

The effectiveness of Internet for informing and mobilizing in the events after the Iranian presidential election

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Activists looking for change in Iran used social networking, blogs, social networks and micro blogging platforms before and after the Iranian presidential election to build a political movement within a country with little political freedom and limited freedom of press. Internet helped to make the movement known to the international audience. It created a common understanding among the protesters and allowed coming to agreements on the tactics and publicizing demonstrations. Iranian government used a range of tactics from denial of service attacks against the opposition websites to the surveillance of Internet traffic to interrupt the use of Internet by the opposition. Social media provided a new way of communication that was harder to be captured by the Iranian government. In addition, was more secure relative to other modes of political activity in Iran.

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Introduction

Social media played a significant role in the creation of the Green movement before and after the Iranian presidential election of June 12, 2009. Persian blog sphere helped to create the discourse for democracy, pluralism and tolerance in the years before the election. During the three months leading to the election, Internet and social media were used to campaign for the presidential candidates.

Before the election, social media was used by the reformist activists to support their favorite candidates Mirhosein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi. These campaigns took place on blogs, political websites, social news aggregators (Balatarin), microblogging tools (FriendFeed and Twitter) and social networks (Facebook).

In most studies done on the impact of the social media in the aftermath of the Iranian election, researchers mainly focused on the impact of Twitter, and in most cases, found little evidence to support the claims for the importance of social media.

The focus on Twitter was due to several factors. The content on Twitter was primarily in English and could be easily used for text analysis without a need for Persian to English translation. Twitter also has a powerful API, which makes it easy to measure different types of activities such as number of postings and re-tweets. The State Department's call for delaying the Twitter maintenance also resulted in overplaying the role of Twitter. Social media was important but in most cases, the activity was taking place elsewhere.

In this article, I discuss how social media played a role and used different platforms to influence the events in Iran. In addition, methods Iranian government used to combat the influence of the Internet are listed.

Internet Platform	Description
Video Platforms: Youtube, etc	The video websites helped to provide evidence for the demonstrations taking place and exposed police brutality and killings. Youtube was the most popular video sharing websites. YouTube highlighted the Iranian protests on the front page of its CitizenTube during the demonstrations.
Facebook	Unblocking Facebook before the presidential election allowed rapid user growth and political activism on Facebook. Facebook allowed information to go from inside Iran to outside and from outside back to Iran.
Twitter	It did not have a large following in Iran. A handful of Iranian activists and journalists twitted what they read on the Iranian source. This allowed the international audience and reporters easily track the events in Iran.
Political campaign websites in side Iran	The political websites based in Iran were influential in creating the Internet activity on the social networks by providing the content to be shared and discussed. Ghalamnews and Kalame: The official websites of Mousavi were the reference point for many of the Mousavi supporters. MowjSevvom: The campaign website of reformist candidates played an important role in bringing the former president Khatami back to the campaign scene. One of their petitions was signed by 450,000 people.
Blogs and Balatarin	Blogs remained the source of new ideas for the movement and also exposures of specific information on the human rights

Blogs and Balatarin	<p>Blogs remained the source of new ideas for the movement and also exposures of specific information on the human rights violations by the Iranian government.</p> <p>Balatarin, an aggregator of blog and news content, where the postings are prioritized by the voting of its members, was used to amplify the voice of the bloggers. A number of non-violent actions originated from the postings or discussions taking place on Balatarin.</p>
Mowj Camp	A website which became very popular right after the Iranian presidential election. With members in Iran, it was the source of the daily news and ideas for the movement. Several key members of Mowjcamp were arrested in Iran and the website shut down its operation.
News websites outside of Iran	Roozonline, Gooya news, Radio Farda: A number of news websites based outside of Iran played an important role in exposing human rights violations and compiling daily updates.
Blogs of NYTimes, Guardian, Huffingtonpost	Using blogs by major newspapers allowed quick reporting on what was produced by citizen journalists.
Mailing	They were one of the most reliable ways of distributing news or

Other communication channels	Description
SMS	Even though it was not internet based, it had a much wider reach than the Internet in Iran. Before it stopped working, it was used widely to share information.
Satellite broadcasts: BBC Persian and VOA	They have a wide audience in Iran, which goes far beyond the Internet reach. However, these broadcasts do not have the same level of engagement as Internet.
Cellphone Videos and Photos	Cellphones provided some of the most important content on the web.

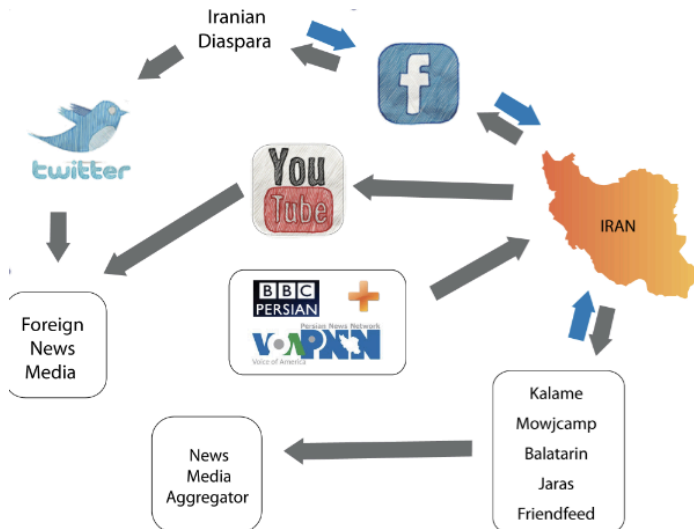


Figure 1: Facebook and a number of Iranian websites were used to send information outside and inside Iran. Twitter was mainly used by a few journalists and activists to send information to the international audience and had few readers in Iran. Due to slow internet connections, YouTube content was not easy to watch in Iran, but the videos were still broadcasted through BBC Persian and VOA satellite programs.

