

Introduction

David M. Faris and Babak Rahimi

What has been the effect of the diffusion of social media technologies in the Islamic Republic of Iran? Do applications like Facebook, Flickr, and Vine undermine the grip of the country's authoritarian elite, or does Iran's strategy of creating a system of increasing censorship and surveillance effectively prevent the kind of online organization that threatened regimes across the region during the events of the Arab Spring? To answer this question properly requires a multidisciplinary effort, one that seeks answers beyond elite political struggles that are visible to nearly all observers, and that seeks to situate the study of social media in the particular cultural, social, political, religious, and generational contexts of the Islamic Republic, a country whose place in Western public discourse nearly always exceeds granular knowledge about its people, internal dynamics, and structures. It requires us to see social change and dissent in arenas beyond high politics and to understand Iran not as a closed system of political inputs flowing from top to bottom, but as an arena for digital contestation in venues as diverse as popular films, lifestyle blogs, and social networking sites, and around issues that go far beyond the political structures of the state to include gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion. In this volume, we have brought together a diverse group of scholars with specialized knowledge about the use of social media in Iran in all of its many applications and fields. This is because one of the most persistent problems in seeking to study the impact of the Internet on authoritarian societies is the cordoning off of knowledge in various disciplines from one another. What should be a strength—that sociologists, anthropologists, communications specialists, and political scientists are all working on what is effectively the same set of

problems—becomes a glaring weakness, because most institutional processes reward mastery of one's own discipline only. This volume is thus not just an attempt to understand the role of social media in Iran but also, significantly, an attempt to bridge disciplinary boundaries and to bring the knowledge of different fields to bear on a discrete question.

Social Media and Networked (Counter)publics

Before we proceed to a discussion of Iran and the chapters in this volume, it would be worthwhile to quickly review the state of scholarly knowledge about social media more generally. It is important to note that the study of social media across many disciplines has produced a body of knowledge that would be impossible to summarize in a short chapter, and that our tour here represents merely a smattering of what we see as the most relevant ideas to come out of this field. Over the past ten years, a consensus has emerged across a number of different disciplines that networks and network analysis are key to understanding the function and purpose of social media. Crucial insights from mathematics strongly suggested that the Internet is governed by what are known as “power laws”¹—meaning that a small number of websites get an extraordinary amount of traffic, while the rest—the “long tail” coined by *Wired* editor Chris Anderson—get only a few hits a day, if that. As Hindman argued, this has significant implications for our understanding of the Internet's dynamics.² The United States was perhaps the first country to see the impact of pioneering bloggers on political discourse, where bloggers weighed in on political matters and often clashed with journalists over what to cover and how to cover it.³ While it may be that everyone has a voice in cyberspace, it is not true that every voice is equally amplified. As time goes on, first-movers and elites become increasingly entrenched, and while it is not impossible to break through these barriers, it does mean that the Internet should not be seen as a flat, equal space but rather as riven by dynamics of stratification, wealth, education, and gender, much like the real world.

The use of social media in authoritarian regimes has generally been studied through one of two lenses—either that of collective action or that of enabling dissent or the formation of what Fraser dubbed “counterpublics.”⁴ For theorists of collective action, even in democratic states, social media sometimes helps to resolve common dilemmas of participation such as high opportunity costs, the linking of geographically diffuse individuals with common interests,⁵ and problems of information scarcity. Scholars gener-

ally perceive the difficulties of collective action in authoritarian countries as stemming from a set of interrelated problems, not unlike those in states where free expression is protected but more acute and deeper. First, citizens in authoritarian countries frequently have few legitimate opportunities to express their dissatisfaction with the government, the treatment of groups or individuals, social trends, or public policy more generally. Moreover, it is rarely just that the opportunity for self-expression is not there, but rather that the state will use citizens to report on one another, creating a climate of pervasive fear and mistrust in which individuals will rarely feel secure enough to express their “real” feelings about public issues. Timur Kuran famously dubbed these feelings “private information” that the state feels compelled to control, lest citizens discover that their dissatisfaction is shared widely.⁶ Typically the only way to reveal these feelings, prior to the diffusion of the Internet, was through grassroots organizing and protest—both incredibly dangerous activities for individuals to undertake in states where repressive apparatuses are typically wielded with little compunction.

