

Online social networks and their Impact on Political Participation in Iran

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, the expansion of participation and competition among social groups in political life is one of the major goals of political development. Meanwhile, given the significant changes taken place in the socio-political life of societies, the traditional tools affecting political participation have somewhat weakened. Today, social networking sites are considered as one of the most important types of cyber social networks that affect political participation in various societies. The present article aims to examine the impact of online social networks on the political participation of their users.

Keywords: *social networks, online social networks, conventional political participation, unconventional political participation*

Introduction

Since its inception, the Internet has created a great deal of hope for scholars, so that it can initiate a new stage in political participation of different societies. In fact, the main causes for the emergence of these hopes are as follows: its interactive nature and capabilities (especially after the transition to the second generation of the Web and the emergence of online social networking sites) as a means of interacting with people who could not be linked to one another, its increasing universality that has out-competed the geographical component or spatial distance, as well as the relative inability of states to control its content (Orr. 2007: 2). Regarding the widespread wave of second-generation web technologies over the past decade that social-networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter can be considered as the examples, a new trend of content creation has begun in cyberspace. In these networks, the developers no longer control the content creation process. Instead, the users create content and even change the way of content creation, not intended by the developers of these sites. Then, the users generate new applications for these networks; for example, the networks used for discussing political issues and talking in

the social, religious, economic and other areas. Many politicians also recognize the importance of this new medium, especially those favored by young people, and become members of such networks to publicize their activities and to show themselves more accountable. At present, social networking sites provide a variety of options for their users and support a wide range of interests. In Iran, the penetration rate of the Internet and social-networking sites such as Facebook is increasing rapidly both quantitatively (number of users) and qualitatively (how it is used and the extent of influence). In this article, we are going to discuss the impact of online social networks on political participation in different societies, regarding the nature of the ruling political system. It is assumed that online social networks affect the political participation of their users at different levels and in various forms. Given the impact of online social networks on the users' political participation, the present article arises the question of whether the impact of these networks is the same in different political systems and contexts, or whether the impact of these networks on the political participation of their users varies by different government systems? The main hypothesis of this article is that, despite the similar potential and capacity of social networks, the impact on the form and level of their users' political participation varies by different government systems, and thus, the political system's relationship with social forces. Therefore, we should not underestimate these networks. Talking about the positive relationship between online social networks and political participation will not open any new way.

Research literature

Unfortunately, a few work has been carried out about the impact of online social networks on political participation in our country. However, there are some works about online social networks and, in general, new communication technologies and their impact on different communities, which are mostly translations of non-Persian papers and books. Non-Iranian scholars have written most articles in this field. For instance, a professor at the University of New South Wales, Ellison Orr (Orr, 2007), in a paper entitled "Political Participation and Web 2", examines the impact of the second generation Web on political participation. According to the article, the impact of the second generation web facilities, including social networking sites, has been exaggerated. Orr believes that we cannot follow the optimistic view on the strong impact of Web 2.0 on political participation, in spite of some of the unique features of Web 2.0, including its interactive nature and the content creation by users. Ellison Orr emphasizes the form and nature of network communication in such a way that we cannot speak about its extraordinary impact on political participation. An effective dialogue should be between heterogeneous groups with different perspectives, while it is unfortunate to note that the dialogue between heterogeneous beliefs and groups is not so common in cyberspace. Most online conversations are made between homogeneous with close opinions which cannot tolerate hearing the opposite. The author believes that the second generation web facilities to users can provide ways and opportunities for those who really want to participate. The opportunity to participate doesn't play the main role in political participation, but it is the individual's interest and desire to participate in politics. As a result of a change in the determination of individuals, the second generation web can be used to increase political participation.