Filtering and Cyber attacks

Events

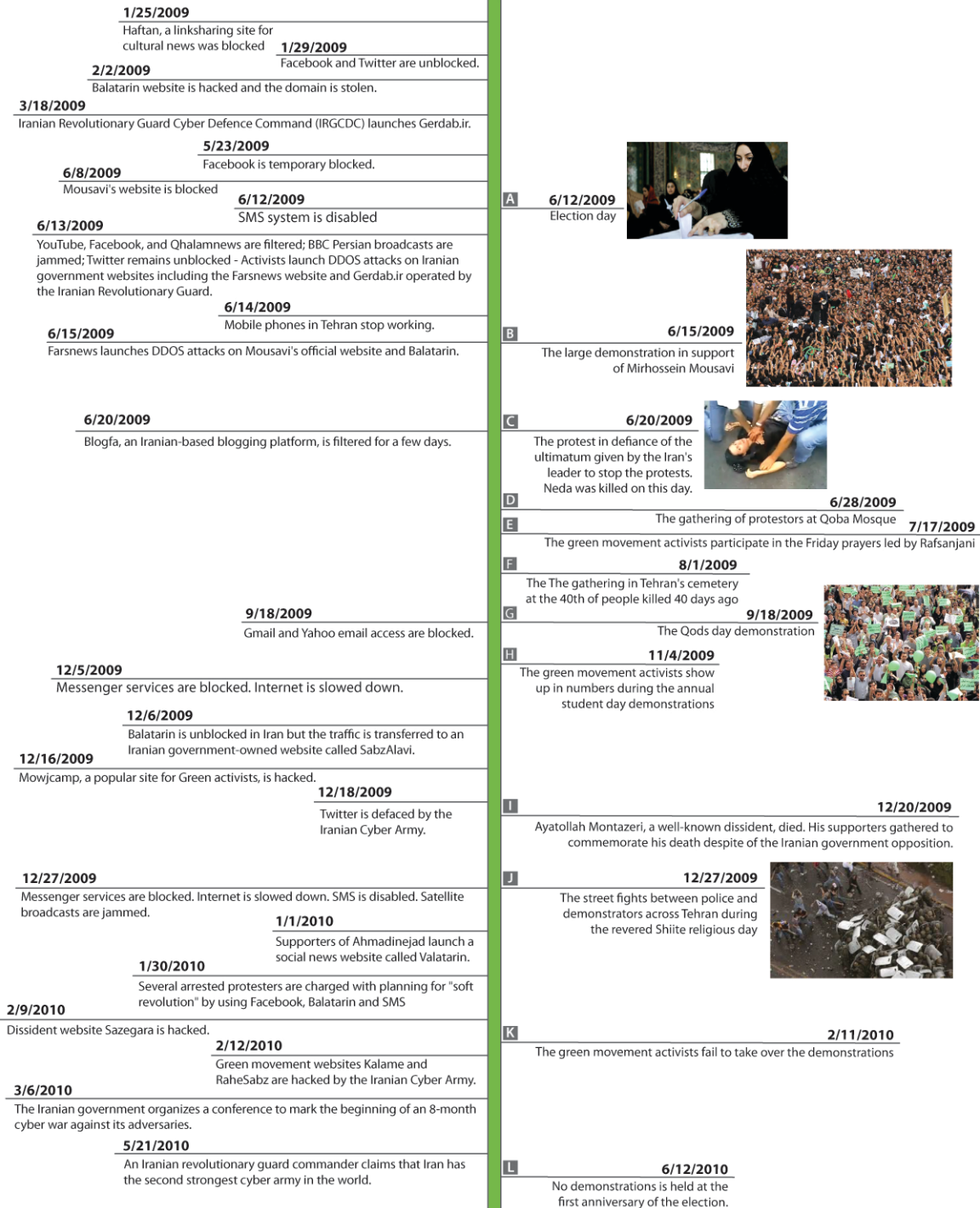


Figure 2: The timeline of major political events and the actions of the Iranian government on the web to contain their impact

