

OPPOSITIONAL POLITICS AND THE INTERNET IN IRAN:  
A VISUAL SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF IRANIAN GREEN  
MOVEMENT'S WEBSITES

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENT'S FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR  
OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA  
KUALA LUMPUR

2016

# UNIVERSITI MALAYA

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Title of thesis: Oppositional Politics and the Internet in Iran; A Visual Semiotic Analysis of Iranian Green Movement's Websites

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## ABSTRACT

The new information and communication technologies, especially, the Internet as a contested terrain or site of struggle, have played an important role in the mediation of cultural and political struggles in Iran. The goal of the study is to illustrate ways in which the Internet is utilized by the Iranian Green Movement activists to advance their cultural and political struggles. To this end, the study focuses on how and whether the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movement activists for promotion of their political and cultural struggles with special attention on the cognitive function of the Internet on alternative forms of culture and information production for representation and reconstruction of collective identity, the logistic function of the Internet to increase public participation, organization and mobilization of protest, tactical function of the Internet for direct expression of their political struggles, and development of alliance and solidarity between movement activists to facilitate the movement's collective struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's oppressive policies. The thesis methodology deploys Roland Barthes's semiotic model for visual semiotic analysis of the website home pages and visual texts of the Iranian Green Movement. Roland Barthes's semiotics perspective has three levels of signification. The first (denotative) order of signification is seen as primarily representational and relatively self-contained. The second (connotative) order of signification reflects "expressive" and cultural values that are attached to a sign. In the third (mythological or ideological) order of signification, the sign reflects major culturally variable concepts underpinning a particular worldview—such as Islamic domination, totalitarianism, dictatorship, tyrannies and violence, absolutism, Islamic sexual torture and violence and so on. The finding of the thesis shows the Internet contributes to different conditions that establish movement formation; promotion and dissemination of alternative forms of cultures, information, and meaning; representation and reconstruction of collective identity; and

organization and mobilization of mass demonstrations, and direct expression of political struggles of oppositional movement activists. The thesis concludes that the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for the promotion of their political interests and agendas, which contribute to a progressive cultural and political struggle that helps to reproduce their alternative form of cultures and identities and focus their political struggle while facilitating their oppositional political movements to seriously challenge the status quo culture and politics. But, the Iranian Green Movement activists do not use full potential of the Internet and websites for promotion of their political struggles.

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## ABSTRAK

Memandangkan Internet menjadi kawasan yang pertandingan atau laman perjuangan, teknologi baharu komunikasi telah memainkan peranan yang penting dalam pengantaraan perjuangan budaya dan politik di Iran. Tesis ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis semiotik visual penggunaan Internet pembangkang oleh aktivis Gerakan Hijau Iran untuk mempromosikan perjuangan budaya dan politik mereka terhadap dasar-dasar negara Republik Islam Iran yang teokratik dan menindas. Matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk menggambarkan cara Internet digunakan oleh aktivis Gerakan Hijau Iran untuk memajukan perjuangan budaya dan politik mereka. Pada penghujungnya, kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada bagaimana dan adakah Internet boleh digunakan oleh aktivis Gerakan Hijau Iran untuk menggalakkan perjuangan politik dan budaya mereka dengan memberi perhatian khusus kepada fungsi logistik Internet dalam meningkatkan penyertaan orang ramai, organisasi dan pergerakan protes, fungsi kognitif Internet dalam membentuk budaya alternatif dan pengeluaran maklumat, perwakilan dan pembinaan semula identiti kolektif, fungsi taktikal Internet untuk bersuara secara langsung berkenaan perjuangan politik mereka, pembangunan persekutuan dan perpaduan antara aktivis gerakan untuk memudahkan perjuangan pergerakan itu terhadap polisi menindas negara Republik Islam yang teokratik itu. Tesis ini mengguna pakai model semiotik Roland Barthes untuk menganalisis visual semiotik laman web utama Gerakan Hijau Iran. Perspektif semiotik beliau mempunyai tiga peringkat signifikan. Yang pertama (denotatif) tahap signifikan yang dilihat sebagai perwakilan yang utama dan agak lengkap. Kedua (konotatif) tahap signifikan yang mencerminkan nilai-nilai "ekspresif" dan budaya yang melekat pada simbol. Yang ketiga (mitos atau ideologi) tahap signifikan, iaitu simbol mencerminkan konsep pemboleh ubah budaya utama yang menyokong suatu pandangan tertentu seperti penguasaan Islam, totalitarianisme, pemerintahan diktator, kezaliman, kesetiaan mutlak,

penderaan seksual dan keganasan Islam dan sebagainya. Hasil tesis menunjukkan bahawa menyumbang kepada keadaan berbeza yang menubuhkan pembentukan pergerakan; promosi dan penyebaran bentuk budaya alternatif, maklumat, dan makna; perwakilan dan pembinaan semula identiti kolektif; dan organisasi dan pergerakan demonstrasi besar-besaran, pembangunan kerjasama, perpaduan antara aktivis gerakan sosial, dan penyampaian secara langsung perjuangan politik aktivis pergerakan pembangkang. Tesis ini menyimpulkan bahawa Internet telah digunakan oleh aktivis gerakan pembangkang Iran untuk mempromosikan kepentingan dan agenda politik mereka, yang menyumbang kepada perjuangan budaya dan politik progresif yang membantu untuk mengeluarkan budaya alternatif mereka dan identiti dan tumpuan perjuangan politik mereka di samping memudahkan pergerakan politik pembangkang untuk mencabar dengan serius status quo budaya dan politik mereka.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would have never happened without the assistance of several individuals and groups and the continual support of the University of Malaya, the Art and Social Science faculty, and the Media Studies Department. In addition, there was help and advice of a great many colleagues, friends, and skilled professionals. I would like to first thank my thesis committee, who provided advice and sound critiques at our meetings, which created a stronger work and offered prompt insights and good-spirited encouragement at key points in the process. I owe much appreciation to my esteemed former supervisor, assistant professor Dr. Abou Hassan Hasbollah, for his sincere guidance and the invaluable suggestions, encouragement, and scholarly advice he provided throughout the duration of my doctorate program at the University of Malaya. I would sincerely like to thank my supervisor, Associate Prof. Dr. Hamed Bin Mohd Adnan for his guidance and support throughout my writing. Simply put, his comments, questions, and gentle prodding made my work better. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my co-supervisor, emeritus professor Abdullah Bin Hassan, for his constant guidance and invaluable suggestions, encouragement, and scholarly advice and support during my study and research at the university.

I would like to thank Professor Douglas Kellner for his careful reading of the first chapter of the thesis and for his thoughtful feedback and conversations that encouraged me to continue this topic. I am also thankful to the dean of faculty of the Art and Social Sciences and the leadership of the University of Malaya for giving me opportunity to study at this unique university. My thanks also go to the administrative staff of the faculty of the Department of Arts and Social Sciences and the Department of Media Studies, namely Mses. Ruhani, Vignishree, Rozita, Sham, and Hizen for their administrative assistance rendered to me during my doctorate study. I also wish to thank all the employees who offered their time to help complete my dissertation.

Special thanks is reserved for my father and mother in law, my wife and daughter and my family who have supported me in so many different ways over the last few years both financially and with sustenance of the mind. Obviously, the above individuals and institutions are in no way responsible for the errors in judgment and facts found in this thesis. Much of the eventual success of this dissertation research project is the result of the efforts, ongoing support, and encouragement of all these people.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HCI	Human Computer Interaction
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IRGM	Iranian Green Movement
IRIG	Islamic Republic Of Iran's Government
IT	Internet Technology
MMDW	Military Mass Destruction Weapons
NCT	New Computer Technology
NICT	New Information and Communication Technology
NSM	New Social Movement
PMOI	People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran
POS	Political Opportunity Structure
RM	Resource Mobilization
RMT	Resource Mobilization Theory
RSS	Rich Site Summery
SM	Social Movement
SMO	Social Movement Organization
WWW	World Wide Web

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

New information and communication technologies (NICTs), especially the Internet, can be used by oppositional movements for promotion of their cultural and political struggles against totalitarian systems and authoritarian states (Downey & Fenton, 2003; J. Downing, 2008; Kellner, 1999b; Pickerill, 2006; Warf & Grimes, 1997). The oppositional politics refers to the public collective challenge against the totalitarian state's hegemonic and oppressive policies and cultural codes (Ayres, 1999; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2003; Tilly & Tarrow, 2008).

The Internet is revolutionary changing public political communications and interactions with totalitarian states. The social affordability of the Internet extended public political participation and interactions so that excluded and oppositional groups can participate in political activities. The Internet has been defined by DiMaggio et al. (2001) as the electronic network that links people and information through computers and other digital devices allowing person-to-person communication and information retrieval. As Kahn and Kellner (2005) put it, "The Internet constitutes a dynamic and complex space in which embodying reconstructive models of citizenship and new forms of political activism, even as the Internet itself, reproduce the logic of capital and becomes co-opted by hegemonic forces" (pp. 1-2). The Internet has created virtual space and environment in which citizens and communities can interact as a tentative form of "self-determination" and "control from below" so that they represent important oppositional forms of agency in the ongoing struggle against domination and oppression for freedom, social justice, and a more participatory democracy.

According to Kahn and Kellner (2004), the Internet as a contested terrain or site of struggle has created complex and dynamic space where “dumb mob” citizens have been transformed to smart mob citizens who challenge inequality, discrimination, and injustice, and struggle for a more direct democracy. Furthermore, the ICTs have facilitated production and dissemination of the alternative forms of culture, information, and meaning for representation and reconstruction of collective identities. Moreover, the ICTs have facilitated the organization of new social and political movement activities and the mobilization of mass demonstrations. Finally, the ICTs can be used as a site for the development of alliance and solidarity between social movement activists and the promotion of their collective struggles against the dominant system.

The Iranian oppositional movement activists have also used the Internet technologies for the promotion of their cultural and political struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian Green Movement emerged after the highly controversial result of Iran’s 10th presidential election of June 12, 2009. Individuals who objected to the officially announced results went to the streets and protested against what they perceived to be electoral fraud (Golkar, 2011, p. 54). “The Green Movement” (Jonbesh-e-Sabz), “Green Wave,” and “Green Revolution” are all terms used by researchers to describe the new political movement that formed in Iran after the June 2009 disputed presidential election” (Golkar, 2011, p. 54). The protests were the most supported demonstrations against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state after the Islamic revolution, which challenged the Islamic republic of Iran’s regime (Khosronejad, 2011, p. 154). By deployment of the Internet technologies, the Iranian Green Movement activists have mediated and circulated their political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran election policy. These activists have seriously challenged the culture and political status quo for the sake of progressive social-political changes and their citizen democratic rights.

Parallel to Kahn and Kellner's (2004) perspective, the main argument of the present thesis is that the Internet as a contested terrain, site of conflict, or an alternative media can be used by oppositional movements for the promotion of their interests and concerns. In this regard, the oppositional deployment of the Internet by a wide variety of Iranian citizen activists and oppositional groups has caused progressive cultural and political struggles, and helped them reproduce their alternative forms of cultures, information, and meaning for representation and reconstruction of collective identities. Moreover, this deployment has intensified their political struggles and facilitated oppositional political movements that seriously challenged the cultural and political status quo. In other words, it would be argued that the new information and communication technologies have mediated and circulated the Iranian Green Movement activists' cultural and political struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state and seriously challenged its cultural and political status quo.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's state developed the Internet in Iran. As Sohrabi-Haghighat and Mansouri (2010) put it, "In Iran, the introduction of the Internet was initiated by the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics in 1992 and remained an academic tool until 1997 when it started to be extended to government organizations, industries and the service sector"(p.25). Sohrabi-Haghighat and Mansouri (2010) also noted that the Islamic government has implemented a few national programs such as e-government initiatives (Iran Civil Society Organizations (ICSOs) Training and Research Centre 2005) and the National Information and Communication Technology Agenda (TAKFA; [www.takfa.ir](http://www.takfa.ir)) to develop the infrastructure of the Internet. From that day forward, the Internet has become an increasingly important means in cultural and political struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the past twenty years, the new

information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, have been extended in Iran. Today, there are hundreds of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Iran. Furthermore, “the technological industry in Iran is bustling with the private sector to promote commercial and social uses of the Internet despite its high costs” (Karagiannopoulos, 2012, p. 154). According to Rahimi (2007), Tehran as the capital of Iran had 1,500 Internet cafés in 2009. Thus, Iran has been regarded as one of the leading countries in the Middle East in terms of the number of Internet cafés per major metropolitan area. Additionally, Sohrabi-Haghighat and Mansouri (2010) contend there are currently 50,000,000 mobile phones and 25,220,000 land line phones in the country. According to Asemi (2006), around 43,000 villages have been connected to the Internet in Iran.

Along with the Internet technology extension in Iran, the number of Internet users is also rapidly increasing. According to the World Wide Web, “the numbers of the Internet users, have rapidly increased from 250,000 users in 2000 to 42,000,000 users [in Iran] in 2012 (For more information see <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>). It means that around 46.7% of the Iran’s population used the Internet, with 53.3% penetration, per IWS and 2.42 Mbps Broadband download speed, per Net Index in, 2012.” The report shows that the number of Iranian Internet users has dramatically increased by 19,200% in less than twelve years, compared to other Middle Eastern countries that had user growth of 1,825.3% from 2000 to 2010, whereas the world total growth is 448.1%. Additionally, the report indicates that 53.3% of Iran’s population had access to the Internet at home in 2012. Today, according to the center of the management system of the Internet development website, the Internet penetration in Iran is 61.06% for a population of 75,149,669. Furthermore, 45,884,144 Iranian users have access to the Internet.

According to the International Telecommunication Union report, Shirazi (2012) cites that the number of Iranian female Internet users reached nearly half (49%) of the total Internet users in Iran in 2003. This constitutes a total of 11.5 million female Internet users in Iran, which is the highest level of Internet penetration rate among Islamic countries in the Middle East. In addition, Shirazi argues that blogging has help repressed and marginalized groups reach out to get their voices heard and to challenge the long-standing univocal government and Islamic religious authorities.

The extensive growth of Internet users and Internet penetration into Iranian society has made Iranian weblogs rank among the four or five most numerous on the Internet (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2007, p. 563). The Persian blogosphere is among the fastest growing in Middle Eastern countries. According to Habibinia (2009), “there are more than 1.5 to 3 million weblog writers, more than 500,000 active Farsi weblog, and more than 7 million visitors” (cited in Golkar, 2011, p.53). The statistics above demonstrate that Internet technologies, Internet users, Internet subcultures, and Internet activities have increased in Iran. However, it should be mentioned that the majority of Iranian blogs are censored, filtered, and shut down by the cyber army of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the 10th presidential election in 2009. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has entirely cracked down on and blocked online activists’ websites and weblogs, many Iranian citizens have widely used proxies and antifilters to access news and information and used an alternate server set up abroad to report on rallies and demonstrations. According to Mashregh news, 19% of Iranian social network users have used proxy and antifilters to log onto social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other websites.

According to Rahimi (2003), since the election of Muhammad Khatami as president of Iran in 1997, the Internet has become a powerful tool for political interaction and

communication. Additionally, the Internet has been widely used by the Iranian Green Movement activists in protest against the presidential election result of Iran in 2009. They mediated their cultural and political struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state.

The Internet contributes to social movements to advance their cultural and political struggles against dominant systems. For instance, Della Porta and Mosca (2005) offer a typology that highlights the Internet contribution in social movement and collective action as follow: firstly, "its purely instrumental use is helpful in the organization and the logistics of demonstrations, and as a means for different groups to keep networked. Secondly, the Internet can also be a specific means for the direct expression of dissent and protest. Thirdly, it has a cognitive function, enabling information to be disseminated and public opinion to be sensitized to issues scantily covered by mainstream media, and also reinforce collective identities" (p. 167). Baringhorst (2008) summed up different functions of mediated communication of media for political protest in the five following parts: the logistic functions of protest mobilization; the cognitive function of knowledge production and communication in Net-based publics; the affective function of virtual community formation; the tactical function of using the Internet as a weapon and target of political protest; and the function of social organization in terms of transnational network formation.

Stein (2009) also highlights web use by the social movements in the six following parts: providing information, facilitating action and mobilization, promoting interaction and dialog, making lateral linkages, serving as an outlet for creative expression, and promoting resource generation and fundraising. Stein's study provides a useful theoretical and practical model for analysis of social movement web use. In the present

study, we use Stein's model for the analysis of oppositional deployment of Internet technologies by the Iranian oppositional movements.

Furthermore, Laer et al. (2010) represented a twofold typology of a new digitalized collective action repertoire for social movement. Based on their model, the Internet can facilitate and support traditional offline collective action in terms of organization, mobilization, and transnationalization such as street demonstrations, rallies, and strikes. Moreover, the Internet creates virtual modes of collective action in terms of alternative website and weblog creation, online petitions, cultural jamming, hacking, and email bombings.

There is heated discussion between scholars of new technologies and social movements about the role of technology in the emergence, formation, and expansion of new social movements in Iran. The following section reviews some of their discussions. Dolatshahi (2009) argues that the cyberspace created by Iranian feminist websites is a contested and yet empowering space. She further states that the website as an independent forum has several of the following functions for the Iranian Feminist movement's activists: given voice and visibility to the Iranian feminist movement, helped the movement mobilize resources, helped movement activists to network and stay connected to other activists and to the public, and helped the movement recruit men as well as women, and empowered the movement by creating a space where movement activists can form a sense of collective identity and develop a sense of alliance and solidarity. Carafano (2009) studied the role of social network media, especially Tweeter, on shaping Iran's 2009 presidential election protests. As Caravan notes, Iranian protesters deployed social network technologies for activities organization and sharing information. According to him, Iranian citizens used social network media in support of at least four kinds of

activities: street journalism, mobilizing the Iranian Diaspora, organizing activists, and information warfare.

Sardarniya (2010) argues that the Internet has several of the following functions for new social movements: cognitive, propaganda, identity-making, network-making, and organization protests. Golkar (2011) also points to the dual function of the Internet usage by both groups of the Iranian Green Movement protestors for mobilizing of popular support and the Islamic Republic of Iran's regime for expansion of political control of society and suppression of political dissent. The study's findings demonstrate that although the Internet helps political opponents to expand the Green Movement by breaking the news monopoly of the regime, mobilizing and organizing mass demonstrations, and delegitimizing the regime, it also helps the regime to increase its political domination by identifying and suppressing political activists, inducing a sense of fear among citizens, and expanding the presence of military and paramilitary forces' in cyberspace. Abdollahi et al. (2012) argue that new social movements don't trust to the mainstream media those depend on center of power and economic. From their view, users of social networks utilize its social features so that media technologies can circumvent the mainstream and state media censorship and regulations to publish news and information, and organize and mobilize their protest activities and actions.

A brief review of the above literature demonstrates that new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, can facilitate oppositional political movements in the following different ways: alternative information and knowledge production, organizing and mobilizing public demonstrations, facilitating collective identity representation and reconstruction, creating a virtual community, providing direct expression of dissent and protest, and development of networked alliance and solidarity between oppositional movement activists. Furthermore, it should be noted

that the Internet as a contested terrain or alternative medium has several different and even contradictory political functions for excluded and oppressed groups as well as mainstream groups for the promotion of their political agendas.

However, in this study, the thesis focuses on investigating the oppositional deployment of the Internet by the Iranian oppositional groups and Green Movement activists. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the critical scholars should avoid of one-dimensional view on the political functions of the Internet technologies. From a critical perspective, the Internet and the World Wide Web have dual functions for oppositional movements and groups. The Internet as a contested terrain can be used by both Iranian Green Movement activists and the totalitarian state of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the promotion of their political agendas and interests. Furthermore, new information and communication technologies can contribute to solidarity and integration of communities. Additionally, they can enhance fragmentation and “cyberbalkanization” of the communities to like-minded groups.

Regarding this brief literature, the problem arises as to whether and if so how the Internet is an instrument of domination or emancipation, as it can be a tool of both dominant societal powers and of individuals and communities struggling for democratization, emancipation, and empowerment. The question can be raised as to how the emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) have facilitated the Iranian oppositional cultural and political movements and provided possibilities for the sort of progressive social-political changes and struggles as an important dimension of the contemporary cultural politics.

To answer this question, the present study examines the Iranian Green Movement’s websites, which have seriously struggled against the tyrannical and oppressive policies

of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The main concern of this study is the oppositional deployment of the Internet and multimedia by the Iranian oppressed and oppositional groups for promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the totalitarian states. For this purpose, the thesis aims to have visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian oppositional groups' websites and weblogs authored by Iranian political activists and oppositional groups.

## **1.2 The statement of problem**

Many scholars have discussed how the new information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the Internet, have been used by oppositional political movements for the promotion of their political and cultural struggles (Baringhorst, 2008; Downey & Fenton, 2003; R. Kahn & D. Kellner, 2004; Pickerill, 2006; Warf & Grimes, 1997). Some advocates of the new information and communication technologies and democracy claim that new digital technologies, especially the Internet, have facilitated citizens' political discussion, widened citizens' political participation, and provided democracy. Based on their perspective, the new information and communication technologies offer instruments for excluded groups and individuals who are dismissed from the mainstream media and politics to disseminate ideas not present within the usual spectrum of political discussion and to participate in dialogue and debates usually closed off to oppositional ideas and groups. On this account,

The Internet and new computer technology to promote democracy by proliferating the range of ideas and information accessible to the public, thus helping to produce a more informed electorate, and by opening participation to individuals and groups usually excluded from the public spheres of political discussion and debate. (Kellner, 1999b, p. 101)

From an advocate's perspective, the new digital technologies play a key role in the renewal of direct democracy and citizen empowerment. The Internet network feature

has created a public sphere where excluded groups can represent alternative forms of information and knowledge to inform electorates, increase public political participation, and promote democracy. For instance, Ferdinand (2000) claims that technological changes are about to bring a third great era of electronic democracy, following the earlier ones of classical Greece.

In contrast to the advocate's positive outlook toward the democratic potential of the Internet, some media scholars "have sharply criticized the democratic deficits of the Internet into a corporate-dominated, highly commercialized media system—its inequalities of access, representation and political/ideological power, its economic and structural integration with globalizing capitalism and consumer culture" (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p. 83). Marxist scholars have also critiqued the democratic shortcomings of Internet technologies. They have argued that new technologies inevitably accompany inequities of access, merely represent dominant powers, and perpetuate capitalist culture worldwide.

Marxist scholars have argued that "the Internet will never be free from systems of capitalist production, which can almost instantly commodify new media technologies, transforming them into inherently commercial enterprises uninterested in furthering the social welfare or the public good" (Lee, 2009, p. 38). For instance, Frank Webster is a prominent Marxist theorist who sharply critiques the democratic potential of the new technologies. Webster (1999) has argued that the new information and communication technologies extended capitalist culture and perpetuated capitalist domination across the globe. Moreover, Schiller (2000) has argued that cyberspace and the Internet are colonized by networked market systems. From his view, capitalist and neo-liberal market systems colonized the virtual sphere to broaden their dominant cultures worldwide. Schiller refers to this new epoch as digital capitalism, in which cyberspace

offers uniquely supply instruments for cultivating and deepening consumerism on a transnational scale, especially among privileged groups, and consequently increases inequality and domination.

Some scholars argue that computer-mediated communication produces “cyberbalkanization” and “fragmentation of communities” to the “like-minded” groups. For instance, Van Alstyne & Brynjolfsson (2005) and Sunstein (2009) claim that the Internet produces “cyberbalkanization” and “fragmented communities.” Furthermore, Dean (2002) has contended that “the Internet content is often reduced to the circulation of noise and effectless content in a new stage of communicative capitalism” (cited in Kahn & Kellner, 2005, p. 703).

Some scholars have contended that “the Internet technology offers greater benefits to marginal interests than to those already enjoying access to mainstream political and media institutions” (Marmura, 2008, p. 247). From their vision, because of lower costs of organizing collective action, the Internet technologies offer possibilities for excluded and subordinated groups who are dismissed from media and political institutions to organize and mobilize their political activities. For instance, Bimber states,

Lower costs of organizing collective action offered by the Net will be particularly beneficial for one type of group: those outside the boundaries of traditional private and public institutions, those not rooted in the businesses, professional or occupational memberships or the constituencies of existing government agencies and programs. (Bimber, 1998, p. 156)

Other scholars have claimed that the Internet may come to play a long-time role in either reinforcing or destabilizing larger configurations of political power (Marmura, 2008, p. 274). From this view, the Internet as an oppressive tool in the hands of ruling forces may reinforce and destabilize the dominant system and rule force domination.

For example, Kalathil and Boas (2003) have observed that the Internet helped authoritarian regimes rather than harmed them.

On the other side, some researchers believe that the Internet undermines the foundation of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and Arab world. For instance, Ghashghai and Lewis (2002) state that many Middle Eastern governments fear that the Internet will facilitate communication among “subversive” individuals and other organizations such as special groups whose political agendas challenge the legitimacy of their governments (cited in Kimppa & Shirazi, 2010, p. 58). For example, Ghanbarlou (2011) observes that mass media and satellite and social networks played an active role in stimulation of the protest movements in the Arab world in 2011. Ghanbarlou contends that Internet social media like Facebook and Twitter are supplements of satellite. Given the limitations of activities of journalists in countries involved in the crisis, Internet users both inside and outside the countries were able to act as citizen journalists by posting messages, analysis, and pictures, and in this way make it easy for satellite networks to work.

The Internet changed to a space where networks could express and represent people’s beliefs and ideas and communicate with each other. The findings of Movassaghi & Attarzadeh (2012) prove that Internet interaction patterns emerged and enhanced some elements of Tilly’s resource mobilization theory, especially when the Internet was sympathetic to people’s interests in the real world in Egypt. In another example, Aghaei et al. (2012) assume that the new media and especially social network media play no role in beginning the revolutionary evolution, but, with the beginning of the revolutionary evolution in the Middle East, they played an important role in informing, mobilizing, and extending the evolution on a regional and transnational level.

Based on the Iranian media perspective, Mohammadian et al. (2013) concluded that the media have played a great role in the Arabian social movement and have accelerated the evolution process and presented the people's voices to the world. Also, some of the Iranian media scholars believe that the social networks have had great impact on Arabian social movements and stress that they will take the place of political parties in these countries in the future. In the study of the effect of the virtual sphere, social networks, and Arab language satellite on occurrence and development of the Arabian revolutions, Ebrahimi (2011) contends that they reconstructed the targeted society so that they produced signs, symbols, and myths that challenged the myths of the Arabian military-nationalist rulers.

The problem that arises is whether and how the Internet is an instrument of domination and emancipation, as a tool of both dominant societal powers and of individuals and communities struggling for democratization, emancipation, and empowerment. The present study addresses this issue by visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian oppositional groups' websites to articulate oppositional deployment of the Internet by the Iranian oppositional groups and oppositional movements for the promotion of their political struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In fact, the problem is the theoretical gap that that thesis tries to filling it with visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian Green movement's websites.

Therefore, the thesis selected websites of some of the known Iranian oppositional groups: the Iranian Green Movement activists who define themselves as oppositional groups and alternatives to the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Among the selected Iranian Green Movement's activists websites are websites of the Voice of Freedom, Kalameh and the Green Path Movement. But, the question that arises is why we select the Iranian Green Movement's websites? There are several

reasons for selecting the Iranian Green Movement's websites as follow: the first reason that encourage us is that the Iranian Green Movement protests were the most attended demonstration against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state after the Islamic revolution, which challenged the Islamic Republic of Iran's regime, the second reason that encourage us is that the Iranian Green Movement as a new social movement is reliant on new information and communicational technologies, especial the Internet and particularly the World Wide Webs, through the technologies propound their requests and represent their protests, the third reason that encourage us is that the website are visible part of the Internet, the forth reason that encourage us is that the websites were the popular websites of the Iranian Green Movement's websites, fifth reasons that encourage us is that the websites were close to the Iranian Green Movement's peers and the final reason that encourage us is that the website have been written by the Iranian reformists and democratic activists.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has fused the fundamentalist interpretations of Twelver Imam Shi'ite Islam with the political, cultural, social, and economic structures of Iran. Furthermore, the government has employed religious conservative intellectuals, seminary clerics and mullahs, organized the revolutionary guards and militants, and taken over the foundations and institutions to reproduce ideologies for establishing its power and domination. Toward this end, it also organizes quasi-military forces to attain and ensure its hegemony and domination of Iran's social, political, cultural, and economic structure on social and personal levels. Additionally, the totalitarian government has employed the mass media and press and social, cultural, economic, military, and political institutions to articulate the fascistic interpretations of the Twelfth Imam Shi'a to consolidate its domination and hegemony. The clergies and military forces, especially the Revolutionary Guard Corps, take over the country's foundation and economic institutions.

As Sreberny and Khiabany (2010) state, each ayatollah has an oil well in his pockets; in Persian language, *chah-e- naft to jib darand*. In addition as they cite the Revolutionary Guard Corps bought 51% the Iran's telecommunication industry after one minute it gets private to \$5bn in 2009. Sreberny and Khiabany also note that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps control one-third of the country's economy through various subsidiaries, charitable foundations, and trusts. Through these ideological, economic, and military affairs, the Islamic Republic of Iran has attempted to legitimize its domination and hegemony for more than thirty years. These affairs have also been obstacles to the democratization process in Iran.

After the full-scale domination of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic republic reactionary fundamentalists leaders, elderships Khomeini and Khamenei, have viciously oppressed all their rivals and political opponents, including critical Iranian political intellectuals, lecturers and supervisors, writers and artists, critical journalists and cyber activists, human rights activists, oppositional political parties, religious reformists groups, feminists and women's rights movements, minority religious groups such as Suuni Muslims, Zorrasterian, Baha'is, Sufis and Dervishes, ethnic groups such as Kurds, Baluchis, Turkmens, Arabs, and others.

Iranian traditional Shi'a independent Marja'iyat was one of the most important subcultural groups brutally repressed by the political Islamic Republic of Iran. This group criticized political-Islamic tyranny, discrimination, injustice, and inequality. Although the theocratic system of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been known as a clerical and theocratic state, it has proved itself as an anti-critical-political cleric government that has purged and repressed traditional Iranian Shi'a independent Marja'iyat institution. For instance, according to Khalaji (2008), Ayatollah Shariatmadari, Ayatollah Reza Sadr, Ayatollah Mohamad Shirazi, Ayatollah Mohamad

Rouhani, and Ayatollah Hassan Ghomi were members of Iranian traditional Shi'a independent Marja'iyat who have been victimized by the violation and tyranny of the Islamic system.

Moreover, critical Iranian political intellectuals are another group brutally oppressed by the Islamic theocratic system of Iran. For instance, the Shi'a fundamentalists and radical conservatives made a list of 150 well-known critical political intellectuals who were accused of opposition to the absolute jurisprudence rule (Veliyat-a Motlaghey-e-Fagih). Later, the Ministry of Security and Intelligence sentenced them to death. According to Alamdari (2005), four critical political intellectuals, including Dariyosh Foruhar, a national figure and the former Minister of Labour in the provisional government, and his wife, Parvaneh Foruhar-Eskandari, both opponents of the Velayat-a-Faqih (jurisprudence), and two writers, Mohammad Mokhtari and Ja'afar Pouyandeh, were brutally murdered by secret fatwa (religious edict) of the supreme Ayatollah. Furthermore, he added that "Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, a well-known Islamist philosopher and the head of Haqqaani Seminary in Qom, ordered his followers "to drown or choke those who are intentionally opposed to the Velayat-e Faqih" (Alamdari, 2005, p. 1294).

Furthermore, after the Islamic revolution, Iranian women have been completely marginalized by Shi'a clerical-militant and patriarchal domination. For example, based on article 115 of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution (IRIC), the president of Iran must be a male who possesses Iranian origin, Iranian nationality, administrative capacity and resourcefulness, a good past record, trustworthiness and piety, convinced belief in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religion of the country (for more information see: <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution-9-1.html>).

Accordingly, based on this article, 35 million Iranian women are deprived of their political rights.

Moreover, after the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini as the leader of the revolution confined and outlawed all Iranian political parties and activities that were opposed to the government. Thus, the oppositional parties had to leave the country and go into exile to organize their parties abroad. For example, Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), also known as Mojahedin-E-khalegh (MEK), with its Islamic ideology, has been brutally oppressed by the Islamic Republic of Iran (for more information see their websites homepage English version: <http://www.mojahedin.org/home/en>). Furthermore, democratic parties like the National Democratic Front and the Kurdish Democratic Party, which support Iranian Kurdish ethnic minority political and cultural rights, have been brutally oppressed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Likewise, Iranian religious minorities/subcultures such as Baha'is, Sunni Muslims, Zoroastrian, Armenians, Jews, atheists and agnostics, godless, Dervishes, and Sufis as well as non-religious voices have been deleted from society, culture, politics and media. For example, Iranian Baha'is were the first and biggest religious minorities/ subcultures that have been victimized by the Islamic Republic of Iran. According to Ghanea-Hercock (2004) more than two hundred Baha'is were killed from the 1980s to the 1990s by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Interestingly, while Baha'is were the most important critics of the clergy's medium role between God and people, Iranian authorities completely repressed them, destroyed their sacred religious centers, Mohammad Ali Bab house, deprived their children from higher education, and imprisoned many of their intellectuals.

In general, all the Iranian oppositional groups and sub-cultures have been dismissed from mainstream media, culture, and society. In fact, ideological features of the Islamic Republic of Iran have led to oppression of oppositional groups, cultures, and identities from the mainstream media and society that highlighted the dominant system and ideology, and eliminated all critics, intellectuals, oppositional political parties, journalists, workers, lecturers, writers, students, feminists, non-believers and atheists, non-Islamic religious minorities, Jewish and Armenians, ethnic and nationalist groups, and other cultures and ideologies opposed to the regime.

With the fast growth of the Internet in Iran, most communication technologies are widely available to oppressed, oppositional, and subcultural groups as well as mainstream cultural groups to represent and express their identities and cultures and advance their political and cultural struggles. In fact, the practical gap is raised that how this phenomenon can help oppositional groups, oppressed subcultures and subordinated groups resist the hegemonic culture and ideologies, and reproduce and circulate their own progressive reading and alternative cultures and identities, which may challenge the established status quo culture and politics for an egalitarian and better world.