Does the Internet encourage and promote democracy? It is the title of a paper written by Wu Jong Shin, professor and head of the University of North Carolina School of Communication (Shin, 2003). In this article, he has evaluated the impact of the Internet and its facilities, in particular, social networking sites, on the promotion of democracy [in which political participation is undoubtedly a key component] through a relatively optimistic perspective. In this article, Shin focused on 2002 presidential election in South Korea. The author believes that the Internet is the first and most recent communication technology that enables interaction in cyberspace. Political parties and candidates have highly regarded the use of this communication device and its facilities since the 1990s. In a survey of South Korean presidential elections in 2002, Shin announced that this election and its final result clearly revealed the impact of the Internet on politics. The president elected, Roh Moo-Hyun, and his supporters were the winners on the network. According to Shin, he became the South Korea's president while his victory did not result from the traditional coalition between the media and political and economic powers. He was called the victorious thanks to the use of Internet facilities and the interaction with people. Hyun published his major administration programs for the country on the Internet and discussed with the public on the network. During the campaign, Hyun received 7,000 emails and managed to collect more than 1 billion dollars from more than 80,000 personal donors. All of these donations and supports were obtained through the Internet and its facilities. "My News" and "Rosamo" websites, which sponsored Hyun, played a key role in his victory. At the end of the article, the author points out that, although the Internet and its facilities have many limitations, it potentially can influence the political activities and encourage people to participate in political affairs. From Shin's point of view, the two distinct features of the

Internet include 1. irregular nature, 2. interactive nature that allows interaction between individuals. These features allow different opinions and voices to be heard.

Facebook promotes political commitment and engagement in political affairs. Three professors at the University of Santa Barbara wrote this article (Feezell et al., 2009). The authors ask whether online groups working on websites and virtual social networks such as Facebook can promote political commitment, engagement in political affairs, and ultimately political participation? They used statistical research to answer this question and select their statistical population from the students. In this research, 450 students were selected as subjects in order to assess the impact of membership in these websites and networks on their political involvement in the 2008 election. Findings of Feezell et al. showed that online political participation of the subjects ultimately ended in the real-world participation. However, another point the authors found in the research was that membership and participation in these sites and social networks did not really affect their political awareness. They believe that Facebook and other social networking sites provide new ways to increase the interconnection of individuals and bridge the gap between users. These new communication technologies, with an interactive nature, promote political participation among their users. Facebook and other similar websites allow the formation of online political groups, and these groups make the most of the benefits and opportunities that face-to-face talks provide. Content analysis of online political groups reveals that they establish political interactions among their members in various ways. An important noteworthy feature is that all actions here are interactive and collaborative, and members have the opportunity to comment on different

issues in various ways. Consequently, it can be said that Facebook and other social networks in cyberspace may play a key role in promoting the involvement of individuals in political affairs and ultimately their political participation. However, the important point by Feezellet al. is that political awareness and political participation are two sides of a coin that should be considered together. At the end of this section, it should be pointed out that, despite studies about the impact of virtual social networks on political participation, this topic has been less studied in Iran.

Conceptual framework

It seems necessary to clarify key concepts underlined in this article. The social network is one of these concepts. In this regard, we need first to provide a clear definition of social networks. There are several definitions of social networks. In a clear and simple definition, social networks include a set of actors (nodes) and their relationships (ties) (Katz, 2004: 3). In another definition, social networks consist of groups of people who communicate voluntarily and enter into common actions. These groups continue to exist through social relationships or shared interests. They can have a formal or informal nature, while common interests that link members of a group are not necessarily political (Zhang, 2010: 76). This definition seems to be more comprehensive than the first one, and it better covers the meaning of social networks. Hence, this definition has been accepted for social networks in this paper. As the concept of a social network is clarified, we can provide a clear definition of online social networks. Online social networks can be considered as network-based services that allow individuals to have their personal or semi-personal profiles within a linked system and communicate with a group of other

users, and also observe their contact list (Boyd & Ellison, 2007: 5). This definition has been accepted and cited by many scholars, so we have also used it as an accepted definition in this research.

Another key concept of this article is political participation. Political participation is a complex and multidimensional conception that any excessive simplification or overlooking its various dimensions will make the findings to be useless. Political participation is an important concept for democratic political systems, and many believe that the health of every democratic system depends on the political participation of its citizens. As with many other commonly used concepts in political science, there are many controversies over the concept of political participation, and there is no consensus on its definition. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics has defined political participation as "engaging in politics," but this definition is very general and vague. Participation can take many forms; from passively watching television news or listening to radio news to voting as the most obvious form of political participation. The concept of participation refers to a wide range of situations and individuals. Political participation has usually been considered only in the election, although it is clear that political participation involves dimensions beyond the scope of election. In fact, different definitions of the wider range of political participation are one of the main reasons for inconsistent results regarding the impact of online social networks on political participation. If we summarize the political participation only in voting, then most of the research regarding the impact of online social networks on political participation (in particular, historically older research) have provided such definition of political participation. Therefore, the likelihood of achieving negative outcomes about the effects of these networks on political

participation is much higher. However, if we consider a wider scope of participation and take into account the diverse dimensions of political participation, the probability of achieving negative and disappointing results will be significantly reduced. Although social networking sites cannot, in many cases, increase the participation of their users in the election, they are likely capable of changing conditions and encouraging their users to many other forms and levels of political participation. Accordingly, political participation in this paper refers to all activities directly or indirectly related to the election of officials or the implementation of public policy (Zhang, 2009: 82). This definition can largely cover the concept of political participation in various dimensions and levels.