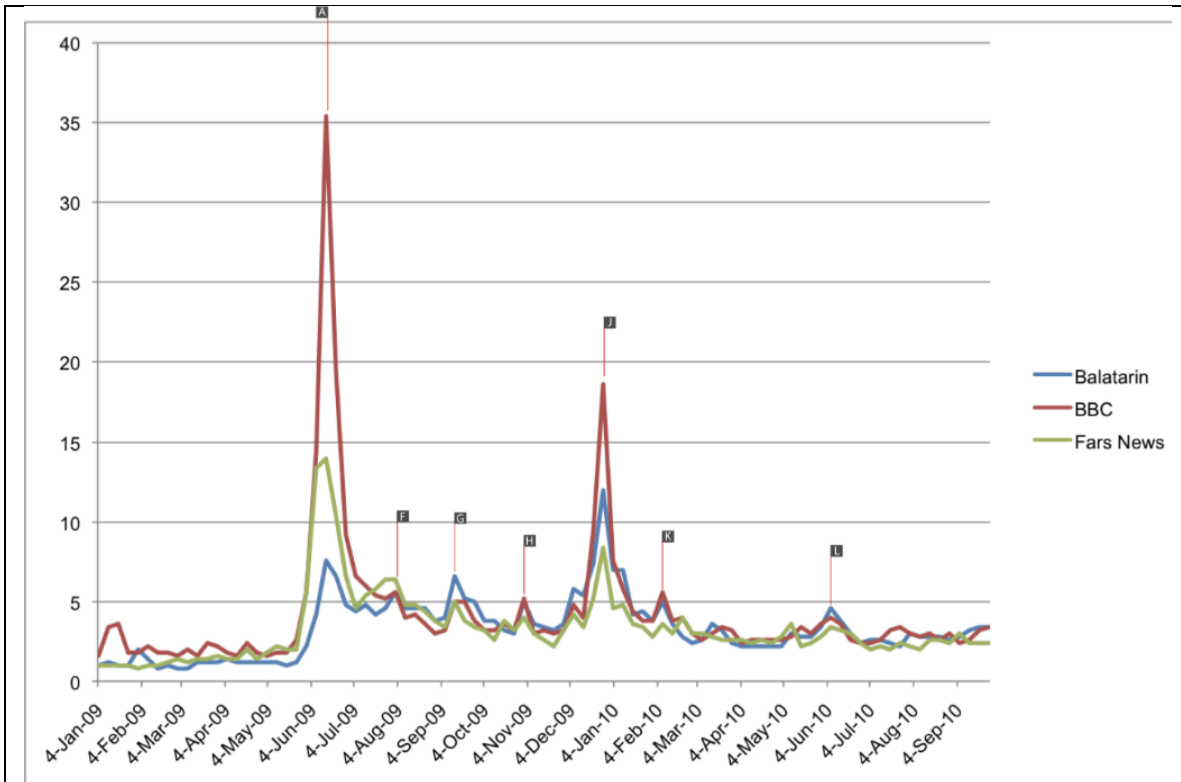


Figure 3: Google search volume limited to Iran for the Persian words of Balatarin, BBC and Fars News. They have similar profiles during the demonstration days.

- Balatarin: a social news aggregator in Persian (similar to Digg)
- BBC Persian: the most influential news network outside Iran
- Fars News Agency: very close to the IRGC(Iranian revolutionary guard and supportive of Ahmadinejad)

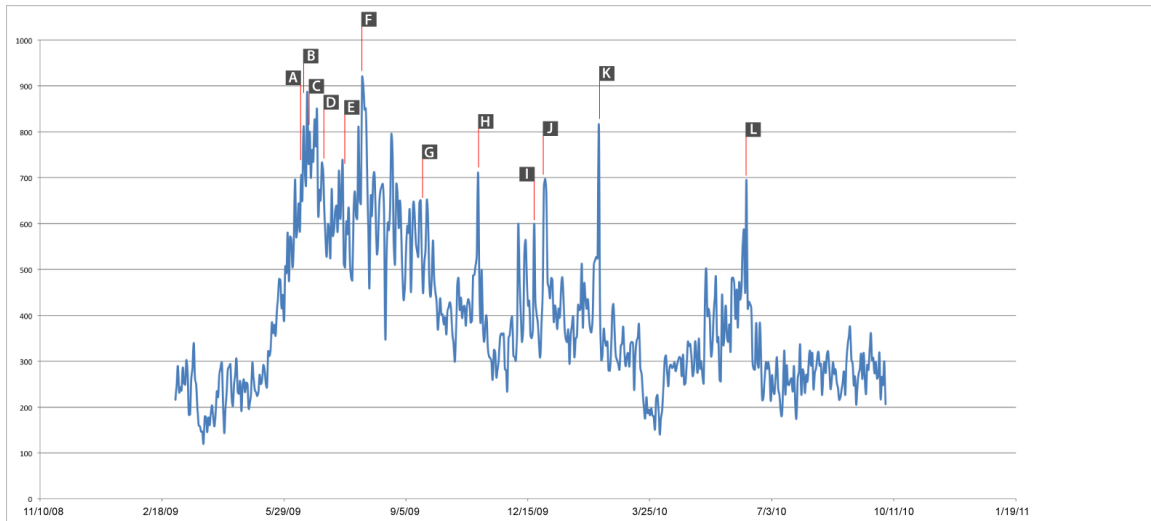


Figure 4: The number of posts submitted to Balatarin in the category of politics per day; the labels correspond to the labels in the event timeline figure.

The ways the Internet played a role

Building the discourse of democracy and non-violence tactics

After the crackdown on the press in 2000 in Iran, many of the Iranian journalists and activists started using the Internet to express themselves. This coincided with emerging blogging platforms that supported Unicode. Many Iranians living in Iran or abroad started blogging and this created a merge of more Iranians blogging. In 2006, The Persian language came in tenth on blogs posts based on the statistics published by

Technorati (1). The journalists and activists brought with them the discussions around building civil society, reform and rule of law which had started during the relative freedom of early years of president Khatami to the web (2). The dominant discussions in the web (3).

Political Activism on the web right before the election

The unblocking of the Facebook and Twitter in January 2009 surprised many Iranian Internet users. A large number of Iranians signed up for these services in a short period of time. In less than a month, Facebook became the 15th most visited website in Iran(4). However, Twitter did not have similar success to Facebook since FriendFeed, also a microblogging platform, was already popular

in Iran. FriendFeed was more suitable for creating conversations and sharing content from other sites.