With social media, however, individuals are encouraged by the very nature and structure of the platforms to share as much information as possible with others—whether that information is public, as with most Twitter accounts, or semi-public, as it is on Facebook and its local competitors. The cumulative results of this revelation of previously private information, as we saw in the Egyptian uprising of January 2011,⁷ can be an information (or informational) cascade—a widespread, seemingly sudden shift in beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors in a single direction.⁸ For large-scale collective actions in authoritarian societies, individuals are much more likely to act if a substantial number of individuals in their social networks do so as well. In the Egyptian case, for example, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians had pledged before January 25, 2011, to protest, which in turn likely altered the willingness of many more individuals to join them.⁹ The substantial role of social media in the Egyptian uprising in particular has been the subject of a number of supportive scholarly inquiries.¹⁰ At the same time, authoritarian regimes have become increasingly aware of the threat posed by digital technologies and have responded with everything from violence against activists to the creation of elaborate architectures of control and surveillance. While shutting down Internet access is a tactic pursued particularly by authoritarian regimes during moments of crisis,¹¹ the toolkit of authoritarian regimes has expanded substantially in recent years. Iran in particular has aggressively pursued total mastery of its digital public sphere.

The default public nature of many social media applications can also influence protest intentionally or unintentionally. Bimber, Flanigin, and

Stohl referred to the intentional consequences as “communality.” As they argued, “*Communality* refers to the public good that is derived from successfully collecting, storing and sharing such information resources among members of some public.”¹² But these kinds of activities require a good deal of intentionality, and the authors identify a category of public goods that they subsume under the idea of “second-order communality.” According to Bimber, “The communal information good now results from largely *uncoordinated efforts*.”¹³ Such activities might include posting to a message board or contributing to a database or store of knowledge. Crucially, the authors argue that many social media activities effectively render collective action theory irrelevant, since they routinely make private-to-public actions (like signing an e-petition) more or less costless to the participant. These points could prove to be crucial in a country like Iran, where participation in (public) collective action might be fraught with danger, and where more ambiguous forms of participation and communality might have similar effects with substantially reduced risks. Furthermore, research from other milieus suggests that enlisting citizens in low-cost online action may increase their likelihood of participating in later, increased high-cost actions, through what is known as the “ladder of engagement.”¹⁴

Seen in this way, social media refers not just to sites such as (micro) blogging, wikis, mashups, video or photo/image-sharing platforms but to a complex set of social practices associated with applications that operate in networked ways. Equally significant is the concept of “social” in “social media,” which integrally underlines a participatory force, an interactive vibrancy with a distinct form of mediated experience for the users as potentially both audiences and producers. Social media technologies thus entail processes of sociability, irrespective of their quality or trajectory, together with how they are perceived and used in shifting contexts. While it remains unclear, as Matthew Allen has argued, how new and revolutionary its applications are, the novelty of social media can be identified as a new set of social practices, ranging from usability, participation, convergence, or design, which may or may not entail political implications.¹⁵ Popularized by its users—in particular free software and open source advocates such as Tim O’Reilly, the founder of publishing house O’Reilly Media, who also popularized the term “Web 2.0”—social media involves complex ways in which people understand or frame their applicability for a “rich user experience.”¹⁶ Through discourses such as “user-generated content” or “platform,” social media carries an implicit reference to an openness paradigm, inclusive and free to all. The rhetoric about social media, in many ways, can be recognized as part of its repertoire of social practices.

Whether social media technologies, however, give relative tactical advantage to activists or their government opponents is a question that has been the subject of robust scholarly debate. A phenomenon that has been dubbed “slacktivism,” many critics contend that digital forms of protest and mobilization are less effective than their grassroots, offline counterparts.¹⁷ Some scholars have challenged the particular importance of social media in the Arab Spring,¹⁸ but the broader debate concerns whether better-funded and better-equipped states will ultimately use digital technologies to impose stricter and more effective forms of surveillance on their populations.¹⁹ Certainly efforts by the embattled regimes of Bashar al-Assad in Syria²⁰ and Vladimir Putin in Russia, as well as the Chinese government’s substantial efforts, suggest that determined regimes can either build parallel networks of supporters on social media or use the state’s power and authority to interfere with the ability of anyone to productively use the technologies to challenge state policy.