The present study try to fill the practical gap by analyzing the Iranian Green Movement activist's websites homepage texts, images, and music to articulate that the Internet can be used by the oppositional groups and subcultures for the promotion of their political interests and concerns. This research focuses on the use of Internet by the Iranian oppositional groups and political activists who struggle against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

For this end, it is the research's intent here to analyze popular, updated and independent websites that have been written by the Iranian Green Movement democratic and

reformist's activists who struggle against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system for reform and real democracy. For this study, a purposive sample of the Iranian Green Movement's popular websites was compiled from several sources: (1) <https://irangreenrasa.wordpress.com>, a non-profit weblog that introduce the Iranian Green movement websites; (2) <https://irannews1388.wordpress.com> a non profit weblog that introduce some the Iranian Green movements supporters websites; (3) one thousands Iranian active websites listed in <http://www.ba2news.com>; and (4) sites prominently and frequently linked to by other Iranian oppositional groups' sites. It should be mentioned that more than these websites exist, but some of them are no longer online or are not available, so the eventual sample consists of more than 10 websites. From these 10 website three popular website have been chosen as a sample of the study. There have been several reasons that the websites have been chosen as sample of the study such as; theses websites call them the Iranian Green movement supporters, they devoted all space to the Iranian Green Movement activities, they launched their website as the Iranian Green Movement websites, they have been detected as the Iranian Green Movements websites, they have been continued their activities in line with the Iranian Green Movements activities for long time. They are popular websites and they still have been updated. They have been written by religious reformists and democratic activists. They have been relatively independent and alternative against the state and conglomerates media.

Accordingly, the thesis will analyze the some of the Iranian Green movement's popular, active, updated, relatively independent, alternative and democrat websites. At least three websites have been chosen as samples for the study. The oppositional groups' websites are: the Iranian Freedom movement website; voice of freedom website: <http://www.nedayezadi.net>; the Population of Monotheism and Cooperation website,

the Kalame website; <http://www.kalame.com/>, and the Iranian Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>.

### **1.3 The objective of the study**

The Internet as contested terrain has been used by both excluded sub-cultural and dominant cultural groups for the promotion of their political agendas (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). Many oppositional groups have employed the new information and communication technologies, Internet, web pages, e-mail lists and software to promote their own political interests and agendas. This thesis attempts to explain how the new information and communication technologies have been employed by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for the promotion of their political struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In other words, this thesis aims to explicate how the Internet has been used by the Iranian opposition groups to advance their interests and progressive political struggles. Additionally, the current study attempts to analyze expansion of new oppositional movements through the Internet. For this ends, the thesis deployed visual semiotic analysis as research methodology for analysis of the Iranian Green Movements websites to visualize and reveal hegemonic ideology of the Islamic system. Actually, visual semiotic analysis is not our research topics, while semiotic analysis is suitable research methodology of critical media cultural studies, thus, the thesis deployed it as research methodology. In particular, this dissertation has four objectives:

- 1) To illustrate how the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists to produce alternative forms of information, knowledge and meaning for representation and reconstruction of oppositional identity/collective identity against dominant or mainstream identity.

- 2) To clear up how the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists as a site for organization and mobilization of public demonstration against the dominant system policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
- 3) To demonstrate how the Internet has become a conduit [site] for the Iranian Green Movement's activists to represent their solidarity and alliance to overcome the issues of the postmodern identity politics.
- 4) To explain how the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists as a site for direct expression of their political and cultural protests.

Nine factors have encouraged the researcher to carry out this study: first, the growth in gender, ethnic, religious, political discrimination, and injustice, inequality, tyranny, and repression in the Islamic Republic of Iran. second, the important role of the new technologies and Internet in counter-hegemonic struggles for the prospect of democratization in Iran; third, the growth of the political, gender, and oppressed ethnic subculture groups as the most important and effective political force for transformation and democratization of cultures and societies; fourth, legitimization of the Islamic Republic of Iran by ideological abuse; fifth, the contradiction of political Islam with democratization, modernization, multiculturalism, and human rights, and the convergence of political Islam with capitalism and imperialism's domination for repression of democracy; sixth, the important role of alternative media in dissemination of alternative information and cultures that are completely dismissed from society; seventh, the convergence of political Islam with fascism and the oligarchy of clergies and militants. Political Islam like other kinds of an ideologically dominant system has to strive to smooth differences and conflicts within society. Seventh, visual semiotic analysis of the Green Movement websites will reveal, visualize and disclose dominant system hegemonic ideology. Eighth, critical mythology of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state will reveal its hegemonic ideology. Thus, it oppresses different

cultural and subcultural groups that sometimes have contradictions and conflicts with the existing regime, then fully grasp of its hegemonic ideology would be significant and useful for sustainable development of society.

#### **1.4 The research questions**

The current research investigates Internet use in oppositional politics by the Iranian oppositional and oppressed groups for the promotion of their political interests and concerns. In another words, the clear purpose of the study is that explain how oppositional movements has been used the Internet for promotion of their cultural and political struggle against totalitarian states. In fact, the thesis tries to fill the theoretical and practical gap the filed of alternative media and new social movements and test the Kelner's theory within the Iranian oppositional movement. By the growth of the new information and communication technologies in Iran, the Iranian oppositional and oppressed groups have employed the Internet and websites for the promotion of their political interests and concerns. Accordingly, the present study attempts to answer one major and four minor questions:

Major Question: How has the Internet been used by Iranian oppositional groups and political movements for the promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

To answer this question, this study investigated four specific research questions about Internet use by oppositional and oppressed groups for the promotion of their political interests and concerns:

Q1: How may the Internet be used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists as a site for dissemination and generation of alternative forms of information, culture, and

meaning for reconstruction and representation of their collective identities against the dominant or mainstream identity?

Q2: How may the Internet be used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists as a site for organization and mobilization of public demonstration against the dominant system policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Q3: How does the Internet become a site for the Iranian Green Movement's activists to develop their solidarity and alliance to overcome the postmodern identity politics?

Q4: How does the Internet become a site for Iranian oppositional groups to express their political and cultural protest?

### **1.5 Limitation and delimitation of the research**

Certain boundaries assist to narrow the scope of the study. Limitations are those over which this study does not have any control, but delimitations are those that the study intentionally limits. In the following sections, it will deal with both of them.

Primary limitations are blocking and filtering imposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The majority of Iranian oppositional groups' websites and weblogs have been blocked by the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, the rate of the Iranian websites' filtering and blocking has never been published by the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, the statistics prove high rate filtering of websites in Iran. For example, Akbar Alamy (2006), former Islamic Republic parliamentary member (MPS), reports ten million websites and weblogs were filtered on the Persian blogosphere in 2006 (For more information see <http://akbaralami.net/Public/MediaGallery.aspx>). Furthermore, according to the website Baztab, based on the report of the Meher News Agency,

Abdolsamad-e-Khorram Abadi, in a one-day regional conference on family pathology at the Islamic Azad University of Azadshahr, announced that currently five million websites were blocked in Iran in 2008. It should be mentioned that Alamy's report is near to reality and the number of blocked websites has substantially increased since the controversial 2009 presidential election. Additionally, according to Reporters Without Borders (2009), Iran obtained the rating of 172 among 175 countries in media censorship worldwide.

Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has entirely cracked down on and blocked online activists' websites and weblogs, many Iranian citizens have widely used proxies and antifilters to access news and information and used an alternate server set up abroad to report on rallies and demonstrations. According to Mashregh news, 19% of Iranian social network users have used proxy and antifilters to log onto social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other websites.

The present study focuses on the Internet usage by the excluded, oppositional and subordinated groups in Iran and their efforts to build an oppositional culture, representation and reconstruction of oppositional identity, mobilize demonstrations and develop politics of alliance and solidarity between oppositional movement's activists against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran for promotion of real democracy and progressive transform of societies social, cultural, political and economic structures. Thus, this study considers the ways in which the Internet technologies can promote the oppositional groups who excluded from critical debate and discussion within the public sphere by the Islamic Republic of Iran. This study aims to promote an agenda of radical democracy that involves subordinated class, gender, race, religion, and other oppressed groups that have been excluded from media and politics commanded by hegemonic forces of domination. For example, the Iranian

critical writers that have been extremely oppressed by the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state have struggled against the government's oppressive policies through the Internet (for more information, see the Iranian Writers Association's (in exile) Website: (<http://iwae.info>)).

Furthermore, the current study analyzes the Iranian Green Movement's websites that were published from March 1, 2009 to December 30, 2011. These dates have been chosen for several reasons. First, it includes a period of time when the majority of Iranians, outside and inside webactivists and bloggers, were actively webbing and blogging. Second, this period is the most important time when the Iranian online activists extended their struggles against the controversial presidential election of Iran in 2009.

Additionally, it is the research's intent here to analyze popular, updated and independent websites that have been written by the Iranian Green Movement democratic and reformist's activists who struggle against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system for reform and real democracy. For this study, a purposive sample of the Iranian Green Movement's popular websites was compiled from several sources: (1) <https://irangreenrasa.wordpress.com>, a non-profit weblog that introduce the Iranian Green movement websites; (2) <https://irannews1388.wordpress.com> a non profit weblog that introduce some the Iranian Green movements supporters websites; (3) one thousands Iranian active websites listed in <http://www.ba2news.com>; and (4) sites prominently and frequently linked to by other Iranian oppositional groups' sites. It should be mentioned that more than these websites exist, but some of them are no longer online or are not available, so the eventual sample consists of 10 websites. From these 10 website three popular website have been chosen as a sample of the study. There have been several reasons

that the websites have been chosen as sample of the study such as; these websites call them the Iranian Green Movement's supporters, they devoted all space to the Iranian Green Movement's activities, they launched their websites as the Iranian Green Movement websites, they have been detected as the Iranian Green Movements websites, they have been continued their activities in line with the Iranian Green Movements activities for long time. They are popular websites and they still have been updated. They have been written by religious reformists and democratic activists. They have been relatively independent and alternative against the state and conglomerates media.

Accordingly, the thesis will analyze the some of the Iranian Green movement's popular, active, updated, relatively independent, alternative and democrat websites. At least three websites have been chosen as samples for the study. The oppositional groups' websites are: the Iranian Freedom movement website; voice of freedom website: <http://www.nedayezadi.net>; the Population of Monotheism and Cooperation website, the Kalame website; <http://www.kalame.com/>, and the Iranian Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>.

## **1.6 Definitions of concepts**

The Internet has been defined by DiMaggio et al. (2001) as the electronic network that links people and information through computers and other digital devices allowing person-to-person communication and information retrieval. In this dissertation, the Internet, which includes web sites, listservs, social networks media, and e-mail, is limited to websites that are authored by the Iranian movement of oppositional activists who struggle against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The researcher defines the key terms and concepts used in this exploratory study as follows:

**Oppositional politics:** According to McAdam et al. (1996) “Contention begins when people collectively make claims on other people, claims which if realized would affect those others’ interests” (Quoted in Ayres, 1999, p. 134). From their perspective, people collectively make claims on other people as the source of contentious politics. The oppositional politics refers to the public collective challenge against the totalitarian state’s hegemonic and oppressive policies and cultural codes (Ayres, 1999; McAdam et al., 2003; Tilly & Tarrow, 2008). Although many definitions have been offered, the following definition by Pickerill (2006) works well: the concept of radical politics refers to the oppositional deployment of the information and communication technologies by activists who engage in collective action campaigns often aligned to specific social movements.

In the present thesis, oppositional politics is defined as the usage of the Internet by Iranian oppositional groups and Internet political activists who are engaged in a long-term struggle against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran for democracy, social justice and egalitarian society throughout: (1) the dissemination of alternative forms of information, culture, and meaning; critical coverage of social movement events, documentation of group protests and debates over oppressive government policy; (2) the representation and reconstruction of oppositional identities; (3) the organization of mass demonstrations, protests, and strikes against oppressive government policies; (4) the direct expression of dissent, virtual struggle, and political and cultural protest such as the creation of alternative and protest websites, activism, culture jamming, e-mail bombing/virtual sit-ins, signing online petitions, organizing oppositional campaigns, and so on; (5) development of alliance and solidarity between political movements activists.

**Visual semiotic analysis:** Visual semiotic analysis is a subsection of semiotic analysis. Before presenting the definition of visual semiotic analysis, we should define the semiotic analysis concept. In the context of this thesis, semiotic analysis is defined as the theoretical and analytical study of signs, codes, and significant practices. According to Danesi (2004), visual semiotic analysis is the study of visual signs and their representative function. Visual signs are also defined as signs that have been constructed with visual signifiers that can be seen rather than touched, heard, smelled, or tasted. In fact, similar to other signs, they can be fashioned iconically, symbolically, and indexically. According to Danesi (2004) visual semiotic analysis is growing and becoming a significant area of inquiry. From his perspective, the visual semiotic analysis includes the study of art forms, logos in advertising, maps, diagrams, pictographs, alphabet characters, and other visual artifacts and symbols.

The present study is mostly restricted to semiotic analysis of oppositional groups' websites, homepage texts such as: logos, title names, aims, mottos, symbols, flags, images, pictures, photography, visual reports, still images of video clips, posters, and so on. Therefore, in the context of the study, the visual semiotic analysis can be defined as the theoretical and analytical study of visual signs, codes, myths, and significant practices. Visual semiotic analysis is the study of visual signs and codes, myths and practices that have been represented on the Iranian oppositional movements' websites.

**Websites:** The World Wide Web or website is “an information server on the Internet composed of interconnected sites and files, accessible with a browser program” (M. Danesi, 2002, p. 229).

## **1.7 The significance of the study**

The importance of this study lies in its potential contribution to an understanding of an innovative model of political struggles by Internet activism. The study is significant because the Internet is playing key role in revolutionary transforming our societies' social, cultural, political and economic structure, then we should fully grasp its implications for progressive transformation of our societies. Moreover, this study is significant because it reveals the impact of ICTs and the Internet on contemporary new oppositional movements. Beside, this study will be significant because visual semiotic analysis of the political websites. Furthermore, this study is significant because, Political struggle mediated by Techno-politics in the age of new technologies. This study is significant because, it will reveal, visualize and disclose the dominant system's hegemonic ideology and myths. This kind of study will be useful for excluded, oppressed and oppositional groups to mediate their political and cultural struggles against the dominant system for achieving democratic, egalitarian, and better societies. Furthermore, this study will be significant, especially in Islamic society context, for pro-Islamic system supporters who strive for political Islam.

Moreover, this study is significant because it represents an alternative culture and information that one finds on Internet websites. This implies that the ongoing discourses in many of these sites could have a large impact on shaping oppositional culture, identities, and struggle for progressive social and political changes in Iran. Thus, this kind of study can provide materials and resources that deeply enrich and improve the contemporary culture and politics. It will also contribute in the field of media studies and political struggles. Additionally, visual semiotic analysis of oppositional movement's website texts reveals government actions, corruption, and abuse of power. Additionally, this study is more significant because it emphasizes the role and function of national and regional social movements. This kind of study will be useful for

students and instructors in the field of alternative media, radical democracy and cultural studies.

### **1.8 Organization of the thesis**

This thesis structure is organized in six basic chapters. The first chapter briefly deals with the thesis introduction. The second chapter reviews relevant experimental literatures on the Internet and oppositional politics and the theoretical and conceptual framework. The third chapter includes methodology and research design of the thesis. The fourth chapter assesses the results and findings of the study. The fifth chapter also represents the discussion. Finally, the last chapter summarizes the findings, discusses data complications, and offers ideas for future studies.

University of Malaya

## CHAPTER 2: LITRATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

A significant body of the literature review deals with the role of the Internet on oppositional politics. The following theoretical overview is composed of three subsections: (1) political impacts of the Internet; (2) (new)social movement's theory; (3) the Internet and new social movement conceptualization. Beginning with a debate concerning the usage of new ICTs on the socio-political landscape, the first subsection examines the dynamics between new technology and society, the virtual public sphere, and the issue of fragmentation. The second subsection explores the interrelationships between information and communication technologies (ICTs) and oppositional politics by reviewing differing theoretical approaches to (new)social movement theories. Then, drawing on three key factors addressed by Kelly Garrett (2006), this subsection describes how new ICTs have influenced movements' practices and organizational structures. Classifying and synthesizing new trends of Internet-based activism, this portion offers a preliminary conceptual framework of Internet focusing on the use of the Internet as a tool, contested terrain or as a site of alternative forms of politics and culture production; a site of production of alternative information, a site of self-representation; a site of organizing demonstrations; a site of development and representation of alliance and solidarity among the movement's actors; a site of direct expression of virtual struggles; and a site of creation of virtual communities. In the final subsection, we review Kellner's (2001) techno-politics and oppositional political movements, and go on to argue whether and why Kellner's (2002b) perspective on the critical theory of technology and radical politics is applicable to non-Western societies, and whether potential limitations exist in its application to current social movements in Iran. Therefore, we will review relevant theoretical tradition during the twentieth

century, starting with a Political impact of the Internet, moving to oppositional movement studies, and finally to more contemporary research on internet activism and oppositional movements.

## **2.2 Political impact of the Internet**

In the following section the political effect of the Internet on society will be reviewed. Since the Internet's development and its expansion, it has been used by people globally. Accordingly, the discussion about the impact of innovative technologies on societies has also increased between media scholars and the theorists of social movements. There are several different perspectives on the effect of the Internet on societies. Some media scholars claim that the Internet leads to the fragmentation of society, whereas others argue the Internet creates a public sphere where critical-rational discussion takes place, which can form public opinion. Based on Habermas's (1974) view, the public sphere is a social space where citizens or private individuals gather to critically and rationally discuss public issues to reach consensus and social integration to resolve public problems. In the following section, their perspectives will be reviewed.

### **2.2.1 Dialectic of technology and society**

There have been heated discussions between scholars about new information and communication technologies (NICTs), and especially if the Internet can meaningfully contribute to radical democratic politics. Advocates of new technologies and cyber democracy claim that new information and communication technologies (NICTs), particularly the Internet, provide media tools for citizens to disseminate their ideas and participate in political dialogue and discussions that are usually closed off to oppositional groups. From their perspective, new computer technologies (NCTs) and the Internet promotes democracy by proliferating a range of information and knowledge accessible to the public, which helped produce more informed voters and opened

participation to individuals and groups usually excluded from the public sphere of political discussion and debate. As Kellner (1999a) states:

Advocates of new technologies and democracy argue that new communication technology provides instruments for groups and individuals [who] excluded from the mainstream media and politics to disseminate ideas not present within the usual spectrum of political discussion and to participate in dialogue and debates usually closed off to oppositional ideas and groups. On this account, the Internet and new computer technology promote democracy by proliferating the range of ideas and information accessible to the public, thus helping to produce a more informed electorate, and by opening participation to individuals and groups usually excluded from the public spheres of political discussion and debate. (Kellner, 1999a, p. 101)

The advocates' view is one-dimensional and optimistic, because they have neglected the destructive role of conglomerate and corporate media, the political economy, state power and corporate media deployment of new technologies, and computer technologies on guenon democracy. Dominant corporate and state powers as well as conservatives, fascists, and rightist groups have effectively used the Internet for the promotion of their political concerns and interests against democratic movements. For example, the Islamic Republic of Iran's government/security forces have deployed new information and communication technology and organized a cyber army for surveillance, control, and repression of critical Iranian intellectuals and pro-democratic Internet activists. In addition, the most obvious example of the Islamic Republic of Iran's new technologies deployment is its security forces and intelligence service's widespread use of the new technologies for identification and surveillance of the Iranian Green Movement's online activists in the controversial 2009 presidential election in which countless Green Movement online activists were arrested. As Kellner (1999a) has argued, the Internet as contested terrain or site of conflict is usable by both groups of corporate, state power and rightist groups as well as resistance and struggle forces to advance their political interests and ends.

Therefore, from this perspective, dominant corporations, conglomerates, and totalitarian state powers deployed Internet technologies for the promotion of their social, economic, political, and cultural interests and concerns, so that capitalist cultures, consumerism, and neo-liberalism extended all around the world. For example, with the fast development and expansion of the computer and Internet, capitalist cultures, materialism, consumerism, and individualism extended throughout Iran. In addition, new information and communication technologies have been used by totalitarian states globally. For instance, the Iranian intelligence service has made widespread use of the Internet against critical Iranian political activists on the Persian blogosphere. Furthermore, the Islamic system widespread and systematic support from pro-government supporters to reproduce the system's hegemonic ideology and culture via the Internet. Consequently, advocates claim that the democratic role of new information and communication is one dimensional, because it ignores the government's role in surveillance, control, and repression of pro-democratic movements and activists. Furthermore, they downplay or underestimate the negative effect of business and media conglomerates on democracy in undemocratic societies.

By contrast to boosters or advocates of new technologies and democracy, some "Media scholars have sharply criticized the democratic deficits the Internet in a corporate-dominated, highly commercialized media system—its inequalities of access, representation and political/ideological power, its economic and structural integration with globalizing capitalism and consumer culture" (Carroll & Hackett, 2006, p. 83).

Marxists scholars, particularly, have also analyzed the democratic shortcomings of Internet technologies; they have argued that new technologies inevitably accompany inequities of access, merely represent dominant powers, and perpetuate capitalist culture globally. Such critics have argued that, "the Internet will never be free from

systems of capitalist production, which can almost instantly commodity new media technologies, transforming them into inherently commercial enterprises uninterested in furthering social welfare or the public good. Moreover, computers still remain largely unavailable to those of lower socioeconomic classes and educational achievement. For example, a prominent Marxist theorist who sharply critiques the democratic potential of new technologies is Webster (1999), who argues that new information and communication technologies extend capitalist cultures and perpetuate capitalist domination across the globe. As Webster states:

Technological spurt was best understood as an integral element of the continuous adaptation and expansion of advanced capitalist forces which were facing a particular set of circumstances. Hence it was largely a matter of enhancing computer communications as corporate institutions spread their reach, of incorporating electronic devices in television and stereo sets as the market for home entertainments burgeoned, of mechanizing and automating processes where competitive edge might be found. (Webster, 1999, p. 60)

As Webster argues, new technology innovations, especially the Internet, have been created by capitalist forces and it has effectively been used by capitalism and imperialism for promotion and expansion of their cultures and hegemonic ideology globally. From Webster's point of view, new technologies have set a market for home entertainments that burgeoned. Moreover, Schiller (2000) argues that cyberspace and the Internet colonized a networked market system, which allowed the capitalist and neo-liberal market system to colonize virtual spheres to broaden its dominant cultures globally. Schiller calls this new epoch digital capitalism, in which cyberspace offers uniquely supple instruments for cultivating and deepening consumerism on a transnational scale, especially among privileged groups, while it increases inequality and domination. Schiller states that

Cyberspace itself is being rapidly colonized by the familiar workings of the market system. Across their breadth and depth, computer networks link with existing capitalism to massively broaden the effective reach of the marketplace. Indeed, the Internet comprises nothing less than the central production and control apparatus of an increasingly supranational market system. (Schiller, 2000, p. xiv)

Indeed, Schiller argues that the virtual sphere and cyberspace colonized a capitalist and neo-liberal market system, so the Internet and cyberspace make it possible to perpetuate the domination of the capitalist culture globally. In contrast to Webster and other old communication technology Marxist scholars, we should mention that their arguments are correct but their arguments are one dimensional, because they merely deal with the negative dimension of new technology implementation and ignore positive deployment of new technology for democracy and social justice. Like Kellner, the thesis argues that the Internet as contested terrain is available for oppressed and oppositional groups and sub-cultures to deploy for the promotion of their struggle against dominant culture systems and ideology. However, it should be mentioned that it does not mean that the contested terrain is free, fair and democratic battleground for struggle against dominant systems hegemonic culture, identity and ideology. As Kahn and Kellner also argue:

Many oppositional groups have been using Internet and WebPages as an instrument of political struggles to mediate and circulate their struggles and to begin broadcasting their own messages to audience. For example, Mexico's EZIN Zapatista movement have used Internet to organize anti-corporate globalization demonstrations. (Kahn & D Kellner, 2005, p. 2)

From their perspective, technologies are tools that both the ruling classes and oppositional groups can use to promote their ends and interests. Neoliberals deploy new technologies to promote capitalist culture, whereas oppositional groups and movements can use technologies to promote democracy and social justice on local and global scales. As Kellner (1999a) explained, new technologies are created and produced by the

dominant culture to strengthen and consolidate their hegemony culture and domination, whereas oppositional groups might use them for their empowerment, self-valorization, and self-representation in struggling against the hegemonic culture and domination. Accordingly, it can be argued that the new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, as tools or as contested terrain can be used by both regressive and progressive groups for their interests and aims.

Therefore, the perspective of Webster and old-generation Marxists is one dimensional, because their view merely focuses on the dominant system deployment of new technologies and ignores oppositional and subculture groups usage for dissemination of their own alternative ideas, beliefs and thoughts, identity, and alternative political view. Thus, their view is one dimensional and unable to analyze or explain the dual functions of new technologies, and we need a fresh theory to analyze the role of new technologies in radical democratic politics.

Accordingly, new information and communication technologies as tools have been used by both the dominant corporate and totalitarian state for promotion of their political interests and agendas and oppositional groups and subcultures to advance their political projects. Therefore, claims of both groups' advocates and opponents are one dimensional, and they deal with just one side of the function of new technologies, but in this thesis the author tries to avoid one-dimensional views and attempts to pay attention to both positive and negative advantages of new technologies for "radical democratic politics." In this thesis, drawing on the dialectical relationship between technologies and human agency, the research draws attention to Iranian Green Movement protests in which Iranian Internet activists make use of the Internet to produce alternative forms of culture, information, and meaning for representation and reconstruction of their collective identity, create their virtual community, develop their alliance and solidarity,

organize their protest demonstrations against the Islamic Republic of Iran's election policies, and direct expression of their political struggles.

In contrast to the advocates' point of view, some critics argue that new communication technologies' innovation and fast development lead to a digital divide between those who have access to computers and the Internet and those who do not. They argue that the dominant players of cyberspace and the Internet are largely young, middle class, or upper class females; although this is true, another fact that statistical and research findings indicate is that workers, women, oppressed groups, subcultural groups, oppositional groups, and people from various class sectors are becoming active in cyberspace. As a result, the Internet, in contrast to mass communication technologies controlled by the state and conglomerates, has democratic functions. First, it potentially makes possible democratic revitalization of multiple public spheres. Second, it makes more information more easily accessible to the public, and from a wider array of sources of information and communication in history. Finally, the Internet allows two-way communication and democratic participation in active public dialogue that is essential to producing a vital democracy. Therefore, in this thesis, following Kellner's (1999b) perspective, new technologies are considered as tools or contested terrain that can be used by oppositional groups as well as mainstream groups for promotion of their own cultural and political interests and concerns.

### **2.2.2 Debate on fragmentation**

There has been much academic discussion and extensive literature about the role of the Internet in the fragmentation of communities to like-minded groups (Dahlgren, 2005; Zizi Papacharissi, 2002; Sunstein, 2002; Van Alstyne & Brynjolfsson, 2005). In this sense, fragmentation refers to the tendency of the Internet users to become subdivided into smaller, like-minded groups—rather than reach consensus as a whole—because

they self-selectively join groups based on predisposed interests while receiving highly customized, targeted information filtered and framed by specific information providers.

Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (1996a) argue that ICTs can link geographically separate people and help them locate interesting or compatible resources. Although these processes have the potential to bridge gaps and unite communities, they also have the potential to fragment interaction and divide groups by leading people to spend more time on special interests and to screen out less-preferred contacts.

Habermas (1991) has also pointed out the potentially dual functions of new technologies in simultaneous expansion and fragmentation of online communities. From Habermas's perspective, whereas the growth of systems and networks multiplies possible contacts and exchanges of information, it does not lead per se to the expansion of an "intersubjectively" shared world and to the discursive interweaving of conceptions of relevance, themes, and contradictions from which public policy spheres arise. The consciousness of planning, communicating, and acting subjects seems to have simultaneously expanded and fragmented. The groups produced by the Internet remain closed off from one another like global villages. Furthermore, Papacharissi (2002) argues that Internet-based technologies make possible discussions between people from around the globe, but they also frequently fragment political discourse. From her vision, new technologies potentially have dual functions: they are simultaneously able to get people to talk together and yet can fragment their communities and discussion.

In addition, some commentators have concluded that Internet fragmentation might intensify political polarization and degrade the quality of social movements. For example, Sunstein (2001) claims that the Internet produces a proliferation and "cyberbalkanization" of daily "me news" feeds and contribute to the fragmentation and

polarization of communities and groups to “like-minded” people. From Sunstein’s (2001) point of view,

The Internet is seen as increasingly giving users the ability to ‘filter’ information and interactions and so ‘self-select’ what they wish to be exposed to. Examples of this filtering include users setting and returning to their preferred sites via web favourites or bookmarks, reading and interacting on sites that support their ‘personal’ views, linking their sites to similar sites, choosing customization of news and using search engines to seek out information on very specific ‘private’ interests. (cited in Dahlberg, 2007, p. 829)

The argument that the Internet extends and increases the fragmentation of communities of like-minded groups and polarizes political groups is strongly contested by some commentators. These commentators point to research that indicate that different people communicate with other opposing groups. They argue that some research shows that, as well as helping people find groups of similar interests and identities, the Internet is used by many people to encounter differences that they would not normally encounter in everyday life. For example, Elin (2003) argues that Internet users tend to use it to verify information filtered to them and actively check claims by comparing multiple sources rather than passively relying only on given information (cited in Lee, 2009, p. 43).

Moreover, some empirical evidence shows that such fragmented groups can join together against mainstream and dominant system cultures. For example, Stromer-Galley’s research findings (2003) show that people appreciate the diversity of the people and viewpoints they encounter on their chosen discussion spaces. In addition, Kahn and Kellner’s (2004) research demonstrates that the anti-corporate globalization movement has revealed a variety of ways in which diverse individuals and groups can build networks and develop collective identities. Soon & Kluver (2014) concluded the by contrast to the common view of blogging as a highly narcissistic activity, their study

explicates how blogging is a communal activity and the emergence of a collective identity which drives collective action. Their study revealed that “shared consciousness”, “distinctive blogging practices”, and the articulation of a common adversary contribute to the development of a collective identity. Moreover, their study shows that “identity multiplicity points to the emergence of “individualized collectiveness, which extends beyond networked individualism and is reinforced by offline participation in activism and pre-existing social ties with other activists” (Soon & Kluver, 2014, p. 500).

Therefore, the role of the Internet in extension and fragmentation of communities should be properly understood in a social context. For example, in Iran—where there is not any democratic communications system and the government strictly controls mass media—the Internet can play a crucial role in dissemination of alternative information, culture, and representation and reconstruction of non-mainstream identities of oppositional subcultural groups and voiceless oppressed groups. Furthermore, the popular use of the Internet has promoted diverse political voices that in Iran would otherwise be marginalized or unrepresentable, activating online grassroots movements that now flourish. Of course, against the views of critics, we do not like to deny unequal access to computer technologies and the Internet that widened the digital divide between Iranian citizens in society, especially in countries like Iran. Undoubtedly, unequal access to new technologies, hardware, software, and Internet access widen the digital divide between Iranian citizens. Shirazi’s (2012) findings indicate and prove the digital divide between Iran and Bahrain (and other Middle Eastern countries) increased by 1.2-fold during the period of 1995–2005. But, Iranian oppositional and oppressed groups also have used these new technologies for advancing their struggles and resistance against the Islamic theocratic system of discrimination, injustice, and inequality.

Therefore, in this dissertation, our argument is instead of the existence of a digital divide; some Iranian oppositional, oppressed and excluded groups, however, have hardly used new technologies/Internet for the promotion of their interests and agendas. The Iranian oppressed groups developed their own critical intellectuals and media activists who struggle against the totalitarian state of their own country. For example, Iranian workers, Iranian women's rights advocates, Iranian Baha'is, and other groups have launched their own websites and opposition against the Islamic Republic of Iran's totalitarian state. Therefore, in this thesis, we believe that the Internet as contested terrain has the dual functions of integration and fragmentation of communities, and it depends on the users' and activists' aims and abilities, motivations, critical media literacy, democratic political literacy and other factors.

### **2.2.3 Virtual space and multiple public spheres**

Media scholars, theorists and researchers have demonstrated how the Internet helps to construct collective identities and creates new forms of interactive communication, including web logs, wikis, and the killer application of e-mail (Bohman, 2004; Dahlberg, 2007; Kellner, 2000b; Zizi Papacharissi, 2002). The concept of a public sphere is applied by Habermas (1991) to analyze social-structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe and the United States. From Habermas's (1974) perspective, the bourgeois public sphere is a public domain of a social life where critical-rational discussion takes place, which can form public opinion. Based on Habermas's view, the public sphere is a social space where citizens or private individuals gather to critically and rationally discuss public issues to reach consensus and social integration to resolve public problems.

The Habermas concept of the public sphere has received detailed critiques. For example, Mark Poster (1997) contends that the Habermasian notion of a public

sphere—a homogeneous space of embodied subjects in symmetrical relations—may not apply to the Internet, because it conflates the distinction between “private” and “public” among other problems of the interference of technology. Poster (1997) has proposed viewing virtual space in fundamentally different terms than those proposed by Habermas’s original understanding of the public sphere:

For Habermas, the public sphere is a homogeneous space of embodied subjects in symmetrical relations, pursuing consensus through the critique of arguments and the presentation of validity claims. This model, I contend, is systematically denied in the arenas of electronic politics. We are advised then to abandon Habermas’ concept of the public sphere in assessing the Internet as a political domain. (Poster, 1997)

From Poster’s (1997) view, the Internet as virtual space has created new forms of decentralized dialogue, new combinations of human-machine assemblages, and new individual and collective voices. Unlike Habermas’s notion of public sphere, Poster’s virtual space: (1) offers little hierarchy or structure in virtual communication; (2) posits “mobile identities” that can be newly invented on the web; and (3) eliminates traditional distinctions between the private and public (Poster, 1997). Not all scholars, however, view the Internet as a utopian solution to issues of voice and visibility. Papacharissi (2002) argues that the Internet plays a dual function in the public sphere. Her study points to several aspects of these new technologies that simultaneously limit and expand the public sphere. First, the data storage and retrieval capabilities of Internet-based technologies infuse political discussion with information otherwise unavailable. At the same time, inequalities to information access and new media literacy compromise the representativeness of the virtual sphere. Second, Internet-based technologies enable discussion between people on far sides of the globe, but also frequently fragment political discourse. Third, given the patterns of global capitalism, it is possible that Internet-based technologies will adapt themselves to the current political culture rather

than create a new one. She concludes that the Internet has created a new public space for politically oriented conversation but does not yet constitute a public sphere; whether this public space transcends to a public sphere is not up to the technology itself. Therefore, both Poster and Papacharissi believe the Internet will create not merely a “new” public sphere, but an entirely different mode of discourse.

Poster (1997) has suggested that the Internet does evince some characteristics of a completely new alternative space marked by decentralized networking, horizontal communication, and new mobile identities as it relates to social movements. Warf & Grimes (1997) have also asserted that virtual worlds offer the opportunity for varied social groups to share a broad sense of social justice without being reductively, stably, and monolithically identified in terms of race, sex, age, religion, sexual preference, or other, often material, identity markers. The Internet thus becomes a counter-hegemonic space wherein “nomadic power” is diffused:

Nomadic power is diffuse power, with no location, and it maintains its autonomy through movement. Its valuables, electronic capital and electronic information, are located both nowhere and everywhere and cannot be physically captured ... Nomadic elite power can be countered by nomadic forms of electronic resistance in cyberspace. (Warf & Grimes, 1997)

The Internet, as a new, decentralized network positioned against dominant hegemony, can thus promote political ideals that oppose centralized governance and hierarchical organizational forms. However, it is important to recognize that the boundaries between online and offline communications are not as clear as Poster initially assumes. Internet users are not confined to an online world but move fluidly back and forth between equally legitimate online and offline identities. The interconnectivity between online and offline activism has been frequently observed in Internet-based protests. As Juris

(2005) has noted, virtual communication has complemented and facilitated face-to-face coordination and interaction rather than replacing them (p. 196).