Conventional and unconventional political participation: Monroe believes that conventional political participation incorporates participatory actions accepted in the traditions and norms of each country. In contrast, unconventional political participation includes the actions rejected by the norms and traditions of the public (Bourne, 2010; Monroe, 2005). However, the definition accepted by the majority is somewhat misleading. Although the traditions and norms of each society are important in the acceptance of different levels of political participation, these two forms of political participation have some certain characteristics which are accepted in today's age, more or less, in all societies, regardless of social traditions and norms. Actions such as voting, involvement in party activities, and providing financial assistance to the favorite party or candidate are among conventional participation. On the other hand, actions such as protests, demonstrations, sanctions against individuals or companies for political reasons, political strikes, and the blocking or

capture of the streets, street violence, and violent protests are considered as unconventional participatory actions.

Online social networks and political participation

Whenever a new media entered the social life of human beings, there have been many debates among experts about its effects on the political system and political participation. The debates were made on the question of whether the new media can create a dramatic development in the world and, in particular, whether the emerging media can strengthen the political participation among the citizens of different societies? These discussions have been raised since the invention of the telegraph as the first inclusive communication tool. At the time of the invention of the telegraph, some people hope that the telegraph could bring the world peace. However, the telegraph was well used by the parties involved in the two destructive world wars! The same arguments are unanimously debated on the Internet and in particular, online social networks as the product of the second generation web. Some analysts believe that online social networks and the communication facilities in the second generation web have increased the socio-political involvement of individuals and ultimately their political participation, although many are opposed to this view. The debate on the impact of the Internet and social networks on political participation has been controversial between the two pessimistic and optimistic views in the form of reinforcement and mobilization (idealism) hypotheses, respectively.

Reinforcement hypothesis: *Proponents of this hypothesis believe that online social networks and, in general, all new communication technologies support the ruling power and its better distribution, because*

individuals and organizations without authority already active in the political process can control the production, dissemination, and application of these technologies and employ them for their purposes (Apr. 2007: 5).

Some other relied on quantitative research results and argued that most of the people who participate in cyberpolitics have been previously active in the real world. They believe that although cyberspace and social networks provide new opportunities for political participation, the important thing in political participation is not the opportunities for participation, but also the desire, motivation, and personality of people that the cyberspace cannot change them. These groups mentioned the factors affecting the level and quality of political participation such as personality traits of individuals, including introversion and extroversion, and their level of interest in politics. Some, for example, emphasized the role of individual determinants in political participation. Regardless of political orientation, people are only likely to engage in a political game and participate in politics; what is more important in this regard is their belief in the impact of their activity and participation. Citizens who are skeptical about the impact of their actions on the political process do not find it reasonable to participate, even if the context is available for their active participation. In contrast, when individuals believe that they can affect the political system even if the dynamic political participation is not possible, they are likely to pursue and achieve their goals in spite of the risks (Vecchione & Caprara, 2009: 489).

The feeling of political effectiveness by individuals is one of the most influential factors in their political participation. In the view of this group of researchers, the main component of political participation is individual characteristics, neither external nor environmental factors. In general, this group emphasizes three factors as individual characteristics that affect the

political participation: 1. Trust in the political system that Fukuyama required for the stability of democracy; 2. The feeling of political effectiveness and efficiency; and 3. The sense of collective awareness (Borne, 2010: 200).

Apart from the importance of individual factors on political participation, some other researchers who follow the reinforcement hypothesis emphasized the quality of social dialogue on social networks. From their point of view, an effective dialogue is the one between heterogeneous groups with different perspectives, while it is unfortunate to note that the dialogue between heterogeneous beliefs and groups is not so common in cyberspace. Most online conversations are made between homogeneous with close opinions which cannot tolerate hearing the opposite (Orr, 2007: 6).