But the conception of the Internet as a public sphere has also received pushback.²¹ The most prominent figure from this view is the German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas. In his seminal 1962 book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas demonstrated that the public sphere is a discursive space where critical debates by individuals influence political action based on rational deliberation.²² However, as Habermas has argued, digital communication practices, with the Internet as its most popular representative, do not “automatically” lead to the growth of the public sphere.²³ This is so since the Internet, as a multidirectional communicative domain, cannot produce a set of focused politically central questions for public action, often leading to fragmented “likeminded” associations online. While the new media technology has enabled more people to access diverse information, the messy communicative sphere of the Internet, described by Habermas as “digital noise,” lacks coherency and inclusivity. The Internet is not a reflexive but a confused mode of communication.²⁴

There is also the aspect of political economy. From a practical standpoint, MacKinnon also cautions that the Internet as a free public space requires robust cooperation between national governments, and that corporations have often violated privacy rights.²⁵ Youmans and York argue that “privatized goals of platform owners and developers can conflict with their use as tools for civil society and popular mobilization.”²⁶ Activists who rely on such commercial applications may see their needs and interests subsumed either to financial exigency or state power. Theorists, meanwhile, have accused enthusiasts of digital communication of “ignoring the real (read material) constraints that both enable and prevent it.”²⁷ While some

observers claim that the Internet is “at the forefront of the evolving public sphere,”²⁸ others are skeptical of the depth and deliberative quality of conversations taking place online. Or, as Mark West argues, the Internet has “no more and no less potential to serve as a deliberative component in a public sphere than do other communication media.”²⁹

Yet while acknowledging the limitations of digital public spheres, the chapters in this volume certainly lend credence to the idea that democratic deliberation, mobilization, and advocacy can take place even under extraordinarily intense limitations imposed by an authoritarian regime.³⁰ This is so since the Internet involves some form of creative action. To various degrees, when users participate in creating the media content that they consume, and accordingly distribute and share, they also shape a more inclusive space of interaction, regardless of situational and structural limitations.

However, the Internet’s effect on authoritarian societies goes, therefore, well beyond the headline-grabbing events of large protests and government-toppling. It is also the stuff of dissent-making, contentious politics, and everyday rebellion against enforced orthodoxies. It is also not just about using the technology, but living with it as an embedded feature of nightly/daily life.

In a significant way, connectivity remains a key feature of Internet practice. The Internet makes it possible for groups living in diaspora to maintain ties more closely and routinely with those living in homelands—and even to have significant impact on discourses, strategies, and actions back home.³¹ In many countries, marginalized groups and individuals have been able to form “counterpublics” in order to rectify their exclusion from the public sphere. For countries like Iran, where substantial numbers of ethnic Iranians live abroad, social media technologies have a clear utility for uniting activists and dissenters in diasporic communities in the West with citizens in Iran. It has also given people from marginalized communities—women, gays, religious minorities, among others—the opportunity to comment on public affairs, to form groups and networks, and to press their demands on the state.

Outline of the Volume

With the aim to sketch out the shifting contours of a social media landscape, this volume provides an overview of the ways in which Iranians based in various localities build complex relations that reshape their lived environments and, accordingly, give rise to new possibilities for networked action.

We offer a collection of empirical and theoretical studies that underline the complexity and diversity of actions in which social media technologies have a multidimensional presence. While changes of socially mediated action in diverse settings is analyzed from various disciplinary perspectives, the authors demonstrate the need to recognize social media as a dynamic process (hence the book's title) that results from participatory interactions that arise from human agency. Such a frame of analysis, involving an understanding of audiences as content creators who operate along lines that are flexible and fluid, underlines what the French cultural theorist Pierre Lévy defines as "collective intelligence"—that is, distributed social intelligence that is perpetually generating the extent of human interaction.³²

The book's fourteen chapters, though not comprehensive in ambition, focus on three key theoretical perspectives. First, as in-depth accounts of the complex dimensions of the Internet's penetration in everyday life, the chapters collectively evaluate social media in the context of globalizing communication practices seen in changing geopolitical settings. In a significant way, they look at how both state and nonstate actors, including diasporic communities, creatively and contentiously engage with social media processes to communicate, disseminate, and consume information for diverse purposes. Second, the chapters explore the increasing role of the Internet in the way individuals interact to build networked communities online with offline implications. The case of the 2009 Green Movement provides one among many other examples of how Iranians based both inside Iran and abroad blur the lines between information, networked communication, and collective solidarity. Third, the chapters reflect an interdisciplinary perspective to rethink the relationship between communication and society, and the intricate ways that convergence of media is making significant transformations in various spheres of life in a country like Iran.