Kellner (2000b) has argued, the Internet potentially helps the revitalization of multiple public spheres that maximize public communication and interaction so that excluded and oppressed groups as well as mainstream and dominate groups can join and reproduce their progressive and alternative readings and meanings against societies dominant cultures, represent their oppositional identity, and develop their alliance and solidarity.

According to this literature, we have reason to doubt Poster's (1997) overambitious claim that "the age of the public sphere as face-to-face talk is clearly over." Virtual communication does not replace face-to-face communication, but coexists with it, as online and offline activities become intermingled and interconnected in practice. It should be mentioned that, like Kellner, we believe that new technologies and the Internet inherently facilitate the creation of multiple public spheres. However, the realization of the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere depends on several kinds of preconditions such as media, democratic politics, democratic government, literacy rate, citizens' social responsibilities, critical media literacy rate, and other factors. Therefore, we argue that the Internet as contested terrain has created multiple public spheres on which excluded groups as well as ruling forces represent their cultures, meanings, and oppositional identity. Also, the Internet facilitates alliance and solidarity among Internet activists; however, the Internet activists may be unable to use the technology potential for development of their alliance and solidarity.

### **2.3 Social movements and Internet technology**

The successful use of Internet technologies by the Zapatista movement inspired social movement activists to adopt new ICTs to promote their political agenda and mobilize resources. As has been mentioned several times, the current thesis is concerned with the oppositional deployment of the Internet by Iranian oppositional groups and political movements for the advancement of their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. Before discussing the role of the Internet in context of oppositional political movements, it is necessary to study the theoretical paradigms and approaches that may be relevant to the study of social movements and Internet technologies. Theories of social movements provide a basis for the analysis of actions taken by diverse social movement participants and facilitate consideration of components of the social movement's structure. Several representative definitions of social movements and a review of social movement perspectives are presented below.

The concept of social movements has been defined in several diverse ways. Tarrow (1994) defines social movements as collective challenges to elites, authorities, other groups, or cultural codes by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents, and authorities. Tarrow (1994) argue that there are four major elements to a social movement: collective challenges against elites, authorities, other groups or cultural codes; people with common purpose; social solidarity and sustained interaction with opponents and authorities. From Tarrow's point of view, collective challenge or contentious collective action refers to collective action, itself, which means groups of people acting together to challenge those authority.

Most social movement theories focus on the modern nation-state as a context of contemporary political contention. However, the central issue is contentiousness. It is

the conflict between groups that leads to social movements. Tarrow argues that contentious collective action occurs when people who lack regular access to institutions, act in the name of new or unaccepted claims and behave in ways that fundamentally challenge others. It produces social movements when social actors concert their actions around common claims in sustained sequences of interaction with opponents or authorities. Tarrow's definition places more emphasis on movement conflict and opposition with established authorities and less pay attention to culture and identity. In other words, his definition has ignored or explicitly set aside questions of culture or the interpretation of meaning.

For Touraine (1981) "social movements are normatively oriented interactions between adversaries with conflicting interpretations and opposed models of a shared cultural field" (cited in Calhoun, 1993, p. 387). Touraine's definition pays more attention to other groups in civil society and neglects totalitarian states. Although his definition is helpful it changes our attention from the state to other groups. But, his definition leaves out totalitarian states while totalitarian states play key role in public collective challenge.

Social movements have been defined by Mario Diani (1992) as "networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals, groups and organizations, who share a distinctive collective identity, and mobilize resources on conflictual issues" (p. 1). Based on Diani's definition, social movements are networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals, groups, and organizations who: (1) share a collective identity; (2) exchange practical and symbolic resources through informal networks; (3) engage in conflict or competition over a social problem by competing for resources, members, and attention. From Diani's point of view, social movements are defined as a sustainable struggle between a group of actors who engage in political-

cultural conflictive collective action with clearly identified opponents to promote or oppose social change, have dense informal networks, and share a distinct collective identity. Therefore, for purpose of this thesis, we rely on Diani's definition of social movement as "networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals, groups and organizations who share a distinctive collective identity and mobilize resources on conflictual issues."

The purpose of this thesis is to visual analysis of oppositional deployment of Internet technologies by oppositional movements and groups. Therefore, Diani's (1992) definition of social movements is most appropriate in this case. As illustrated in his definition, computer-mediated communication has the potential to influence primary dimensions of social movements such as the actors (individuals and organizations), the movement's collective identity, networks, and resources. Diani's definition stresses that within the process of pursuing a new social order, social movement activists define themselves by constructing their own meaning, which indicates that the movement's own ability to accomplish this is premised upon its capacity to create communication among the movement's actors, along with the social forces with which they seek to connect.

#### **2.4 Social movement's major theoretical approaches**

There are several radically different types and typologies of social movement approaches. Dalton (1994) has typified social movement perspectives to five approaches: (1) the classic (collective behavior) perspective, (2) the resource-mobilization perspective, (3) the political opportunity perspective, (4) the ideologically structured perspective, and (5) the discourse or social constructionist perspective (Cited in Van De Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004, p. 6). Hellmann (1998) distinguished between "movement paradigms," which focused on structural strain, collective identity,

framing, resource mobilization, and political opportunity structures (cited in Van De Donk et al., 2004, p. 6). In their analysis of social movement theories, Diani (1992) and Tarrow (2012b) point out five main approaches to the analysis of social movements: (1) collective behavior, (2) resource mobilization, (3) the political process model, (4) social-constructionism, and (5) new social movements. The current thesis focuses on new social movements' approach that emphasizes on collective identity representation. This section will discuss the main theories, with the exception of collective behavior, because it is not relevant to this study.

#### **2.4.1 Resource mobilization theory**

Resource mobilization theory has recently presented an alternative interpretation of social movements (Jenkins, 1983, p. 527). The resource mobilization theory has been a dominant paradigm in the study of social movements from a North American perspective (Canel, 1997, p. 1). Resource mobilization theory (RMT) explains the growth and development of social movements by emphasizing the fundamental importance of pre-existing organizations and the availability of resources such as money, professional expertise, and recruitment networks in civil society. The resource mobilization approach focuses on available resources and the role of formal organization in the rise of mobilization. Resource mobilization theorists stress that movements require some form of organization: leadership, administrative structure, incentives for participation, and a means for acquiring resources and support. They saw the existence of grievances in society as normal, but grievances alone were an insufficient condition in explaining the rise of mobilization. From this perspective, social movement's actors are essentially rational and instrumentally oriented actions. From their perspective, human beings are considered as rational agents who calculate the costs and benefits of their participation in progressive social movements.

Though an improvement on the classical model, the RM-T approach has several shortcomings and cannot be used for our project's purposes. First, it overemphasizes the organizational matters of social movements but neglects their ideological and cultural dimensions. Additionally, the RM-T overemphasizes the approach of rationality on social movements and pays much less attention to the ideological role in the emergence and development of social movements. Moreover, the RM-T approach pays more attention to the vertical and centralized organization forms of social movements and much less attention to the horizontal and decentralized forms of social movements' organizations. Therefore, the resource mobilization approach is insufficient and inappropriate for analysis of (new) social movements. While, the Internet networked system provides social movements with a cheap and fast means of international communication that simplifies mobilization and favors highly flexible, loose organizational structures which make facilitate grassroots mobilization.

#### **2.4.2 Political process theory**

Some social movement scholars focus on how social movements emerge and develop their outcomes in relation to their political environment. From their perspective, "social movements emerge in a milieu derived from the opening and closing of political opportunities and constraints" (Reisinezhad, 2014, p. 3). This has been called the political process model or political opportunity structure model. The political opportunity structure (POS) perspective—also called the "political process model"—has edged out the resource mobilization perspective, which was dominant in the 1970s (Opp, 2009). According to Opp (2009) the political opportunity structures (POSs) are defined as changes in the political environment that influence the chances of success.

According to Tarrow (2012b), the "political process model" explored movements, relationships with political parties, interest groups, opponents, and institutions. Scholars

working in this tradition tried to build a synthetic model: they embraced the culturalists' "emphasis on framing; the actors in their analyses were movement organizations; and their attention centered on the political process and on the opportunities and constraints it offered challengers" (Tarrow, 2012b, p. 15). Goldstone and Tilly (2001) made a clear distinction between opportunities and constraints or threats. From their point of view, opportunities refer to "the probability that social protest actions will lead to success in achieving a desired outcome," and threats refer to "the costs that a social group will incur from protest, or that it expects to suffer if it does not take action" (cited in Tarrow, 2012a, pp. 132-133). Tarrow (2012a) defines political opportunities as signals to social or political activists that either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form a social movement.

Tarrow's broad definition of political opportunities emphasize both the formal structures like state institutions and the informal structures like money that provide resources and oppose constraints external to the groups. According to Tarrow, there are five salient kinds of signals: the opening up of access to power, shifting alignments, the availability of influential allies, cleavages within and among elites, and the likelihood of repression. From this perspective, social movement organizations have been seen as rational actors who make strategic decisions based on the costs and benefits involved and the potential for realizing their goals.

They have less appeal outside developed northern democracies because it was difficult, especially under authoritarian regimes, to imagine political opportunity as a significant explanatory category. As Ayres (1999) argues, critical scholars in the social movement have pointed out the state-centric bias of the concept of political opportunity.

### 2.4.3 Frame analysis theory

According to Benford and Snow (2000), collective action frames and framing processes in relation to social movements have come to be regarded, alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity processes, as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements. As Casquete (2006) argues social movements need to frame a situation and produce symbols, signs and meanings to reinforce bonds of alliance and solidarity between movement activists through creation of sense of “we-ness”. By Zald (1996) framing processes are strategic attempts to craft, disseminate, and contest the language and narratives used to describe a movement. The objective of this process is to justify activists’ claims and motivate action using culturally shared beliefs and understandings (cited in Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 3). Snow (2004) states that social movements construct frames and the process of the frames are constructed. As Snow (2004, pp. 402-403) put it:

Frames are continuously articulated and elaborated during the course of conversation and debate among the interactants within a discursive field ... Such fields emerge or evolve in the course of discussion of and debate about contested issues and events, and encompass not only cultural materials (e.g. beliefs, values, ideologies, myths and narratives, primary frameworks), of potential relevance, but also various sets of actors [who] include one or more counter movements, the targets of action or change, the media, and the larger public.

From Snow’s perspective, collective action and the social movement’s frames are constructed during discussion and debate between social movement activists and opponents about contested issues. Snow asserts that the discussions include cultural materials such as values, beliefs, ideas, myths, signs, symbols, meanings, narratives, and frameworks, diverse kinds of activists, targets of change and action, the media, and the public at large.

The Internet as contested terrain makes facilitate the creation of alternative forms visual symbols, signs, and meanings which may reinforce collectivity through creation of sense of “we-ness” and “collective agency”. Jalaeipour and Nasr Esfahani (2014) state that the main feature of frame analysis in study social movement is that notice and tray for theoretical understanding symbolic activities and meaning-giver of social movements activists for formation of dissatisfactions, creation of agreement on necessity collective action and justification of activities for proposed solutions for members, opponents and neutrals. From their view, the frame analysis provides interpretative tools that will help us to study descriptive method of the current situation from the movement’s leader’s orientation. In continue, they argue that without the frame that the leaders provide, the recognition of the dynamic of movement is impossible. According to above literature, the thesis is going to argue that the Internet as contested terrain make facilitate creation of alternative form of visual symbols, signs, and narratives make facilitate sense of “we-ness” and “collective agency” for emergence and extension of social movement.

#### **2.4.4 New social movement’s theory**

Sometime after 1968, social movement scholars began to speak of “new social movements” (Calhoun, 1993; Habermas, 1981; Zugman, 2003) that worked outside formal institutional channels and emphasized on lifestyle, ethical, or “identity” concerns rather than narrow economic goals. New social movements refer to movements and organizations that deal primarily with issues of identity and meaning, in contrast to traditional class-based organizations such as unions or political parties (Zugman, 2003).

New social movements have prominent features and characteristics that distinguish them from previous movements. The most important features and characteristics of the new social movements are listed as follows: first, “the new social movements do not

bear a clear relation to structural role of the participants. There is a tendency for the social base of the new social movements to transcend class structure. The background of participants finds their most frequent structural root in rather diffuse social statuses such as youth, gender, sexual orientation or professions that do not correspond with structural explanation. Second, ideological characteristic of NSM stands in sharp contrast to the working class movements and to Marxist conception of ideology as unifying and totalizing element for collective action. In another word, the new social movements exhibit a pluralism of ideas and values, they tend to have pragmatic orientation and search for institution reform enlarge the system of members participation in decision-making. Third, NSM theories specifically address the conditions for the emergence of collective identity formation and collective action in contemporary information society. The organizing base of NSMs has been theorized as more dispersed diverse, fluid and complex in structure than the more defined and fixed structures of previous movement organizations (e.g., labor movements)” (Langman, 2005). Fourth, the new social movements are reliant on new information and communicational technologies, through the technologies propound their requests and represent their protests, while the old social movements depend on mass media and face-to-face communication.

To sum up, new social movements represent an active resistance or struggle against the exploitation and colonization of the social actors “life-world” by the dominant system hegemony. NSM theories specifically address the conditions for the emergence of collective identity formation and collective action in contemporary information society. As Offe (1985) argue, “NSM participants can also be drawn from three categories: the new middle class (groups tend to be young, well-educated, and working in the public sector), elements of the old middle class, and those operating primarily outside the labor market (e.g., unemployed workers, students, housewives, retired persons)” (p. 820). The

organizing base of NSMs, as Langman (2005) has been theorized as more diverse, fluid, and complex in structure than the more defined and fixed structures of previous movement organizations (e.g., labor movements). The new social movements exhibited radicalized demands for real democracy, equality, and citizen participation during an era when the restructuring of capitalist hegemony and reactionary state totalitarianism involved efforts toward de-democratization and increased domination.

The new social movement's theory received critiques from scientists as follow: New social movement models place more emphasis on culture, identity, and meaning that make a distinction among society, culture, and politics, and subsequently it reduces social movements to cultural components that can be called cultural reductionism, because it ignores other dimensions of social movements such as the economic and political. Some social and cultural problems and conflicts fall within political and economic institutions; therefore, the reduction of social conflict to a cultural component is a one-dimensional model and inadequate for analysis of collective action. Furthermore, because new social movements take middle-class forms, they fail to address the concerns of other classes and pursue politics in ways that are alien to them. Since the emergence of the new social movement's theory with its emphasis on the middle class and the exclusion of labor movements, there has been a decline in the study of worker and labor movements. The decline of the labor movement, as Touraine (1985) states, is "the transformation of Third World national liberation movements into oppressive or even fanatic regimes, the influence of Soviet dissidents, had destroyed the traditional eschatological confidence in some movements which were supposed to be popular and libertarian" (p. 767).

Therefore, it is useful for our purposes here to highlight the characteristics associated with the emerging forms of the oppositional movement that combine elements of both

old and new social movement theories. In short, the new social movement reveals a series of unique characteristics that have been explored in the literature: the use of new information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet (Feixa, Pereira, & Juris, 2009). The new social movements are reliant on new information and communication technologies, though the technologies propound their requests and represent their protests, whereas the old social movements depend on mass media and face-to-face communication. Furthermore, the new social movements are reliant on dispersed diverse, fluid and complex in structure than the more defined and fixed structures of previous movement organizations. Finally, the new social movements exhibited radicalized demands for real democracy, equality, and citizen participation during an era when the restructuring of capitalist hegemony and reactionary state totalitarianism involved efforts toward de-democratization and increased domination.

In this thesis, it is argued that the Iranian oppositional movements can be understood, in analytic and theoretical terms, as a new social movement involving the rise of a new wave of contentious action and its associated characteristics. Although a large body of social movement literature links the formation of new social movements to either the expansion of structural opportunities or rational choice theory, recourse mobilization theory, frame analysis theory, and collective identity, the current thesis addresses the key role of represented and reconstructed collective identity” at the heart of the movements.

## **2.5 Three factors of social movement**

McAdam et al. (1996) offer a theatrical framework for analysis of emergence, development, and outcome of social movements and revolution by addressing three interrelated factors: mobilizing structures, opportunity structures, and framing processes (Table 2.1). Van De Donk et al. (2004) have employed a similar strategy to present a

common theoretical framework for analysis of the use of ICTs by oppositional movements. Following this line of discussion, Kelly Garrett (2006) presents a common theoretical framework about how new information and communication technologies influence social movements' mobilization structure, political opportunities, and framing processes. Parallel to the theoretical framework, the thesis is going to analyze Internet usage by the Iranian Green Movement.

Mobilizing structures, according to McCarthy (1996), refer to “the mechanisms that enable individuals to organize and engage in collective action, including social structures and tactical repertoires” (cited in Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 203). Social structures encompass both formal configurations, such as social movement organizations or churches, and informal configurations, such as friendship and activist networks. Tactical repertoires describe the forms of protest and collective action that activists are familiar with and able to utilize.

**Table 2.1:** Framework of Social Movement Factors (McAdam et al., 1996).

<b>Mobilizing structures</b>	Social structures	Formal	Movement organizations, churches, etc.
		Informal	Friendship, activist networks, etc.
	Tactical repertoires	The forms of protest and collective action	
<b>Political Opportunities</b>	Conditions in the environment that favor social movement activity		
<b>Framing Processes</b>	Strategic attempts to craft, disseminate and contest the language and narratives used to describe a movement		

According to McAdam et al (1996), “opportunity structures refer to conditions in the environment that favor social movement activity, and include factors such as the relative accessibility of the political system, the stable or fragmented alignments among

elites, the presences of elite allies, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression" (Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 204).

According to Zald (1996), "framing processes are strategic attempts to craft, disseminate, and contest the language and narratives used to describe a movement. The objective of this process is to justify activists' claims and motivate action using culturally shared beliefs and understandings" (Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 204).

Drawing on the three factors, we can reconsider the changes that new ICTs have brought to the fields of social movements. Kelly Garrett (2006) has proposed adopting McAdam et al.'s (1996) framework to align and integrate the discussion about newly emerging practices and phenomena involved with Internet activism.

In terms of mobilizing structures, Kelly Garrett (2006) asserts there are three mechanisms that potentially link technology and participation: reduction of participation costs, promotion of collective identity, and creation of community. The first mechanism linking technology and participation is the reduction of participation costs. According to Leizerov (2000), "by reducing costs associated with publishing and accessing movement information, ICTs have the potential to alter the flow of political information, to reduce the cost of conventional forms of participation, and to create new low-cost forms of participation, ultimately contributing to an upsurge in participation" (cited in Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 205).

The second mechanism that links technology and participation is the promotion of collective identity. The Internet is also able to foster collective identity across a dispersed population and facilitate community creation. Melucci (1989) defines collective identity as a "shared definition produced by several interacting individuals

who are concerned with the orientations of their actions as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their actions take place” (cited in Wall, 2007, p. 261). Snow (2001) gives a simple conceptual definition from the notion of collective identity. From his point of view, conceptually, the essence of collective identity resides in a shared and interactive sense of “we-ness” and “collective agency.” For Snow, a shared and interactive sense of “we-ness” and “collective agency” is the essence of collective identity. Thus, in applying the concept of collective identity within the context of this study, we seek to identify and highlight the presence, representation, and reconstruction of collective identity in the texts of websites. The thesis adopt Snow’s (2001) definition of collective identity as a shared sense of “we-ness” and “collective agents and Taylor and Whittier’s (1992) description of collective identity as solidarity experienced by challengers of those in power. While collective identity is represented and reconstructed through cultural elements, then is recognizable. As Kahn and Kellner (2005) argue, oppositional groups and individuals excluded from mainstream politics and cultural production have used the Internet to build solidarity among participants and develop their collective identity which will be discussed in sub topic of 2.7.1 the cognitive function of the Internet that refers to the process of alternative culture and information production by the social movements’ activists for the building of collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members

The third mechanism identified in the literature is ICTs’ facilitation of community creation. According to Norris (2004) “Online community members report that their experiences with these groups significantly reinforce existing social networks, while simultaneously allowing them to connect with those who hold different views” (cited in Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 206). Numerous case studies suggest that new technologies are also facilitating the maintenance of geographically dispersed face-to-face networks (e.g Kahn & Kellner, 2004).

Framing processes provide cognitive bases for actors to build collective identity and participate in collective action. By Zald (1996) “framing processes are strategic attempts to craft, disseminate, and contest the language and narratives used to describe a movement. The objective of this process is to justify activists’ claims and motivate action using culturally shared beliefs and understandings” (cited in Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 204). The Internet as contested terrain makes facilitate the creation of alternative forms of symbols, signs, and meanings which may reinforce collectivity through creation of sense of “we-ness” and “collective agency”. Similarly, Jalaeipour & Nasr Esfahani (2014) state that the main feature of frame analysis in study social movement is that notice and try for theoretical understanding symbolic activities and meaning-giver of social movements activists for formation of dissatisfactions, creation of agreement on necessity collective action and justification of activities for proposed solutions for members, opponents and neutrals. From their view, the frame analysis provides interpretative tools that will help us to study descriptive method of the current situation from the movement’s leader’s orientation. In continue, they argue that without the frame that the leaders provide, the recognition of the dynamic of movement is impossible. According to above literature, it is going to argue that the Internet as contested terrain make facilitate creation of alternative form of symbols, signs, and narratives make facilitate sense of we-ness and collective agency for emergence and extension of social movement.

With regard to political opportunities, scholars have suggested that ICTs foster transnational activity and offer a geographically unbounded communication mode fundamentally resistant to state regulation (Kelly Garrett, 2006). The Internet mediates and develops political opportunities structures for new social-oppositional movement activists. As McAdam et al. (1996) put it “opportunity structures refer to conditions in the environment that favour social movement activity, and include factors such as the

relative accessibility of the political system, the stable or fragmented alignments among elites, the presences of elite allies, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression" (cited in Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 204). The Mediatization police ruthless violence by social movement's activists through the global Internet may facilitate international institutions and organizations and groups allies and support for social movements activist which may weak repressive capacity of policies.

As Sohrabi-Haghighat and Mansouri (2010) argue that the Internet allowed the Iranian Green Movement's activists to enhance its political opportunities through reaching out the international allies and weakening the repressive capacity of the Islamic republic of Iran's government. The mediatization of the political opportunities by the Internet allow to people to know and inform about the political opportunities. Khalaf and Ghorbanpour (2011) argue that the Internet and cyberspace has created communicative opportunities for social movement's political leaders and activists which increased communication between members, with communities and peoples, financial resources. The implication of the concert structures have created their targeted cultural alternative and transmit of their alternative values and norms which lead to delegitimization of the systems, the changing of people behaviors against the system and creation of friction between people and system.

Therefore, based on the above literature, it could be argued that the Internet as contested terrain or site of struggle can be used by social movement's activists for development of political opportunities for promotion of their political struggles through; the mediatization political struggles via the Internet and reaching out the international allies and weakening the repressive capacity of the Islamic republic of Iran's government, the implication of the concert structures have created their targeted cultural alternative and transmit of their alternative values and norms which lead to delegitimization of the

systems, the changing of people behaviors against the system and creation of friction between people and system.

In sum, the Internet as contested terrain or alternative media offers the potential to mobilize more resources in more efficient, diversified, and unorthodox ways. They also affect the forms and decision-making processes of existing social movement organizations. On the Internet, organizations, groups, and individuals can develop their collective identities through interactions in online communities and/or alternative media. Therefore, the Internet as a contested terrain has created a dynamic and complex space which could be used by oppositional movements for promotion of their political struggles against totalitarian state power.

## **2.6 New social movements and Internet technology**

In this thesis, Internet technologies and the World Wide Web as contested terrain and alternative media have several affordances and political functions for oppositional groups and new social movements to advance their cultural and political struggles. With the fast growth of Internet technologies, social movements have witnessed some changes that extend beyond their classical functions and boundaries in which new terms such as global social movements, online social movements, e-movements, e-activism, and e-protests have entered the academic discourse and the global scene. Revolutionary Internet technologies have changed today's social movements' levels of participation, organization, mobilization, community development, collective identity construction, allegiance and solidarity, communication, and so on. The following section reviews relevant literature about the role of the Internet in oppositional politics. Ayres (1999) states that contentious politics have diffused from the street to cyberspace. There is truth in Ayres's argument about the diffusion of contentious politics via the Internet; however, another truth is that cyberspace can and has been used by oppositional groups

for organization and mobilization of their support for street demonstrations. Thus, his view about the Internet is reductionist, because he considers the Internet as merely a diffusion channel of contentious politics and ignores its function in street movements. Downing et al. (2000) argue that radical alternative media generally serve two overriding purposes: (a) to express oppositional vision against the power structure and its behaviors and (b) to built support, solidarity and networking against policies or against the very survival of power structure. However, Downing et al. (2000) argument is correct about the role of the radical media in expression of oppositional vision against the power structure and its behaviors, but another truth is that the alternative media have been seriously utilized by the totalitarian system for control and suppression of oppositional and social movement's activists. Moreover, it seems that the author override on the powerful role of radical media on rebellious communication and social movements, despite of their small size and their very gradually transformation of status quo. Furthermore, Downing et al. (2000) less pay attention to the role of Internet in fragmentation and "cyberbalkanization" communities and groups to "like-minded" groups networks which may be desperate groups and communities to small groups which is so harmful for social movements.

Kellner (2001) argues that new information and communication technologies have mediated political struggles so that oppositional movements can deploy the technologies for promotion of their political and cultural struggles. Based on Kellner (2001) argument, political struggle mediated by Techno-politics in the age of new technologies. The third generation critical theorist (2001) defines techno-politics as the use of new technologies such as computers and the Internet to advance political goals. From his perspective, politics have been mediated by technologies, and new technologies are playing a crucial role in politics and all realms of social life. The author argues that deploying computer-mediated technology for techno-politics,

however, opens new terrains of political struggle for voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media and thus increases potential for resistance and intervention by oppositional groups.

Moreover, Van Aelst and Walgrave (2002) pinpoint the contribution of these sites to three different conditions that establish movement formation: collective identity, actual mobilization, and a network of organizations. Furthermore, Kahn and Kellner (2004) analyze oppositional deployment of the Internet by the oppositional political movements. They argue that new information and communication technologies mediate political struggles. They summarize the diverse roles that the Internet plays in the dynamics of oppositional political movements as follow: alternative culture and information production and dissemination; collective identity representation and reconstruction; and organization and mobilization of public demonstrations and developing networks of solidarity and alliance.

Furthermore, Van De Donk et al. (2004) observe that the Internet offers revolutionary prospects for social movements to reach out to a global audience, circumventing the official political organizations and mainstream media message, to provide powerful tools for coordinating activities between the geographical diaspora and for constructing collective identity. Although Van De Donk et al. (2004) argument is correct, but, their argument neglects the strict role of authoritarian state in widespread and systematic censorship, shutting down and blocking Internet and website contents, slowing Internet speed, detaining blogger and writers, and tapping cell phones. Van De Donk et al. (2004) less pay attention to the role of Internet in fragmentation and “cyberbalkanization” communities and groups to “like-minded” groups which may be desperate groups and communities to small groups which is so harmful for social movements

Furthermore, the findings of Della Porta and Mosca (2005) point out four of the Internet functions that empower social movements: (a) purely instrumental ways (an additional logistical resource for “resource-poor” actors); (b) a protest function (direct expression of protest); (c) symbolically (as a medium favoring identification processes in collective actors); and (d) cognitively (informing and sensitizing public opinion) (p. 167). Moreover, Kelly Garrett (2006) argues that ICTs contribute to movements in shaping new models of contentious activities, such as cyber disobedience, cyber protest, and political hacktivism. From Garrett’s point of view, ICTs can be used by social movement activists as a site for the direct expression of dissent, virtual struggle, and political and cultural protest.

In Baringhorst’s (2008) analysis, political protests on the Net have the five following functions of mediated communication of media for political protest: the “logistic functions” of protest mobilization; the “cognitive function” of knowledge production and communication in Net-based groups; the “affective function” of virtual community formation; the “tactical function” of using the Internet as a weapon and target of political protest; the function of social organization in terms of enabling transnational network formation. Stein (2009) highlighted web use by social movements in the five following parts: provides information; assists action and mobilization; promotes interaction and dialogue; makes lateral linkages; serves as an outlet for creative expression; and promotes fundraising and resource generation.

Dolatshahi (2009) argues that the cyberspace created by Iranian feminist websites is contested and yet empowering space. Also, she further contends that the website, as independent forums, has several of the following functions for the activists of the Iranian feminist movement it has given voice and visibility to the Iranian feminist movement; it has helped the movement’s resources mobilize; it has helped the

movement's activists to network and stay connected with other activists and to the public; and it has helped the movement recruit men as well as women, empowered the movement through creating a space where the movement activists can form a sense of collective identity, and develop a sense of alliance and solidarity. Carafano (2009) believes Iranian citizens used the social network media to support at least four kinds of activities: street journalism, mobilizing the Iranian diaspora, organizing activists, and information warfare. Similarly, Sardarniya (2010) states that the Internet leads to new social movement power in shaping and guiding the realm of public opinion, protests, and creating serious challenges for the government. Accordingly, the author believes that a new social movement plays an important role in the development of global civil society with the involvement of new media technology. From his view, the Internet has several functions for new social movements, including: cognitive, propaganda, identity-making, network-making, and organizing protests. The result of his studies shows that the Internet, with features such as e-mail, web sites, networking, and identity making, has had a great effect on the success of this movement to encourage and mobilize protest at the global level in the second half of the 1990s.

Furthermore, Van Laer & Van Aelst (2010) have represented two-fold typology of a new digitalized action repertoire. Based on their model, the Internet can facilitate traditional offline activism on the one hand, the Internet facilitates and supports (traditional) offline collective action in terms of organization, mobilization and transnationalization and, on the other hand, creates virtual modes of collective action in term of alternative website and weblog creation, online petitions and email bombings, virtual sit-ins to hacking the websites of large companies, organizations or governments.

Shirazi (2012) also argues that the Internet provides a voice to Iran's marginalized and repressed groups, especially young people and educated women. According to an

International Telecommunication Union report, the number of Iranian female Internet users reached nearly half (49%) of the total Internet users in Iran in 2003. This constitutes a total of 11.5 million female Internet users in Iran, which is the highest level of Internet penetration rate among Islamic countries in the Middle East. Also, Shirazi argues that blogging has help repressed and marginalized groups get their voices heard and to challenge the long-standing univocal government and Islamic religious authorities. The study's findings demonstrate that "women's digital activities prove to be an effective means of participating in communication discourse and mobilizing the female population of Iran in their struggle for a just and fair society." However, there is some truth in Shirazi's argument about the role of the Internet empowering excluded groups in Iran, but another truth is that the Internet has been extensively used by the Islamic Republic of Iran's totalitarian system to control and repress subcultures and marginalized groups in Iran.

Moreover, Kamalipour (2010) argues that digital media technologies play a crucial role in bypassing "physical-geographical" boundaries and government censorship and restrictions. The author further argues that the new digital media have empowered the traditionally voiceless and marginalized people in the heart-wrenching postelection events in Iran. Although Kamalipour's argument is correct, but, his statement neglects the strict role of the Iranian authoritarian state in widespread and systematic censorship, shutting down and blocking the Internet and website contents, slowing the Internet speed, detaining blogger and writers, and tapping cell phones. Furthermore, his study ignores the deployment of Internet technology by the Islamic Republic of Iran's totalitarian system to control and suppress marginalized and voiceless groups. Besides, he emphasizes the digital media technology use in alternative news making, whereas more attention should be paid to digital technology use in representation and reconstruction of collective identity, organization, and mobilization of mass

demonstrations, creation of virtual communities, direct expression of oppositional struggles, and alliance of solidarity between movement activists.

Moreover, Sohrabi-Haghighat et al. (2010) studied the role of ICTs in the emergence and development of the Iranian Green Movement. They adopted the Political Opportunity Structures perspective as the theoretical framework of their study. They argue that “the Internet allowed the Green Movement to enhance its political opportunities through reaching international allies and by weakening the repressive capacity of Iran’s regime” (Sohrabi-Haghighat et al., 2010, p. 24). They further assert that “the Green Movement used ICTs as an organizational resource to back-up demonstrations and gatherings. The ability of ICTs to promote a collective identity within the Green Movement and to create a discursive opportunity is also discussed” (Sohrabi-Haghighat et al., 2010, p. 24).

By contrast to the opponents and proponents of one-dimensional perspectives, Sreberny and Khiabany (2010) argue that the Internet is a contested site or agonistic space that offers an alternative mode of communication to those who directly controlled the Islamic Republic of Iran’s state. Similar to Kellner’s (2001) perspective, they see the Internet as a site of struggle and conflict, which differs from Habermas, who sees the Internet as a site of deliberation and discussion, they believe the Internet is a site of struggle and conflict. Golkar (2011) also pointed out the dual function of the Internet by both the Iranian Green Movement protesters for mobilizing popular support and the Islamic Republic of Iran’s regime for expansion of political control of society and suppression of political dissents. The study’s findings demonstrate that although the Internet helped political opponents to expand the Green Movements by breaking the news monopoly of the regime, mobilizing and organizing mass demonstrations, and delegitimizing the regime, it also helps the regime to increase its political domination

by identifying and suppressing political activists, inducing a sense of fear among citizens, and expanding military and paramilitary forces' presence in cyberspace. The article emphasizes the simultaneous role of the Internet on both expansion and suppression of the Iranian Green Movement in the post-presidential election era. In contrast to digital optimists and pessimists, Golkar's studies correctly point out the dual functions of the Internet for both groups of ruling forces and struggles for the promotion of their political projects. From his view the Internet is a battlefield or contested terrain in which both groups promote their political projects.

Additionally, Rahimi (2011) studied the role of social media or cyberspace in formation of political dissent as well as in consolidation of state power in postelection Iran. In this article, the author argues that Iranian post-election political protest events reveal that the social networking media have created sites wherein a virtualized political struggle challenges the Islamic Republic of Iran's authoritarian state both online and offline. In this article, Rahimi points to state online governance through surveillance operations, propaganda, and hacktivism for the exertion of its authority on the Persian cyberspace. The study's findings show that "online social media are agonistic arenas where information, ideas, values, and subjectivities are contested between (uneven) adversaries, and where new contexts could potentially emerge for new ways of doing politics" (Rahimi, 2011, p. 158). Christensen (2011) argues that in the aftermath of the Iranian 2009 presidential elections protests, Iranians social network use provided ample evidence that social network media, on the one hand, facilitated anti-government political dissent and activist organization, and, on the other hand, served to rationalize processes of the Islamic state's surveillance and repression. Christensen's studies demonstrate that new technologies can be used as tools by both state and oppositional groups for promotion of their political agendas. The paper concluded that the effect of the social media on the Green Movement was ambiguous so that it simultaneously

helped and hindered its aims; on the one hand, it increased its challenge to the regime, and, on the other hand, it increased the regime's revenues used to defuse the various challenges. Abdollahi et al. (2012) argue that new social movements don't trust the mainstream media who depend on the center of power and economics. From their point of view, social networks have social features so that instead of the motivations of the technologies' creators and developers, people use the media technologies to circumvent the mainstream and state media censorships and regulations to publish news and information, and organize and mobilize of their protest activities and actions. They also argue that the new social movements need to inform public opinion to attract mainstream media attention. Their finding shows that the successful usage of the social network media technologies in the Wall Street Movement should be considered as a rejection of former media theories such as agenda setting.