Mobilization hypothesis: *Contrary to the reinforcement hypothesis, the supporters of mobilization hypothesis or the idealists argue that, in spite of the extensive efforts made by governments as well as the regional and local elites and power holders, modern communication technologies and online social networks have diminished the dominance of power holders on information and communication leading to the prevalence of communications and information in most areas (April 2007: 7). The Internet, by its very nature, provides resources that increase public awareness of the political decision-making process. In terms of external effectiveness, the Internet (and active social networks on it) provides a shield for citizens to bring their voice to the ears of others. The Internet and its facilities provide users with information different from that of other existing media which are employed as a propaganda machine for political and economic powers. This medium is not a "minority for the majority"*

media, like the old mass media. It allows many people to connect with each other thanks to its wide range of influence (Shin, 2003: 12).

In fact, the Internet (especially after the transition to the second generation web and the emergence of online social networks and other multifaceted communication channels) has converted its users from the consumers of the published news to the activists who take part in the production and especially dissemination of news. The users can now influence the decision-making process. In this regard, Stanley and Werr's research showed that network-based discussions have motivated new people to participate in the decision-making process and affect a wide range of topics. The expansion of participation opportunities can reflect different voices and opinions, and thereby transform the range of decision-makers' information (Stanley & Werr, 2003: 34).

According to the supporters of this hypothesis, the importance of these networks is clearly found in closed political systems where the free flow of information comes with many problems. Online social networks provide new ways for individuals, especially young people, to convey information and ideas that are largely out of the governments' control. Online social networks such as personal websites and instant messaging applications provide an easy and accessible way to interact with others and, consequently, facilitate social relationships. They believe that although political systems have the facility to control cyberspace, the interactive nature of the communications on these networks, the horizontal communications and non-hierarchical relations, and the facilities of these networks to escape from the control and surveillance of power holders create an unfavorable atmosphere for the governments and surveillance systems to control political activities of users. Therefore, it is

not possible for the political systems to control these networks and there would be an opportunity to participate more freely and without fear (Kruger, 2005: 443).

Regarding the quality of social communication on the online social networks, some studies came to positive conclusions. For example, Feezellet al. found that online political participation ultimately ends in the real world participation and social networks are successful in mobilizing individuals for political participation (Feezellet al., 2009: 5). As a result, as noted above, researchers who are optimistic to the Internet and online social networks argue that two features of the Internet and social networks have developed a positive and hopeful look at the positive impact of this new communication medium on political participation and the promotion of democracy. These two features are 1. the interactive nature of the Internet, and 2. the irregular or chaotic nature of the Internet and active social networks, which reduces the possibility of strict monitoring of the political actions (Shin, 2003: 14).

From an unbiased perspective, we can say that online social networks and other virtual technologies have a dual function. These networks, on the one hand, can pave the way for mobilizing individuals in participatory actions, even protests and anything called unconventional political participation. On the other hand, they can be applied by political elites and power holders, or political systems, to preserve and even strengthen their political position. We believe that social networks on the Internet in many cases can have a positive impact on increasing political participation. Despite the weaknesses mentioned for the mobilization hypothesis, the present research supports this hypothesis and emphasizes the positive impact of online social networks on political participation (albeit in various ways). The

impact of online social networks on political participation is ambiguous due to the contradictory results obtained in quantitative research. One of the reasons for this ambiguity is undoubtedly in the approach to political participation and its definition. We have assumed in this article that online social networks affect political participation in Iran.

Research on political participation has mainly stated that there are different types of political activity. Makarovich believes that two general types of political participation have been identified so far: conventional and unconventional (Makarovich, 2005: 5). However, there are uncertainties regarding the differences between these two types. Monroe believes that conventional political participation incorporates participatory actions accepted in the traditions and norms of each country. In contrast, unconventional political participation includes the actions rejected by the norms and traditions of the public (Bourne, 2010; Monroe, 2005). As Makarovich claimed, actions such as voting, involvement in party activities, and providing financial assistance to favorite party or candidate are among the conventional participation. Also, actions such as protests, demonstrations, sanctions against individuals or companies for political reasons, political strikes, and the blocking or capture of the streets, street violence, and violent protests are considered as unconventional participatory actions (Makarovich, 2005: 5).

