualization of labour. Problems of quantity and chaos of information challenge the way analysis and action are integrated in decision-making processes as well as existing configurations of power and collective identity in social movement organizations. Furthermore, the internet may contribute to the fragmentation of civil society, as well as political mobilization and participation.

Greater pluralism is regarded by Habermas as a risk for deliberative democracy rather than its savior. This concern is echoed by Sunstein(2001), Hill and Hughes (1998), who argues that the internet has spawned large numbers of radical websites and discussion groups allowing the public to bypass more moderate and balanced expressions of opinion in the mass media. Moreover, these sites tend to link only to sites that have similar views. Sunstein argues that a consequence of this is that we witness group polarization and this is likely to become more extreme with time. Sunstein contends that two

preconditions for a well-functioning, deliberative democracy are threatened by the growth of the internet and the advent of multi-channel broadcasting. First, people should be exposed to materials that they have not chosen in advance. This results in a reconsideration of the issues and often recognition of the partial validity of opposing points of view. Second, people should have a range of common experiences, in order that they may come to an understanding with respect to particular issues (Downey & Fenton, 2003). Sunstein(2001) also recognizes that 'group polarization helped fuel many movements of great value – including, for example, the civil rights movement, the antislavery movement, and the movement for sex equality'.

In a same way as Atton (2004) notes: "To consider the internet as an unproblematic force for social change is to ignore the political and economic determinants that shape the technology; ...; and it is to ignore the obstacles to empowerment that legislation, inequalities of access, limits on media literacy and the real world situation of disempowerment necessarily place on groups and individuals.

The danger in constructing global solidarity online, as Tarrow (1998) points out, is that the speed at which social movement actors can respond encourages a focus on short term and rapidly shifting issues rather than fully fledged ideologies. This easy-come-easy-go politics does not lend itself to long-standing commitments or deeply held loyalties, but rather to a following that is also fleeting and momentary and often lacking in political memory.

Overall, in spite of all these problems, the CSNs have a great potential for establishing social movements seeking for their goals.

7 EFFECTS OF CSNs ON SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENTS

It is obvious that CSNs would play a pivotal role, fundamental to the social movement's success. Protest activity and alliances of social movements on the ground can impact upon the way in which the internet is used and structured on the various and multiple websites. In other words interactivity is both between groups and between online and offline forms of organizing.

Scholarship in this area has demonstrated that new technologies can reduce a state's capacity for repression and open up access to elite allies. For example, the Mexican Zapatistas used the high-speed global communication capacities afforded by the internet to coordinate with elite allies internationally and to exploit differences between their own government and that of the United States (Schulz, 1998). Scholars also suggest that the Internet can be used to avoid surveillance and to circumvent state regulation (Denning, 2001; Kidd, 2003; Scott & Street, 2000). Changes such as these alter activists' political opportunities, enhancing their ability to organize, mobilize, and influence elites (McAdam, 1996). Such as, the People's Global Action (PGA) organization, formed in 1998 by activists protesting in Geneva against the second Ministerial Conference of the WTO which is an attempt to create a worldwide alliance against neo-liberal globalization on an anti-capitalist platform. It is defined as 'an in-

strument for communication and coordination for all those fighting against the destruction of humanity and the planet by capitalism, and for building alternatives' (www.agp.org, 2006).

Furthermore, Ayres's (1999) depicts the internet as a mechanism facilitating the rapid circulation of unverifiable claims. Based on this characterization, he suggests that new technology may "indeed herald a return to old-fashioned collective behavior—the riots, panics and sporadic protests of old".

One much quoted example is the anti-globalization movement that gained public recognition at what is now commonly referred to as 'The Battle of Seattle'. On 30 November 1999 an alliance of labor and environmental activists congregated in Seattle in an attempt to make it impossible for delegates to the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference to meet. They were joined by consumer advocates, anti capitalists and a variety of other grassroots movements. At the same time, it is claimed that nearly 1200 NGOs in 87 countries called for the wholesale reform of the WTO, many staging their own protests in their own countries (The Guardian Online, 1999). Groups integrated the internet into their strategies. The International Civil Society website provided hourly updates about the major demonstrations in Seattle to a network of almost 700 NGOs in some 80 countries (Norris, 2002). The demonstration was heralded as a success for transnational internet activism. Wall (2002) concludes that Seattle was not an anomaly, but rather the prototype for a global anti-corporate domination social movement that will increasingly rely on the Internet – for its benefit while also at its peril. While other media and even face-to-face organizing will remain vital, this new communication technology has and will continue to affect the face of social change in ways that we have yet to fully comprehend.