The brief review of the previous literature demonstrates the Internet as contested terrain or site of struggle that can be used by both Iranian Green Movement activists and the state and ruling forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, the above literature helps us in providing a theoretical framework for the current research. Furthermore, the above literature demonstrates that the Internet and social movement's literatures have been somewhat text-dominated, where alternative Internet and multimedia mixed textual, visual and vocal texts together, but, they have also largely neglected visual analysis which the thesis tries to address. Additionally, the above literature demonstrates that the most of the studies rather exclusively focused on the textual analysis, while visual images are sites for representation of ideology, identity and political orientation of social and political movements. Beside, the above literature shows that while social movements and protests images conveying various messages of the movement and protests, but, the studies little pay attention on visuals semiotic analysis of social and political movements images and photographs. Furthermore, while

famous visual texts could publicize social movements and protests events, the above studies almost ignored the visual images and their analysis (Kim, 2015). Still, while multimedia, the Internet computer screen displays and visualizes social movement's information and meaning, but, the above literature neglected it. Similar to their studies, the thesis argues that the Internet as contested terrain or as alternative multimedia can be used by both dominant system and oppositional movements for promotion of their political and cultural struggles, different to their studies, the thesis argues that while alternative Internet and multimedia mix textual, visual and vocal texts together, whereas visual texts conveying various messages of the movements and protests, then, social movement study should deploy visual method instead of textual analysis. Therefore, the thesis argues that the omission of visual aspects has left a gap in the canonized research of the Internet and radical politics which the thesis tries to address.

According to this literature, the thesis would like to deploy a revised form of Kellner's (1999b) critical theory of technologies and radical politics for the visual semiotic analysis of oppositional deployment of new technologies by Iranian oppositional groups excluded from the Islamic Republic of Iran's mainstream media, culture, politics, and societies, and who seriously struggle against its oppressive policies. Accordingly, in this section, these functions of the Internet and World Wide Web for new political movements will be discussed, with special attention on the political struggles of Iranian oppositional groups against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policy. Thus, the next section will discuss how the Internet's technologies and websites shape the diverse political functions of oppositional groups and new social movements in the following ways: as sites of organization and mobilization of mass demonstrations; as sites of dissemination and generation of alternative forms of culture, knowledge, and information; the Internet and websites as sites of representation and reconstruction of collective identity; as sites for the Iranian oppositional groups to develop/represent their

solidarity and alliance; as sites for building communities; and as sites for direct expression of political protest and virtual struggles. Although these functions often are interrelated in practice, they are categorized separately here for heuristic purposes. The next section will describe the categories and identify the features or attributes within web-based communication that contribute to each of them.

Therefore, in this thesis, we will focus on these uses of the Internet and websites by the Iranian political oppositional groups and movements for struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies, with special attention to the development of alternative culture and knowledge production, collective identity formation, and solidarity and alliance involved with the movement and its activists. The movement for global justice has been particularly interested in the Internet as a means for transnational communication. The emphasis the movement places on its global identity and transnational aims, as well as on a "networked" organizational structure, and its attention to the development of alternative knowledge, are all factors in the significant relevance the Internet has for the movement.

## **2.7 The functions of the Internet for social movements**

Accordingly, in this section, these functions of the Internet and World Wide Web for new political movements will be discussed, with special attention on the political struggles of Iranian oppositional groups against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policy. Thus, the next section will discuss how the Internet's technologies and websites shape the diverse political functions of oppositional groups and new social movements in the following ways: as sites of organization and mobilization of mass demonstrations; as sites of dissemination and generation of alternative forms of culture, knowledge, and information; the Internet and websites as sites of representation and reconstruction of collective identity; as sites for the Iranian oppositional groups to

develop/represent their solidarity and alliance; as sites for building communities; and as sites for direct expression of political protest and virtual struggles. Although these functions often are interrelated in practice, they are categorized separately here for heuristic purposes. The next section will describe the categories and identify the features or attributes within web-based communication that contribute to each of them.

### **2.7.1 The cognitive function of the Internet**

The cognitive functions of Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by the social movements' activists for the building of collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members. Elaborating on cognitive practices of social movements, Eyerman and Jamison (1991) define knowledge production primarily as a "process by which social movements generate identities and meanings for themselves and their members" (cited in Baringhorst, 2008, p. 68). From this point of view, social movement actors through alternative culture, information, and knowledge production represent and reconstruct social movements' identities and meanings.

From the Kahn and Kellner (2004) perspective, the Internet, as contested terrain or site of struggle, has created a virtual space and environment in which citizens and communities can interact as a tentative form of "self-determination" and "control from below" so that they represent important oppositional identity in the ongoing struggle for freedom, social justice, and a more participatory democracy. From their perspective, the Internet, as a contested terrain or site of struggle, has created a complex and dynamic space where "dumb mob" citizens have been transformed to "smart mob citizens" who challenge inequality, discrimination, and injustice, and struggle for a more direct democracy. They further argue that the Internet as contested terrain or alternative multimedia create a dynamic and complex space on which several diverse subcultures

produce an alternative form of culture, symbols, and meaning for representation and reconstruction of their oppositional identities. Furthermore, the authors argue that the Internet's multiple networks also link diverse communities and provide the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitation of postmodern fragmented and dispersed identity politics.

Their arguments refer to the oppositional deployments of Internet technologies by subcultures and groups who are excluded from mainstream culture and politics to oppose the governing culture and politics by changing and transforming the dominant system's hegemonic cultural codes, meanings, and myths that make the representation and construction of collective identity possible. From their perspective, the alternative Internet and media such as websites and weblogs facilitate the creation of virtual space in which citizens and communities can discuss, challenge, and transmit the dominant system's social and cultural codes through production and dissemination of their meaning and practice, which makes the representation and reconstruction of their collective identity possible.

But question that arises is what collective identity meaning is. Collective identity is a key concept of new social movements. Snow (2001) gives a simple conceptual definition from the notion of collective identity. From his point of view, conceptually, the essence of collective identity resides in a shared and interactive sense of "we-ness" and "collective agency." For Snow, shared and interactive senses of "we-ness" and "collective agency" are the essence of collective identity. Melucci (1989) defines collective identity as a "shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their actions as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their actions take place" (cited in Wall, 2007, p. 261). Taylor and Whittier (1992) identify three elements of collective identity in social

movements. First, individuals share a sense of “we” or solidarity when they define some shared characteristics as salient and important. Second, individuals harbor a consciousness comprising shared interpretive frameworks that include political consciousness, relational networks, and the goals, means, and environment of action of the movement. Third, a culture of direct opposition to the dominant order exists” (cited in Y. M. Nip, 2004, p. 206). From their point of view, for the construction of collective identity it is necessary that social movements’ actors gain some common and mutual sense of meaning from their actions. Also, the progressive new political and social movement activists should have strategic mutual goals and action for construction of collective identity to reach intersubjective agreement, which is necessary for genuine and robust democracy; otherwise, their movement will be defeated and lose social support, which will weaken their movements.

Thus, in applying the concept of collective identity within the context of this study, the thesis seeks to identify and highlight the presence, representation, and reconstruction of collective identity in the texts of websites and website visual texts. The thesis adopts Snow’s (2001) definition of collective identity as a shared sense of “we-ness” and “collective agents,” and Taylor and Whittier’s (1992) description of collective identity as solidarity experienced by challengers of those in power. While collective identity is represented and reconstructed through cultural elements, then is recognizable.

Scholars have highlighted cultural aspects of the collective identity, and they argue that collective identity can be expressed in cultural materials. For example, Kellner (2003a) claims that identities are constructed and reconstructed through cultural elements such as models of behavior, objects, and narratives combined in specific ritual forms, artifacts, events, and places. Moreover, for Gamson (1992) collective identity also is culture; he explains that it is manifested through the language and symbols by which it

is publicly expressed. We know a collective identity through the cultural icons and artifacts displayed by those who embrace it. It is manifested in styles of dress, language, and demeanors. In addition, Della Porta and Diani (1999) place an emphasis on a multiplicity of identities, stating that a “movement identity is, in reality, largely a contingent product of negotiations between collective images produced by various actors and various organizations” (p. 101). Moreover, Polletta and Jasper (2001) point to some cultural material that can express collective identity such as names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on—but not all cultural materials express collective identity.

Furthermore, as Doerr, Mattoni, & Teune (2013b) argue social movement’s activists appearances leave impression. They send messages which do not require words. In their use of visual language, socio-political movements tap into the shared visual knowledge of society that they are rooted in it. From their perspective, socio-political movement’s activists use and re-interpret a pre-existence the shared visual knowledge to voice critiques and to form collective actor. They further argue that visual symbol play a key role in the Imagineering of dissents. Symbols as markers of rich knowledge and complex frame play a central role for socio-political movements. The visual symbols help protestors to mark their affiliation with a collective and to identify their position in political conflicts. Visual markers also make it easy for fellow activists to identify the orientation of a group and thus to define them as allies, competitors or enemies. As Kim (2015) argues visual images as cultural signs can define the common shared identities of activists and long-term orientation of movements. Accordingly, visual materials are repositories of shared activist identities and cultures that are able to link different generations of protesters and different waves of contention.

Therefore, the collective identity of social movements is recognizable for researchers through visual symbols and cultural materials such as names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, models of behavior, objects, and narratives combined in specific ritual forms, artifacts, events and places, styles of dress, language, demeanors, putting reports, websites title name, logo, motto, national figures images and photo, protests photographs, video clips, visual reports or video images online, and so on. In sum, it can be argued that the Internet has cognitive functions for social movements. The cognition function of the Internet refers to visual alternative information, culture and meaning production by social movement activists for representation and construction of collective identity. The alternative Internet and multimedia displays and visualizes alternative information, culture and meaning for representation and reconstruction of social movement collective identity. The Internet has allowed Iranian Green Movements to represent and reconstruct their oppositional identities through production of visual signs and symbols. The information and communication technology contribute to the growth and development of a strengthened Iranian oppositional movement's identity rather than a weakened, mainstream-infused one.

### **2.7.2 The logistic function of the Internet**

The social affordability of the Internet may enhance political participation, organization, and mobilization among traditional excluded or underrepresented groups and individuals in the political process. The logistic functions of the Internet for political protest mobilization related to the technologies' ability to bring several different and diverse kinds of groups together to oppose the dominant system and ruling forces' oppressive policies at the same time and in many different places on the international and national levels. As Baringhorst (2008) argues Internet technology as a network system facilitates and increases public political participation in international

protest events as well as it facilitates the organization of public demonstrations at the same time in many different places.

From Baringhorst's (2008) point of view transaction costs of protest mobilization events have been reduced by Internet technologies because of its high speed and spatial range of communication. The highly networked structure of Internet technologies also allows information and culture to be exchanged easily, cheaply, quickly, and globally via the virtual sphere. From Baringhorst's point of view, the inexpensive and convenient technologies of the Internet facilitate sending messages via electronic mail less expensively than using other technologies such as telephone and fax, especially when activists must communicate over long distances and reach members of the network who live in remote areas. Moreover, organizers can distribute social movement materials (posters, photographs, recordings, and the like) far more cheaply—and, of course, more rapidly and easily—than would be the case if they used postal mail or other means to distribute physical copies of the materials.

Similar to Baringhorst, Della Porta and Mosca (2005) argue that “the Internet provides social movements with a cheap and fast means of international communication that simplifies mobilization and favors highly flexible, loose organizational structures” (p. 168). Della Porta and Mosca (2005) further argue that because of “horizontal,” “bi-directional,” and “interactive” features, the Internet facilitates internal and external communication between individuals, groups, and organizations on an international level so that it enables organizations and groups to send the same messages to thousands of addresses and overcome the time and place limitations that facilitate international political protest mobilization. From their viewpoint, computer-mediated communication media make the connection of oppositional forces possible globally, which solves one key problem of international protest mobilization.

Some scholars claim that the Internet is an open network instrument that connects individuals, groups, and social movement organizations to gather and coalesce in collective action against the dominant system. For example, Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) write that the Internet as an open network tool can closely knit a diverse range of activists, groups, and social movement organizations together and coalesce the different groups in coordinated actions against the WTO summit both offline, in the streets, as well as online, in cyberspace. From their point of view, the Internet as a free and open network technology connects activists, groups, and social movements and knit the different groups together in coordinated protest actions. Although there is clearly truth in such statements, it will be argued here that the Internet in developing countries and authoritarian regimes still is a state-controlled technology, and totalitarian regimes are finding several ways in which to control and counter its usage and political effects.

As Etling & et al. (2010) argue that while alternative information threat authoritarian governments, they reaction to it. In continue they argue that totalitarian states have made a number of efforts to rein in Internet speed, including Internet filtering, cyber-attacks, informal threats and intimidation, new and expanded legal tools for limiting online speech, and Internet surveillance. Currently, Etling & et al. (2010) cite that “there are several dozen countries that filter the Internet to various degrees. For example, China and Iran are among the most aggressive in limiting access to information online. Each employs a broad mix of policies in an attempt to police online speech. They are joined by a growing set of countries that are applying stringent online media controls, including Burma, Tunisia, Uzbekistan and Vietnam, among others” (p. 4). Therefore, their view is technologically deterministic because they ignore that totalitarian governments intervene in monitoring, surveillance, and control of the Internet network. Their view is also one-dimensional because they merely deal with the positive dimension of the Internet and ignore its negative dimension.

Some media scholars argue that these features of Internet technologies are more beneficiary for resource-poor political actors like protest activists. For example, Scott & Street (2000) sum up the logistic advantage of Net communication: “High impact on little resource.” The Net offers, they observe, particularly communicative advantages in heterogeneous networks. But it should be considered that some richer organizations use the Internet more effectively than the resource-poor political actors for promotion of their political ends and agendas. Rucht (2004) argues that: “Micro-media of protest like emails, list servers and online newsletters enable individuals as well as groups to exchange information rapidly and independently from particular locations, to organize interactive processes of communication and to coordinate collective protest action” (cited in Baringhorst, 2008, p. 66).

Vegh (2003) claims the Internet facilitates organization and mobilization by three means: (1) calling for offline action via e-mail or a website; (2) calling for online action for something typically done offline, such as sending e-mails to Congress members instead of letters; and (3) calling for online action that is possible only via the Internet, such as a computer spam campaigns.

Sardarniya (2010) concludes that the Internet, with the capability of electronic e-mail, websites, widespread information exchange, networking, and collective identity building, has had significant/noticeable success with new social movements in encouraging protest mobilizations on a global level after the second half of the decade of the 1990s. From his point of view, the Internet with its fast exchange of information about serious issues facing society, exchange of protest symbols, and stimulation of emotions plays an important role in organizing protest activities and actions. The author further argues that the new social movements by implication of Internet capabilities such as messenger, e-mail, websites and weblogs, chatrooms, online journalism,

forums, two-way communication with activists, voting, and signing online petitions has had great impact on the organization and mobilization of protest activities such as demonstrations, rallies, and strikes.

Granmayepour (2011) states that the most important function of the new media that control is difficult, is effect on public opinion and mobilization of public opinion so that through the media kind of public space formed on which so many people without seeing each other and exchanging their view, like each other think and act. From his point of view, the media through visual, vocal, and textual materials manipulate public opinion and mobilize mass demonstration against the national government.

Movassaghi and Attarzadeh (2012) argue that the same facilities and elements of the virtual sphere can be effective in the process of Charles Tilly's resources mobilization theory (power, mobilization, interests, organization, opportunity-threat, repression-facilitation) about the benefit to social movements and challengers, and it also can be helpful in production to some elements of social movement repertoires. Their findings show that the Internet's interactive pattern helps the emergence and enhancement of some features of Tilly's resources mobilization theory, especially when the Internet shows empathy with people's interests in the real world.

Golkar (2011) claims that Iranian Green Movement activists have used the Internet for mobilizing people inside and outside of Iran to keep the Green Movement alive through the "wave creation" (Mowj Afarini) process. According to Golkar, the wave creation process refers to the process where the Iranian Green Movement activists post their ideas and suggestions on social networks, websites and weblogs, and their suggestions are discussed on social networks, and, if users welcome their suggestions, in the virtual and real world, they are used to mobilize Internet activists to act on their ideas and

create an information wave effect. The author further argues that the Internet enables users to post their suggestions to expand protests and gather feedback on these suggestions. Golkar states that the wave creation process makes the movement more democratic and participatory, on the one hand, and it makes its activities more rational with lower cost of action on the other hand.

Aghae et al. (2012) state that the Internet with its fast exchange of information about serious human issues, the transmissions of protest symbols, and stimulation of emotions plays an important role in the organization of wide protest activities and actions. Moreover, the Internet through networking and organization, on the one hand, attracts more supporters and internal integration, and, on the other hand, deals with the creation of coalition and unity between social actors. The authors further contend that the cybernetic and virtual space has an extensive capability for connecting like-minded groups, creating coalitions, and the coordination of protest goals and tactics. Michaelsen (2011) argues that the Iranian Green Movement activists used microblogging services and organized widespread street demonstrations against the regime's religious hardliners. Moreover, Ebrahimi's (2011) findings show that the social networks usage played a crucial role in organization and mobilization of mass demonstrations in Middle Eastern revolutions. Ebrahimi states that the protesters published news about mass demonstrations and announced the place where people should gather. In addition, Wojcieszak and Smith (2014) studied the new media's potential to affect dissent in authoritarian countries for political strategizing and social mobilization. Generally, the previously mentioned literatures positively deal with the role of the Internet and social media on organization and mobilization of social movement's activists. But, by contrast to their positive outlook about the literature, it should be mentioned that the Internet and social media as contested terrain have been used by dominant social forces for advancement of their goals and aims. The ruling forces and totalitarian state have

consistently used the technologies for disorganization and desperation of social movement activists. Furthermore, the above literatures entirely neglect the important role of visual images in organization and mobilization of social movement's activists and protest movement's supporters. According to Doerr et al. (2013b) images can be used as a powerful means of mobilization. They authors cite that pictures of tortured animals resulted in moral shocks that recruited concerned citizens into the animal rights movement. As Kim (2015) argues one of important function of visual street arts such as posters and graffiti, is the mobilization of social movements by tapping into human emotions and gauging political sentiment. Similar to Kim's argument, the thesis argues that visual images play a key role in the mobilization of social movements by tapping into human emotions and gauging political sentiment. Furthermore, as Chaffee (1993) argues visual artworks also make it possible for participants to be active in a political event (cited Kim, 2015, p. 175). Similar to Chaffee's argument the study argues that alternative multimedia documentary visual texts also make it possible for participants to be active in a political event.

To sum up, protest politics takes logistic advantage of new information and communication technologies to increase public political participation and organization of protest demonstrations. The fluidity and interactivity offered by ICTs facilitate citizen engagement in the organization of collective actions before and during protest mobilization. The utility of ICTs for protest politics is particularly worthy of attention given that social movements are one of the most popular forms of civic engagement in politics in a contemporary society. Of course, this does not mean that Internet technologies cause the increase of public political participation and organization of political demonstrations. In fact, it would argue that the Internet as contested terrain or as alternative media can be used by oppositional groups and social movement activists for the organization of public demonstrations. The social affordability of Internet

technologies mediates decision making about the participation, organization, and mobilization of mass demonstrations.

### **2.7.3 The affective function of the Internet**

The affective function of the Internet refers to the role of the Internet network in creation of virtual communities. Contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs) have given rise to networked communities adept in organizing, coordinating, supporting, and maintaining “real life” activism (Biddix & Park, 2008). The diffusion of the Internet and other ICTs as expanded channels for social interaction and information exchange lead to networked communities that are characterized as having shared (communicational, psychological, emotional) proximity beyond locality (Biddix & Park, 2008). Recently, Rheingold (2003) has coined the term “smart mobs,” which emphasizes the ad hoc connections within today’s networked communities. In such communities, an unlimited extension of relations is possible, allowing members to obtain the necessary information and resources with relative ease. Easy access to alternative information transforms dumb mob citizens to the smart mobs who changed to political agents of the new society.

Biddix and Park (2008) findings reveal that the ICTs play an important role in maintaining a movement through the creation of an unintentional networked community in times of both mobilization and latency. Remarkably, their findings show that the resultant network has allowed the campus living wage movement to overcome previous limitations inherent in student protests, and sustained the campus struggle through several student generations. Noormohammadi and Mohammadi (2013) argue that the virtual sphere facilitates the creation of virtual communities that are considered as progressive forces of social, cultural, and political change in societies. They assume that the virtual network communities through facilitating and accelerating communication

between protesters and the coordination among them, compiled programs and shaped and promoted protests that played an accelerant/catalyst role in the Egyptian revolution. In addition, Aghaei et al. (2012) believe that the effect of the Internet and social and virtual networks on informing, accelerating, and facilitating revolutionary evolution is undeniable. They state that orienting to public opinion on the social network occurs at all of the following levels: networking and community building in the virtual sphere and networking and participation in the real world. They argue that the role of social networks in networking and community building causes political and social crisis for some countries and, along with other factors, provides a context for political reform and collapse for some of the region's regimes. The thesis argues that the Internet as a contested terrain or site of struggle can be used for the creation several different kinds of communities in the virtual sphere. Furthermore, the study argues that the contemporary information and communication technologies (ICTs) have given rise to networked communities useful in organizing, coordinating, supporting, and maintaining real life activism.

#### **2.7.4 Tactical function of the Internet**

The Internet as a tool or as contested terrain can be used by oppositional groups as a weapon and target of direct expression of political protest and struggle. Baringhorst (2008) argues that practices of civil disobedience play a significant role in the action repertoire of social movement actors. Hick and McNutt (2002) define "the term electronic advocacy refers to the use of high technology to influence the decision-making process, or to the use of technology in an effort to support policy-change efforts" (Della Porta & Mosca, 2005, p. 175). The typology of online and offline action repertoires represented here are borrowed from the Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) provide a useful model that argues that the Internet, on the one hand, facilitates and supports (traditional) offline collective action in terms of organization, mobilization,

and transnationalization and, on the other hand, creates virtual modes of collective action in terms of online petitions and e-mail bombings, creation of alternative websites, virtual sit-ins to hacking the websites of large companies, organizations, or governments. Therefore, from their point of view, most widely known and used forms of online protest actions consist of: the creation of alternative and protest websites and weblogs, hactivism, culture jamming, e-mail bombing/virtual sit-ins, signing online petitions, organizing oppositional campaigns, and so on.

#### **2.7.4.1 Creation of alternative media website**

The first tactic used by oppositional groups and excluded and oppressed groups is to create their own alternative and protest websites and weblogs to mediate their political and cultural struggles against the oppressive policies of dominant systems. For the first time in history, Internet technologies facilitate people's access to their own media and communication technologies, which make facilitate resistance against the ruling state's political force and culture possible. Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) argue that the Internet provides activists and social movements with alternative channels for media production, thereby circumventing mainstream media channels and taking advantage of the same possibilities of the new Internet space to publish and disseminate alternative points of view about political and cultural struggles. The social affordability of the Internet technologies provides Iranian oppositional groups with their own alternative and protest websites which mediated their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. One of the clearest examples of tactical function of the alternative Internet in creation of the protest website is the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>; wherein Iranian secular democratic movement actors struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state's oppressive policies. The next form of tactical functions of the Internet and websites as sites for the direct expression

of dissent, virtual struggle, and political and cultural protest is e-mail bombings and virtual sit-ins that will be discussed in the following section.

#### **2.7.4.2 E-mail bombing/virtual sit-ins**

“E-mail bombing” consists of sending e-mails to a website or a server until it overloads and jams. E-mail bombing, according to Van Laer & Van Aelst, (2010), “is a more destructive form of online petition, which comprises large amounts of e-mails sent to an e-mail account of or to a target system to pin down the targeted mailing server, demonstrating the extent of support for a specific cause” (p. 11).

#### **2.7.4.3 Netstrike**

Another form of online protest, according to Freschi (2002), is netstrike, which has proliferated in recent years among radical organizations as a “virtual practice for real conflicts” through the StranoNetwork” (cited in Della Porta & Mosca, 2005, p. 175). Netstriking is a virtual attack by a huge number of Internet activists to the certain and given website to jam it and make it impossible for other users to reach it. For Della Porta & Mosca (2005) Netstrike is defined as “consisting of a large number of people connecting simultaneously to the same domain at a prearranged time to jam a site considered a symbolic target to make it impossible for other users to reach it” (p. 176).

#### **2.7.4.4 Hacktivism**

Another form of tactical function of the Internet for oppositional politics is hacktivism. Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) argue that confrontational activities such as DoS attacks via automated e-mail floods, website defacements altering the source code of targeted websites, or the use of malicious software like viruses and worms can occur in virtual space that has been created by the Internet. From their point of view, these confrontational activities are all actions that touch the boundary of what is seen or held

as legal and what as illegal. According to Denning (2001), these tactics are then labeled as “electronic civil disobedience,” “hacktivism,” or as “cyberterrorism” (cited in Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010, p. 14).

#### **2.7.4.5 Culture jamming**

Oppositional groups’ use of culture jamming is an Internet function in their resistance and struggle against the hegemonic culture and politics of the established societies. Culture jamming has developed into an important strategy of virtual struggles and it is rising as an integral part of protesters’ political expression in the Internet era. Mark Dery defines culture jamming, a term originated by the experimental band Negativland, as “media hacking, information warfare, terror-art, and guerrilla semiotics, all in one,” which captures and subverts the images and ideas of the mainstream media to make a critical point” (cited in Lievrouw, 2006, p. 117). Handelman and Kozinets (2004) have defined culture jamming as “an organized, social activist effort that aims to counter the bombardment of consumption-oriented messages in the mass media” (cited in Carducci, 2006, p. 116). Others call it “a strategy that turns corporate power against itself by co-opting, hacking, mocking and re-contextualizing meanings” (Lievrouw, 2006, p. 117). As new media technologies have rapidly developed to create and edit pictures, photos, graphics, and music, dissemination of satirical text online has become a persuasive new way of bringing a new audience to the virtual struggles. As Chadwick (2007) has argued, people are increasingly employing satirical graphics, audio and video, photoshopped pictures, humorous animation, flash cartoons, or personal home movies—in other words, the paraphernalia of marginal subcultures—for citizen action on the Net. Therefore, in this thesis, culture jamming is defined as artistic efforts that aim to counter mainstream and state media messages by co-opting, hacking, mocking, and re-contextualizing meanings.

#### **2.7.4.6 Signing online petitions**

Some oppositional groups and activists take advantage of the Internet's facility for mass communication and use online petitions to address political, social, and cultural aims. Earl (2006) defines online petition as, the online petition, which is a statement published online that individuals can sign as a show of support, is a prime example of this kind of activity. When a web site hosts a petition, visitors are generally able to read the text of a petition and electronically sign it; ultimately, the petition is forwarded to its target (e.g., congressional members), although sites vary in the methods they use to deliver the petition (e.g., electronic or physical delivery). Accordingly, it can be argued that the Internet as a site of opposition can be used by the movement's activists for direct expression of their political struggle.

Accordingly, it can be argued that the Internet as a site of struggle can be used by the movement's activists for direct expression of their political struggle. It could be argued that the Internet, on the one hand, facilitates and supports (traditional) offline collective action in terms of organization, mobilization, and transnationalization and, on the other hand, creates virtual modes of collective action in terms of online petitions and e-mail bombings, creation of alternative websites, virtual sit-ins to hacking the websites of large companies, organizations, or governments.

#### **2.7.5 The networking function of the Internet**

The last feature of the Internet related to networked and web-based technologies is social organization. Baringhorst (2008) wrote about the technical and net social structure of the Internet that:

The network has become the most prominent term to characterize current social movements. The Internet is not a simple distribution network. Its technicity is defined by its multilateral

backward channel capacity. Due to its anarchic structure it evokes hopes to technically enable the establishment of an organizational alternative to the top-down structure of professionalized social movement organization. (Baringhorst, 2008, p. 75)

From this point view, the Internet shapes social movements like its networked shape. Klein states (2002), “the Net is shaping the movement on its own web-like image” (Baringhorst, 2008, p. 75). Similarly, social movement theorists have argued that “the Internet has altered the organizational structure of protest politics. Interactive tools of the social web support the spread of a decentralized and flexible structure of transnational protest networks that cannot be controlled by territorially bounded nation state actors” (Baringhorst, 2008, pp. 75–76).

Net-based network formations are characterized by a horizontal and vertical integration of actors (Baringhorst, 2008, pp. 75–76). The net-based network formation integrates a plethora of actors from diverse social movements like women’s, environmental, labor, farmers, or indigenous people’s on the protest network. Aside from the social movement activists from different spatial levels of an organization, it connects local, national, and international activists. Kahn and Kellner (2004) argue the Internet facilitates links among several diverse communities such as labor, ecological, peace, feminist, and various anti-capitalist groups, which provide a basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of apolitical, individualized, and fragmented postmodern identity politics. In addition, as Kim (2015) argues sharing a design concept with other groups was another way to signify the meaning of the networked movements.

To sum up, oppositional political movements and protest politics take advantage of ICTs for organization of mobilization, alternative culture and knowledge production,

collective identity representation and reconstruction, direct expression of political struggle, community formation, and transnational networking formation. The fluidity and interactivity offered by ICTs facilitate citizen engagement in a diverse repertoire of actions, ranging from the creation of information to sharing collective identity to organization of collective actions before and during protests. The utility of ICTs for protest politics is particularly worthy of attention given that social movements are one of the most popular forms of civic engagement in politics in a contemporary society. Therefore, the Internet as a contested terrain or as alternative media serves as both an interpersonal and a mass communications channel for oppositional movements. Deploying internet mediated technologies for techno-politics opened site of struggles for excluded and voiceless groups and increased potential for resistance and struggle against totalitarian states.

## **2.8 Kellner's critical theory of technologies and radical democratic politics**

Constituting a coherent framework for understanding the oppositional deployment of the Internet by excluded, oppressed, and oppositional groups in authoritarian societies, Kellner's (1999b) critical theory of technology and radical democratic politics has been deployed as a framework for the analysis of the Iranian oppositional movement's websites homepages and texts.

There are several good reasons that encourage me to deploy Kellner's critical theory and radical democratic politics for analysis of oppositional deployment of the Internet by the Iranian oppositional movements. The first reason that persuades me to deploy the Kellner model is its perspective critical feature. From Kellner's (2003a) perspective, the critical media cultural studies conceptualize societies as a terrain of domination and resistance and develop a critique of the domination and oppression and engage in ways that media culture uses in reproducing relationships of domination and oppression.

Based on Kellner's perspective, "Critical perspective toward culture and society has long attacked domination and oppression while positively valorizing resistance and struggle which attempt to overturn these forces" (Kellner, 2003a, p. 94). From his perspective, critical media cultural studies also intends to relate its theories to practice, to develop an oppositional politics aimed at producing a progressive term in contemporary culture and society through contributing to development of a counter-hegemonic to the conservative hegemony of domination or resistance. Thus, Kellner's perspective is interested in advancing a critique of structure and practices of domination and advancing forces of resistance struggle for a more democratic and egalitarian society.

The second reason that encourages me to employ Kellner's theory relates to his multicultural perspective. From Kellner's point of view, the multicultural perspective affirms otherness and difference, and it emphasizes the importance of attending to oppositional groups and marginalized and minority groups and voices previously excluded from mainstream culture and media. The third reason that persuades me to use Kellner's theory is its multidimensional feature, which is in contrast to the one-dimensional theory that merely deals with one side of social phenomenon, instead of dealing with social phenomenon fairly and reasonably from several points of view.

An additional reason that encourages the author to utilize Kellner's perspective is its multiperspectival approach. Durham and Kellner (2006) argue that their multidisciplinary cultural studies model subverts current discipline-oriented academics; that is, theories that merely emphasize one academic discipline like the sociology department, for example, focusing on the social dimension of culture by conflating political economy, social theory, cultural analysis, and political critique. Therefore, it

can be argued that Kellner's perspective is useful and proper for analysis of oppositional deployment of the Internet by the Iranian oppositional movements.

### **2.8.1 The critical theory of technology and radical democratic politics**

The Internet and computer technologies revolution has changed societies' social, cultural, political, and economic structures. As Kellner (2002b) argues, the Internet and computer network facilitates globalization through the production of a technological infrastructure for the global economy. From his perspective, Internet technologies, computerized network systems, the satellite communication system, and software and hardware facilitate the global economy. Based on his perspective, advances in new information, communication technologies, and the Internet revolution pose two main challenges to critical theory and radical democratic politics: "First, how to theorize the dramatic changes in every aspect of life that the new technologies are producing; and, secondly, how to utilize the new technologies to promote progressive social change to create a more egalitarian and democratic society than has been the case for the past two centuries marked by rampant industrial/technological development and the seeming victory of market capitalism over its historical opponents" (Kellner, 1999, p. 186).

Based on Kellner's (1999b) approaches, critical theory based on orthodox Marxian theory with economic and technological determinism is not able to explain the new information and communication technologies revolutionary effects on social changes and political struggles in capitalism and the market-dominant system as well as state domination. Accordingly, argues that it's necessary to re-theorize and reconstruct a new critical theory to explain these changes. Also, from his perspective, the second challenge is how to utilize these technologies to promote democratization and the empowerment of societies and oppressed groups. The author believes the important point is that new information and communication technology must be used for the

promotion of democratization and empowerment of oppressed groups. Consequently, Kellner's theory considers the current technological revolution and its effects on social and political changes to empower oppressed groups and promote genuine democracy.

With these ends in view, Kellner (1999b) suggests some ways that the new technologies revolution affects social and political transformation without falling into either an economic or technological determinism perspective, as well as an unwarranted optimistic or pessimistic perspective. Moreover, the third generation critical theorist criticizes orthodox Marxian theory that claims that new technologies and media are powerful forces of production used to perpetuate capitalist culture, hegemony, and domination globally. For example, the prominent orthodox Marxist theorists who have been criticized are Adorno and Horkheimer (1972), and they argue that media and new technologies expand bourgeois and capitalist culture and values, which promote the dominant ideology by constructing viewers as passive consumers of dominant norms. Although their argument is true, there is another truth that new technologies and the Internet can be used by oppressed and oppositional groups as instruments for "self-empowerment," "self-valorization," "self-representation," and for political and cultural resistance and struggle against the dominant system's culture and ideologies.