Online social networks and their impact on political participation in Iran

It seems that social networks on the Internet, due to their nature and facilities, have the potential and the ability to influence both types of participation. Regardless of the inherent characteristics of online social

networks that affect their impact on political participation, there are also external factors that influence the way and level of impact. The researchers have emphasized one or more external factors according to their interests and their way of thinking. For example, some studies have focused on cultural differences, such as individualism and collectivism, and their impact on online users' activities (Vitkauskaite, 2010: 845). The potentials of these networks should be considered alongside the external factors. Online social networks have the potential to influence political participation in both conventional and unconventional dimensions. However, it seems that there is a relationship between the use of these networks for conventional or unconventional political participation and the type of political system in different societies.

Various reasons have been mentioned for the unconventional political participation; for example, Monroe emphasizes the deteriorating economic situation and the weak and inefficient social infrastructure, while Fukuyama focuses on the weakness of social capital and the failure of political socialization (Borne, 2010: 200). However, the relationship between unconventional political participation and the health of democracy has been approved by many thinkers and research. In this regard, Dall stated that public protest and opposition is essential for the dignity of democracy and it should not be considered as a threat to the democratic system (Stockemer & Carbonetti, 2009: 242). Nevertheless, if political systems with elective elements, such as the political system in Iran, can look positively at these networks and encourage their users to the political participation, then the possibility of unconventional political actions through these networks will be undermined or at least the activities such as street protests and violent actions that challenges the nature of the

political system will be decreased. Although unconventional political participation in the democratic regimes are continuing their life, the users of online social networks in these systems rarely use them for unconventional political participation and these networks are not an instrument for any activity or propaganda against the political system. Taylor and Hudson formulate another typology of unconventional political participation that seems to be extremely precise and functional. Accordingly, an organized demonstration against a regime, government, leader, or ideology with no physical power is a non-violent unconventional political participation. In contrast, the protesters in violent movements use weapons, the security forces use anti-rebel equipment, and some people are also killed. As a result, non-violent unconventional political actions are within the limits of accepted democratic norms (Stockemer & Carbonetti, 2009: 244). Saunders also made a strict distinction between regime and government and believed that the violent challenges are concerned with the regime, because the use of violence is beyond the legal methods of conflict settlement. On the other hand, since the peaceful challenges (in general) are within the framework of legal methods, these challenges do not represent a challenge to the regime, but also a challenge to the government. Therefore, we can consider violent challenges for the regime and peaceful challenges for the government (Saunders, 2001: 141). Indeed, it seems correct if we regard the Saunders' peaceful challenges as unconventional peaceful participatory actions and address the violent challenges as unconventional violent political participation. Thus, it can be concluded that unconventional peaceful political participation engages the regime not the nature of the political system, while unconventional violent political participation is intended to change the political regime. But as Saunders pointed out, it is necessary to pay attention to the nature of the political system in order to get rid of the

criticisms to this division. Political demonstrations and strikes are supposed to be legal in all systems, which is not true. In cases where demonstrations and strikes are not legally accepted as a means of influencing the decision-making process, then these are considered as a challenge to the regime or the government (Saunders, 2001: 142). In such a situation, such actions are no longer regarded as unconventional peaceful political participation. Finally, in our opinion, the democratic systems have features and potentials that prevent the deepening of unconventional political participation, especially at its high levels. So, these features made the users of social networks not to apply cyberspace facilities with the aim of organizing an unconventional violent political participation which is targeting the nature of the political system, based on the Saunders' division. These features can be summarized as follows: 1. The existence of formal channels for political participation: these channels provide citizens with access to politics and eventually prevent from severe unconventional political participation. This is also reflected in cyberspace and online social networks. Despite the existence of formal channels, users do not necessarily need to use such opportunities for unconventional political participation; 2. Effectiveness and efficiency of participation channels: These channels, often referred to as intermediary institutions (such as parties), need to have a social base and enable citizens to feel the effectiveness of their political participation; 3. The existence of various types of political participation: this discussion was mentioned in the definition of political participation and it became clear that political participation is not limited to voting. Nevertheless, political participation in the pseudo-democratic political systems largely occurs in elections (which in many cases is a show), and the higher levels of participation face resistance and oppression. It is while many types of participation and even weak unconventional actions are