Our focus on Iran is not meant to exoticize a unique Middle East case study, but to critically examine the social media landscape of a so-called "developing" country, undergoing major changes in the broader context of global communication processes. The view adopted is that contemporary Iran is far more multifaceted and interconnected in consequence to transnational processes that entail shifting relations between normative structures and mediated affects, between identity and politics, between self and reality. While regional specialists may find studies on specific themes useful, the aim of this volume is to provide broad narratives of actor-based conceptions of media technology, an approach that focuses on the experiential and social networking processes of digital practices in the information era, extended beyond cultural specificities. Technosocial analysis of contemporary Iran thus

recognizes the role of agency in the technological context within which social change takes place in contentious ways. Such analysis advances a set of perspectives that essentially understand technology and society in terms of mutually shaping processes.³³

These perspectives are studied within a three-part framework of society, politics, and culture, though with some degree of overlap. Part I of the volume looks at societal processes. The section begins with an essay on social capital and the Iranian social media. In this study, Jari Eloranta, Hossein Kermani, and Babak Rahimi argue that emerging social media such as Facebook are providing new social networking opportunities and alternative collective interactive domains for Iranians of diverse backgrounds, based in different localities, to build social capital, defined in their study as the dense network of social relations built around conceptions and practices of trust and support. Yet social media as a “many-to-many interactive” medium is a multilayered and permeable form of computer-mediated communication, and accordingly, its impact on offline domains of Iranian life or beyond is ambiguous and multidirectional.

In Chapter 2, Elham Gheytauchi expands on the gender dimension of social media with a focus on how gender relations and identities undergo change in popular sites such as blogs and Facebook. As Gheytauchi shows, social media is providing a distinct sphere of cooperation between diasporic communities and women inside Iran to build alternative network ties and defy state norms of gender relations and identities in everyday offline domains. Social media sites such as Facebook are not just places for social interaction but contested spaces where normative discourses such as motherhood and womanhood are rearticulated through national and transnational ties.

The discussion of the role of social media in the empowerment of marginalized groups is continued in Chapters 3 and 4, in which Abouzar Nasirzadeh and Kobra Elahifar offer in-depth analysis, backed by empirical evidence, about the ways in which gay and disabled Iranians use social media to express and make themselves visible to local and global publics. In his study, Nasirzadeh argues that online sites are carving out experimental spaces where gay Iranian men form new relations and construct alternative images of self in a positive light, thus challenging “heteronormativity.” Increasing Internet penetration and growing civic engagement of the diasporic homosexual community have enabled Iran-based gay communities to become more visible, though more research is required to better understand diverse activities of gay Iranians, particularly among the lesbian community online.

Elahifar's essay focuses on another marginal community, disabled Iranians, which is subject to social exclusion primarily due to normative conceptions of the body rather than sexuality. In her study, Elahifar shows how disabled Iranian men and women based in Iran use social media, in particular blogs, to make themselves present as active individual members of contemporary Iranian society. She argues that through blogging practices disabled Iranians employ the individualized notion of "voice" to insert themselves online and forge new identities and practices of visibility for social recognition offline. Both Nasirzadeh's and Elahifar's works confirm the argument advanced by Zizi Papacharissi that activities that were once significant in the public domain are increasingly performed in the private sphere, where connections link "the personal with the political, and the self to the polity and society."³⁴ The private sphere exerts power within the frame of digital practices of public life.