Therefore, from this perspective, the orthodox Marxist argument is technologically and economically deterministic because it merely deals with the negative dimension of new technology implementation and ignores positive deployment of new technology for democracy and social justice. By contrast to the orthodox Marxist one-sided perspective, Kahn and Kellner (2005) argue that technologies are tools that both groups—ruling classes and oppositional groups—can use for promoting their ends and interests. Neoliberals have deployed new technologies to promote capitalist culture,

whereas oppositional groups and movements can use these same technologies to promote democracy and social justice on local and global scales.

From Kellner's point of view, orthodox Marxists are drawn to technological and economic determinism because they place more emphasis on new technologies and the economy and ignore the creativity and motivation of people. People are able to employ, reshape, and reconstruct these technologies for promotion of their progressive interests and agendas. They can re-form and turn them into instruments for the democratization and revolutionization of societies. To avoid of this one-dimensional view, Kellner suggests that:

My argument is that one needs to theorize the spread of new technologies and series of transformations that we are undergoing in the context of the current stage of capitalist development, as a crucial part of the global restructuring of capitalism, and thus to think together the current development and imbrication of technology and capitalism. (Kellner, 1999, p. 186)

Therefore, the author carefully notes that we should consider new technologies and capitalism developments and imbrications together, not merely emphasize their negative features. Moreover, he suggests that "one needs to see new technologies as embodying a set of artifacts and practices that can be restructured and reconstituted to carry out individual and group projects, thus rejecting the perspectives of economic or technological determinism" (Kellner, 1999, p. 186).

In addition, the author argues that critical theorists or anyone who theorizes about the effect and use of new technologies on radical democratic politics and societal transformation should consider new technologies as tools or instruments that can be used to reconstruct, reshape, and re-form by people for their "self-valorization," "self-empowerment," and "self-representation," in their struggle for democracy and

egalitarian societies. Therefore, as Kellner argues, it is time to reject a one-dimensional perspective.

Based on his perspective, theorists must avoid exaggerating or downplaying the autonomous role of new technologies in society's political and cultural transformation process. In addition, they should avoid denigrating or demonizing new technologies in the mode of technophobia, or celebrate and deify in the mode of technophilia. Instead, from this viewpoint, critical theory tries to develop a dialectical optic that avoids one-dimensional approaches in theorizing and analyzing new technologies and their ambiguous and contradictory effects on societies' politics and cultures. Kellner's multiple perspective strives to deploy these technologies for democratization and egalitarian societies and the empowerment of oppressed groups and individuals. As he proposes,

I also want to develop democratic and activist perspectives on the new technologies, suggesting some ways that they might be used for such things as self-valorization and empowerment, democratization and progressive social transformation, in contrast to strengthening the forces of corporate and state domination. (Kellner, 1999, p. 187)

In contrast to the first generation of critical theorists who ignored the abilities and creativity of their audience, the writer emphasizes the perspectives of agents and activists about the deployment and use of new technologies for their "self-empowerment" and "self-valorization" and in their struggle for democracy and a better world, which stands in stark contrast to strengthening the forces of corporate and state domination. Kellner's (1999b) critical theory appeals to neither the utopianism of the boosters of new technologies who see them as instruments of our salvation, nor the pessimism of groups who see new technologies as instruments of capital and state domination. Therefore, Kellner's critical theory intends to analyze new technologies

and their dramatic effect on new society's culture and politics. It also emphasizes on the oppositional deployment of new technologies for their "self-empowerment" and "self-valorization and democratization and progressive social transformation.

Kellner (1997) criticizes postmodern theorists like Albert Borgmann, who claims that new technologies are taking us into virtual space or a sphere of "hyperreality," where we are losing touch with our bodies, with nature, with other people, and with focal things and practices. Arthur Kroker and Michael Weinstein are other postmodern theorists who have been criticized by Kellner because they demonize new technologies. Kroker and Weinstein (1994) claim that "our culture has crashed, imploded, into hyperreality, and that that we have lost touch with reality altogether, and we are ruled by a new virtual class, that we have entered a new stage of virtual capitalism, which comes to a great surprise to those still laboring in sweatshops or factories" (cited in Kellner, 1997, p. 3). Therefore, Kellner sharply criticizes the technophobes' excessively one-sided and negative perspective concerning new technologies and, thus, miss the empowering and democratizing aspects of new technologies that can be used by oppressed groups for their self-valorization and democratization.

The third generation critical theorist (1997) also criticizes advocates of new technologies and cyber-democracy who claim that new information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet, provide media tools for citizens to disseminate their ideas and thoughts and participate in political dialogue that is usually closed off to oppositional ideas and groups. From his perspective, new computer technologies (NCTs) and the Internet promote democracy by proliferating a range of information and knowledge accessible to the public that produces more informed voters and opens participation to individuals and groups usually excluded from the public spheres of political discussion and debate.

Kellner (2003b) also criticizes theories of information, knowledge, and postindustrial societies because of their emphasis on the role of information and knowledge about the economy, politics, and society in everyday life. He argues that these theories downplay the role of the hegemonic configuration of corporate and state power, and the capitalist relationship of production corporate ownership and control with all their massive and momentous effects.

The third generation critical theorist (1999b) rejects that technophilic discourse, which claims new technologies and the Internet as our salvation, will solve all of our social, economic, cultural, and political problems and issues, or technophobic discourse that views technologies as our damnation, which cause all of our social, cultural, and political problems. For Kellner, both theories are one-sided and should be critically re-structured to better analyze our society's problems. In contrast to technophilic or technophobic approaches, The author (1999b) argues that we should develop a multidimensional critical social theory of new technologies that sort out both negative and positive features, advantages, and disadvantages of new technologies in their development and trajectories. In his vision, new technologies as tools have been created by human beings or dominant forces, but they can be used by oppressed groups and subcultures as well as dominant cultures for promotion of their "self-valorization," "self-representation," and political agendas. Thus, from his perspective, the Internet and computer technologies can be used for either domination or emancipation, and it's up to the citizens which way that they deploy them and for which ends they want to use them. Consequently, in Kellner's point of view, both approaches demonstrate/illustrate that we need to re-theorize and reconstruct critical theories of new technologies to encompass the best features of both approaches. Kellner states,

Both approaches reveal the need for a dialectical theory that plays off extremes against each other to generate a more inclusive position, indicating how technology can be used both as an instrument of domination and emancipation, as a tool of both dominant societal powers and of individuals struggling for democratization and empowerment. What is at stake, therefore, is theorizing how new technologies can be used both to create a more egalitarian society, and to empower individuals and groups who are currently disenfranchised. (Kellner, 1999, pp. 189-190)

According to Kellner, the approaches of both technophobes and technophiles are one-sided and insufficient to analyze the impacts of new technologies on contemporary societies. These one-sided approaches demonstrate that it's necessary to re-theorize and reconstruct a new critical theory based on a dialectical perspective to adopt a critical social theory to find an inclusive position. In his view, a critical theory should consider the dual functions of new technologies for either domination or democratization of societies. Based on Kellner's approach, new technologies can be used as instruments of either domination or emancipation. He (1997) believes that the Internet should be seen as a site of conflict, as a contested terrain, and progressives should look to its possibilities for resistance and dissemination of struggle. The author further argues that even though dominant corporate and state powers, as well as conservative and rightist groups, have been making serious use of new technologies to advance their agendas, oppositional groups and movements can use new technologies to promote democracy and social justice on both local and global scales.

The third generation critical theorist (1997) argues that the Internet as a contested terrain, site of struggle, or alternative media can be used by the Left, Right, and Center of both dominant cultures and subcultures to promote their own agendas and interests. Kellner further argues that media, computer, and information technologies mediated political struggles and will increasingly mediate political struggles in the future. Those interested in the politics and culture of the future should therefore be clear on the

important role of new public spheres and intervene accordingly. To continue, we would like to deal with Kellner's techno-politics perspective, which refers to implantations of new technologies in politics and, particularly, in this dissertation's oppositional politics.

### **2.8.2 Techno-politics and oppositional political movements**

There have been heated discussions among scholars about how the Internet can be used by oppositional groups and oppositional political movements for promotion of their political struggles. Based on Kellner (2001) argument, political struggle mediated by Techno-politics in the age of new technologies. the third generation critical theorist (2001) defines techno-politics as the use of new technologies such as computers and the Internet to advance political goals. From his perspective, politics have been mediated by technologies, and new technologies are playing a crucial role in politics and all realms of social life. Kahn and Kellner define techno-politics as:

By "techno-politics" we mean politics that is mediated by the wide range of digital tools such as broadcasting technology, cameras, the hardware and software involved with computers, and the Internet. Thus Internet politics and a myriad of other forms of media politics are contained under the more general concept of techno-politics, which describes the nature of the proliferation of technologies that are engaged in political struggle. (Kahn & Kellner, 2005, p. 95)

Therefore, based on Kahn and Kellner's definition, "techno-politics" refers to mediated politics by digital technologies. Kellner (2001) has argued that politics in the modern era have always been mediated by digital technology, with the printing press, photography, film, radio, and television playing crucial roles in politics and all realms of social life. As to whether globalization renders revolution in the classical Marxian tradition obsolete, the third generation critical theorist (2001) further argues that "much significant political struggle today, especially resistance to globalization, is mediated by techno-politics. The use of computer and information technology is becoming a

normalized aspect of politics, just as the broadcasting media were some decades ago. Kahn and Kellner (2007) also argues that “deploying computer-mediated technology for techno-politics, however, opens new terrains of political struggle for voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media and thus increase potential for resistance and intervention by oppositional groups” (p. 18). Therefore, from this perspective, political struggles are mediated by techno-politics.

Nevertheless, the question arises as to what is new and innovative about new information and communication technologies and how they mediated political struggles in new societies. From Kellner’s point of view, computer technologies and especially the Internet as “contested terrain” or “alternative multimedia” can instantly communicate culture, information, and knowledge to large numbers of individuals throughout the world who are connected via computer networks. The Internet as network- or web-based technologies makes easy access to a wealth of information and misinformation possible via cyberspace, and it makes the creation of information and knowledge by citizens and critical oppositional intellectuals for a global audience possible. Furthermore, the Internet makes public critical discussion and debate possible via multiple virtual public spheres that it created.

Moreover, the Internet is multimedia in scope and allows citizens to disseminate images, sounds, video, and other cultural forms. Incidentally, the use of computer technology and networks is becoming a normalized aspect of politics, just as the broadcasting media were some decades ago. The use of computer-mediated technology for technopolitics, however, opens new terrains of political struggle for voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media, which increases the potential for intervention by oppositional groups and potentially expands the scope of democratization.

The Internet can also be used by excluded and oppositional groups for promotion of their own interests and agendas. Thus, although emergent media tools like Internet-ready personal digital assistants (PDAs) can provide yet another impetus toward experimental identity construction and identity politics when loosed in a techno-culture, the multifaceted social ecologies that they constitute also link diverse communities such as labor, feminist, ecological, peace, and various anti-capitalist groups, thereby providing the basis for a broadly democratic politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics. Also, Kellner argues that new technologies and cyberspace make identity construction and identity politics possible for oppressed groups who are dismissed from mainstream media, cultures, and societies.

Based on Kellner's (2001) argument, significant political struggles today, especially resistance against globalization, are mediated by techno-politics. The author emphasizes that new information and communication technologies are becoming a normalized aspect of political struggles so that the majority of political oppositional groups and activists use new technologies for their political activities. Also, he argues that deployment of computer and Internet technologies for political struggles opens new contested terrain of political struggles groups who have been excluded from state and mainstream media, and they also increase the potential for resistance and intervention by oppositional and oppressed groups. Therefore, from Kellnerian's point of view, the Internet should be seen as contested terrain or as site of struggle that activists and democratic radicals should look to for its possibilities of resistance and advancement of political education, action, and organization against discrimination, injustices, and state domination and should consider its potential for their ends. As Kellner states:

Cyberdemocracy and the Internet should be seen therefore as a contested terrain. Radical democratic activists should look to its possibilities for resistance and the advancement of political education, action and organization, while engaging in struggles over the digital divide. (Kellner, 2001, p. 184)

The author further argues that the new information and communication technologies have been sustained by the ruling forces, dominant corporations, rightist groups, and conservatives for the advancement of their political agendas and aims. He suggests that if forces who struggle for genuine democracy, social justice, and equality want to be players in the cultural and political battles of the future, they must effectively use new technologies to advance radical democratic and environmental agendas and the interests of the oppressed. In Kellner's words:

Dominant corporate and state powers, as well as conservative and rightist groups, have been making sustained use of new technologies to advance their agendas. If forces struggling for democratization and social justice want to become players in the cultural and political battles of the future, they must devise ways to use new technologies to advance a radical democratic and ecological agenda and the interests of the oppressed. (Kellner, 2001, p. 184)

It is our contention that such examples are becoming increasingly common and that the intersections between ICTs and other digital tools like cameras, mass populaces, and democratic politics represent powerful new networked spaces for the progressive reconstruction of social life. Thus, while emergent media tools like Internet-ready personal digital assistants (PDAs) can provide yet another impetus toward experimental identity construction and identity politics when loosed in a techno-culture, the multifaceted social ecologies that they constitute also link diverse communities such as labor, feminist, ecological, peace, and various anti-capitalist groups, thereby providing the basis for a broadly democratic politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the

limitations of postmodern identity politics (For more information see Best & Kellner, 1998).

Therefore, by contrast, the postmodern New Age lifestyle as a form of an apolitical postmodern New Age lifestyle perspective promotes a form of apolitical individualism that emphasizes a transformation of lifestyles and values to enhance individual freedom and liberty that lead to apolitical individualism, atomism, fragmentation, and balkanization of individual, community, and society. Best and Kellner (1998) try to promote politics of alliance and solidarity between different diverse groups and subcultures. They attempt to reconstruct and retheorize new political theory through creative combination of best elements of modern and postmodern politics. The authors combine modern notions of solidarity, alliances, consensus, universal rights, macropolitics and institutional struggle with postmodern notions of difference, plurality, multiperspectivalism, identity, and micropolitics (Best & Kellner, 1998, p. 298).

From their perspective, the creative and winning combination of modern and postmodern politics should be composed of the modern concepts of unity, solidarity, alliance, universal rights, macropolitics and institutional struggles and with postmodern notions of difference, plurality, multiperspectivalism, identity, and micropolitics. For this reason, they suggest deployment of Hegelians concept of “differentiated unity” that look for difference and unity. Therefore, Best & Kellner (1998) criticize the abstract unity of the enlightenment because of its false unity that masked and suppressed differences and privileged especial groups at the expense of others. Thus, the authors combine modern notions of solidarity, alliances, consensus, universal rights, macropolitics and institutional struggle with postmodern notions of difference, plurality, multiperspectivalism, identity, and micropolitics

Kellner (2001) cites a number of examples in which oppositional social movements have used the Internet and computer technologies for circulation and promotion of their struggles. The peasant and guerrilla armies who formed the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, beginning in January 1994, used computer databases, guerrilla radio, and other forms of media to circulate their ideas and to promote their cause through the world via computer networks. Moreover, in January 1995, when the Mexican government attacked the Zapatistas, the latter used computer networks to inform and mobilize individuals and groups throughout the world to support them in their battle against repressive government action. There were many demonstrations in support of the rebels throughout the world. Prominent journalists, human rights observers, and delegations traveled to Chiapas to demonstrate solidarity and to report on the uprising. The Mexican and US governments were bombarded with messages calling for negotiations rather than repression. The Mexican government was forced to back down and halt their repression of the insurgents. While carrying out various forms of subjugation, they continued to sporadically negotiate, and as of this writing in late 2001, the New Mexican President Vicente Fox has agreed to continue negotiations.

the third generation critical theorist (2001) states that using new technologies to link information and practice and to advance oppositional politics is neither extraneous to political battles nor merely utopian. He further argues that even if immediate gains are not won, often the information circulated or the alliances formed can have material effects. From his vision, Internet-centered organizing campaigns and linking groups together effectively worked against the institutions and corporations of capitalist globalization. However, Kellner proposed that the Internet alone did not defeat this initiative for capitalist globalization, but it enabled the nongovernment organizations fighting against it to circulate information, share resources, and link their struggles.

Thus, from Kellner's perspective, the Internet diffuse political struggles in the real world rather than the virtual sphere.

Furthermore, hacking oppositional groups' websites is another way in which the oppositional social movement activists have used the Internet and computer technologies for circulation and promotion of their struggles. The third generation critical theorist points to hackers who attacked Nike's website in June 2000 and substituted a global justice message for Nike's corporate hype. Many anti-Nike websites and listservs have emerged, helping groups struggling against Nike's labor practices circulate information and organize movements against Nike, which have forced them to modify their labor practices.

Furthermore, creating and launching websites and weblogs are another way of opposition deployment of Internet technologies for the promotion of political struggle. According to Kellner (2001) a British group created an anti-McDonald's website against the junk food corporation and then distributed the information through digital and print media. This website was developed by supporters of two British activists for distributing leaflets denouncing the corporation's low wages, advertising practices, involvement in deforestation, cruel treatment of animals, and patronage of an unhealthy diet. The activists counterattacked and, with help from supporters, organized a McLibel campaign, assembled a McSpotlight website with a tremendous amount of information criticizing the corporation and mobilized experts to testify and confirm their criticisms. The example shows that oppositional movements can create their website and disseminate critical information against powerful corporate institutions and state power and mobilize their supporters for demonstration and strike.

Moreover, according to Kellnerian's (2001) perspective, a tremendous amount of information has been disseminated by anti-Nike, McDonalds, and other websites critical of global capitalist corporations. Kellner further argues that many labor organizations are also beginning to make use of the new technologies. For example, in 1997, activists involved in Korean workers strikes and the Merseyside dock strike in England used websites to promote international solidarity. The findings of Jesse Drew (1998) indicate that many of his union activists attest to how useful e-mail, faxes, websites, and the Internet have been to their struggle and, in particular, how such techno-politics help organize demonstrations and strikes in favor of striking English or Australian dockworkers, as when US longshoremen organized strikes to boycott ships carrying material loaded by scab workers. Thus, techno-politics helps labor create global alliances to combat increasingly transnational corporations.

Generally speaking, worker organizations note that computer networks are useful for organizing and distributing information but cannot replace print media, which are more accessible to many of their members, along with face-to-face meetings and traditional forms of political action. Thus, the challenge is to articulate one's communications politics with actual movements and struggles so that cyberpolitics is an arm of real battles rather than their replacement or substitute. The most efficacious Internet projects have indeed intersected with activist movements encompassing campaigns to free political prisoners, boycotts of corporate projects, and various labor and even revolutionary struggles, as noted earlier.

The third generation critical theorist (2001) argues that the Internet has been used by worldwide protest movements to organize resistance to the institutions of capitalist globalization, while championing democratization. In the build-up to the 1999 Seattle demonstrations, many websites generated anti-WTO material and numerous mailing

lists used the Internet to distribute critical material and to organize the protest. From his perspective, the Internet has been used by oppositional movements for promotion of critical materials and alternative information and organization of mass demonstrations. The third generation critical theorist argues that the result of the oppositional deployment of the Internet by the global oppositional movement to organize mass demonstrations led to the mobilization of caravans throughout the United States to take protesters to Seattle, as well as contingents of activists from throughout the world. Kellner, with emphasis on political alliances and solidarity among several different groups, proposed that “For the first time ever, labour, environmentalist, feminist, anticapitalist, animal rights, anarchist and other groups organized to protest aspects of globalization and to form new alliances and solidarities for future struggles” (Kellner, 2001, p. 22).. Furthermore, Kellner observes that demonstrations took place globally, and a proliferation of anti-WTO material against the extremely secret group spread throughout the Internet.

The leading theorist of media culture studies deals with another function of the Internet for oppositional movements, which is the critical coverage of protest events. Kellner contends that the Internet provides critical coverage of the oppositional movement’s events, documentation of the various groups, protests, and debates over the WTO and globalization. Meanwhile, mainstream and state media negatively represent democratic movements, and Internet activists try to provide real pictures of the social movements’ events. In Kellner’s words, “Whereas the mainstream media presented the protests as anti-trade, featured the incidents of anarchist violence against property, and minimized police brutality against demonstrators, the Internet provided pictures, eyewitness accounts and reports of police viciousness and the generally peaceful and nonviolent nature of the protests” (Kellner, 2001, pp. 187-188). In contrast to the mainstream media’s negative representation of oppositional movement’s identity and ideology, the

alternative Internet provided multiple representations of the oppositional demonstration's advanced reflective discussion of the WTO and globalization, and presented a diversity of critical perspectives.

Hence, from Kellner's perspective about capitalism's globalization from above, cyberactivists have been attempting to carry out globalization from below, developing networks of solidarity and propagating oppositional ideas and movements across the planet. To the capitalist international of transnational corporate-led globalization, a Fifth International, to use Waterman's phrase (1992), of computer-mediated activism is emerging that is qualitatively different from the party-based socialist and communist Internationals. Kellner, with the emphasis on political alliance and solidarity between oppositional groups and subcultures, argues that the Internet facilitates linkages between groups for the development of political alliances and solidarity against the dominant system. From Kellner's perspective such networking links labor, feminist, ecological, peace, and other anticapitalist groups, which provide the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics.

Postmodern identity politics can be a starting point for reviewing Kellner's political perspective. Finally, there is another mode of affirmative postmodern politics, perhaps the dominant form of politics today, known as "identity politics," that often has emancipatory aspirations but which usually falls short of advancing systemic change and new forms of radical struggle. "Identity politics" refers to a politics in which individuals construct their cultural and political identities through engaging in struggles or associations that advance the interests of the groups with which they identify. Sometimes identification is concrete, based on participatory involvement in specific groups, while sometimes it is more imaginary and abstract in nature, as one identifies,

for example, with the black, gay and lesbian movement, or with whatever community from which one gains their identity and sense of self and belonging (Best & Kellner, 1998, pp. 287-288). In contrast to the postmodern “identity politics” perspective that promotes apolitical individualism, social atomized, fragmented, disintegrated, disconnected and cyber-balkanized individual, community, and society, Kahn and Kellner (2004) attempt to promote the politics of alliance and solidarity between different diverse groups and sub-cultures. From their perspective, the Internet network system facilitates linkage between diverse groups and communities that provide a basis for development of politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitation of postmodern identity politics.

Best and Kellner (1998) believe that both modern and postmodern perspectives have their own strengths and limitations, and we should seek a creative combination of the best elements of each. From their perspective, new politics could be constructed from combinations of modern notions of solidarity, alliances, consensus, universal rights, macropolitics, and institutional struggle with postmodern notions of difference, plurality, multiperspectivalism, identity, and micropolitics. As a result, they propose that our task is to reconstruct what Hegel called a “differentiated unity,” where the various threads of historical development come together in a rich and mediated way.

From his perspective, techno-politics is considered contested terrain and key for development of techno-politics is articulation, the mediation of techno-politics with real problems and struggle, instead of the self-contained reflections of the internal politics of the Internet. Similar to Habermas, Kellner sees techno-politics as a battle in the bourgeois public sphere that should deal with the most important social, cultural, economic, and political problems rather than self-contained reflections. By contrast to Habermas, who emphasizes consensus, the third generation critical theorist emphasizes

the struggle for robust democracy and social justice and equality. Kellner argues that the oppositional deployment of the Internet as an instrument of cultural and political struggle by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas addresses problems of survival and the transformation of social, cultural, political, and economic conditions. Thus, for Kellner, techno-politics as contested terrain can be used to advance progressive political agendas and to engage key issues of the day.

Kellner argues that “The examples in this study suggest how techno-politics make possible a refiguring of politics, a refocusing of politics on everyday life and using the tools and techniques of new computer and communication technology to expand the field and domain of politics” (Kellner, 2001, pp. 189-190). At this juncture, Kellner contends that the ideas of Guy Debord and the Situationist International are especially relevant with their stress on the construction of situations, the use of technology, media of communication and cultural forms to promote a revolution of everyday life, and to increase the realm of freedom, community, and empowerment. To some extent, the new technologies are revolutionary, they do constitute a revolution of everyday life, but it is often a revolution that promotes and disseminates the capitalist consumer society and involves new modes of fetishism, enslavement, and domination, as yet but dimly perceived and undertheorized.

Therefore, Kahn and Kellner (2004) argue that the Internet is a tool or as contested terrain that can be used by Left, Right, and Center of both the dominant culture and subculture for promotion of their individual interests and agendas. They also believe that political and cultural struggle is mediated by new technologies and will be so increasingly in future.

### **2.8.3 Kellner's perspective shortage and weakness**

Douglas Kellner's perspective rejects piecemeal reforms and local strategies to enhance individual freedom and progress in favor of international politics of solidarity and alliance against globalization of capitalism and neoliberalism. Furthermore, Kellner's perspectives downplay the role of ideological contradiction in fragmentation of societies and communities to like-minded groups and small groups. Kellner's perspective pays more attention to the capital base of domination and ignores the other kind of ideological base of dominations such as religion, state, and nationalism. Moreover, Kellner's perspective seems to be a highly subjective point of view. Although alliance and solidarity between several diverse groups is not impossible, it is especially difficult, in new societies between people who are socialized in capitalist societies and internalized materialism and capitalism and consumerism culture, values, and norms. A typical example of fragmented and balkanized oppositional groups could be the Iranian oppositional groups who have never reached an alliance and solidarity against the Islamic Republic of Iran for more than thirty-five years except to the Green Movement. Kellner's perspective pays more attention on class, gender, ethnic and racial domination, and less pays attention to the religious groups domination, while, religious hegemonic ideological system is as same as other kinds of dominate and oppressive systems hegemonic ideology.

Moreover, Kellner's techno-politics perspective, more emphasis on contested feature of techno-politics, while, there is some truth in his argument, but, another truth is that techno-politics is not fair, democratic and contested terrain under totalitarian state. Because, totalitarian state widespread and systematic interfere in virtual sphere and brutally and ruthlessly oppress their opponents and dissents. Therefore, it could be argue that Kellner's perspective less pay attention to the totalitarian state hegemonic use of the internet. Therefore, the thesis argues that the Internet as alternative media can be

used by the excluded groups and sub-cultures for advance of their political struggles against totalitarian systems dominant and oppressive policies, but, they should pay its costs.

Additionally, Kahn and Kellner's (2004) perspective is technological deterministic about the role of Internet in transforming ordinary people identity or personage from dumb mobs to smart mobs and oppositional agents against dominant systems. By contrast to their perspective, the study avoids from technological determinism and argue that the technologies itself unable to create oppositional agents against the totalitarian states. But, oppositional groups and subcultures those who access to the Internet and computer technologies can represent their oppositional identity. Thus, the thesis argue that technologies unable to create new oppositional agencies, but, the technologies can be used by the oppositional groups, subcultures, critical intellectuals, and political activists who dismissed from mainstream media and politics for promotion of their political interests and agendas.

Furthermore, Kellners's (1999a) perspective more emphasis on global and international struggles against capitalism and globalization and less pay attention to local struggles against the reactionary and totalitarian states. Totalitarian and reactionary states will be more than happy to put global politics on the top of political issues and because critical political intellectuals and radical activists have been eager to shift to global politics and ignore totalitarian state oppressive policies which will reestablish and reproduce their hegemonic system. Therefore, similar to Kellner, the thesis emphasis on political struggles on the global level and difference with Kellner the study also emphasis on the local struggles against the totalitarian and oppressive states.

In sum, Kahn and Kellner's (2005) research exemplified or indicated that new information and communication technologies in techno-cultures make a reconfiguring of politics and culture and a refocusing of politics on everyday life possible. Kellner (2000b) argues that new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet, have created multiple public spheres that maximize public participation so that excluded and oppressed groups can represent their alternative forms of culture and information, and represent their own oppositional identities and political views. Kahn and Kellner (2004) argue that new technologies as tools or as contested terrain can be used by the Left, Right, and Center of both the dominant culture and subculture for promotion of their interests and agendas. They believe that political and cultural struggle mediated by new technologies will be so increasingly in the future.

Furthermore, Kellner argues that critical theorists or anyone theorizing about the effects of new technologies on radical democratic politics and the transformation of societies should consider new technologies as tools or instruments that can reconstruct, reshape, and re-form by human beings for their "self-valorization," "self-empowerment," "self-representation," and struggle for democracy and egalitarian societies. Kahn and Kellner (2005) argue that the Internet is a complex series of reconstructive models of citizenship and new forms of political activism, even as the Internet itself reproduces a logic of capitalism and becomes co-opted by hegemonic forces. From this viewpoint, the Internet creates a virtual space and environment in which citizens and communities can interact as tentative forms of self-determination and control from below. From their view, which follows Reingold's view, the Internet as contested terrain creates a complex and dynamic space wherein dumb mob citizens transform to smart mob citizens who struggle against inequality, discrimination, and injustice to gain a more direct democracy.

Therefore, as Khan and Kellner (2007) argue, technologies are tools that both dominant and resistance forces, can use for promoting their ends and interests. Neoliberals, conservatives and totalitarian state powers have deployed new technologies to promote capitalist culture, as well as oppositional groups and movements can use technologies to promote democracy and social justice on local and global scales. The political battles of the future may well be fought in the streets, factories, parliaments, and other sites of past conflicts, but all political struggles is now mediated by media, computer, and information technologies and increasingly will be so.

## **2.9 Case study of the thesis**

The current thesis case studies include a visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian Green Movement's activist websites.

### **2.9.1 The Iranian Green Movement**

The Iranian Green Movement (IGM) emerged after the highly controversial Iranian 10th presidential election's result of June 12, 2009. Individuals who objected to the official presidential results went to the streets and protested against what they perceived to be electoral fraud (Golkar, 2011, p. 54). "The Green Movement" (Jonbesh-e Sabz), "Green Wave," and "Green Revolution" are all phrases used by researchers to describe the new political movement that formed in Iran after the disputed June 2009 presidential election (Golkar, 2011, p. 54). The protests were the most attended demonstration against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state after the Islamic revolution, which challenged the Islamic Republic of Iran's regime (Khosronejad, 2011). As Muir (2009) states, this led to demonstrations on the streets of the Iranian capital, Tehran, which drew "the largest crowds since the Iranian Revolution in 1979" (cited in Kamalipour, 2010, p. 4).

New social movements have prominent features and characteristics that distinguish them from more established movements. According to Diani and Eyerman (1992) new social movements should manifest four elements to be considered a social movement: (1) a network of organizations, (2) the basis of a shared collective identity, (3) mobilizing people to join by mostly unconventional methods, (4) obtain social or political goals. Touraine (1985) claims that new social movements include the three following components: (1) identity; the definition of the identity of the movement must be clear. It must be clear so that the social movement that has been formed represent itself as an advocate and spokesperson for people's interests, (2) opponent or opposition; the movement should clearly define who its opponents are, and (3) the stakes, that is, the cultural totality that defines the field of conflict belongs to the same universe; they express the central conflict of a societal type. In another word *totality*, which refers to the realm in which actors "strive for domination." In the following section, the Iranian Green Movement, as based on these features, will be analyzed.

(1) The identity of the Iranian Green Movement's supporters/activists: Who were the Green Movement activists and what was their social status? In response to this question, Golkar (2011) observes that "the Green Movement attracted a huge support base from groups with very different ideologies—from Islamist modernists to secular dissidents, from Marxists to liberals" (p. 54). However, Golkar is correct about the multiplicity and pluralities of the Green Movement's supporters, but it should be mentioned that the majority of supporters of the Green Movement belong to the middle class of Iran's society. As Cross (2010) put it about Green Movement supporter; Mousavi's slightly wealthier, more urban, more educated, and more tech-savvy supporters. It should be mentioned that, although the Green Movement's participants belong to the middle class, it was a superclass movement. As Dabashi (2011) observes, the Green Movement from its outset has had "a more middle class urban base, in its essence and political derives, it

is (and increasingly becoming) a superclass movement.” He further argues that “It has supporters and activists who are secularists as well as Muslims, and socialists as well as nationalists; in a nutshell, it reflects what the cosmopolitan nature of the Iranian society actually is, rather than prescriptive approaches of what it (ideologically) should be” (Dabashi, 2011, p. 11). Tezcür (2012) states that Mir Hossein Mousavi’s campaign, named the Green Movement (Jonbashe-Sabz), energized vast segments of the population and attracted the support of a variety of social classes, especially the urban middle-classes, who were politically marginalized under Ahmedinejad’s presidency (Tezcür, 2012, p. 129). Although the author believes that the majority of Iranian Green Movement activists belong to the well-educated, urban middle class, the Green Movement’s activists belong to the superclass movement.

(2) The Green Movement’s opponent identity: Who were the opponents of the Green Movement? By contrast the Mousavi’s supporters; the Green Movement supporters, “Much of [Ahmadinejad’s] support comes from poorer and more religious sections of Iran’s rapidly growing population particularly outside Tehran” (*Who’s Who*, 2009). In fact, the opponents of the Iranian Green Movement belong to the faction of conservatives, hardliners, and militant forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s ruling groups who have brutally oppressed the Green Movement activists. The Green Movement’s opponents belong to the conservative camp who gathered around Iran’s supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Sayyid Ali Hoseini Khamenei, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Guardian Council of the Constitution, and The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps who completely supported the former Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

(3) The stakes: The initial ideology and main goal of the Iranian Green Movement were to restrict or limit the enormous and almost absolute power of conservatives in control

of elections and their manipulation of election results. A brief review of the Green Movement's demonstration signs, symbols, and pictures demonstrate the Green Movement's initial objectives. Shortly after the official announcement of the result of the presidential election, protesters chanted the slogan Where is my vote? Thus the Movement's main challenge refers to the control of the rule of the election system in Iran. Therefore, the theme of democratization of election system was the significant element of the Iranian Green Movement which according to Cohen (1983) "democratization is one of the most important feature of the new social movement" (cited in Pichardo, 1997, p. 414).

Golkar (2011) highlights two different characters of the Iranian Green Movement from earlier movements that have arisen in Iran and in other parts of the Middle East. From his view point, "the first difference between this movement and earlier political and social movements lies in decentralized, networked movement based on social relations and a common agenda. The second difference between this movement and earlier political and social movements, lies in the way participants have used information technologies to launch, develop and expand the movement" (Golkar, 2011, p. 54).

In the absence of free, fair, and democratic media in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian Green movement's activists used the new information and communalization technologies for advancement of their struggles against the regime. They used new technologies as a site for production of alternative information and culture, representation and reconstruction of their collective identity, and development of their solidarity and organization of their demonstrations. In fact, the Iranian Green Movement is probably better understood as one between a dominant oligarchy and those whom they excluded from society, culture and politics. The Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant oligarchy, the hardliners, took over power and dismissed all critical

intellectuals, critical political activists, oppositional groups and political parties, feminists' activists, and religious reformists.

The Green Movement has its roots in Iran's societies. Several main internal and external factors caused the emergence and extension of the Iranian Green Movement, such as: social, political, cultural, economic, and technological internal and external factors; social factors: more literate citizens, urbanization, media literacy, and youth activists; political factors: dictatorship, totalitarianism, authoritarianism, lack of elites circulation, lack of legitimacy and acceptability, ideological systems; cultural factors: globalization and internationalization of culture, pluralism, liberalism, democracy, human rights, and secularism; economic factors; unemployment, poverty, inflation, expensive, widespread and systematic corruption; and technological factors; globalization technological revolutions, social affordability of digital technologies, and so on.