Antiarwar movement in London is another example. On 15 February 2003, about one million people took to the streets of London to protest against the imminent war with Iraq. It was followed on the third anniversary of the war, 18 March 2006; thousands once more lined the streets demanding an end to the occupation. These protests, and the multiple actions that have taken place in between, represent an upsurge in peace campaigning in Britain and worldwide.

On the whole, we can conclude that CSNs, as were mentioned, have undeniable effects on social movements. Nowadays, social movements will increasingly rely on the Internet and virtual communities and moves toward cyber social movements.

In the next section, we will study Tehran as a case study, and show why people have recently inclined to CSNs and how it helps them establish a powerful social movement.

8 TEHRAN

For clarifying the role of virtual space in Tehran, we made an interview with a group of people (includes 200 people, 100 males and 100 females, and 144 persons younger than 35 years old) about how much time they spend on urban space and virtual public space for social interaction. At first, we can see in bar chat (1 and 2), most of the women

spend less than 6 hours per week for social interaction in urban spaces while this number for virtual spaces upsurge more than 8 hour a week. Women in Islamic society confront with some limitation for participating in social activities and it seems that they use the virtual space to break these limitations and play an effective role in the society. Overall, all the people with different ages and sexes prefer virtual spaces rather than urban spaces. They indicated several reasons such as lack of appropriate public places in Tehran, government monitoring and limitations which were imposed by traditional society, especially for women. The bar chart2 shows that young people more than old ones and females more than males are interested in using cyber social networks.

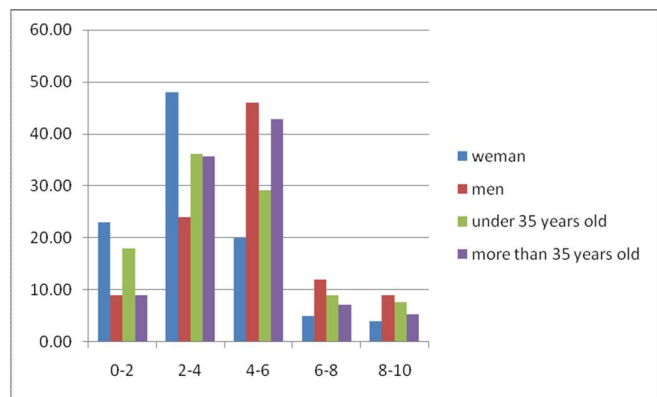


Figure 1. How much hour do people spend on urban spaces for interaction with others?

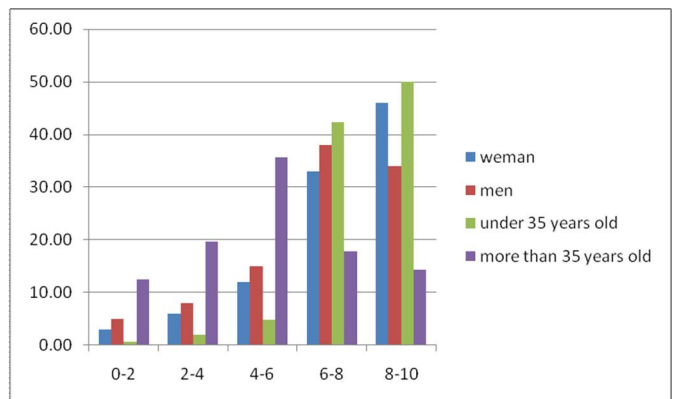


Figure 2. How much hour do people spend on cyber social networks for interaction with others?

When we asked the interviewees to determine by which way they often get their information and share them with others, they indicate social networks such as Facebook and Twitter in the first stage and email in the second one (bar chart 3). As it can be seen, women are more interested in cyber networks, while men prefer email and its accessories.