In Chapter 5, the first chapter of Part II, on politics, Marcus Michaelsen offers an account of the role of the Internet in the reformist period (1997–2005). He focuses on the reformist journalists who identified the new medium as an alternative to print media, which by the late period of Mohammad Khatami's presidency had increasingly come under pressure by the conservative-dominated judiciary and state security apparatus. According to Michaelsen, prior to the 2009 elections, reformist Iranians, as some of the most politically active members of the Iranian society, had already developed vibrant online "counterpublics" that not only affirmed a new dissident political identity, but also challenged state ideology and bolstered offline civic support for reform. By the early 2000s, such vibrant publics had become active on the blogosphere, the topic of Chapter 6. In their essay on Persian blogs, Arash Falasiri and Nazanin Ghanavizi continue the discussion on dissident (online) publics and argue that blogs, as distinct social media sites, have provided a new public sphere for self-expression and, more important, for "the formation of public opinion." Following Hannah Arendt's notion of the public sphere as a site of political action and discussion, Falasiri and Ghanavizi argue that the Internet provides an alternative dialogical forum for political activism, in which even state actors are involved to promote state interests and compete with dissidents.

The use of social media for political mobilization is the focus of Mohammad Sadeghi Esfahlani's contribution in Chapter 7. Sadeghi Esfahlani provides a theoretically rich study of how Facebook was used by the Green Movement, a protest movement that emerged after allegations of electoral fraud in the June 2009 presidential elections in Iran. As an activist and also the founder of Mir-Hossein Mousavi's official Facebook site,

Sadeghi Esfahlani advances a unique argument that social media shapes social capital, following the sociological work of Mark Granovetter, through the bridging of diverse clusters of “weak ties” to build cooperative action and bring about change in politics.³⁵ Through framing practices, social networks construct collective action and contentious identities that, in turn, empower social movements to reshape political reality. Toward the end of his chapter, Sadeghi Esfahlani draws attention to his personal online activism. He shows how the Facebook site he designed for Mousavi’s camp, while residing outside of Iran, facilitated the organization of rallies for electoral campaign, mobilization of street protests after the elections, and circulation and consumption of alternative news that would be censored by Iran state media or not made available by Western media.

In Chapter 8, Reza Masoudi Nejad offers an alternative discussion on the role of social media in the postelection protests. While his essay studies the close relationship between Web 2.0 and the geography of postelection protests, it argues that “the trans-local network of the Iranian diaspora” played a far more important role than social media. Defining the Green Movement in terms of “trans-spatial” fields of activism, Masoudi Nejad looks closely at the Iranian diasporic communities around the globe, and underscores how social media played merely a communication channel rather than a defining role for the diasporic communities to connect with Iran and influence the “geography of protests.” At the heart of the 2009 Green Movement was the kind of collective action that primarily operated through trans-spatial domains of interaction, with social media playing only a part in the process. Politics on social media became meaningful only through concrete social interaction, in which the diasporic communities played a far greater role than often assumed.

In chapter 9, Babak Rahimi and Nima Rassooli move away from the online formation of political dissidents to the contentious politics of internal struggles and competitions within Persian-language social media domains. The chapter focuses on the popular collective blog site Balatarin and addresses the way political idealism can become undermined as a result of exclusionary practices through the intervention of gatekeepers and contentious politics. Despite its original ambitions to provide a free platform for all Iranians to voice opinion and create an online democratic forum, in the postelection period Balatarin evolved into an increasingly exclusionary site where opposition activists could interact for social and political purposes. Politics in its everyday contentious reality also prevails in social media.

Chapters 10 and 11 turn our attention to the Internet’s communication networks and state power. David Faris’s chapter provides a compara-

tive study between Egypt and Iran and offers an overview of the online contentious politics and, correspondingly, reactions from the state to control dissent. While social media did contribute to Egyptian and Iranian social movements, it did so, Faris argues, in dissimilar structural ways and in different political contexts with divergent consequences. He provides a typology of state reaction in terms of (1) response regimes—regimes that imprison or persecute online activists, (2) control regimes—regimes that impose regulative measures such as filtering over the Internet, and finally, (3) cordon regimes—regimes that construct a “parallel set of social media and information sites” in order to defuse the impact of dissident sites. According to Faris, the Mubarak-era state in Egypt was a response regime, and therefore less creative in its reaction to the protesters and use of social media, while Iran represents a type of cordon regime that successfully and creatively stifled dissidents through social media.