## **2.10 Conclusions**

Although these literature reviews have some opportunities to examine the role of the Internet in political struggles, they often lack a multidimensional theoretical approach. For example, much research merely deals with two positive effects of the Internet on political oppositional groups and ignores the negative effects of the Internet on political and cultural struggles, whereas the Internet is a double-edged sword that has dual functions for cultural and political struggles and social movements. Another limitation of these previous studies is that they lack multiperspective theoretical approaches. For instance, the majority of researchers neglect the interactive effect of social, cultural, political, and economic variables/factors on Internet political impact within democracy or political struggles.

In addition, the majority of the previous research deployed quantitative research methods, whereas the Internet as multimedia makes it possible to have a mixture of sound, pictures, video, and writing to provide information; however, the researchers ignored the use of qualitative research methods. In contrast to the research, the current thesis tries to show the several diverse functions of the Internet and the World Wide Web for political and cultural struggles by visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's website home pages and the Green Movement's website home pages. Furthermore, the literature reviews demonstrate that the Internet and the webs as contested terrains and alternative media have given oppositional, excluded, and oppressed groups new tools to mediate their political and cultural struggles against dominant systems and state power in free and democratic countries. Moreover, the literature reviews demonstrate that the majority of the research places more emphasis on the technological dimension of the Internet and less attention on human beings; Internet activists are an active and dynamic agent of effect. Much of this research has especially focused on the diffusion of ideas and information; let us assume that two main suggestions can be identified in the literature: on the one hand, the Internet facilitates and supports traditional offline collective action in terms of organization, mobilization, and transnationalization and, on the other hand, creates new modes of collective action and collective identity formation. The Internet has indeed not only supported traditional offline social movement actions such as conventional street demonstrations and made them more transnational, but it is also used to set up new forms of online protest activities and creates online modes of existing offline protest actions (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010).

Therefore, following Kellner's (2003a) perspective, we need to consider a multidimensional, multiperspective, and critical theory that allows us to explain the role of the Internet in political struggles. Based on this theoretical framework, we consider

the Internet as a tool or contested terrain that can be used by several kinds of groups for the promotion of their own interests and agendas. They can use the Internet for the organization of their political activities, promotion of alternative forms of culture and information, representation and reconstruction of their collective identity, development of alliance and solidarity, the direct expression of dissent, virtual struggle, and political and cultural protests, and the formation of a virtual community.

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## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of the study is to explore how the Iranian Green movement deployed the Internet or the web as a contested terrain or alternative media for the promotion of their own political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. The study also tries to provide useful analytical tools for visual semiotic analysis of radical democratic politics and new social movements in the age of digital technologies. For the purpose of the study, the messages and meaning of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages and visual texts will be analyzed, focusing on the implications for understanding the operation of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. In this thesis, the study will develop a visual semiotic analysis of computer-based communication through an electronic medium: the World Wide Web.

For the purpose of this study, Roland Barthes's visual semiotic approach is deployed for analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages and their visual texts. This chapter discusses the methodologies applied in this thesis. It outlines in particular research methodology approaches: Barthes's visual semiotic analysis, research questions, statistical population and sampling procedures, and data collection procedures, data analysis process. It discusses in particular the research of the pilot study and the limitation and location of the study, which is the Iranian Green movement activist's websites. The chapter also elaborates on the instrument and procedures used for collecting data from websites.

### **3.2 Research methodologies approaches**

Research methodology approaches generally divide into three main groups of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (J.W Creswell, 2008, pp. 13-17). First, the quantitative approach is one in which the investigator primarily uses postpositive claims for developing knowledge (i.e., cause and effect thinking, reduction to specific variables and hypotheses and questions, use of measurement and observation, and the test of theories), employs strategies of inquiry such as experiments and surveys, and collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistics data. Second, the qualitative methods approach centers on the quality of meaning produced by actors, which associate with participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups and textual or documentary analysis, semiotic analysis, and qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), uses a variety of research methods, including semiotic, observation, interviews, content analysis, and discourse analysis. Finally, the mixed methods approach is one in which the researcher tends to base knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds (e.g., consequence-oriented, problem-centered, and pluralistic). It employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problem. The data collection also involves gathering both numeric information (e.g., in instruments) as well as text information (e.g., on interviews) so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information (Creswell, 2008, pp. 13-21). Accordingly, the study is going to employ qualitative approach for analysis of the meaning of the Iranian Green movement activist's websites home pages and visual texts.

There are many different ways to analyze qualitative data. Semiotics is one approach of analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. For example, a qualitative method approach is a semiotic analysis conducted to identify stylistic and substantive meaning of the

Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages and visual texts. For this aim, the current research employs/applies Barthes's visual semiotic model to analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages. Therefore, a visual semiotic analysis model has been deployed as an alternative media research methodology for the analysis of oppositional politics.

There are several reasons why the study deployed semiotic analysis model for analysis of the Iranian Green movement's websites home pages and visual texts. First of all, it relates to the research's theoretical framework, while our research deployed Kellner's (2003a) critical media cultural studies perspective, it seems semiotic/visual semiotic analysis is a suitable method for analysis of alternative media and radical democratic politics. Second, as O'Neill (2005) argues the Internet is revolutionary transforming our world by providing mediating and communicating opportunity. Arguably, these transformations in media result in transformations of the familiar signifying systems that surround us. Thus, a semiotics of new media must be explored in order to understand how we interact with these new media sign systems. Third, as Kim (2015) argues while political and social movements produce various kinds of communicative signs such as slogans and symbols to fully communicate with the mass public, it seems semiotic/visual semiotic analysis of socio-political movements is a suitable method for analysis of alternative media and radical democratic politics. Fourth, to fully grasp the meaning of the Iranian oppositional group's websites, images, signs, and symbols suggests that Barthes's visual semiotic analysis is the proper method because of its emphasis on the meaning of media messages. Fifth, while the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state is an Islamic ideological system, the Iranian oppositional groups concentrate their own critiques on the politically dominant ideology and oppressive policies of Islam; then, semiotic analysis is the proper method for revealing the dominant system's ideological codes and myths. Fourth, Barthes's semiotic analysis

model is a mixed system in which different kinds of matters are involved (sound and image, objects and writing, etc.), and, because websites as multimedia use a mixture of sounds, images, video, and written text for promotion of information, the Barthes's semiotics model is preferred. Therefore, the visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's websites is the appropriate method to represent cultural meanings and social reality. The visual semiotic analysis of the oppositional group's websites home pages and materials will help us to understand the political Islamic system of culture and ideology. Although visual images and photography address cultural meaning and power, the visual semiotics analysis of the websites images and photography can address the cultural meaning and power relation in the Islamic system. As Selg (2011) argues, semiotics is a fruitful complement to the theory of hegemony. The visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's website home pages will reveal their behavior and message meaning. With the new media texts, especially visual images that convey message and meaning, visual semiotic analysis is the proper method for analysis of the website texts' meaning. Finally, as Khatib (2012) argues image centered at the heart of political struggles which replace other pictures. Therefore, cultural understandings of visual texts become important theoretical ground for analyzing the sociohistorical meanings, purposes, ideologies, identities and political orientations of socio-political movements. Accordingly, visual semiotic analysis of the image and photography would be suitable method for analysis of the visual texts. For these reasons, the visual semiotics analysis will be deployed for analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages with special attention devoted to visual texts; photography and image for deeply and fully grasp of the Iranian oppositional group's websites visual texts meaning. Therefore, the study argues that the media semiotics and especially visual semiotic analysis can be a very useful method or tool in textual

analysis in terms of uncovering the hidden meaning of media texts. Then it can be used the principle of the semiotics to analyze the alternative media texts.

### **3.3 Semiotic analysis**

The term of Semiotic derives from the Greek word “*semion*”, or sign. Generally, semiotics or semiology is the study of signs. Semiotic analysis is the scientific and systematic analysis of the cultural meaning of signs, symbols, and images. Semiotics investigates how signs and images create meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) provides an easily understandable and concise definition of semiotic, which is: “the study of signs” (cited in Chandler, 2000). For the philosopher Charles Peirce (1931-1958) “semiotic” was the “formal doctrine of signs,” which was closely related to “logic” (cited in Chandler, 2000). Also, Umberto Eco (1976) gave a broad definition of semiotic: “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign” (p. 7). For Danesi, semiotic is “the science or doctrine that studies signs and their uses in representation” (M. Danesi, 2002, p. 227). For Chandler semiotic has had the broader definition than the mere study of signs; from Chandler views “semiotics as not purely a method of textual analysis, but involves both the theory and analysis of signs, codes, and signifying practices” (Chandler, 2007, p. 3). For the purposes of this study, we agree with the definition offered by Chandler that semiotics is the theoretical and analytical study of signs, codes, and significant practices. Therefore, in this thesis, semiotics is considered the study of contingent articulation of signs and codes and their meanings in alternative media.

### **3.4 Signs**

In this study, semiotic is defined the systematic study of signs, codes, and significant practices, but question raises that what is the meaning of *sign*. Sign is the key concept of the semiotic analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Similarly, Gillian (2001) has

argued that the sign is the fundamental unit of semiology. According to the American semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, a sign is “something by knowing which we know something more” (Johansen & Larsen, 2002, p. 25). From Peirce view a sign is a meaningful unit that is interpreted as “standing for” something other than itself. Based on this definition, a sign is a signifier that represents, means, and stands for something else other than itself. In other words, a sign is a form or signifier that stands for something else that is called the signified. As Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson (1991: 174) say in their defense of semiology, “human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs” (cited in Rose, 2001, p. 69).

Therefore, sign as a basic unit of semiotic analysis that stands for something else, and the Iranian oppositional groups website as multimedia produces different kinds of meaningful signs, especially visual signs such as logos, flags, national Figure images, title names, photography, visual reports, and video clips, which will be semiotically analyzed on this study. Therefore, operational definition for signs could be each kind of form that stands for something else such as: logos, flags, national Figure images, title names, photography, visual reports, and video clips. In another words, it could be argued that signs, symbol and images represent groups or activists oppositional culture, identity, ideology and politics. The following example: Figure 3.1 photography of Peyman Aref after his brutal lashing shows that his back is injured and damaged that is the sign of lashing of critical political activists under the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state and sharia code.



**Figure 3.1:** Photography of Peyman Aref after his brutal lashing, <http://jebhe.info/old/news/fa/index3411.html?mi=9&ni=7715>; 18/3/2014; copyright © 2004 - 2011 -  
خبرگزاری جبهه ملی ایران

At the denotative level, Figure 3.1; is a color photograph, the mid-shot of Payman Aref just a few minutes his release from prison on Sunday, 9 October, student political activist Payman Aref received 74 lashes on the charge of insulting Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The Tehran revolutionary court also sentenced him to a one-year prison term and a lifetime ban from journalism and political activities, including membership in political parties. The photograph shows that his back is severely damaged and wounded because of lashing. In an interview with the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, Payman Aref said that the lashes he received were delivered a lot more harshly than stipulated, and that several judicial authorities were present in the room laughing when he was flogged. After his flogging sentence was carried out, he filed a complaint against the judicial officer from the “Sentence Implementation Unit” for his failure to carry out the sentence correctly. Also, in continue, He added that; he was released after 90 days in solitary confinement where he was interrogated, and

according to Aref himself, “was tortured and one of [his] teeth were broken by the interrogator. They took me to a windowless room in the court. They told me to take off my clothes. I objected, saying that my flogging sentence called for the ta’aziri [milder/correctional] flogging, and that they had to flog me over my clothes, not my bare body. But they removed my clothes forcefully. My flogging was carried out as a hadd [preventive flogging reserved for those who have committed sins], and without any of the ta’aziri flogging elements. According to Shia jurists, when ta’aziri flogging is carried out, the flogger must have the Koran under his arm, which would prevent him from raising his arm too high. The lashes also have to be placed on different parts of the back, so as all the lashes do not land on the same spot. But the flogger did not follow any of these requirements. He flogged me with all his might and by fully raising his arms, bringing the whip down on my back like hadd flogging, reserved for crimes such as drinking alcohol and sodomy,” continued Aref.

At the connotative level, Figure 3.1; the mid-shot of Payman Aref just a few minutes his release from prison connotes to Personal relationship of photographer with him and his damaged and wounded back stands for flogging and lashing of political critical activists and brutally torture of political activists under Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic states judiciary system and sharia law.

At the mythical level, Figure 3.1; demyth Islamic sharia code on the ta’aziri [milder/correctional] lashing, flogging, and flagellation of critical political activists. Based on the Islamic sharia code on the ta’aziri [milder/correctional] flogging is imposed on an unwilling subject as a punishment against critical political activists. Accordingly, the Islamic judiciary system charge Iranian critical political activists to lashing and flogging. Three layers meaning of photography of Peyman Aref after his brutally lashing can be summarize in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1:** Three layer meaning of photography of Peyman Aref after his brutal lashing

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
A photography of Peyman Aref after his brutal lashing	His damaged and wounded back	Stands for flogging and lashing of political critical activists and brutally torture of political activists	Demyth Islamic sharia code on the ta'aziri [milder/correctional] lashing, flogging, and flagellation of critical political activists.

Therefore, signs are found in the physical form of words, images, photographs, sounds, acts or objects (this physical form is sometimes known as the sign vehicle) stand and represent something else. According to Chandler (2000) signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning. Accordingly, from Chandler (2000) view anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as 'signifying' something - referring to or standing for something other than itself. From chandler view sign should be significant and meaningful. We interpret things as signs largely unconsciously by relating them to familiar systems of conventions. It is this meaningful use of signs which is at the heart of the concerns of semiotics. Thus, the operational definition of signs, symbols and images refers to the website as multimedia produce different kinds of meaningful signs especially visual signs such as logo, flag, national Figures images, title names, photography, visual reports, video clips, posters which will be semiotically analyzed on this study.

### 3.5 Codes

Chandler (2000) stated that the concept of the code is fundamental in semiotics. As Chandler defines semiotic codes as "procedural systems of related conventions for correlating signifiers and signified in certain domains" (Chandler, 2000). Deneci (2004) define codes as system of signs with specific structures and relations that can be used for coding and decoding of media texts and their messages. Code is defined by Cobley (2009) as the set or system of rules and correspondences that link signs to meanings.

Eco (1968) similar to Miller's (1951) define codes as “any system of symbols that, by prior agreement between the source and destination, is used to represent and convey information” (p.19). More specifically, Eco defines the code as a system of significant units with rules of combination and transformation. In sum, a code is “a system of rules given by a culture” (1968: 130, 134). Fiske (1987) defines semiotic code as “a rule-governed system of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture” (Nack, 2012, p. 25). Chandler (2000) defines semiotic codes as “procedural systems of related conventions for correlating signifiers and signified in certain domains”. From their perspective codes are rules and conventions that correlate signifier to signify. Following Chandler (2000) definition, code could be defined “procedural systems of related rules and conventions for correlating signifiers and signifieds in certain domains.

### **3.6 Visual semiotic analysis**

Visual semiotic analysis is a major branch of semiotic analysis. According to Danesi (2004) visual semiotics analysis is defined as the study of visual signs and their representational function. Visual signs also have been defined by Danesi (2004) as signs that have been constructed with visual signifiers that can be seen rather than touched, heard, smelled, or tasted. Danesi (2004) also sees visual semiotic analysis as a growing and robust area of inquiry. From his perspective, visual semiotics analysis includes the study of art forms, logos in advertising, maps, diagrams, pictographs, alphabet characters, and other visual artifacts and symbols.

Nöth (2011) offers a difference between general semiotics and applied semiotics in his definition of visual semiotics. According to Nöth's (2011) vision, general semiotic refers to the study of signs, sign systems, and communicative processes in general,

whereas applied semiotics study signs in special context use. In continue, he argues that some branches of applied semiotics established themselves as sub-disciplines of semiotics under names of their own: for example, medical, musical, or film semiotics. From Nöth's perspective, visual semiotics is one of the domains of applied semiotics. In contrast to Danesi, who states that visual semiotics studies visual signs, Nöth argues that the concept of visual semiotics is not synonymous with the study of visually communicated signs. Nöth (2011) argues that the topics of visual semiotics include pictures, print ads, posters, design, films, drawings, paintings, photographs, colors, diagrams, logograms, road and traffic signs, and maps. Nöth has accepted other visual communicative signs such as geometry, writing, or non-verbal communication (gestures, eye contact, body language from visual semiotics topics). The study is mostly restricted to semiotics analysis of oppositional groups' websites home pages and visual texts, such as: logos, title names, aims, mottoes, symbols, flags, images, pictures, photography, visual reports, video clips and still images of video clips, posters, and so on. where as in this thesis, visual semiotic refers to the use of visual images specifically; logos, title names, aims, mottoes, symbols, flags, images, pictures, photography, visual reports, video clips and still images of video clips, posters that have produced by the Iranian Green Movements for promotion of their oppositional politics.

### **3.7 Visual semiotic analysis of oppositional politics**

Visual analysis of social movements, oppositional politics and protests can increase the outcome of protest or social movement research (Philipps, 2012). The thesis argues that visual semiotic analysis of social movements web use will deepen our understanding on social movements and contentious politics in the age of digital technologies. As Philipps (2012) argues research on protest events or social movements rarely employs visual analytic procedures. Similarly, Daphi et al. (2013) argue that while visual images play crucial role in expression of political message and production of social and

political reality, but, social movement's studies have neglected visual analysis which the thesis tries to address by visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian Green Movement's websites. Following section will review related literature on visual analysis of social movements in the age of alternative media.

The wave of studies analyzed the content of social movement's websites (Porta & Mosca, 2009; Laura Stein, 2009; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002). For example, Porta & Mosca (2009) quantitatively analyzed content of 261 organizations of the Global Justice Movement in six European countries. Their analysis focused on a series of social movement's dimensions such as: information provision, identity building, transparency/accountability, mobilization, and intervention on the digital divide. For further example, Stein (2009) analyzed the content of US-based social movement's websites. Her study developed a typology of communication functions central to social movements as follow: provides information; assists action and mobilization; promotes interaction and dialog; makes lateral linkages; serves as an outlet for creative expression; and promotes fundraising and resource generation. The typology constructed here was the basis for a survey instrument that enumerated the features or attributes of each communication function for social movements. However, their studies help us in providing a theoretical framework for the current research, but, their studies have been somewhat text-dominated, where alternative Internet and multimedia mixed textual, visual and vocal texts together, have also largely neglected visual analysis which the thesis tries to address throughout visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian Green Movement's websites. Therefore, the thesis argues that visual semiotic analysis of social movements web use will deepen our understanding on social movements and contentious politics.

Some studies visually analyzed social movement, conflict and mobilization (Doerr et al., 2013b; Doerr & Teune, 2012; Kolářová, 2004; Oleinik, 2015; Parry, 2010). For example, Parry (2010) develops a model of visual framing analysis through an examination of the photographic representation of the 2006 Israel–Lebanon conflict. The study employed a detailed content and framing analysis of all press photographs relevant to the conflict, with the following questions in mind: What is the character of photographic representation of both sides in the conflict and how does it fit with various moral evaluations and political interpretations of the war? Which groups are shown in an empathetic light? Is there any coherence to the framing of the war, or are many alternative explanations presented? In their study toward a visual analysis of social movements, conflict and mobilization, Doerr, Mattoni, & Teune (2013a) argue that information and communication technologies quickly spread the visual news of recent mobilizations in Arab, European and North-American countries across the world. They state that before written reports analyzing the unfolding mobilizations, images of protests circulated widely through television channels, print newspapers, internet websites and social media platforms. They argue that pictures and videos of squares full of people protesting against their governments became the symbols of a new wave of contention that quickly spread from Tunisia to many other countries. Similar to Mitchell (1994) who represents visual realm as site of struggle with a life of its own, they further argue that the visual realm is not only battleground for contention politics, but also universe of culturally shared meaning. They further argue that systematic visual analysis of social movement within broader frameworks is still rare and social movement research is almost exclusively focused on texts. Their study tries to address three neglected areas of research in the visual analysis of social movements: the visual expressions of social movements through images and other visual artifacts; the visual representation of social movements by actors external to social movements; and the

more general aspect of social movements' visibility in larger societal contexts. Their study helps us in understanding the visual as site of struggles against dominant system's hegemonic culture, identity and ideology. Protests photographs, video clips, and visual reports are uploaded in real time by oppositional movements activists may challenge dominant systems and totalitarian state's hegemonic culture, identity and ideology and represent resistance forces progressive culture, identity and ideology.

Some studies focused on semiotic analysis of social movement images (Daphi et al., 2013; Goodnow, 2006; Kane, 1997; Kim, 2015; Kourdis, 2013; Sabety, 2009). For example, Goodnow (2006) semiotically analyzed 208 symbols of social campaigns for both their visual content and their use in campaigns. Following Barthesian (1985) semiotic model that outlines levels of signification which consist of "denotation", "connotation", he analyzed these symbols in a two-step process. First he analyzed the symbols themselves using a semiotic approach to garner meaning from the images. Second he attempted to identify those meanings by considering the symbols of social campaigns in their original contexts so that through abduction he determined how those symbols function for campaigns. Their studies support the thesis's research mythology; Roland Barthes's visual semiotic approach is suitable method for analysis of the Internet and radical politics. Sabety (2009) makes an innovative exploratory attempt to use semiotic tools to develop an interpretation of a YouTube video clip from the death of one twenty-three-year-old female protester, Neda Agha-Soltan who has been shot to death by the Islamic republic of Iran's security forces on the 2009 Iranian presidential election demonstration. Obviously, her research mythology has been adequate and very thorough for analysis of the YouTube video clip, but, her study lack of a systematic analytical model to resolve visual semiotic analysis of social movement's problem. By contrast to her study, the thesis tries to provide a systematic visual semiotic model for analysis of social-political movement on the age of the Internet.

Davis (2012) research explores the way queer political groups as social movement use symbolic capital in their web presences and seeks to read semiotically how images deployed in queer Internet spaces can create and reinforce queer identities. From his perspective, the process of reinforcement queer identity takes place through the generation of heterodoxic discourses, embedded within the code system, and denotative signifying level of queer symbolisms. These discourses generate moments when radical breaks between the heteronormative power structures and actors are possible. The writer explores that how these semiotics as seen through Bourdieu's theories are in relation with the concept of counter publics.

Daphi et al. (2013) developed a method of visual analysis that draws mainly on semiotics and art history, and, partly, cultural studies and discourse analysis. For developing the model, the authors draw on Ferdinand de Saussure's (1960) structural linguistic semiotics model that distinguishes between two side of a sign; signifier and signified. From his perspective, the signifier is the means of expressing an ideas or concept such as a piece of colored fabric, while the signified concerns an idea or concept like flag. The author also followed Barthesian (1985) semiotic model that outlines two levels of signification which consist of "denotation", "connotation". Denotation refers to the definitional, literal, obvious, or common-sense meaning of a sign (e.g. a piece of colored fabric = flag), connotation links the sign to broader cultural themes and concepts (e.g. a flag = nationality) and its evaluation.

To be able to transfer these distinctions into a concrete methodology, recourse to Erwin Panofsky's (1975) art works interpretative scheme that the first step of analysis refers to primary or natural subject mater; pre-iconographic description of art works signs that analyze the purely material configuration of colors and shapes as well as natural beings and things such as animals, women, men and tables. The second steps that refers to

secondary or conventional subject matter that analyze the composition of motives and images (e.g. anecdotes or allegories) as carriers of meaning for whose identification knowledge of the conventional meaning patterns is required (e.g. a man with a knife represents St. Bartholomew in a renaissance painting). The third steps that refers to Intrinsic Meaning or Content (iconology) that analyze the meaning or content of an artwork, which can only be grasped when one knows the founding principles of a nation, an epoch, a class, a religious or philosophical conviction”(Daphi et al., 2013, p. 10).

To be able to transfer these distinctions into a concrete methodology, recourse to Erwin Panofsky’s (1975) art works interpretative scheme, Daphi et al. (2013) developed a three-step analytical approach of visual analysis of images from anti-surveillance protest as follow: description of components, detection of conventional signs, and contextual analysis. The first step of analysis refers to extensive description of the image’s components (pre-iconographic, basic denotation) such as lines, colours, forms and their arrangement to detect the image’s visual elements on a very basic level and to avoid leaving out elements unnoticed at first sight. The second analytical step focuses on the detection of denotative or conventional content to identify symbols, metaphors, allegories, and allusions created in the combination of motives on the basis of conventional meanings. These conventional meanings refer to well-known sacral or political motives and to particular ‘moods’ conventionally linked to specific combinations of colours and/or forms. The third and last step draws on both iconological and connotative analysis in order to identify the broader themes and claims alluded to in the image. In this step the conventional meanings identified in step two are related to the specific cultural and political context of the image’s production and dissemination. In order to do this, the researcher identifies underlying concepts which are characteristics of the culture or epoch in which the images are produced or shown in

order to elaborate the diverse possible meanings of the images. **Table 3.2** shows Daphi et al. layer meanings and methodological steps.

**Table 3.2:** Layers of meaning and methodological steps, Daphi et al., 2013

Rising level of abstraction from the image			Panofsky	Paper analytical method
sign	Signifier	form	Primary or Natural Subject Matter	1st step: description of image components
		Denotation	<i>Secondary or Conventional subject matter (iconography)</i>	2nd step: Detection of conventional signs
	Signified	connotation	Intrinsic Meaning (Iconology)	3rd step: Contextual analysis

The above literature reveals that Roland Barthes's visual semiotic approach is suitable method for analysis of the Iranian Green Movement's websites home pages and their visual texts. The above literature helps us to develop an analytical method for visual semiotic analysis of social movements and oppositional politics in the age of the Internet. Different from their model, the thesis argues that Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1968, 1972, 1977) three layers meaning is more suitable, sufficient and functional than Erwin Panofsky's (1975) art works interpretative scheme, especially, because of its mythical or ideological analysis of dominant system's hegemonic culture and ideology. Accordingly, recourse to Daphi et al. (2013) analytical model, the thesis provide its own model based on Roland Barthes significance system that provided three layers meaning as follow; the denotative level refers to the literal meaning of what ever you see in the scene and the connotative level refers to the socio-cultural and personal associations

meaning of what ever you see in the scene and the mythical level refers to the system of cultural values and beliefs that are expressed at the level of connotation. Consequently, The thesis analytical method three steps can be as follow; 1st step: description of image components, 2nd step: detection of contextual analysis and 3rd step: ideological Analysis. **Table 3.3** shows the thesis's three layers meaning and methodological steps.

**Table 3.3:** The thesis's three layers meaning and methodological steps

Rising level of abstraction from the image		Barthes		Paper analytical method
sign	Signifier	Denotation	The literal meaning of what ever you see in the scene	1st step: description of image components
		Connotation	The socio-cultural and personal associations meaning of what ever you see in the scene	2nd step: Detection of contextual analysis
	Signified	Mythology	The system of cultural values and beliefs that are expressed at the level of connotation.	3rd step: Ideological analysis

### 3.8 Semiotic theorists

Major work on semiotics is done by the following theorists: Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914) was funder of American semiotics. Semiotic analysis begun with the American influential philosopher Charles Pierce (1839-1914) who derived his idea about signs from Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Charles Pierce was interested in how signs signify meaning, and examined the power of the image and way in which we read them. Charles Pierce (1931) believed we think only in signs. He believed that we make meninges through our creation and interpretation of signs. From

Charles Peirce's definition sign is something stand to somebody for something in respect or capacity. From Charles Peirce's perspective, sign consist three parts: representment, object and interpretent. Representment form that the sign take, object to which the sign refers and interpretant idea or interpretent in mind. From Charles Peirce's perspective, semiotic is the process of co-operation between signs, their objects and their interpretent. Charles Peirce's paradigm (1934) differentiated between three kinds of signs include of icon, index, and symbol. From Peirce describes iconic signs is a sign that represent their objects via a direct likeness or similarity. Essentially, icons have features or qualities that resemble those of the objects they represent; e.g., all pictures, paintings and photographs are essentially iconic because they attempt to faithfully represent a recognisable image of their subject matter. An index or indexical sign denotes its object by physical link to it, or affected by it. An indexical sign is mode in which the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some ways (physically or causally) to the signified. For example: smoke is index of fire. Symbols: Symbolic signs are signs that refer to their objects by virtue of a law or set of socially derived rules that cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object. In another words the symbolic sign is a mode in which the signifier does not resemble signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional so that the relationship must be learned. Thus, similarly to Saussure, Peirce views symbolic signs as conventional signs and wholly related to the notion of thirdness. Generally, symbolic signs have no relation to their object other than the accepted conventions agreed upon by a culture. They do not look like them nor have they any direct relation to them as indices do. Essentially, they are signs that have an arbitrary relationship to their objects. Words, books, and mathematical symbols are good examples of symbolic signs (O'Neill, 2008).

Another key figure of semiotic analysis is Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) Swiss linguistic and semiotician whose ideas laid a foundation for many significant

developments both in linguistics and semiotics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Saussure tried to develop a systematic understanding how language works. Ferdinand de Saussure defined semiology as a science which studies the role of the signs as a part of social life. Saussure (1983) suggested that there are three levels on which we read media texts: syntactic level that identify the basic denotation in the text e.g. the color or overall effect; representation level: look at the representation conveyed in the media texts; and symbolic level that involve in hidden cultural and symbolic meaning that the text conveys.

He argued that the sign is the basic unit of language. Based on Ferdinand de Saussure semiotics terminology, the signifier and signified are components of the sign. The signifier refers to physical entity such as: a word, an image or a sound that gives a meaning. For example: red color. The signified is concept or meaning that the sign refers to such as: red color is often associates to danger and blood.

Therefore, from Saussure's approach, for a sign to be considered as sign it must have a signifier and signified. From Saussure's view, the sign in the media, the signifier is physical form that we can see or hear within the clip and the signified is the mental concept or meaning that attached to the signifier within the clip. Central to Saussure's understanding the linguistic sign is arbitrary nature the bound between signifier and signified. A word is really just an arbitrary that we have been taught to use to express a particular concept or idea. There is no inherent reason why the word tree should indicate the concept of tree. From Saussure's view, by contrast the Pierce view, From Saussure's view, there is not logical connection between a word and a concept. While pierce argue that there is logical relation between indexical sign, signifier and signified such as smoke that stands for fire. Also, Saussure argue that words are verbal signifiers

that are personal to whoever interpreting them. Then, a signifier can have many different representations which can turn into a different sign.

Roland Barthes (1915–1980) was a French literary, cultural theorist and critic who had an interest in semiotics. Barthes, as a leading modern semiotic theorist, played a crucial role in promoting and developing modern semiotic analysis. Barthes' productive career ranged from the early days of structuralism linguistics up to the peak of poststructuralism (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807). His works covered many fields and were considered key texts of both structuralism and poststructuralism and have exerted great influences until nowadays (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807).

As a semiotician, Barthes (1968) developed Saussure's sign system into mass media and literature analysis, so his semiotic thoughts were composed of two branches, literary semiotics and cultural semiotics (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807). As a structural semiotician, Barthes (1977) emphasis on structural analysis on his literature or linguistic analysis, his main interest was not so much in what things mean as in how things mean. That is, he explored the way of meaning producing in the course of structure analysis of literary texts (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807). However, he valued meaning and the way of meaning-making in his cultural semiotics, and demonstrated the notion thoroughly in his mass media analysis (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807). He tried to search the deep meaning hiding behind the surface meaning in mass media and found that the deep meaning was historical or cultural, which had close relationship with ideology of the dominant class (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807). From Barthes (1977) perspective mass media messages are constructed by by a source of emission, a channel of transmission, and a point of reception. Barthes (1977) argued that the seemingly innocent poster, ads and even all mass cultural materials were not really innocent for they were intended to shape and reshape readers' ideology, to

persuade the audiences to accept the ideology of middle class (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807). Barthes' demystification on mass culture and their manipulating process are to find out the hidden meaning or myth implied in mass media so as to remind people from following myth and myth-effect blindly, which also proved that he was meaning-oriented or meaning centered in his cultural semiotic thoughts (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807).

From Barthes's perspective, semiotics or semiology has defined "the system of sign" or "system of signification". For Barthes, "semiology aim to take in any system of sign, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and the complex association of all of these, which form content of ritual, convention or public entertainment these constitute, if not languages, at least system of signification" (Barthes, 1968, p. 9). From Barthes perspective, the primary goal of mass media semiotics is to analysis these structures as they manifest themselves in mass media products. Therefore, From Barthes's point of view, semiotics, or semiology, is a system of signs or signification that forms the content of culture and ideology of societies. Barthes's semiotic theory focuses on how signs and photographs represent different cultures and ideologies in different ways.

As early as the 1960s, another well-known French semiotican, Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), continued from where Barthes left out. Like his compatriot, according to Genosko (1999) Baudrillard has scathingly attacked the entire consumerist pop culture industry as one large distraction-producing factory intent on lulling the masses into soporific stupor, so they will acquire material objects habitually and for other purpose than the pose them (cited in Shu-ping & Li, 2011, p. 807). Baudrillard (1976) argued that reality has been replaced by sign system and supplant the real. Simulation precedes and determines the real. Mass media shapes these symbols as agents of representation,

not communication. People come to live in pure mass media creates a new culture of signs, images and codes without referential simulation, replication of reality value, and are exchangeable. That resemble it in all respect save they are representative. Contemporary society consumes these empty signs status and identity having through lost the ability to make sense of the distinction between the natural and the simulation. The era of simulation is thus every where all the grate humanist criteria of value, all the values of a civilization of moral, aesthetic, and practical judgement, vanish in our system of images and signs

Stuart Hall (1932-194) is another famous theorist of semiotic analysis. According to Stuart Hall all images are both encoded and decoded. They are encoded in the production process and in the placement within a certain cultural setting. They are decoded by the viewers/readers. Hall's encoding and decoding model is audience reception theory that looks how audience respond and interpret to a particular medium whether it be a newspaper or television show. Stuart hall theorized that broadcaster, producers, institutions such as newspapers and magazines encode a particular message which creates a new form of communication. Hall also argues that the audience then decodes this meaning using their own methods of logical interpretation. Hall further argue that the meaning of the media messages is not fixed by the institution that is encoding message and that those receiving message are not passive when it comes to interpreting meaning. Hall argues that the meaning of the text is relative to the audience or person interpreting it. From hall perspective, the producer can fix the meaning the message in a specific way, but they can not control how the audience decodes the message and this is depend on their personal background, economic situation and cultural background. For Hall denotation is an analytical tool he also argues that this is vary rare for sign to signify their literary meaning in the world and that the most sings

will combine both denotative and connotative process and work simultaneously together to create meaning.