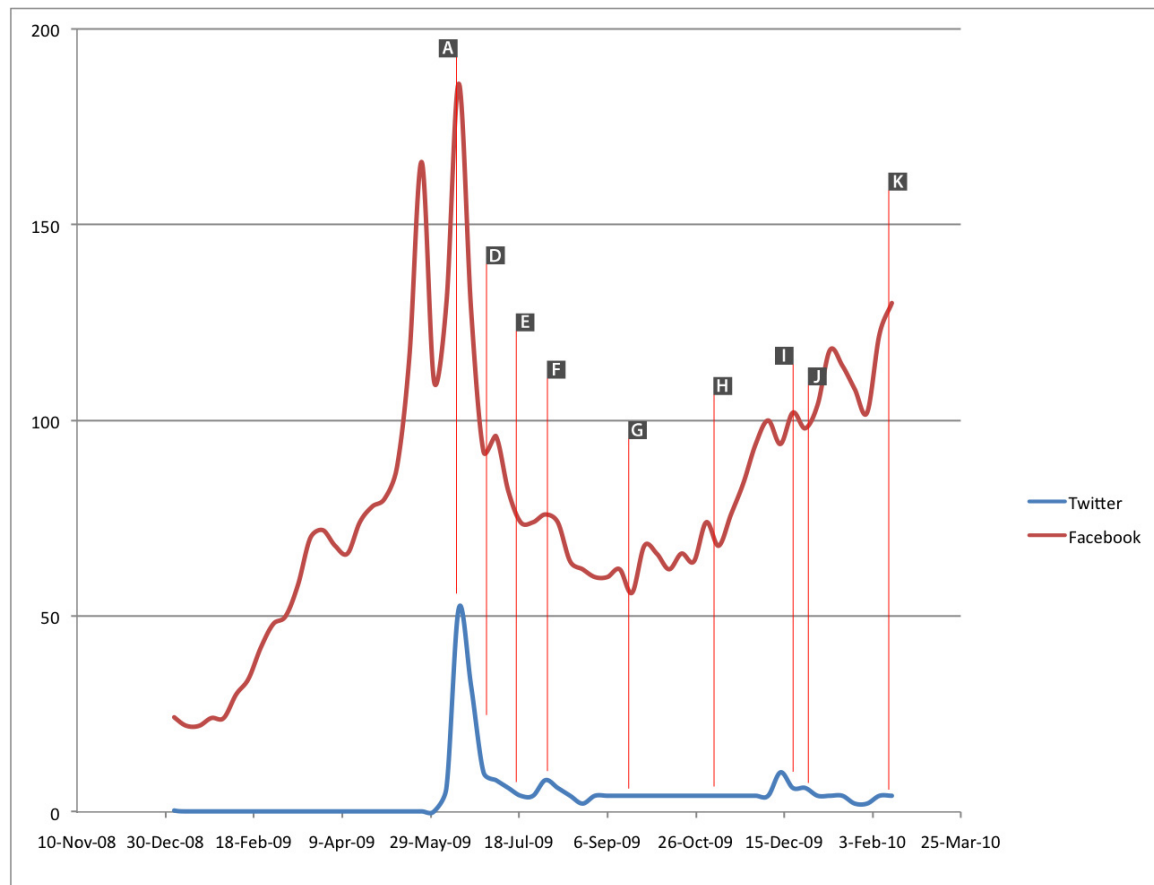


Figure 5: Comparing the google searches for twitter and facebook from Iran. Twitter is not a popular social network in Iran.

It has been a mystery why the Iranian government lifted the censorship on these websites. Some people speculated that this was done to create more excitement for the upcoming presidential election and more participation in the election. This does not have much support considering that the use of Facebook and Twitter during that time was far less political as compared to the reformists online websites and opposition websites, including news websites such as Gooya News, Roozonline or Balatarin.

One potential explanation could be that the Iranian government tried to divert the attention from the more political websites to what they perceived to be apolitical platforms of Facebook and Twitter. Another explanation could be that the Iranian government has done this to collect information on Iranians by taking snapshots of their profiles and who they are friending with. This is technically feasible considering the fact that Facebook did not support encrypted access to its website. Users viewed the website through the http (not https) access, which is not encrypted.

The unblocking of Facebook and Twitter coincided with hacking of Balatarin, which was the main hub of the Iranian bloggers, journalists and dissidents. Balatarin had been used by bloggers to expose corruption and wrongdoing within Ahmadinejad's government.

The first political activism of the pro-reform camp in Iran started by a website called The Third Wave (Mowj Sevvom). In their campaign, they called on the former president Khatami to run against Ahmadinejad. They collected more than 450,000 signatures calling on Khatami to run(5). Khatami signed up for the presidential election and acknowledge the role of The Third Wave campaign(6). Khatami later left the campaign after the other reformist candidate, Mousavi, announced his participation.

After Mousavi's nomination, the political campaign heated in a very short period. Mousavi made his campaign slogan (*har Irani yek resaneh*) "**every Iranian is a media outlet**" and called on his supporters to use the Internet to broadcast his message. He also had an active campaign website called Ghalam News. In addition, his wife, Zhahra Rahnavard, had a Facebook page (not updated by herself)(7).

The other reformist candidate, Mehdi Karoubi, was active online. His party's newspaper, Etemad-e Melli, was also published online. His campaign manager, Karbaschi, created and maintained an active Twitter account. There were also multiple groups in support of a different candidate. According to an adviser to one of the candidates, in their campaign, they even discussed who had enough seniority points on Balatarin.com to create the headline of the day to be more sympathetic to their campaign.

The political scene before the election

After Mousavi announced his run for presidency, he gained popularity in a short matter of time. Mousavi had not been in politics for more than 20 years and had less than three months to campaign. There is no independent TV in Iran and most of the reformist media had been closed in the previous years. Mousavi was also running against Ahmadinejad used a populist language. Ahmadinejad had substantially increased the retirement payments of the retirees in the months before the election. He also distributed the shares of the state-owned companies to the villagers and the poor with a promise of future money?. Ahmadinejad blamed Mousavi for the past failures of the Islamic Republic and publicly denounced the corruption of the former president, Rafsanjani, a backer of Mousavi.

At least one person from the Mousavi camp has told the author that the campaign between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad cost Mousavi 12 points in the polls. Mousavi on the otherhand was very popular among youths, students and middle class Iranians.