In Chapter 11, Niki Akhavan further analyzes the uses of social media by state power. Since 2009, the Islamic Republic has engaged in policies and strategies that employ social media as a way to challenge a perceived cultural invasion to undermine its legitimacy. With the rhetorical charge of a brewing a “soft war,” the Iranian state has sought to control the Internet by proactively producing pro-government material online, information that can ultimately bolster the legitimacy of the state. Akhavan’s analysis focuses on the official rhetoric of values, purity of national culture, and “content production” for sanctified information with the aim to manufacture consensus in favor of state control over online domains. Though the rhetoric and practice of “soft war” has decreased since 2011, Akhavan underlines the significant role of state media policy to manage the ways in which Iranians engage with the social media for various purposes.

Chapter 12, the final chapter in Part II, serves as a transition to Part III, which comprises Chapters 13 and 14. In all three chapters, however, the authors map the relationship between cultural practices and the use of social media as a distinct digital technology. Taking the cultural dimension as their main frame of analysis, the authors in their studies also acknowledge the political potential of a new communication process in the context of Iranian sociopolitical life.

In Chapter 12, Samira Rajabi shows the multifaceted political dimensions involved in the online practices revolving around the death of Neda Agha-Soltan in the post-2009 elections. She argues that the death of Neda was redefined in the memorial practices of a rich online culture of symbols and visuals of a noble death, depicted through a fallen female body. In many ways, social media served as a political site of remembrance where cultural

identity, based on national and transnational ties, could be reimagined in cultural memory. Remediation of Neda's martyrdom image through Facebook, YouTube, and other social media sites, in a sense played a critical role in reframing Iranian national identity through the trauma of the 2009 postelection crisis.

In Chapter 13, Michelle Langford, a film and media theorist, looks at Iranian cinema as a contested cultural site, where filmmakers have defined and defied boundaries of censorship and expression in creative ways. The emergence of social media on the Iranian cultural scene in the 2000s, particularly since the 2009 elections, has introduced a new vibrancy in audience and producer relations. Following Henry Jenkins, an American media scholar, Langford discusses cinema and media convergence processes as the merging of media technologies as a result of digitization and computer networking. In this dynamic media landscape, Langford addresses the increasing interdependence of old and new media as a way to resist media regulations beyond state institutions, and toward new engagements with civic activism for both Iranian and global audiences. What has emerged in the process is an increased potential for interactivity and participatory practices for creating and sharing content marked by changes in the relationship between existing audiences, genres, and technologies with global significance.

Jafar Panahi's *This Is Not a Film* (2011), Langford argues, exemplifies a new form of cinematic experience that articulates political discontent in practices and visuals of the everyday Internet culture, as it also deliberately employs media convergence in its narrative and structural strategy. In many creative ways, *This Is Not a Film* blurs the boundaries between old and new media and reconstructs an alternative mediated landscape of contentious character. Likewise, in Chapter 14, the book's final chapter, Staci Gem Scheiwiller also identifies creative processes. She shows that the digitization of the Iranian avant-garde in various social media platforms is less about subversive activities against the Islamic Republic and more about challenging the art market and gallery establishments in Iran and beyond. Following Walter Benjamin's critical theory of media art, Scheiwiller's study of online Iranian aesthetic practices provides an account of social media as an alternative platform that could potentially liberate art from elitism and institutional constraints.

The main theme running through this book is that social media, despite its limitations, foregrounds distinct forms of social dynamics that link human action with new technologies. While all the chapters in this volume address the theme of inclusion and expressivity in some ways, they offer only a glimpse into the vast and fast-paced social media cultures of Iran

and beyond. Numerous other social media spheres of interaction yet remain to be studied, in particularly religion and the way it is negotiated through technology in everyday life. However, we hope that this volume, which contains contributions primarily from an emerging group of young scholars who have done innovative empirical and theoretical research on social media, can pave the path toward new understandings of local, regional, and global communication processes in the new age of digital media.