Daniel Chandler is another famous theorist of semiotic analysis in field of media cultural education. From Chandler's (2000) view an understanding of semiotic is essential for any one who studying the mass media, communication and cultural studies. Chandler (2000) particular account of semiotic betrays its European origins, focusing on Saussurian and post-Saussurean semiotic (structuralist semiotics and post structuralist critiques) rather than, for instance, on Peircean semiotics. As structuralist and poststructuralist semiotician, Chandler (2000) argues that "the focus on the structuralist semiotics is intended to be of value to readers who wish to use semiotics as an approach to textual analysis (p. Preface). For Chandler semiotic has had the broader definition than the mere study of signs; from Chandler views "semiotics as not purely a method of textual analysis, but involves both the theory and analysis of signs, codes, and signifying practices" (Chandler, 2007, p. 3).

There are several reasons why the study deployed Barthes's visual semiotic method for analysis of the Iranian Green movement's websites home pages and visual texts. First of all, it relates to the research's theoretical framework, while our research deployed Kellner's (2003a) critical media cultural studies model, it seems semiotic/visual semiotic analysis is a suitable method for analysis of alternative media cultural studies. Second, to fully grasp the meaning of the Iranian Green movement's websites, images, signs, and symbols suggests that Barthes's visual semiotic analysis is the proper method because of its emphasis on the meaning of media messages. Third, while the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state is an Islamic ideological system, the Iranian oppositional groups concentrate their own critiques on the politically dominant ideology and oppressive policies of Islam; then, semiotic analysis is the proper method for

revealing the dominant system ideological codes and myths. Fourth, Barthes's semiotic analysis model is a mixed system in which different kinds of matters are involved (sound and image, objects and writing, etc.), and, because websites as multimedia use a mixture of sounds, images, video, and written text for promotion of information, the Barthes's semiotics model is preferred.

### **3.9 Roland Barthes's visual semiotic analysis model**

Roland Barthes (1915–1980) was a French literary, cultural theorist and critic who had an interest in semiotics. Barthes, as a leading modern semiotic theorist, played a crucial role in promoting and developing modern semiotic analysis. Barthes (1968) developed Saussure's ideas to analyze media texts in relation to culture and ideology. From Barthes's perspective, semiotics or semiology has defined "the system of sign" or "system of signification". For Barthes, "semiology aim to take in any system of sign, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and the complex association of all of these, which form content of ritual, convention or public entertainment these constitute, if not languages, at least system of signification" (Barthes, 1968, p. 9). Therefore, from Barthes's point of view, semiotics or semiology, is a system of signs or signification that forms the content of culture and ideology of societies. Barthes's semiotic theory focuses on how signs and photographs represent different cultures and ideologies in different ways.

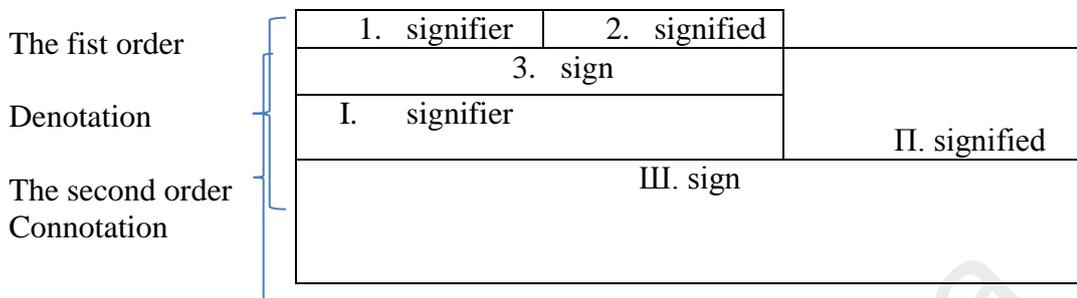
Barthes (1977) argues that the press photograph is a message. The message is formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission, and a point of reception. He believes that the press photograph is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy. From his perspective, the press photography communicates with text structure—title, caption, commentary, and article that

accompany every press photograph. Barthes tries to provide a structural analysis of the press photograph message.

Barthes's visual semiotic model is an initial way to analyse a media text. Barthes's semiotic model outlines three levels of signification, which consist of "denotation", "connotation", and "myth or mythology". The first level of the meaning of signs is denotation in Barthes's visual semiotic analysis models. The denotative level refers to what we actually see in the image and surface meaning of the photograph. The second layer of meaning is connotation *that* refers to what you associate with the image and the hidden and deeper meanings of the images and photographs. Myth or ideology is the third order pattern signification in Barthes's semiotic model. From Barthes's perspective, myth refers to cultural values and beliefs that are expressed at the level of connotation. Myth refers to a hidden set of rules and conventions through which meanings are made to seem universal and natural. In Barthes's semiotic model, myths are dominant ideology of our time.

For example, in the first level of signification, for example, the sign fox comprises the association of a certain sound-image and a certain concept (reddish-coloured canine with a bushy tail, etc.). In the second order, this association becomes the signifier to the signified: sly or cunning. The first-order sign need not be linguistic. For example, a cartoon of a fox would serve equally well. For Barthes myths were the dominant ideologies of our time. According to Martin W. Bauer & George Gaskell (2000) myth is the means by which a culture naturalizes, or renders invisible, its own norms and ideology. As Curran (1976) argued the ideological or mythological significance of message refers to systems of representation, which, which appear often neutral and objectified but legitimate, reproduce and reestablish power structure or a particular sets

of cultural values. Barthes illustrates the relationship between the two systems using the spatial metaphor shown in Figure 3.1.



**Figure 3.2:** Barthes illustrates the relationship between the two systems using the spatial metaphor shown

For example; Figure 3.4 the photographs of Khavaran cemetery, political mass grave are signs of mass execution of oppositional critical political activists in the Islamic republic of Iran theocratic state.



**Figure 3.3:** The photographs of Khavaran cemetery, political mass grave, <https://icsppi.wordpress.com>, 28 December 2015, without permission

Based from the Figure 3.2 at the denotative level, these are shocking photography of the Iranian political prisoners who have been secretly executed and their bodies have been

dumped in mass grave in The Khavaran Cemetery in summer of 1988. The first photograph depicts an unknown Iranian political prisoner buried in the grave with his dress. As the second photography shows, two victims buried near each others so that somebody's foot is near face of other victim. The victims buried with their clothes, and with his unshaved face.

At the connotative level, the thesis associates Figure 3.2 to the mass grave of the Iranian critical political intellectuals, also it connote to Islamic republic of Iran's strive for dismissing, cleansing, genocide and elimination of critical political intellectuals; especially Muslim and Marxist and leftists groups who were critics of western cultural imperialism from society, culture and politic.

At the mythical level, the thesis understands Figure 3.2 demyth Islamic republic of Iran's official and authorities and political Islam principle about the Iranian critical political intellectuals and oppositional groups. In another words, the thesis associate it the Islamic system and Islam to anti- critical intellectualism. Based on Surat Al-Mā'idah verse 33 penalty code, 'the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world; and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment (<http://quran.com/5/33>). According to this Islamic sharia principle, Islamic republic of Iran's political authorities and officials impose their ideas on ayatollah Khomeini, then religious supreme leader to issue a deathly fatwa against Iranian critical political prisoners who support People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, leftist parties and Marxist ideology to execution. Islamic Sharia penalty code for apostasy (Mohareb) and corruption on the earth (in Persian mofsed fel arz). Three

layers meaning of photography of Peyman Aref after his brutally lashing can be summarize in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.4:** Three layer meaning of the photographs of Khavaran cemetery, political mass grave

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
The photographs of Khavaran cemetery, political mass grave	Shocking photography of the Iranian political prisoners who have been secretly executed and their bodies have been dumped in mass grave in The Khavaran Cemetery in summer of 1988	Dismissing, cleansing, genocide and elimination of critical political intellectuals; especially Muslim and Marxist and leftists groups who were critics of western cultural imperialism from society, culture and politic	Demyth Islamic system and Islamic sharia code on dismissing, cleansing, genocide and elimination of critical intellectual and critical political activists. from society, culture and politic. In another words, the thesis associate it the Islamic system and Islam to anti-critical intellectualism

Furthermore, as Van Leeuwen state that “Barthes’s visual semiotic model considers two overarching questions when viewing, reading, and interpreting a photograph: (1) what is represented within the image, thus a question of representation; and (2) what ideas and values do the people, places, and thing represented in image stand for” (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 92). In other words, the Barthian visual semiotic approaches ask two fundamental questions: the question of representation (What do images represent and how?), and the question of the “hidden meanings” of images (What ideas and values do the people, places and things represented in images stand for?). In Barthian visual semiotics, therefore, the key idea is the layering of meaning. The first layer is about denotation, or “What, or who, is being depicted here?” The second layer is about connotation, or “What ideas and values are expressed through what is represented, and through the way in which it is represented?” In the following section, Barthes’s semiotic analysis models, or three signification system orders, will be discussed.

### **3.9.1 Denotation**

The first level of the meaning of signs is denotation in Barthes's visual semiotic analysis models. In linguistics and literature semiotics, according to Barthes's perspective, the denotative meaning of the sign or word is the dictionary meaning. In other words, in case of a linguistic sign, the denotative meaning is what the dictionary attempts to provide. For example, the denotative meaning of the word "rose" is a red flower in the Moein (1999) dictionary; an Iranian Persian dictionary. As Chandler put it, "denotation tends to be described as the definitional, literal, obvious, or common-sense meaning of a sign" (Chandler, 2000). But in the visual image and photograph, the denotative level refers to what we actually see in the image and surface meaning of the photograph. The denotative meaning of media visual text refers to the answer to the question of "What do you see?" For example, the denotative meaning of the red rose image is a flower.

Therefore, for Barthes, denotation is a relatively unproblematic issue because there is not any linguistic code in this layer meaning. There is no "encoding" into some kind of language-like code, which must be learned before the message can be deciphered. Perceiving photographs is closely analogous to perceiving reality, because photographs provide a point-by-point correspondence to what was in front of the camera, despite the fact that they reduce this reality in size, flatten it, and, in the case of black and white, drain it of color.

### **3.9.2 Connotation**

The second layer of meaning is connotation, the layer of the broader concepts, ideas, and values in which the represented people, places, and things "stand for," or "are signs of." Connotative meaning is the potential or suggested meaning of the sign. The connotative meaning refers to what you associate with the image and the hidden and

deeper meanings of the images and photographs. The connotative meaning of media visual text is the answer to the question of what does it mean and what is being represented? The connotative level refers to the meaning of what you see in images. The term “connotation” is used to refer to the socio-cultural and “personal” associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign. Therefore, denotative meaning is literal, signifiers, obvious, descriptive, and realm of existence, whereas connotative meaning is figurative, signified, inferred, suggests meanings and a realm of myth.

### **3.9.3 Myth and mythology**

From Barthes’s perspective, a myth, mythical, or ideological sign is the result of two interconnected sign systems of denotation and connotation. From Barthes’s (1972) perspective, myth refers to cultural values and beliefs that are expressed at the level of connotation. Myth refers to a hidden set of rules and conventions through which meanings are made to seem universal and natural. Barthes (1977) argue that the press photography is message. From his perspective, a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception construct the media message. In continue, Barthes argues that the organization of signs encodes particular messages and ideologies into media message. He describes these constructed messages and ideologies as myths.

Form Barthes perspective, “myths serve the ideological function of naturalization” (Barthes, 1977, pp. 45–6). Their function is to naturalize the cultural—in other words, to make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem entirely “natural,” “normal,” self-evident, timeless, obvious, and “common-sense”—and thus objective and “true” reflections of “the way things are”. As Bauer et al (2000) put it, “myth is the means by which a culture naturalizes, or renders invisible, its own norms and ideology” (Penn, 2000, p. 231). As Curran (1976) argues, “the ideological or mythological significance of message refers to systems of representation, which often

appear neutral and objectified but legitimate, reproduce, and reestablish the power structure or a particular set of cultural values” (Penn, 2000, p. 231). Therefore, myths are dominant ideology of our time that reproduce, legitimate and establish dominant system power structure. The semiotic analysis of cultural myths involves an attempt to deconstruct the ways in which codes operate within particular popular texts or genres, with the goal of revealing how certain values, attitudes, and beliefs are supported.

The following example; Figure 3.4 shows Barthes’s visual semiotic model; three levels of signification, which consist of “denotation”, “connotation”, and “myth or mythology” in the context of the Iranian Green Movement.



**Figure 3.4:** Selection is not election, <http://inkhordad1388.blogspot.com/2009/06/88328.html>, 9 October 2015, without permission

At the denotative level, Figure 3.4 is a color photograph of the Iranian Green Movement protesters demonstration against the official result of the presidential election at 7 Tir Square on 18 Jun 2009. From left side, the first women who wrapped green clothes around her head, with make up, wearing ring, maghnaea: long headscarf, dark tight manto, black jean and wallet, green color wrist band, with one hand shows “V” shape

and with another hand support her friend who carry up placard that says SELECTION IS NOT ELLECTION, with make up, wearing maghnaea, sunglasses, dark tight manto, black jean and wallet. Next to the women, there is a man who wearing sunglasses, mask, a blue and white striped T-shirt, watch and black jean and belt and next to him there is a man who carry Mir Hossein Mousavie's picture.

At the connotative level, Figure 3.4 connotes to Islamic Republic of Iran's election system as selection system. In other words, Figure 3.4 stands for fake, false and mock election system and appointment and hand pick up of political roles under the Islamic republic of Iran's election system.

At the demythical level, Figure 3.4 demyths contradiction of the political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih when people vote, democracy, republican and people sovereignty rights. Based on the Islamic Republic of Iran's official and authoritative view, the legitimacy of political Islam is a divine right, and based on their interpretation from the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih, the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih; the supreme leader's authority is directly derived from divine right, and he is representative of both the big god, also Imam Zaman; Shia Muslims twelfth imam who are hidden and will appear in the future and he will his right to the jurisprudence. Therefore, based on their interpretation, people have no right to elect the president, because this is divine right and Imam Zaman's right that is given to the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih and Islamic Republic of Iran's authorities and officials. Then, they can change the people's vote in favor of divine right and Imam Zaman's right. Three layers meaning of a photograph of the Iranian Green Movement protesters who carry up a placard that says "selection is not election" in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.5:** Three layer meaning of a photograph of selection is not election

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
A color photograph of the Iranian Green Movement protesters demonstration against the official result of the presidential election at 7 Tir Square on 18 Jun 2009	The first women who wrapped green clothes around her head, with make up, wearing ring, maghnaea: long headscarf, dark tight manto, black jean and wallet, green color wrist band, with one hand shows "V" shape and with another hand support her friend who carry up placard that says SELECTION IS NOT ELLECTION, with make up, wearing maghnaea, sunglasses, dark tight manto, black jean and wallet	Iranian women, married, fake, false and mock election system and appointment and hand pick up of political roles under the Islamic republic of Iran's election system,	Demyth contradiction of the political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih when people vote, democracy, republican and people sovereignty rights.

### 3.10 Sampling procedures

Sampling procedures comprise several stages as follow: define the population, specify sampling frame, and specify sampling unity, specify sampling method, determine sampling size and select the sample. In the following section, the sampling process is discussed.

#### 3.10.1 The statistical population of the study

The statistical population of our research includes the entire Iranian Green movement's websites, which have been authored by the Iranian Green Movement's activists who are oppressed by the Islamic Republic of Iran's state policies, and who struggle against its oppressive policies. Of course, as Schafer (2002) argues that conducting content analyse of web sites is problematic because it is impossible to determine the true size and nature of the population. The Internet is in constant flux, and no comprehensive directory of web sites exists (cited in Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003). The thesis supports the argument offered by Schafer about the impossibility of determining the true size and nature of the population. Accordingly, finding all of the Iranian Green movement's websites is problematic because of the diversity of the Iranian Green movement's activists, the ephemeral features of websites, geographical diffusion, and political considerations and so on. Although it's difficult and nearly impossible, we strive to find

the entire Iranian Green movement's websites. To this end, we make an open-ended list of the Iranian Green movement's websites to complete it while conducting the research. Therefore, the entire Iranian Green movement's activist's websites constitute our research population. Of course, it should mention that the population of the study excludes the Iranian Green Movement's weblogs and social networks.

### **3.10.2 Sampling frames**

As it mentioned earlier, all Iranian Green Movements websites those promote their struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies form our research sampling frame. But the question that arises is how we can compile a list of their websites to analyze their usage for the promotion of their own political concerns and interests. According to Weare & Lin (2000), there are four kinds of web page sampling frames, which include the Internet address, search engine, collector sites, and popular sites that in the following paragraph, the thesis is going to briefly deals with to them.

**Internet address;** the addressing system for host computers and individual web site on the internet provides researcher with a method for generality scientific random samples based on comprehensive sampling frames of internet. Every host computer is identified with a unique physical and logical address. The physical address consists of 32-bit internet protocol (IP) routing header. Like telephone number, IP address suffices for the routing of communication on the Internet, but because these numbers are difficult to remember, they are associated with a logical address or domain name. These addresses are stored and constantly updated in online databases called routing table for IP address and have servers for domain names. The Internet employs these databases to route traffic, first looking up the IP address associated with a requested domain name in a name server and then sending packets along the route associated with the IP address in a routing table (cited in Weare & Lin, 2000, p. 276).

**Search engine;** a more popular method to develop a sampling frame is to rely on search engines. For example, Ho (1974) create a sampling from the site of commercial firms by entering industry name is commonly used search engine such as Yahoo and Alfa Vista McMillan's (1999) survey of 16 studies found that 7 (44%) had developed their sampling from one or more search engines. The main advantage of this are that it is relatively inexpensive and unlike sampling frames based on domain name, it is not limited to sites with first-level domain names (cited in Weare & Lin, 2000, p. 278).

**Collector sites;** another frequently employed approach is to based a sampling frame on a collectors site. A popular activity on the web by both individual and organization is to collect and post lists of link to related site. For example, the markable foundation and Shorenstein center on press, political and public policy at Harvard University maintain a site called web, white, and blue that list campaign related site and other related information. Similarly, two firmly, city link and city.net, maintain links to municipal web sites (Musso et al., 2000). These collector sites are most useful for analysis of sites from particular sources or concerning a particular topic. Moreover, the better collection site can be more comprehensive than search engines because they may distill significant experience searching a subject on the web. Nevertheless, they remain incomplete and because there are no standard for collector sites, they are highly idiosyncratie, leading to biases of unknown direction (cited in Weare & Lin, 2000, p. 278).

**Popular site;** a final approach employed to create a sampling frame is to focus on the most popular sites on the web. There are a number of site that track either traffic to a site (e.g., 100hot.com) or search word submitted to search engines (e.g., searchword.com). Based on these data, they generate lists of the most popular web sites sorted by a number of categories. Bucy & et al. (1999) randomly sample sites off this list for their study of the formal feature of WebPages. This method has the important

advantage of being complete and tracks the portions of the web that are being used. It, nevertheless, is limited to the relatively broad categories provided by the services (e.g. sports, computer hardware, books, etc.), making it inappropriate for any research focusing on more specific types of web-based communication (cited in Weare & Lin, 2000, p. 278).

As mentioned earlier, finding all Iranian Green Movements websites because of ephemeral features, geographical diffusion, and political consideration is very difficult throughout the Internet address and search engine. Therefore, the research's sampling frame combines multiple methods of the collector site, popular site, and links to other oppositional groups' websites, which we will find when we analyze website links to gather the whole Iranian Green Movement's websites, which are authored by the Iranian critical political activists who struggle against the Islamic states oppressive policies.

It's impossible that the sample for this study could include all major Iranian Green movements' websites, as well as many unknown minor ones, who struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran's tyranny policies. Thus, although there is no reason to suspect that the websites in the sample are atypical, there is insufficient evidence to claim that the findings based on the non-random sample can appropriately be generalized to the larger population of all Iranian Green movements' websites home pages. Consequently, our research sample is purposive and the results are interpreted only in terms of what they reveal about the sample under examination. As a result, our research sampling frame includes all Iranian Green movement's websites that are authored by a wide variety of the oppositional groups, which are extremely oppressed and seriously struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies.

What are the criteria used to select population and sampling? According to the Dalhousy University website (<https://libraries.dal.ca>), there are six criteria's for selecting websites as follow: authorship, purpose, coverage, currency, objective and accuracy. Authorship refers to the person, institution or agency responsible for a site has the qualifications and knowledge to do so. Purpose of the website refers to clarity of the information presented in the site. Coverage of the website relates to comprehensive or selective coverage of a topic. Currency of the site refers to: 1) how current the information presented is, and 2) how often the site is updated or maintained Sample of study. Objectivity of the site should be clear. Beware of sites that contain bias or do not admit its bias freely. Accuracy of the website refers to factuality and reliability information represented on the website.

Based on the above argument, there have been several criteria's for choosing the Iranian Green Movements websites as sample of the study such as; the author of theses websites have been the well-known Iranian reformist political writers and analysts, the purpose of the information presented in these sites has been clear and they devoted all space to the Iranian Green Movement activities, they have been detected as the Iranian Green Movements websites, they have been continued their activities in line with the Iranian Green Movements activities for long time. The contents of these websites support the purpose of the site. Theses websites comprehensively covered the Iranian Green Movements activities and events. The information that represented in these websites has been current and the websites have been still updated until data collection of the study. The information that the websites present is with minimum of bias and the information that the websites present is reliable.

It is the researcher's intent here to analyze popular websites that have been written by Iranian Green Movement activists who struggle against the oppressive policies of the

Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system. For this study, a purposive sample of the Iranian Green Movement's popular websites was compiled from several sources: (1) <https://irangreenrasa.wordpress.com>, a non-profit weblog that introduce the Iranian Green movement websites; (2) <https://irannews1388.wordpress.com> a non profit weblog that introduce some the Iranian Green movements supporters websites; (3) one thousands Iranian active websites listed in <http://www.ba2news.com>; and (4) sites prominently and frequently linked to by other Iranian oppositional groups' sites. It should be mentioned that more than these websites exist, but some of them are no longer online or are not available, so the eventual sample consists 10 websites. From these 10 website three popular website, active, update have been chosen as a sample of the study. Table 3.7 shows lists and details of the Iranian Green Movement's websites.

**Table 3.6:** Lists and details of the Iranian Green Movement's websites

No	Name and URL	Features	Analysis
1	Kaleme <a href="http://www.kaleme.com">www.kaleme.com</a>	Aims Agent: Target Functionalities: Organization's purpose:  Links: Political economy: Audience filtering and monitoring policy Current situation Principles	Promotion, support and strength of the Iranian Green Movement and support from Mir Hossein Mousavi view The Population of Monotheism and Cooperation The Islamic Republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners Information and organization Critically and analytically deals with the interpretation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's state and mainstream media news There is no external link between this website and other websites unclear Audience filtering and censorship policies  Active and updated Islamism, Islamic Unitarianism, and unification and solidarity
2	Green Path Movement <a href="http://www.rah-esabz.net">www.rah-esabz.net</a> /	Aims: Agent: Target Functionalities: Organization's purpose: Links:  Political economy: Audience monitoring policy: Current situation Principles	Promotion, support and strength of the Iranian Green Movement Religious reformist The Islamic Republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners Strategic, analytic and news network Information and organization More than 100 links to other Iranian Green Movement's websites and organizations unclear Audience filtering policies  Ended its activities and inactive Iranian networked, independent, egalitarian, ethical, freed, secular, human rights defender, democratic, Islamic, anti-violence, anti-the jurisprudence absolutism rule and dictatorship and follower of realism and moderation

**Table 3.7: continued**

3	http://www.safiranesabz.com/	<p>Aims: Agent: <i>Target</i> <i>Functionalities:</i> <i>Organization's purpose:</i> <i>Links:</i> Political economy: Audience filtering or monitoring policy Current situation Principles</p>	<p>Promotion, strength and unity of the Iranian Green Movement Representatives council of the loyal association the Iranian Green Movements charter in the overseas The Islamic Republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners News website Information and organization Link to five Iranian Green Movements 'Websites Unclear Audience filtering policies</p> <p>Inactive Anti-religious despotism, republican, social justice, equality, and freedom supporters</p>
4	Global Network of Iranian Green Seculars http://www.seculargreens.com	<p>Aims: Agent: <i>Target</i> <i>Functionalities:</i> <i>Organization's purpose:</i> <i>Links:</i> Political economy: Audience filtering and monitoring policy Current situation Principles</p>	<p>Act in line with the objectives of the Green Movement in Iran the Iranian liberal activists The Islamic republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners Networking, Making alternative against the Islamic system Internal link with other branch of the network unclear Audience filtering and censorship policy</p> <p>Ended its activities and inactive Secularism, democracy, liberalism, and anti-discrimination</p>
5	Neday-e Sabz-e Azadi http://www.irangrenvoice.com/	<p>Aims: Agent: <i>Target</i> <i>Functionalities:</i> <i>Organization's purpose:</i> <i>Links:</i>  Political economy: Audience filtering and monitoring policy Current situation Principles</p>	<p>Promotion, support and strength of the Iranian Green Movement Unknown the Iranian Green Movement volunteer supporters The Islamic republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners News website Information and organization There are several external links to the some Iranian green movements websites, news websites, foreign news agencies and the Islamic republic of Iran's authorities and officials Unclear Audience filtering and censorship policy</p> <p>Active Did not mentioned certainly</p>
6	Neday-e Azadi (Green Voice) http://www.nedayeazadi.org/	<p>Aims: Agent: <i>Target</i> <i>Functionalities:</i> <i>Organization's purpose:</i> <i>Links:</i>  Political economy: Audience filtering and monitoring policy Current situation Principles</p>	<p>Promotion, support and strength of the Iranian Green Movement Unknown the Iranian Green Movement volunteer supporters The Islamic Republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners Strategic, analytic and news network Information and organization There are several external links to the some Iranian green movements websites, news websites, foreign news agencies and the Islamic republic of Iran's authorities and officials Unclear Audience filtering and censorship policy</p> <p>Active and updated Liberalism, freedom, and democracy, peace, and nationality</p>
7	Tahavvol Sabz www.tahavvolSabz.net/	<p>Aims: Agent: <i>Target</i> <i>Functionalities:</i> <i>Organization's purpose:</i> <i>Links:</i>  Political economy: Audience filtering and monitoring policy Current situation Principles</p>	<p>Promotion, support and strength of the Iranian Green Movement Unknown the Iranian Green Movement volunteer supporters The Islamic republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners News website Information and organization There are several external links to the some Iranian green movements websites, news websites, foreign news agencies and the Islamic republic of Iran's authorities and officials Unclear Audience filtering and censorship policy</p> <p>Inactive Green Movement development</p>

**Table 3.7: continued**

8	<a href="http://www.jmj-sabz.com/">http://www.jmj-sabz.com/</a>	<p>Aims: Agent: Target Functionalities: Organization's purpose: Links:</p> <p>Political economy: Audience filtering and monitoring policy Current situation Principles</p>	<p>Promotion, support and strength of the Iranian Green Movement Unknown the Iranian Green Movement volunteer supporters The Islamic republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners News website Information and organization There are several external links to the some Iranian green movements websites, news websites, foreign news agencies and the Islamic republic of Iran's authorities and officials Unclear Audience filtering and censorship policy</p> <p>Hacked unknown</p>
9	<a href="http://shora.org/">http://shora.org/</a>	<p>Aims: Agent: Target Functionalities: Organization's purpose: Links:</p> <p>Political economy: Audience filtering and monitoring policy Current situation Principles</p>	<p>Integration between the council and people, Promotion, support and strength of The Iranian Green Movement Unknown the Iranian Green Movement volunteer supporters The Islamic republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners News website Information and organization There are several external links to the some Iranian green movements websites, news websites, foreign news agencies and the Islamic republic of Iran's authorities and officials Unclear Audience filtering and censorship policy Coordination and harmony, and integration Inactive Freedom for Iran</p>
10	<a href="http://www.greenwavevoice.com/">http://www.greenwavevoice.com/</a>	<p>Aims: Agent: Target Functionalities: Organization's purpose: Links:</p> <p>Political economy: Audience filtering and monitoring policy Current situation Principles</p>	<p>Promotion, support and strength of the Iranian Green Movement Unknown the Iranian Green Movement volunteer supporters The Islamic republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners News website Information and organization There are several external links to the some Iranian green movements websites, news websites, foreign news agencies and the Islamic republic of Iran's authorities and officials Unclear Audience filtering and censorship policy</p> <p>Inactive Supporter of civil movements, freedom and liberty, anti-discrimination</p>

Accordingly, from above list, at least three websites have been chosen as samples for the study: the Iranian Freedom movement website; voice of freedom website: <http://www.nedayezadi.net>; the Population of Monotheism and Cooperation website, the Kalame website; <http://www.kalame.com/>, and the Iranian Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>, since this study aimed at the analyzing visual texts of the Iranian Green Movement's popular, active and updated websites, then, the study excluded unknown, inactive and hacked websites such as; Tahavvol Sabz [www.tahavolesabz.net](http://www.tahavolesabz.net), <http://www.greenwavevoice.com>, <http://www.jmj-sabz.com> and so on.

### **3.10.3 Website texts selection procedure**

The thesis initially planned to conduct the semiotic analysis of the Iranian Green movement's website home page and visual texts. Websites as multimedia use a mixture of visual, textual, and vocal texts, and their analysis should include all kind of these texts. Although the websites include large numbers of texts, we have to limit our project to the consideration of meaningful and impressive visual texts that represent Iranian oppositional politics against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state policies. Accordingly, the website texts have been selected through purposeful sampling methods to merely answer the research questions. Click on the most important, meaningful, and impressive visual texts throughout, which clearly represent Iranian oppositional groups' contentious politics selected from website texts. In this study, the meaningful texts refer to the most critical, impressive, and significant texts that sharply criticize the Islamic Republic of Iran's totalitarian policies and Islamic ideology. In another words, the study will analysis the meaningful visual texts that sharply criticize the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state hegemonic ideology such as Figure 4.28 Abolfazl Ghadyani's published letter from Evine prison about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of velayat-e-motlaghe-faghih in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. The main reason behind the decision is that the Islamic republic of Iran's theocratic state is a ideological system and it imposed its hegemonic ideology to the our societies and the Iranian Green movement activists also try to challenge its hegemonic ideological codes and myth. Therefore, the thesis has to represent the meaningful and impressive and ideological visual texts.

### **3.11 Data collection procedures**

As mentioned earlier, the research analyzes the Iranian Green Movement's websites for representation of the Iranian oppositional groups' political struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. As Creswell (2002) has argued, websites

represent a growing data source for qualitative researchers. Accordingly, it can be argued that the Iranian oppositional groups' website home pages are the most popular space for data collection, and they are the most appropriate source of material for addressing the current study's questions. However, the first pages of websites are the most popular space for data collection, but websites main page options, archives, and collections also provide significant resources for data collection.

Consequently, the study's data will be collected through a (first) screenshot from the Iranian oppositional groups' website home pages and a screenshot of their visual texts for exploring their sign meanings. Therefore, the current study's data will be collected from the Iranian Green movement's websites through print screen scanning and pasting of the websites' home pages and their archived texts. The collected data have been saved and recorded for analysis of their denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings.

Websites represent a growing data source for qualitative researchers. Websites as multimedia communication technologies consist of several kinds of data, including textual, visual, and vocal materials. According to Creswell's (2002) definition, visual and verbal material include images and pictures, photographs, videotapes, objects, and sounds consisting of images or sounds of people or places recorded by the researcher or someone else. For visual semiotic analysis of website home page contents, including textual, visual, and vocal texts, our research will follow Banaji's (2008) study's guidelines online [website] template stages. According to Banaji (2008), filling in online templates involved in the following stages: clicking on and reading the content on all the main page options (such as "about us," news, photo gallery, "campaigns," "FAQs," "get involved," forums, links, etc.); clicking on every topic category on each page opened (for instance, "climate change," "prisoner support," "getting started in the

forum,” “career advice,” “history of anarchism”); clicking on at least three examples of specific options within each theme page (particular posts in the forums, particular examples of the offers in “ethical advertising,” particular responses to readers’ questions, particular endorsements or calls to action on specific issues, etc.); clicking on all hyperlinked visual items on the “home page,” “about us,” “get involved,” and “campaigns” pages; clicking on and scanning a selection of hyperlinked newspaper reports and official documents; clicking on and using accessibility options to test the site’s disability awareness; clicking on privacy policies and “contact us” options; clicking on video footage and other language options if any; following instructions for making posts and navigating back and forth between pages, hyperlinks, and options to test the site’s usability; and clicking on at least one of the external links listed on the website. The thesis applied Banaji’s (2008) study’s guidelines online [website] template stages for recording our data through clicking on and reading the content on all the main page options (such as “about us,” news, photo gallery, “campaigns,” “FAQs,” “get involved,” forums, links, etc.), clicking on every topic category on each page opened (for instance, “prisoner support,” “getting started in the forum,” “career advice,” “history of anarchism”); clicking on hyperlinked visual items on the “home page,” “about us,” “get involved,” and “campaigns” pages; clicking on and scanning a selection of hyperlinked newspaper reports and official documents.

### **3.11.1 Instruments for data collection**

The typology constructed here was the basis for a survey instrument that enumerated the features or attributes of each communication function, and categorizing them accordingly: the oppositional deployment of the information and communication technologies, produce alternative forms of information, knowledge and meaning for representation and reconstruction of collective identity; organization and mobilization

of mass demonstration; development of alliance and solidarity between movement activists; and direct expression of political struggles.

### **3.11.2 Data recording procedures**

For data recording, first of all, we made a list of Iranian Green Movement's websites, and then we saved the first screenshot of their websites home pages, collecting one image for each website home page. We will then have an archive of website images collected in a short time. In addition, although we are going to analyze website text meanings instead of their structure, we have to record the first screenshot texts, including logos, flags, images, photography, video and audio, and so on. To this end, we saved more significant and meaningful texts; unflattering photographs and images that skewered political Islam's dominant ideological features and a few written texts that sharply criticized Islamic dominant codes were recorded.

### **3.11.3 Coding categories**

Chandler (2000) introduces tripartite framework of typology of codes in media, communication and cultural studies as follow: **Social codes**; verbal language (phonological, syntactical, lexical, prosodic and paralinguistic subcodes); bodily codes (bodily contact, proximity, physical orientation, appearance, facial expression, gaze, head nods, gestures and posture); commodity codes (fashions, clothing, cars); behavioral codes (protocols, rituals, role-playing, games). **Textual codes or representational code** refers to scientific codes, including mathematics; aesthetic codes within the various expressive arts (poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, music, etc.) - including classicism, romanticism, realism; genre, rhetorical and stylistic codes: narrative (plot, character, action, dialogue, setting, etc.), exposition, argument and so on; mass media codes including photographic, televisual, filmic, radio, newspaper and magazine codes, both technical and conventional (including format). Cinematic and

televisual technical and conventional codes include: genre; camerawork (shot size, focus, lens movement, camera movement, angle, lens choice, composition); editing (cuts and fades, cutting rate and rhythm); manipulation of time (compression, flashbacks, flashforward, slow motion); lighting; colour; sound (soundtrack, music); graphic and narrative style. **Interpretative codes** refers to perceptual codes: e.g. of visual perception, ideological codes: More broadly, these include codes for 'encoding' and 'decoding' texts-dominant (or 'hegemonic'), negotiated or oppositional. More specifically, we may list the 'isms', such as individualism, liberalism, feminism, racism, materialism, capitalism, progressivism, conservatism, socialism, objectivism, consumerism and populism. However, Chandler's checklist is useful for exploring the meanings of visual text, but it should be operationalized to be suitable for visual semiotic analysis of political website home pages and their photographic, video clips, and other pictorial signs.