An online poll, asked supporters of different candidates on why they support their candidate. Ahmadinejad supporters mentioned the fight against corruption, gaining access to nuclear energy and his support for the poor as the main reasons. In contrast, the supporters of the three other candidates mentioned the increase of social freedom, improved relations with the west and moving toward democracy as the main reasons for voting for their candidates.

Providing evidence of unusual activity during the election day

The day of the presidential election was a critical day. The speed of events happening on that day caught everyone by surprise. On the day of the election, Iranian government disabled SMS services across Iran. Mousavi's camp had more than 20,000 observers in different polling locations. The observers were supposed to report back the results and or any election irregularities using SMS messages to Mousavi's campaign headquarters. The interruption of SMS services has been named as one of the primary evidence in the election fraud by the Mousavi campaign.

The government claims that the SMS service was interrupted to prevent their use for the purpose of campaigning for different candidates on the election day (campaigning on the election day is illegal in Iran).

Live video feed proved the militia attack on Mousavi's headquarter

The second event of the day in relation to the social media was the militia attack on of the main campaign headquarters of Mousavi in Tehran. On the fifth floor of Qeytarieh campaign headquarter, Mousavi campaign had set up a room with

web broadcasting of video interviews of politicians and celebrities who were encouraging people to get out and vote.

The plaintiff militia attacked the building and moved to the 5th floor of the building to disrupt the broadcast. VahidOnline, an Iranian Internet celebrity who remained anonymous until that day, was present in the building. He had witnessed the attack and posted it on his Twitter account and other web services about the attack(8)(8)(8). To prove to his online readers the severity of the situation, he used his mobile phone to broadcast videos of the attack to a video site called Qik. He has stated that about 8000 users have viewed the video so far.

Meanwhile the attackers made it to the 5th floor of the campaign headquarter and broke the broadcasting equipments. People in the building fought back and were able to arrest four of the militia and called the police.

The video of the events broadcasted live on Qik. These videos were later broadcasted on BBC Persian evening newscast. The videos of the militia attack on the Mousavi headquarter was one of the most important elements that made people think of militarization on the election day. Because of these events, it resulted in the creation of the perception that a silent coup had taken place. The supporters of Iranian government claim that the security forces went to the headquarter to disable a broadcast which was violating the campaign laws. VahidOnline, who broadcasted the video, went to hiding and later escaped Iran. He posted an emotional statement on his blog with the title of “The crime of being online” before he crossing the border with the help of smugglers(9).

At 6:30pm several hours before the polling stations close, Fars News Agency, a website close to the Iranian revolutionary guard, predicted that Ahmadinejad will win with 60 percent of the votes. There was a general disbelief among the online users. The news announcement of Fars News was posted to Balatarin with the altered title of “Is this believable: Mousavi 28 percent!! Ahmadinejad 69 percent?” (the biggest fraud of the century). This link was posted at 12:09am (Tehran local time) only after 3 hours after the polling stations closed(10).

Consolidation of perceptions to agree that there was election fraud

Iranians supporting Mirhossein Mousavi were surprised by the election result. Based on many firsthand accounts, these supporters made up their mind about the election fraud in the first few hours after the election. One foreign-based journalist who was interviewed for this article said that his host stayed up all night and was checking different websites and making calls to friends and families discussing the election fraud.

Considering that there is no independent TV stations in Iran and all the newspapers are heavily monitored by the Iranian government, the only means of getting alternative information is through the Internet, satellite TV broadcasts (BBC Persian, etc) and word of mouth. The word of mouth has its own limitation

when it comes to deciding on whether their perception is shared by the rest of the public. Most people might feel unhappy about their government but would not be informed that people in a different part of town are against their government too.

The satellite broadcasts of BBC Persian and Voice of America have limited ability due to being less interactive compared to Internet. Viewers see them as the reflection of a certain viewpoint and might also suspect their independence and fairness. In this case, social media could go beyond the discussions among friends and family and also carry the opinion of other people living in Iran.

The long distance links provided by the social media helped to speed up the consolidation of this perception. There is a need for further research and better methods of measuring of this role of social media.

Keeping the movement alive in the intervening periods

Internet and SMS created mediums to keep the Green movement alive at the time when demonstrations were not feasible due to the state suppression. Different campaigns on the Internet kept activists connected and active. In some cases, creative ideas emerged from Internet discussions and were practiced widely by the public.

Case study: sending 1 million SMS messages to sport program

The most watched program on Iran state-run TV is the sport program called 90. During this program, people are sometimes asked to vote on certain answers by sending SMS. Early in January 2010, the online activists called people to send an SMS to the next program of 90 and choose the 3rd option regardless of what the question would be (11)(12). This idea was spread by SMS in Iran. The last choice was chosen because it was primarily shown in green. In this program, the host chose to make the last option in yellow but people still voted for the last option. The question on the program was "What is the main reason for the decline of soccer in Iran?"

The options that were given were as follows:

- 1) The weakness of soccer management
- 2) The technical weakness of the coaches.
- 3) The departure of the Golden soccer players.



Figure 6: More than a million Iranians voted for the 3rd option(a wrong option) by sending SMS to a sport program on the state-run TV to show their support for the Green movement

Most Iranians for whom soccer is the most favorite sport are well aware that management is the main reason for the decline. More than 1.8 million people voted and 75 percent of them chose the third option. This simple and fairly low risk action proved to the people who were watching the program that there are at least one million Iranians who are ready to show their dislike of the government by following the campaign of the green movement activists(13)(14). Jahannews website, a news website supporting Mahmood Ahmadinejad, accused the host of the program of fraud by saying “the websites of Twitter, Facebook, and Balatarin have announced that they won with 77 percent of the votes before even the program ends”.(15).