Notes

1. Duncan Watts, *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003); Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means for Business, Society, and Everyday Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).
2. Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
3. Scott Rosenberg, *Say Everything: How Blogging Began, What It's Becoming, and Why It Matters* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010).
4. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracies," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992): 109–142.
5. Clay Shirkey, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (New York: Penguin, 2008).
6. Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44.1 (October 1991): 7–48.
7. David Faris, *Dissent and Revolution in a Digital Age: Social Media, Blogging and Activism in Egypt* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013).
8. Sushi Bikchandani, David Hirshleifer, and Ivo Welch, "A Theory of Fads, Fashion, Custom and Cultural Change as Informational Cascades," *Journal of Political Economy* 100.5 (1992): 991–1026.
9. Faris, *Dissent and Revolution in a Digital Age*.
10. Sahar Khamis and Katherine Vaughn, "Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution: How Civic Engagement and Citizen Journalism Tilted the Balance," *Arab Media and Society* 13 (Summer 2011): <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=769>; Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson, "Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations from Tahrir Square," *Journal of Communication* 62.2 (April 2012): 363–379; Merlyna Lim, "Clicks, Cabs and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004–2011," *Journal of Communication* 62.2 (April 2012): 231–248; David Faris and Patrick Meier, "Digital Activism in Authoritarian Countries," in *The Routledge Participatory Cultures Handbook*, eds. Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (Routledge: New York, 2012): 195–205; Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, "The

Role of Digital Media,” *Journal of Democracy* 22.3 (2011): 35–36; Christopher Wilson and Alexandra Dunn, “Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Datasets,” *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1248–1272; Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, and Deen Freelon, “Blogs and Bullets II: New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring,” *United States Institute of Peace* (2012): 1–24.

11. Philip N. Howard, Sheetal D. Agarwal, and Muzammil N. Hussain, “When Do States Disconnect Their Digital Networks? Regime Responses to the Political Uses of Social Media,” *Communication Review* 14.3 (2011): 216–232; 226.

12. Bruce Bimber, Andrew J. Flanigin, and Cynthia Stohl, “Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment,” *Communication Theory* 15.4 (November 2005): 365–388. See also Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprisings: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs, 2012).

13. Bimber et al., “Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment,” 372.

14. David Karpf, “Online Political Mobilization from the Advocacy Group’s Perspective,” *Policy and the Internet* 2.4 (December 2010): 7–41.

15. Matthew Allen, “What Was Web 2.0? Versions and the Politics of Internet History,” *New Media and Society* 15.2 (2012): 260–275. For other critiques of social media, see Trebor Scholz, “Market Ideology and the Myths of Web 2.0,” *First Monday* 13.3 (2008), n.p., and Christian Fuchs, *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

16. For a definition of Web 2.0 by O’Reilly, see Tim O’Reilly, “Web 2.0: Compact Definition,” http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2005/10/web_20_compact_definition.html (accessed December 15, 2014).

17. Malcom Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, 42.

18. Gadi Wolfsfeld, “Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics Comes First,” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 18.2 (2013): 115–137.

19. For the most comprehensive iteration of this thinking, see Evgeny Morozov’s *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012).

20. William Lafi Youmans and Jillian York, “Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements,” *Journal of Communication* 62.2 (2012): 315–329.

21. Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 24.4 (2007): 7–30.

22. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

23. See Habermas’s interview by Markus Schwering, “Internet and the Public Sphere: What the Web Can’t Do,” July 24, 2014, www.resetdoc.org. For a broader analysis of Habermas’s theory of the public sphere in the information age, see Pieter

Boeder, "Habermas' Heritage: The Future of the Public Sphere in the Network Society," *First Monday* 10.9 (September 2005): <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1280/1200> (accessed December 16, 2014).

24. For a comprehensive examination of critical literature on the Internet's public sphere, see Lincoln Dahlberg, "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic: From Consensus to Contestation." *New Media and Society* 9.5 (2007): 827–847.

25. Rebecca MacKinnon, *Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

26. York and Youmans, "Social Media and the Activist Toolkit," 316.

27. Elisabeth Chaves, "The Internet as a Global Platform? Grounding the Magically Levitating Public Sphere," *New Political Science* 32.1 (March 2010): 25.

28. Peter Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres and Political Communication," *Political Communication* 22 (2005): 158.

29. Mark West, "Is the Internet an Emerging Public Sphere?" *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 28.3 (2013): 155–159; 158.

30. See, in particular, Chapter 6 for a more articulated conception of the Internet and the public sphere by the contributing authors.

31. Jennifer Brinkerhoff, *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

32. Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (New York: Plenum, 1997), 13. See Chapter 13 for a more elaborate discussion on "collective intelligence."

33. See Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, eds., *The Social Shaping of Technology*, 2nd ed. (Buckingham, England, and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999).

34. Zizi Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 164.

35. See Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78.6 (1973): 1360–1380.