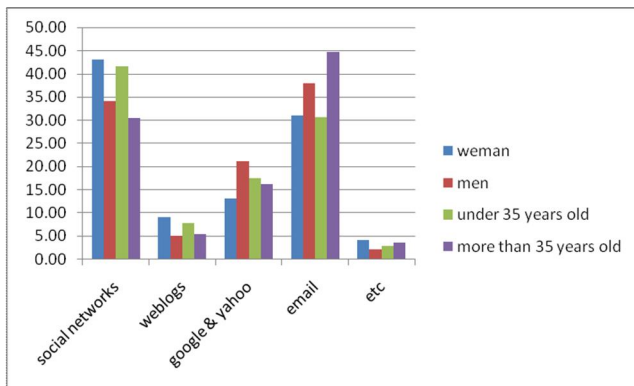


Figure 3. Which ways do interviewees prefer for interaction through cyberspace?

The problems which internet users have to deal with are respectively, narrow internet band, inaccessibility for all and user's limit knowledge (bar chart 4). All users from different age and sex group have the similar idea and the numbers only fluctuate slightly except for old people that have problem with complicated sites because of the lack of knowledge.

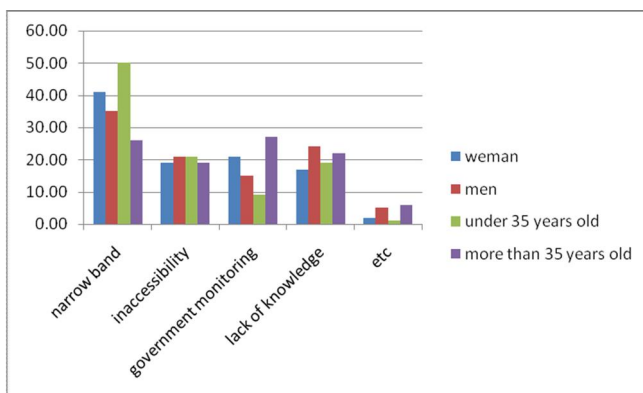


Figure 4. Which problems do make more difficulties for internet users?

In conclusion, we can summarize that in the absence of appropriate urban spaces in Tehran, people like using virtual spaces more and more, and people who were put into marginal areas in their society, are more keen on using cyber social networks.

9 COMMUNICATION THROUGH CYBER SOCIAL NETWORKS

Where real public places don't exist (Tehran), there is still social communication. Thanks to new technologies creating cyber social networks, absolute preventing human interactions has been impossible and social movements have bred their social interaction possibilities in an impressive virtual public place. Poster (1995) states, "When users have decentralized, distributed, direct control over when, what, why, and with whom they exchange information...it seems to breed critical thinking, activism, de-

mocracy and equality...This electronically mediated communication can challenge systems of domination" through offering an effective environment for presenting interests and messages of resistance identities. "Cyberspace is a new domain for social interaction and entertainment" (Wertheim, 1999).

Cyber social Networks such as Face Book, Twitter, You Tube, enable Tehran's users to construct their cyber identity and communicate with others in desired ways. "These networks are very flexible and the main bond between the various individuals and coalitions is that they maintain similar values and visions" (Smith, 2002). Such networks which were once used to make friendships as delightful spaces for Tehran's users gradually have changed into proper places for socio-political interactions and attracted various socio-political groups of human rights activists, journalists, reformists and so on who have been forbidden to activate throughout the city. These groups applied these networks to state their policies and thereby found a lot of advocates being communicated via the internet. "These online communities also launch e-mail campaigns and strategize to organize marches and teach-ins" (Nieves, 2003). One Million Signatures campaign for women's equality in Iran is a noticeable example of this networking. In such campaigns all members can activate and present their beliefs and ideas. They "have changed substantially what counts as activism, what counts as community, collective identity, democratic space, and political strategy. And online activists challenge us to think about how cyberspace is meant to be used" (McCaughy & Ayers, 2003)

All protesting online organizations, cyber networks and E-campaigning were jointed and formed broad coalition in the cyberspace to seek their common political goals, a political cyber activism. "Cyberactivism crosses disciplines, mixes theories with practical activist approaches, and represents a broad range of online activist strategies, from online awareness campaigns to internet transmitted laser projected massaging" (McCaughy & Ayers, 2003). The combination of various activist approaches founded a great cause that Features by which these cyber public places assisted are:

- Be entertained to attract different people

Connect with strangers in meaningful ways, as "weak-tie instrument" par excellence as such it is able to attract easily and rapidly a large number of people to join an action or event" (Kavada, 2006). It helps Iranian people from different race and religious, establish new interaction realm between strangers which were not possible in the past.