Another interesting aspect of this campaign was that there was a consensus whether this is a good idea(16). Some people argued that this would allow the Iranian government to identify the supporters of the Green movement. In fact, the person who maintains Mousavi’s Facebook page asked people not to send SMS(17). By then, the campaign was outside of Internet and was spreading through SMS in Iran.

Universal recognition for the movement

If there is one single thing that made the Green Movement on the top of the news was the effectiveness of the activists in getting the news of what was happening outside of Iran and present it to the right audience in the fastest possible manner. Several trends came together to allow this to happen and this might not happen

again any time soon. Many people worldwide started using social networks like Facebook. Journalists and celebrities started using tools like Twitter to stay connected and be cool. Iran was on the top of the news due to the nuclear issue and this raised the profile and importance of the country for news media. Iranian diaspora participated in the election in far greater numbers than previous elections and their disappointment after the election made them active broadcaster of Iran-related news.

Neda's video

Social media provided tools of reporting the news quickly and anonymously. For example, Neda Agha Soltan was killed at 7:20pm Tehran time. The person who took the video sent the video to someone else outside of Iran who posted it on Facebook on 8:53pm. The link to the video was posted once at 9:45pm to Balatarin and was promoted to the front page after getting the required votes by 9:59pm. The video was subsequently posted to youtube on 10:19pm. That video has received 270,000 views on facebook. In less than 3 hours, the video of Neda's death had been broadcasted to thousands of viewers worldwide. As S.E. who was interviewed for this article said "in 80s, thousands of Iranians were killed in the Iranian prisons in a short period of time and to this day that event has got very little publicity, but a good number of atrocities are documented and the Iranian government is forced to come up with explanations for them." In the case of Neda, Iranian government changed his story many times(**18**)(**19**). At first, it claimed Neda has not died in the video and the blood was fake. Later, the Iranian government made a documentary claiming that Neda was assassinated by a woman who ran away from the scene(**20**).

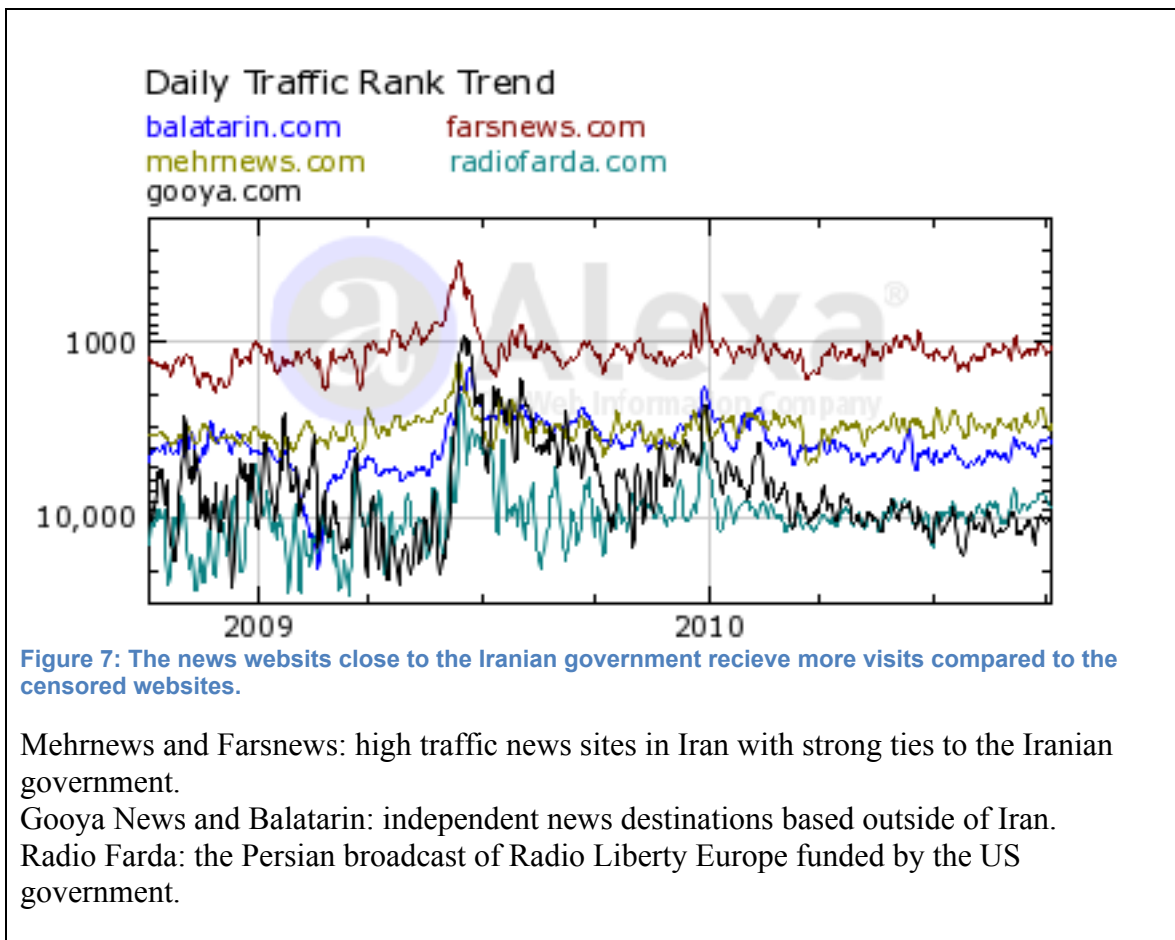
In a similar example, on Dec 26, 2009, in the large protest that took place, a truck-owned by the Iranian security forces drove over a protestor several times(**21**). The video was immediately posted to youtube and was broadcasted to Iran by the satellite TV broadcasts. Iranian government had to come up with an explanation and changed its story three times(**22**).