recognized by democracies, and citizens also have the right to protest and strike; 4. Proper distribution of different types of political participation between citizens: This means that there are no restrictions on political participation among citizens for various reasons, including gender (women), ethnicity and religion, so all citizens have full citizenship rights; 5. Great tolerance of democratic systems against unconventional political actions: These systems have different reaction to unconventional peaceful political actions due to their strong popular base. These systems rarely seek to eliminate the protesters in physical and violent manner. However, the elimination and suppression of the opposition is the first way for the pseudo-democratic regimes to overcome the crisis (the above five items were derived from Matej Makarovich's study, entitled "European Patterns of Political Participation," but the explanations are mostly provided by the author). These features dissuade political activists in democracies from unconventional political participation that threatens the life of the political system. Accordingly, online social networks in these systems are mainly used for conventional political participation or peaceful and unconventional protests. As well, these networks are not considered as an instrument for anti-regime for the opposition groups, because individuals and groups can achieve their demands in conventional forms. The events of France in the recent years can approve this claim. Although the French used the Internet and social networks as a means of communication to oppose the increase in the retirement age for expressing their demands and even planning for protests in various sectors, the protests, neither in the streets nor in cyberspace and social networks, didn't go beyond the protest against Sarkozy and Francois Fillon, the French prime minister, and the protest against the law that was eventually ratified. In fact, the nature of the democratic system in France was not

questioned and these protests should be considered as protests against the government and not the regime. This is also true in relation to the wave of protest against immigration laws, especially for Arab immigrants, that changed the appearance of the streets in many French cities. In the midst of protests in the cyberspace, no slogan was heard against the French political system. This is also true about the recent European protests ranging from Portugal to Ireland. Democratic political systems also have a different look at social networks, and generally consider modern communication technologies as an opportunity rather than a threat. Robust democracies have the dream of overcoming the participation crisis by resorting to these networks and other modern communication technologies. In this regard, despite the fact that Iran has not faced a crisis of participation, the positive insight of the system toward online social networks can both increase the political participation and the use of these networks for conventional political participation. However, unfortunately, the negative insight and the attempts to filter these networks have converted them to an instrument for unconventional political participation at some critical periods in Iran. For the approval of this claim, one can point out the results of a quantitative research on students of Tehran University regarding the impact of online social networks on political participation in post-election events. According to the study, about 75 percent of Iranian students expressed their political dissatisfaction with the political system regarding the 2009 Iranian presidential election protests, and about 50 percent of them emphasized their lack of trust in the political system. Most importantly, 79.3% of the respondents emphasized the increased use of online social networks during the election and after the announcement of the results, and 64.4% of the respondents emphasized on the increased impact of social networks after the announcement of the election results

and during the protests. In fact, if the insight toward these networks is positive, then online social networks can be seen as a positive factor in increasing political participation in Iran with regard to the young population of Iran and the rapid penetration of the Internet in different sections of the Iranian society. However, if these networks are supposed to be eliminated, then the potential and positive capacities will ultimately lead to the negative use of unconventional political participation, an issue that emerged after the 2009 presidential election also led to street protests against the regime.

Conclusion

The present article has focused on the impact of online social networks on political participation in Iran. Does the Internet increase political participation? There are two general views on the research carried out in this regard: optimistic (mobilization hypothesis) and pessimistic (reinforcement hypothesis). We support the mobilization hypothesis in this paper, which speaks about the positive role of the Internet and online social networks in political participation. Our answer to the above question is positive, but it is necessary to consider different levels and dimensions of political participation as well as the factors outside the network. This paper emphasizes the viewpoint of the political system as an important external factor, which in part determines the use of social networks. Accordingly, the impact of these networks on the users' political participation in democratic political systems seems to be somewhat different from other political systems. In democracies, by virtue of the elite circulation and the open space for dynamic political participation (at different levels, not just voting), various individuals and groups use these

networks typically for engaging in conventional political activities. If these sites are supposed to be used for unconventional political participation, they are mainly targeted at low and poor levels of unconventional participatory practices. Finally, we concluded that online social networks have the potential to affect the political participation of users, but how they influence varies according to the political system's approach. It is also true in Iran. Undoubtedly, active social networks on the Internet will increase their impact on the users' political participation at a global level in the future, because the number of their users and range of influence is rapidly increasing. It can be clearly stated that the future is in the hand of cyberspace. Also, the use of cyberspace facilities, especially the Internet, will be expanded on a global scale with a fast-paced trend, and this is a path that does not seem to have a turning back.

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