- Sharing experiences and interests

People share their interest and experience in Facebook and by which show to others what they believe and desire. In recent years, Facebook has become a place for transforming information and acts as a multilayer media which make a lot of people interact with each other and talk about what that is not possible to be discussed in governmental media.

- Informing people about their various rights

Through interacting in CSNs, Iranian people, especially women had been more familiar with their rights by comparing themselves to the overdeveloped countries.

- Presenting experiences in visual formats and audio
It helps them to inform other citizens about their experience in the society throughout different from what government has stated.

- Offering a place for poll about movement's problems and activities

In the Facebook and Twitter, people were able to criticize their movements and its policy.

- Enrolling in an indefinite rate

Here, there are vast ranges of selections and everyone is able to identify himself or herself, based on his/her notion.

- Flexibility and no formal or complicated membership

For registering in a group, there is no need to use your real identity and so everyone can be a member without receiving any threat or danger from the state.

Therefore, these virtual spaces are the extension for physical public places in which people can express beliefs forbidden to state in the city. Virtual spaces, alternative media and citizens' media were necessary tools in establishing a public sphere for dissenting views of protesters. According to Rodriguez (2001), "alternative media spin transformative processes that alter people's senses of self, their subjective positioning, and therefore their access to power".

Considering about explanations, we can conclude protesting demands and beliefs which cannot be physically expressed in real forms, such as 'talk', 'face-to-face' due to the lack of public places, "are symbolically replaced in cyberspace by 'chat', 'chatting', 'e-mail' and 'posting'" (Hamman, 1999), eventually will materialize in urban spaces in form of protesting rallies. "Social movement organizations wanting to mobilize for a mass street demonstration make extensive use of the Internet to enhance coordination and mobilization efforts" (Van Laer, 2007).

10 CONCLUSION

New media can become the location for counter reflexive political deliberation and activity – but only if they embody democratic practice. The use of new communication technology to spread radical social critique and alternative culture is the realm of New Social Movements marked by fragmentation. Fragmentation has been variously interpreted as multiplicity and polycentrality when focusing on the potential for social agency and disaggregation and division when focusing on the potential for increased social control.

Computer networks can provide the means to create new 'virtual' places that offer functionally similar forms of localized informal interaction. These virtual third places should not be designed merely to reconstruct a hyper real image of a nostalgic small town embedded in our mediated collective memory. Further, these virtual third places should not be designed as 'futuristic' virtual realities created to realize fantastic visions from science fiction films and novels requiring elaborate equipment and sophisticated technical knowledge. Rather, virtual third places should be designed to fit into the participants' 'mundane' and 'ordinary' lived experiences. The virtual third place should feel like a place for the here and now, a

place that is integrated seamlessly into the existing textures and details of our lived communal experiences. By emphasizing the unique demands of our unique communities, these virtual great good places can expand the participants' social world and further redefine how communication technology is integrated into everyday life.

In order to strengthen social movement, cyber social networks and virtual third space should provide people with an environment in which they can collect and provide information, publicize them, have dialogue and make lateral linkages, Coordinate action and also are able to lobby decision-makers.

Furthermore, they need a place to have a daily practice about socio-political events and also they need a network leadership to help them have an effect on their movement decision. This place should be able to make a good connection between online and offline users and also connect its user and share the online experience with whom are not able to use internet.

There are several examples in which people established social movement by using net. In Tehran and other cities that there are no powerful urban places for interaction, cyber social networks can play a more effective role in social movement. In Tehran, people have used the CSNs increasingly and have organized their own NGOs and campaigns independent from the government. These CSNs act as a place for enrolling and informing them about their right and their abilities.

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