This shows the speed of reporting combined by video evidence puts significant pressure on the state to explain its actions. If the social media was going to be given a name, it should have been called "mobile video revolution" or "Youtube revolution."

Distributing independent news to Iran

There are no independent TV stations in Iran. Most of the newspaperers are state-owned or belong to pro-government politicians. Prior to the presidential election in 2009, satellite broadcasts by BBC Persian and Voice of America had a wide

reach among the general public. Students, journalists and activists used Internet as their main source of alternative news. Most of the sources on Internet were websites in Persian. Iranian government owned websites still had a lot of visitors compare to the foreign-based Persian websites. For example, Farsnews Agency believed to be operated by the Iranian revolutionary guard has more visitors compared to Gooya news, Jaras or Balatarin.com, which have more anti-Iranian government content. This is due to the Internet censorship.



Prior the Iranian presidential election, Facebook was unblocked and was used heavily by the supporters of Mousavi. Twitter was not popular among Iranians. In fact, Friendfeed, a different Silicon Valley based microblogging platform, was more popular in Iran. Twitter was mainly used by a small number of Iranians—mainly based outside of Iran—to translate news and distribute it among the international audience. The phrase “Twitter Revolution” was interpreted by many as Twitter being used for coordinating the demonstrations. This was never the case. In fact, the value of twitter for coordination in street protests comes from its quick announcements of action to a large number of followers through SMS. SMS system was down from the day of the Iranian presidential election for several weeks. Even though Twitter can be accessed through its web interface on mobile devices, but its user base was so low that this never materialized in

Iran. Chain emails and mass emails were far more effective in sending the time and location of upcoming demonstrations.

Challenges

Censorship and jamming: There is almost no medium that is not affected by the Iranian government censorship or jamming. Internet websites are routinely blocked. SMS could be monitored or blocked at times when the Iranian government feels threatened. Also, satellite TVs could also be jammed.

Building Trust: BBC and VOA are professionally run and often provide good reporting but the facts that they are known to be funded and operated by the UK and US government, they are viewed by some with suspicion. In the case of BBC, the influential role that BBC played during the Iranian revolution by broadcasting Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches from France, has created a lasting suspicion of being a cleric-supporting station among some secular forces in Iran.

Out of context: since TV stations are broadcasted from outside the country by people who have been outside of Iran many years, often the opinions expressed by talk hosts or guests is out of touch with the ordinary Iranians.

Call for action

Many people using the phrase "Twitter Revolution" imagined activists running in Tehran streets, coordinating gathering and demonstrations using their mobile phones. This never happened. As it has been mentioned, there were not that many Twitter users in Iran, and also SMS system was disabled by the Iranian government. However, social media was used in a number of ways to call for action. Social media was used as a way of brain storming ideas and improving these ideas before publicizing them any further.

This mostly took place in blogs and Balatarin. Once these ideas were ready, they were publicized widely by the weekly connected group of activists on blogs, Balatarin, Facebook, Twitter and chain emails. The author knows of at least two group who had built mailing lists with tens of thousands emails and were sending news or action calls to people in Iran. S.V. who was interviewed for this article states that he would receive up to 30 chain emails per day during the summer after election.

Email proved to be the most resilient way of Internet communication. Many of the ideas developed on the web were also broadcasted to Iran by Mohsen Sazegara and Alireza Nourizadeh. They were guests and political analysts of a weekly program on Voice of America. They would discuss the political issues but would not forget to mention the details of the locations.

Most of the protests were planned for the days on which there was already a historical or political anniversary. On these anniversaries, the Iranian government had held pro-government rallies. The Green movement activists planned their

demonstrations on these days to lower the risk of presence in the demonstrations. In many cases, the leaders of Green movement called people to participate in the pro-1979 revolution rallies. Major demonstrations took place on the Qods day (historically an anti-Israel rally), the student day, the university student day, Ashoora (a Shia holy day) and 22 Bahman (the anniversary of the 1979 revolution). These days have been shown in the figure for the timeline of the events.

Online activists impacting the mainstream media

Example: VOA removing Sazegara's program and the online protest

Mohsen Sazegara and Alireza Nourizadeh were guests of a program on Voice of America and was the most viewed program on VOA's Persian broadcasts to Iran. Since Sazegara and Nourizadeh were supporting demonstrators and were announcing what web activists had decided for the next demonstrations, VOA management who did not approve this use of their airtime canceled their program (23). Many online activists were outraged. On websites like Balatarin and Facebook people called on VOA to bring back the program. This protest was primarily web based. It wasn't something that would be discussed in the Iranian newspapers or by competing TV channels. Finally, the program was re-enacted.

Case study: putting pressure on BBC to change their reporting

The last Friday of the month of Ramadan has been called Jerusalem day (Qods day) and has been dedicated by the Iranian government to the annual state-supported anti-Israel demonstrations. In summer 2009, there was a serious crackdown on the protests that occurred after the election and emerging reports of the rapes in the prisons, there was an impression of fear and the Iranian government believed that the demonstrations have died out. Online activists called for Green supporters to show up at the Jerusalem Day and protest the crackdown. This mobilization started several weeks ago and initially did not have any support among the opposition figures in Iran. The Green movement activist called it "The Jerusalem day, the green day of Iran". Many of them were hesitant to use the demonstrations against Israel to protest against Iranian government. Only in the days close to the Qods day, Mehdi Karoubi, one of the opposition leaders, responded to the calls by the online activists (24). Mousavi waited until the last day to announce his participation. By those means, the Qods day's demonstration was an idea that came out of Internet and was mainly spread through the web.

Iranian government disrupted Internet services on the Qods day. In several hours after the demonstration, there were no youtube videos of the demonstration. BBC News published a news article which read:

Reformist opponents of the controversially re-elected President Ahmadinejad seem to have been massively outnumbered by system

loyalists eager to demonstrate their support for the president and his patron, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Balatarin users posted a link with the title “The weird claim of BBC International regarding the low number of the Green movement activists in the demonstration; There is need to send pictures”. This followed with online activists sending the links to pictures and the new videos on youtube to BBC. BBC website updated the article without acknowledging the correction **(25) (25)**:

Thousands of opposition supporters have clashed with security forces during a government-sponsored rally in Tehran.

The Green movement protesters had been present in large numbers and subverted the official demonstration**(26)(27)**. The protests at Qods Day revived the movement. In a way, it changed it from an election protests to a long lasting movement. One source close to the Iranian government who saw this only as social divide, told me that they believe it would take them ten years to regain the trust of half of Iranian who supported Mousavi.

Mousavi was well aware of the significance of the demonstration. He called it a turning point for the movement. He also acknowledges the role of social media in a speech after the demonstration**(28)**:

Today, there has been a network created in the virtual space which acts very efficiently when there isn't other type of media. The social groups acting with in this virtual space are less venerable. The members of these groups have given dynamism to the movement which has made us much more hopeful.

There hasn't been any official call [by the leaders of the movement] for the demonstration for the Qods day, but we witnessed this great demonstration. This was at a time where there have been many, many threats in the past 3 months and many of the families were preventing their children to go [to the demonstrations]. This could have not of been achieved without this [virtual] network.

[From a blog post to 3000 gathering in less than 9 hours](#)

It is hard to find cases in which only social media was involved. In practice, satellite TVs, SMS and word of mouth play an important role. In this particular example, the idea originated on a blog and was publicized through Balatarin. A blogger posted a link on Balatarin suggested people gather in Mohseni Sq in Tehran for a public mourning for Ayatollah Montazeri. In less than 9 hours, people circulated the announcements and about 3000 people gathered**(29,30)** . This example was one of the rare examples where the call originated by an

anonymous blogger, and did not have any other endorsement from the Green movement leaders.

(24)(24)(25) (29,30).

When social media failed the Green movement: The Trojan Horse Strategy

After the large demonstrations during the religious ceremony of Ashoora, the Green movement activists looked forward to the opportunity of the annual demonstration of 22 Bahman in celebration of the revolution of 1979. The annual demonstration starts from the main street in central Tehran and leads to the large Azadi Square (Freedom Square). Ebrahim Nabavi, a well-known Iranian satirist and blogger, suggested that the protestors hide their green signs until they reach Azadi Square. Once there, they would be able to take over the square and disrupt the speech by Ahmadinejad.

Nabavi published his idea on Jaras, one of the green movement news websites. This idea was debated online. Most people thought it to be a good idea. In a poll conducted the day before Feb 11, 2010, 80 percent of visitors of Balatarin said they believe this strategy will succeed(31). Many of the green movement activists compared it to the day in which Chashesco was overthrown.

What happened on Feb 11th, 2009, showed that the Iranian government has long prepared for this event. The streets of Tehran were controlled by the security forces, and people were scared to leave their houses. The supporters of Iranian government were bused in to the main street leading to the Azadi Square. The supporters of green movement who made it to the rally were too spread out and were not able to recognize each other and could form groups of protesters. Iranian government also prevented people to go to Azadi square. Only a select group were allowed in which filled in the front of Ahmadinejad's podium.

A satellite picture taken by Geo Eye(32) taken during the rally showed exactly what had happened. Azadi square was kept mainly empty. A large number of buses could be identified in the picture that had brought the supporters of the Iranian government to the main street leading to Azadi square. The low number of people in Azadi square was an embarrassment to the government. At the same time, the Trojan horse strategy had badly failed. The Iranian government knew the intentions of the green movement supporters well in advance and prepared for the day. In the hindsight, many people realized that the idea wasn't such a good idea and no one had thought about the details and potential reactions by the Iranian government.

As it was proved in this case, the type of existing platforms don't provide a systematic ways of brainstorming or choosing the best ideas. Also the open nature of these platforms allows the adversaries to see the tactics and strategies.

The failed demonstration on Feb 11, 2010 became the last major attempt by the Green movement to protest in the streets.

Human rights campaigns through social media

Majid Tavakoli, a student activist in Iran, was arrested after a speech he made criticizing the Iranian leaders. Fars News Agency claimed that Tavakoli was arrested when he tried to escape in woman clothing. It was evident this had been published to discredit Tavakoli(33). Masih Alinejad, a journalist and blogger, posted an article and asked men to wear headscarf in solidarity with Majid and in protest to the forced Islamic dress code for women in Iran (34). This was posted to Balatarin(35) and became the most voted item of the day and quickly spread to Facebook and other social networks. A blogger also slightly altered the campaign and made it only an action in solidarity with Majid(36). More than 450 men took pictures of them with headscarf and posted it on Facebook in support of Tavakoli(37).

Conclusions

In this article, the main contributions of Internet in the events of the Iranian presidential election are reviewed. In most of the events, Internet was used among other communication tools such as word of mouth, SMS and satellite TVs. Internet lowered the cost of the political participation and protest for the masses. It also proved to be the only place to call for demonstrations on a specific day. In Iran cost of being a member of an opposition party is so high, which would make most people refrain from protesting against Iranian government in an organized way. Internet on the other hand lowered the cost of involvement. The risks of being a member of a Green movement Facebook group or being a member of a mailing list to get the updates from Jaras—a Green movement website—is an acceptable cost to many for making a difference. These loose affiliations have lowered the cost of participations but at the same time can result in confusion when there is a need to deal with the complex issues and tactics, which require better coordination and discipline.

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