Jack Brookes (2010) introduces a user's guide to visual literacy as follow: **angle of shot**; low angle shot; a low angle shot is a shot taken from the ground. This type of angle is commonly used to make someone look tall and powerful, high angle shot; a high angle shot is when camera is above eye level. This shot would be used to make someone look small, helpless and weak, eye level shot; an eye level shot is when the camera is right up to the person's face. This is to show a person's face reaction or an expression of someone who has most likely heard some horrible news), size of shot; close up shot; is a shot zoom right up to a person's face that stands for intimacy, medium shot; is a shot that shows most of body that connotes to personal relationship, long shot; is a shot that shows setting and characters that stands for context, scope and public distance and impersonal mode; bird eye view is when the camera man is filming above the person or the object. This is to show the top view of something.

Saliency or focal points; saliency is when an object stands out more than its neighboring objects. For example; when you are looking at a dark Coca-Cola bottle picture in white background it stands out more than the white background and attracts your attention.

Reading path; a reading path is the path you take through a visual text. The path moves from the most salient to the least salient elements.

Modality; modality is when a picture is either real or drawn. For example if you have a real picture of a man standing looking at you. This would be high modality but if you were to have a cartoon man standing still this would be low modality.

Vectors; a vector is when someone may be looking or point at the particular way which gives you the feeling that you should look where they may be pointing or staring. In other words, vectors; line-abstract or actual that guide viewer's eyes across an image. They may be objects or parts of objects (such as arms, legs, a pole, the side of the house) or invisible line such as the direction of gaze from a represented person's eyes to another person or object.

Gaze; a gaze is when a man or a woman is giving you either a demand or an offer. For example in a picture a woman is looking straight at you as if she wants something. This is called demand. But, in another picture a woman is looking at something else. This means you can look at her, but she won't really care. This is called an offer.

Colour symbolism; Element of color is an essential element in the visual semiotic analysis of multimedia texts. Color plays an important role in creating meaning of multimedia visual texts. Symbolic use of color is considered an important event in visual culture. Red symbolizes excitement, energy, love, power, war, and violence. Pink represents love, romance and excitement. Yellow symbolizes joy, happiness, hope and jealousy. Blue symbolizes peace, truth, trust and depression. Purple symbolizes royalty, mysterious, wisdom and nobility. Orange symbolizes energy, balance, enthusiasm, and warmth. Green symbolizes healthy, good, lucky, youth, jealousy and envy. Brown

symbolizes home, outdoor and comfort. Grey symbolizes security, sadness, modesty, sold, old and intelligent.

Framing; framing is the object that goes around the picture. The frame can play an important role for the photo in the center of it. For example if there were to be a black frame and a white picture the frame would attract eyes directly to the picture. Layout page; layout is the part of the details in the arrangement of a magazine cover or story. The page layout can have an effect on how we feel about the subject in the text it can trigger sad emotion happy emotion or even make you scared. Perspective; perspective is when you are looking at one particular object but at a different angle or perspective. this can be used in commercial for example the iPad commercial it show the front perspective of iPad to show how big and wide the screen is but then it moves to side perspective just showing how thin and light it is. Font; font is the different types of writing used in visual text. For example if there is a poster on a haunted house the type of style that they use could make you feel scared and frightened.

However, the above techniques are useful for analysis of visual literacy, but, they are incomplete. Therefore, the thesis needs more techniques for fully grasp of visual texts such as; foreground, middle ground and background –what is in the foreground is often considered more important than what appears in the background. Centrality- placing the main object or Figure, in the center of the image or close to the center of the image. Given/new-when an image is clearly divided into left and right. The left side of the images is called the given and represent information we already know, while the right side of the image is called new and represent the information we may not know. Ideal/real-when an image is divided horizontally, top and bottom. The top of the page is often called the ideal. In advertising the product is usually placed in the ideal. What has been placed at the bottom of an image can be said to represent the real and usually

contains information about the product. Lighting; lighting create mood-shadows may suggest concealment or fear and despair- light, may suggest hope and inspiration and soft light may suggest romance.

But the question arises is that how does these codes relate the study? Does the study apply it as theoretical framework for analysis of its materials? If yes how? How the thesis operationalized codes? Unite of analysis? Hidden meaning/representation? In answer to these questions, the thesis argues that websites as alternative multimedia make facilitate production and dissemination of the alternative forms information, knowledge and meaning so that oppositional groups critically transmit and change dominant system's hegemonic codes and myth and produce their meaning and codes trough the signs production. In another words, the Iranian Green Movement activists challenged the Islamic republic of Iran's theocratic states hegemonic ideological codes and myth. Accordingly, for analysis of their media message, we need the codes to analysis their media's messages. The following example could be a typical example for visual semiotic analysis coding categories.



**Figure 3.5:** “Democracy” and “freedom, <http://www.rahesabz.net>: 12 December 2015;  
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At the denotative level Figure 3.5 is a colorful, eye level angle and close up shot of the one of the Iranian Green Movement youth supporters who is with short, simple style and dark hair, wraps Iran's three-colored flag; green, white and red without the Islamic Republic of Iran emblem over his face and with the words "democracy" and "freedom" prominently displayed in bold form and white color.

At the connotative level, Figure 3.5 as a the close up shot stands for intimacy, the Iranian Green Movement youth supporters connotes to youthfulness of the Iranian Green Movement's supporters, the Iran's flag stands for the Iranian Green Movement's activists' patriotism and nationalism, Iran's three-colored flag; in the Iranian culture, green color symbolizes growth, happiness, unity, nature, vitality; white color stands for freedom and peace and red color symbolizes bravery, fire, life, love, warmth, and sophistication, covered face stands for anonymous and danger, words of democracy and freedom stand for lack of democracy and freedom expression under the Islamic system and finally dismiss of the Islamic republic of Iran's emblem stand for secularism.

At the mythical level, the thesis associates Figure 3.5 to the democratization, secularization and liberalization the Iranian Green Movement activist's identity, culture and ideology. The above example demonstrates the some application of social codes such as; bodily codes (physical orientation, appearance, facial expression, gaze, head nods, gestures and posture), textual codes; mass media codes including photographic codes, both technical and conventional codes include (shot size, focus, lens movement, camera movement, angle, lens choice, composition), and interpretative codes e.g. of visual perception or ideological codes on the study. Three layers meaning of a photograph of the Iranian Green Movement protesters who carry up a placard that says "selection is not election" in Table 3.8.

**Table 3.7: Three layer meaning of the photography of democracy and freedom**

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
A colorful, eye level angle and close up shot of the one of the Iranian Green Movement youth supporters who is with short, simple style and dark hair, wraps Iran's three-colored flag; green, white and red without the Islamic Republic of Iran emblem over his face and with the words "democracy" and "freedom" prominently displayed in bold form and white color.	A colorful, eye level angle and close up shot of the one of the Iranian Green Movement youth supporters who is with short, simple style and dark hair, wraps Iran's three-colored flag; green, white and red without the Islamic Republic of Iran emblem over his face and with the words "democracy" and "freedom" prominently displayed in bold form and white color.	The close up shot stands for intimacy, the Iranian Green Movement youth supporters connotes to youthfulness of the movement's supporters, the Iran's flag stands for the Iranian Green Movement's activists' patriotism and nationalism, Iran's three-colored flag; in the Iranian culture, green color symbolizes growth, happiness, unity, nature, vitality; white color stands for freedom and peace and red color symbolizes bravery, fire, life, love, warmth, and sophistication, covered face stands for anonymous and danger, words of democracy and freedom stand for lake of democracy and freedom expression under the Islamic system and finally dismiss of the Islamic republic of Iran's emblem stand for secularism	The democratization, secularization and liberalization the Iranian Green Movement activist's identity, culture and ideology.

A question raises is that how the above coding categories for visual semiotic analysis assist in the deciphering of meanings in the websites. In answer to this question, the thesis argues that while websites as multimedia mixed the textual, visual and vocal material together we need coding categories that make possible analysis of the multimedia texts, therefore, with this categories, the researcher will be able analysis multimedia texts. The coding categories for visual semiotic analysis of photography provide systematic analysis of meaning of the multimedia texts. For instance in photography, it assists to researcher to detect which kind of shot is that such as: long shot, medium shot and close up that each of them has certain meaning in semiotic analysis (close up: face only stands for intimacy, medium shot; most of body connotes to personal relationship, long shot; setting and characters that stands for context, scope and public distance).

Therefore, the thesis analysis the meaning of websites textual, visual and vocal texts based on the coding categories. Another question rises is that what is relation between

symbolism and representation? Symbolic representation refers to symbol as an object that represents, stands for, or suggests an idea, belief, action, or material entity. Obviously, in the context of the study, symbols or signs represents, stands for or suggests a political idea, belief, and action or material entity.

### **3.12 Data analysis and interpreting procedures**

There are several modes of analysis in qualitative research methods, which include hermeneutics, semiotics, and approaches that focus on narrative and metaphor. Our research will deploy visual semiotic analysis of the text meanings of Iranian oppositional groups' websites. For visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian oppositional groups' websites, Roland Barthes's visual semiotic analysis perspective will be deployed in interpretation of the website's visual texts with systemically looking at their meanings, codes, myths. As reviewed earlier, Barthes's semiotic analysis model has three levels of meaning: denotative, connotative, and mythical. Thus, all analyzed texts are based on denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings.

At this stage, we should identify the elements of a denotational inventory. According to Bauer et al. (2000), the material element identification may be done by listing the constituents systematically, or by annotating a tracing of the material. Although multimedia visual texts include both visual and textual elements, neither must be ignored. As we mentioned before in Barthes's visual semiotic model, the denotational stage analysis of media texts refers to the definitional, literal, descriptive, obvious, figurative, and surface meaning of the materials. It should be mentioned that each elements may be dissected into smaller units.

A connotational inventory refers to the socio-cultural and "personal" associations (ideological, emotional, etc.). Connotative meaning is what you associate with the

images and hidden and deeper meanings of photographs. In the second-level signification system, we should ask of each element a series of related questions, such as: What does it connote? What associations are brought to mind? What does it mean and what is being represented?

A mythical or ideological inventory refers to cultural values and beliefs that are expressed at the level of connotation. Myth refers to a hidden set of rules and conventions through which meanings are made to seem universal and natural. Barthes's argue that myths were the dominant ideologies of our time. The dominant ideology of our time is the ruling system's ideas and beliefs that are imposed on society. Under the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state, the dominant system ideology is the twelve Imam Shiite Islam religions, which changed to the ruling forces' hegemonic ideology that caused discrimination, inequality, and injustice in Iran. In this stage we are going to demythologize the dominant system's hegemonic ideology.

The question may raises is that what about the representation of signs and symbols? In response to this question, according to the American semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce definition, the thesis argues that a sign is "something by knowing which we know something more" (Johansen & Larsen, 2002, p. 25). From Peirce view a sign is a meaningful unit that is interpreted as "standing for" something other than itself. Based on this definition, a sign is a signifier that represents, means, and stands for something else other than itself. In other words, a sign is a form or signifier that represents or stands for something else that is called the signified. Furthermore, following the Roland Barthes models, the sign; signifier and signified or denotation and connotation represents dominant system's hegemonic culture, identity and ideology. Therefore, the thesis argues that visual signs and symbols especially documentary visual texts such as photographs, video clips and visual reports have been taken by the citizens represent

dominant system's hegemonic culture, identity, and ideology. Furthermore, the semiotic interpretation of the visual texts may reveal or visualize dominant system's hegemonic culture, identity, and ideology.

### **3.13 Categorizing**

The study prefers to form a codebook and code sheet duo for the easy gathering of information and analysis of research questions. The codebook and code sheet guide researchers like a map and their value depends on categorizing, defining, and coding data. If categories define exactly and validly, then codebook and code sheets will be valid. It should be mentioned that the thesis category adapted from Stein's (2009) work for oppositional deployment of the internet by the Iranian Green Movements activists. In contrast to the Stein's (2009) work, the thesis tries to visualize the oppositional deployment of the internet by the new social movement. Therefore, based on the Stein's (2009) study and given theoretical discussion and research questions, there are five main categories on Internet usage in oppositional politics, which include: (i) website as a site of alternative information and culture production for representation and reconstruction of collective identities; (ii) website as a site of organization and mobilization of movements' demonstrations and protests; (iii) website as a site for development of alliance and solidarity among movements' activists; (iv) Website as a site of direct expression of dissent and protest. In following section, website functions for oppositional groups and movements will be defined;

- i. Website as a site of alternative knowledge and information production for representation and reconstruction of oppositional identities

New information and communication technologies on the one hand make easy access to a plethora of knowledge and information and, on the other hand, facilitate production of

a wealth of knowledge and information. Thus, the oppositional deployment of websites as multimedia facilitates access to alternative information and knowledge and production and circulation of critical information and knowledge against mainstream and state media. Information and knowledge production is defined by Eyerman and Jamison (1991) as knowledge production primarily as a process by which social movements generate identities and meaning for themselves and their members (cited in Baringhorst, 2008, p. 68). Accordingly, in this study, knowledge production of social movements refers to internal knowledge of social movement actors, which refers to debates on action frames and agendas, slogans of rallies, or theoretical and strategic writings (Baringhorst, 2008, p. 68).

Accordingly, in this thesis, alternative or oppositional knowledge and information production categories were collected based on semiotic analysis of the website texts: visual reports; video clips; stream video reports; mainstream media critiques; alternative news articles; mainstream news articles critiques; leadership speeches and articles; media/press releases; self-published articles/reports; newsletter; law and policy critical analysis; organization history; organization description; news links; distribution of books, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, so on. Also, there is alternative culture: the expression of norms and values, expectations, wants, needs, desires, goals, ideas, beliefs, lifestyle, norms, mottos, home page titles, home pages logos, home pages pictures, identities, and so on.

In this study, collective identity is defined as a “shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences and solidarity” (Taylor, Whittier, & Morris, 2013, p. 350) and articulates the group’s goals, beliefs, and visions of social change. For purpose of this feature on websites, we are going to use semiotic analysis of Iranian oppositional groups’ websites; groups or organization profiles about us, logos,

flags, icons, Figures, visual images of the groups and members photos, self-representation, groups' identity descriptions, groups' names, website captions, descriptive biography of groups, intimate common issues, national symbols, group or personal announcements, groups' identity definitions, wall posts and pictures, groups' interests and hobbies, narratives about us, visual self- or identity descriptions, descriptions, textual identity description, home page titles, home pages, collective identity expressed in cultural materials—name, narrative, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on.

ii) Website as a site of organization and mobilization of public demonstrations and protests

One of the key functions of activists' presence online has been to mobilize others to take part in or support particular campaigns and actions (Pickerill, 2006, p. 271). According to McCarthy (1996), social movements' mobilizing structures refer to the mechanisms that enable individuals to organize and engage in collective action, including social structures and tactical repertoires (cited in Kelly Garrett, 2006, p. 203). Social movement activists or movement's organizers can republish, recycle, and redistribute a movement's materials (posters, photographs, recordings, and the like) for the organization and mobilization of mass demonstrations and protests.

iii) Website as a site of development solidarity and alliance

Oppositional movement activists can develop their alliance and solidarity through linkages as follow: links to mainstream news, links to alternative news, links to international SMOs, links to SMO sites of other movements, links to research sites, links to national SMOs, links to SMO sites of primary movements, and so on. Instead of link based unity, as Tilly (1978) argued unity can be found on the united flags or signs

that have been seen among the population or the chorus and coordinated songs and slogans.

iv) Website as a site of direct expression of dissent and protest

The Internet as a tool or as contested terrain can be used by oppositional groups as a weapon and target of direct expression of political protest and struggle. Baringhorst (2008) argues that practices of civil disobedience play a significant role in the action repertoire of social movement actors. The typology of online and offline action repertoire represented here is borrowed from the Van Laer & Van Aelst (2010) model on the role of the internet on social movement action repertoire. Based on their model, on the one hand, the Internet facilitates and supports (traditional) offline collective action in terms of organization, mobilization, and transnationalization and, on the other hand, creates virtual modes of collective action in terms of online petitions and e-mail bombings, virtual sit-ins to hacking the websites of large companies, organizations, or governments. As is mentioned in Chapter 2 on tactical functions of the Internet for social movements, most widely known and used forms of online protest action consist of: the creation of alternative and protest websites, hactivism, culture jamming, e-mail bombing/virtual sit-ins, signing online petitions, organization of oppositional campaigns, which should be semiotically analyzed.

Therefore, the oppositional deployment of the Internet can be summarized as follows:

(i) New information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the Internet and the World Wide Webs as contested terrain, site of struggle, or alternative media can be used by the oppositional groups, oppressed groups and sub-cultures for generation of alternative forms of information and cultures beyond the state and mainstream media; for representation and reconstruction of the oppositional group's identity; (ii) the new

information and communication technologies can be used by the oppositional groups and movements organization and mobilization of public demonstrations and protests; (iii) the new information and communication technologies can be used by the oppositional groups and movements for alliance and solidarity between oppositional group's movement's activists; (iv) the new information and communication technologies can be used by oppositional movement for organization and mobilization of public demonstration; (v) the new information and communication technologies can be used by the oppositional movements for building their communities and societies (vi) the new information and communication technologies can be used by oppositional movements for direct expression of dissent and protest. Of course, it should mention that these are positive functions of the new technologies for social movements. While we know the new information and communication technologies have negative functions for social movements. Based on the above category that adapted from Stein's (2009) work, the thesis is formed a coding category for each category of oppositional deployment of the Internet by oppositional movements. while these categories have been provide Stein's (2009) work on quantities analysis, the thesis tries to apply it for qualitative analysis and visualize it. Accordingly, it could be argued that the thesis coding category is internal valid, because its categories exactly analysis the oppositional deployment of the Internet by the oppositional movements and external validity, because its result of the study reflect similar outcome elsewhere such as; (Atton, 1999; Kellner, 2002b; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002).

### **3.14 Determining the unit of analysis**

Units of analysis are the basis for reporting analysis (Marsh & White, 2006, p. 29). Krippendorff (2003) argues that there are three kinds of analysis unit: the sampling unit, the recording unit, and the context unit. The sampling unit encompasses the whole independent message used as the basis of sampling. The recording unit encompasses the

whole independent message used for the basis of sampling. Recording units are analytically separable components of the message that will be independently attached to content analysis categories.

We are going to analyze the Iranian Green Movement's website home page, visual texts and link themes. In this research, themes mean political websites main topics or ideas in posts, comments, and links. So units of analysis will be the main topic of political websites, posts, and links. Therefore, the units of analysis include both the Iranian Green movements' websites home pages and home page visual text meanings. In semiotic analysis, also, each text is broken down into the signs—units of meaning—that make it up. This might be image, photography, words, colors, movements, particular sounds, parts of images, and so on. The researcher then treats these individual signs like words in language and analyze how they are arranged in texts (McKee, 2003, p. 130). Therefore, the homepages and the website visual texts such as photography, video clips, posters constitute the unite analysis of the study.

### **3.15 Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are key aspects for evaluating the scientific merit of all research: quantitative and qualitative. As Golafshani (2003) argues the use of reliability and validity are common in quantitative research and now it is reconsidered in the qualitative research paradigm. Since reliability and validity are rooted in positivist perspective then they should be redefined for their use in qualitative approach. In following section, the thesis will deal with the validity and reliability of the study.

#### **3.15.1 Validity**

Validity refers to “extend to which a measuring procedure represents the intended, and only the intended, concept” (Neuendorf, 2002, p.115). As Watson (2009) argues

validity concerns the truthful representation of the object of research. There are many types of validity and many names have been used to define the different types of validity. Campbell and Stanley (1966) have defined two major forms of validity that encompass the many types: internal and external validity (cited in Brink, 1993, p. 35). Similar to Campbell and Stanley, Denzin (1970) used the distinction between internal and external validity and applied it to qualitative research (cited in Brink, 1993, p. 35). According to Brink (1993) internal validity is the term used to refer to the extent to which research findings are a true reflection or representation of reality rather than being the effects of extraneous variables and external validity addresses the degree or extent to which such representations or reflections of reality are legitimately applicable across groups. Similar to Brink (1993) argument, the thesis argues that validity of visual material refers to representation of reality, fact and truth. For this end, the thesis selected the documentary visual data's such as photographs and video clips have been produced by the Iranian Green Movements activists from the Green Movement events at the streets to increase validity and reliability of the study.

### **3.15.2 Reliability**

Reliability is concerned with the consistency, stability and repeatability of the informant's accounts as well as the investigators' ability to collect and record information accurately (Selltiz et al., 1976, p. 182). In another words, reliability refers to the ability of a research method to yield consistently the same results over repeated testing periods. The reliability of the sources is asking question about whether the source can be trusted. Who created the photography/image/graphic? When and where was it created? Why was it created? Is the source biased (does it present a one-sided perspective)? Modality; modality is when a picture is ether real or drawn. For example if you have a real picture of a man standing looking at you. This would be high

modality but if you were to have a cartoon man standing still this would be low modality.

Actually, it should be mentioned that validity and reliability in semiotic analysis of visual texts refers to modality and representation reality and truth (Chandler, 2000; Harrison, 2003; Kellner, 2002a). Modality; modality is when a picture is either real or drawn. For example if you have a real picture of a man standing looking at you. This would be high modality but if you were to have a cartoon man standing still this would be low modality. For this end, the thesis selected the documentary visual data's such as photographs and video clips have been produced by the Iranian Green Movement activists from the Green Movement events at the streets to increase validity and reliability of the study.

To summarize the research methodology and research design, the study is going to employ qualitative approach for analysis of the meaning of the Iranian Green movement activist's websites home pages and visual texts. For the purpose of this study, Roland Barthes's visual semiotic approach is deployed for analysis of the Iranian Green Movement's websites home pages and their visual texts. It outlines in particular research methodology approaches: Barthes's visual semiotic analysis, research questions, statistical population and sampling procedures, and data collection procedures, data analysis process. It discusses in particular the research of validity and reliability and the limitation and location of the study, which is the Iranian Green movement activist's websites and websites visual texts. The chapter also elaborates on the instrument and procedures used for collecting data from websites.

### **3.16 Conclusion**

Considering the methodological difficulties of visual semiotic analysis of oppositional groups' websites, the study was primarily qualitative. This chapter introduced the studies of methodology, approaches, visual semiotic analysis, the method used in data collection and data analysis as well as the rationale behind them. It detailed semiotics, Roland Barthes's visual semiotic analysis model, and website sample size and categorization websites. It also related the process of data collection and the approach this research plans to take in the data analysis phase. We will devote our efforts to data analysis and output interpretation in the following chapters.

University of Malaya

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the results and findings of the thesis. As mentioned before in the Introduction, the main purpose of this research is to explore how the Iranian oppositional groups deployed the Internet as a contested terrain or alternative media to promote and advance their own political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. For the purpose of this study, Roland Barthes's visual semiotic approach has been deployed to analyze the Iranian oppositional group's website homepages. Toward this end, data will be collected through print screenshots of the website homepage for visual semiotic analysis of some of the most important and significant news articles, newsletters, visual reports, video clips, and photography about oppositional politics which represent the Iranian oppositional politics and political struggles against the Islamic republic of Iran's oppressive policies. After a brief review of the research questions, data will be collected for each question one by one from the oppositional group's website.

### 4.2 Visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian Green movements websites

In the following section, a number of the Iranian oppositional movement websites will be analyzed. The oppositional group's website are; Neday Azadi or Voice of Freedom: <http://www.nedayezadi.net>, The Website of Kalame: <http://www.kalame.com>, and the Green Path Movement website [www.rahesabz.net](http://www.rahesabz.net), [www.zrombesh.org](http://www.zrombesh.org), The first website belonging to the Neday Azadi or Voice of Freedom that is analyzed as follows:

#### 4.2.1 Voice of Freedom website

According to the website, Neday Azadi or Voice of Freedom considers itself among the Green Movement websites and will act in line with the objectives of the Green Movement in Iran. In following section, their website will be semiotically analyzed.

Major Question: How has the Internet been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for the promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state?



Figure 4.1: The first screen shot of the Neday Azadi website, <http://www.nedayezadi.net>, 26 September 2014; copyright © 2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

Figure 4.1 is the first screen shot of the Voice of Freedom Website Home page with URL (<http://www.nedayezadi.net>). According to the website, Neday Azadi or Voice of Freedom considers itself among the Green movement's websites and will act in line with the objectives of the Green Movement in Iran.

Starting from the right side, the background of the header of the website is in green which stands for flourishing, prosperity, birth and growth in Iranian culture. The green color is favorite color of Muslims. In the Moein (1999) Persian dictionary, the green color has been defined as a color that is obtained from a combination of yellow and blue and fresh and new and succulent. In Islamic culture, the green color stands for belief and faith in the Islamic religion, belief and trust in God, survival and immortality and belief in the Day of Resurrection. Accordingly, at the mythical level, in Islamic culture and the context of the website, the green color could be associated with Islamic ideology, Islamism and Islamic orientation of the website operators. From the right side, the header of the website is covered with the title of the website in the Persian language and in bold and white colour: ندای آزادی: the Voice of Freedom that the concept denotes to the Iranian Green Movement activists who look for freedom, liberty and citizens' rights under the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. At the connotative level, it connotes the lack of freedom of expression, speech and voice under the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. At the mythical level, the thesis associates it with contradiction of the Islamic system with real freedom of expression and speech. At the mythical level, it stands for democratization and liberalism of the Iranian Green movement activists. Instead of the title of the website, the header of the website is covered with the map of Iran with a photograph of the Green Movement's demonstration that denotes the map Iran and country of Iran and it connotes the Iranian Green Movement's activists' patriotism. At the mythical level, it could be associated with patriotism and Iranian nationality. Next to the map of Iran, is a sentence in the

Persian language that says “without a deep intelligent revolution, no evolution will be possible in society”. At the denotative level, the sentence denotes to the necessity of cultural and intellectual deep revolution for social development. At the connotative level, it connotes to the necessity of a cultural and intellectual deep revolution for social development and evolution, and in other words, it connotes the disfunctionality and futility of the Islamic Revolution for social development. Next to the sentence is a dove with an olive branch in its beak and the national Iranian three-colored flag on its wings symbolizes hope, peace and freedom for Iranians. At the mythical level, it could be associated with the peacefulness of the Iranian Green movement protests and it also could be associated to the anti-peacefulness and aggressive features of the Islamic system as same as other ideological system.

Under the header of the website, are the navigational links to other parts of the website such as home, news, report, interviews, Iran Freedom Movement documents, library, documentary film, audios, photos and posters, links, about us, contact us, and the English version of the website that with double click on them a wealth of information will be accessible and we can analyze them. Unfortunately, we have to analysis some of them for propose of the study.

The right column of the website is covered with news head lines from the daily news in Iran. Under the news head line rectangle, the next part devoted to the website search box where readers can search for their favorite topics on the website. Below the website is the website news subscription section that is under construction. Next to the news subscription, is the website’s RRS feed link that facilitates the publishing of frequently updated information or summarized texts. In addition to the column covered with calendar and the archive of the website.

The main body content of the website is covered with the website's rotating headline box that includes the latest news head lines that in this case are related to interviews with the families of *Dr. Ali Rashidy and Seyed Ali Asghar Gharavi* which in following section will be semiotically analyzed.

The screenshot shows the website's interface. At the top, there is a green banner with the site's logo and the title 'ندای آزادی'. Below this is a navigation menu with links in Persian and English. The main content area is titled 'گفتگو با خانواده علی اصغر غروی و علی رشیدی' and dated '۲ مهر ۱۳۹۲'. It features two photographs of the individuals and a long text report in Persian. A sidebar on the right contains a 'سرخط اخبار' section with various headlines.

**Figure 4.2:** The first screen shot of the news report on interviews with the families of Dr. Ali Rashidy and Dr. Seyed Ali Asghar Gharavi, <http://www.nedayeazadi.net>; 27 September 2014; copyright © 2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figure 4.2 is a news report of interview with families of Dr. Seyed Ali Asghar Gharavi: Quran scholar and member of Iran's freedom movement and Dr. Rashidy: the founder and head of Iran's Economists Forum and member of the Iran National Front leader board who both have been arrested and imprisoned by the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state because of their critical and political views. As their photographs show, DR. Rashidy is clean-shaven, white haired with a bald spot, wears glasses, a suit, light colored shirt and tie, and Dr. Gharavi also is clean shaven, with gray and white hair, wears glasses, jacket and dark a colored shirt.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.2 stands for incarceration and imprisonment of critical political intellectuals connotes a systematic suppression of the critical political intellectuals by the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state for repression and dismissal of critical intellectual voices from the media and society.

At the mythical level, Figure 4.2 is associated to the orthodox Shiite Islamic clergies' view about the opponent of the Islamic system and Velayate-e-Faghih; jurist governance. In another words, it stands for the Islamic system and Velayate-e-Faghih's anti-criticism, anti-critics and scholarship features. Based on this Islamic Sharia code, all people who are against the Islamic system and Velayat-e-Faghih; the leader of the Islamic state must be silenced, imprisoned, executed and whose blood can be spilled. According to their view, the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities believe there must be no pity or compassion for the Islamic system and Velayat-e-Faghih critics and dissenters. Accordingly, they arrested, imprisoned, assassinated and even executed them to silence their voice in society and the media. Three layers meaning of the visual news report of interview with families arrested critical intellectual will be summarized in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1:** Three layer meaning of the visual news report of interview with families arrested critical intellectual

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
A visual news report of interview with families arrested critical intellectuals	Incarceration and imprisonment of critical political intellectuals	Widespread and systematic suppression of the critical political intellectuals by the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state; omission, elimination and exclusion of critical intellectuals voice from media, culture and society	The orthodox Shiite Islamic system's and Velayate-e-Faghih anti-criticism, anti-critics and scholarship features

Under the website rotating headline box are articles that the Iran's Freedom Movement activists put on their website. The first article belongs to the Abdol Ali Bazargan with a question in title "For what sin has he been killed?" At the denotative level, the article stands for execution of Mohsen Amir Aslani; an Iranian psychologist who was executed

by the Islamic Republic of Iran's judiciary system, because of his different interpretation of the Qur'an. At the connotative level, it connotes the elimination and dismissal of critical intellectual voice from societies, culture and politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. At the mythical level, the article demyths the Twelfth Imami Shiite sharia code about the execution of opponents of Political Islam and Velayate-e-Faghih; jurist governance. Based on this Islamic sharia code, all people who are against political Islam and Velayat-e-Faghih; leader of the Islamic regime must be executed and whose blood can be spilled. Based on this Islamic code, the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities believe there must be no pity or compassion for Velayat-e-Faghih dissenters. Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities issue death fatwa and execute the Islamic Republic of Iran's critical intellectuals and opponents.

Next section covered with the Iran's freedom movement documents. The Iran's Freedom Movements is one of the main political parties in Iran. According to Nowzary (2007) the Iran's Freedom Movement was established by radical religious and some like-minded reformists on Wednesday 6 May in 1961. The Freedom Movements was the first political party that was created according to Islamic duty and explicitly anti-authoritarian and against foreign domination. Therefore, the ideology of the Iran Freedom Movement was the maintenance of the originality of the National Movement and its contraction/interaction unity with the Islamic movement. Since Iran's Freedom Movement activities are illegal under the Islamic Republic of Iran's state regulations, the website saves the political party's documents up which with a click on the section, allows the viewer full access to these documents. The poster of the document includes two pages. The first page has a photograph of Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, Iranian national Figure who nationalized Iran's oil industry but who was overthrown by the British/USA intelligence services. The second page offers photographs of Iranian

national Figures and pioneers of the Freedom Movement such as Mehdy Bazargan, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, Dr. Ali Shariati and others. The footer of the web page presents link buttons to the Freedom Movement's Facebook, Tweeter, and YouTube as social networks where viewers can follow the website activities. In the section that follows is some of the most important texts of the website will be analyzed.

Q1: How may the Internet be used by the Iranian oppositional groups for dissemination and generation of alternative forms of information, culture, and meaning for reconstruction and representation of their collective identities against the dominant or mainstream identity? Based on the theoretical framework of the thesis, the Internet has cognitive functions for social movement. The cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.



**Figure 4.3:** A screenshot of the “Crime Without Punishment” coverage pages, <http://www.nedayeazadi.net>; 17 September 2014; copyright ©2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figure 4.3 is “Justice For Iran’s” research report on rape, torture and sexual violence against female political prisoners in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s prisons in 1981. “Crime Without Punishment” is a project that attempts to document the rape and sexual torture against female political prisoners in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s prisons. The present report was done based on the published literature about rape and sexual torture against the political prisoners, interview with 77 of the political prisoners, and 17 informed people about these cases. The picture captions provide the details of the atrocities. Photographs are provided of the raped and tortured women political prisoners who by chance released from the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Prison and execution. Between the photography from right to left are the words (in Persian): “First Section; Decade of the 60s”; at the center is the title of the project written in bold and black: “Crime Without Punishment”. At the footer below the photographs the name of the organization is written in English: “Justice for Iran”.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.3 connotes to widespread and systematic rape and sexual abuse of the female political prisoner as a method of torture to extract confessions in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s prisons in 1981. Also forced ideologic marriage before execution of virrgin grils in Islamic Republic of Irans prisons. Also, it connotes the lack of punishment for Islamic Republic of Iran’s authorities and officials criminal behaviors which are crime without punishment.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.3 demyths the shiite Islamic penalty code for the execution of virgin girls. Based on this islamic principle, the virgin girls are innocent, and if they are killed or executed they will go to paradise. Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran’s officials and authorities in order to prevent them from entering paradise, force the virgin girls to marry prison officials before executing them and sometime rape them. Three layers meaning of a screenshot of the “Crime Without Punishment” coverage pages will be summarized in Table 4.2

**Table 4.2:** Three layers meaning of a screenshot of the “Crime Without Punishment” coverage pages

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
A screenshot of the “Crime Without Punishment” coverage pages	“Justice For Iran’s” research report on rape, torture and sexual violence against female political prisoners in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s prisons in 1981	Widespread and systematic rape and sexual abuse of the female political prisoner as a method of torture to extract confessions in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s prisons in 1981	The Shiite Islamic penalty code for the execution of virgin girls.

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement’s activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.



1) The security force hitting people



2) The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is beating a women



3) People try to save a man who is beaten by pro-government Basij militias



4) Basij militias try to force open the Tehran University's closed main door



5) Pro-government Basij militias removed the fences and entered the university



6) Smashed computer monitor in a room in a Tehran University dormitory



7) Destruction of libraries, computer labs



8) Destruction of libraries, computer labs



9) Destruction of computer labs



10) The brutal repression of the students



**Figure 4.4:** The results of military attack on University of Tehran and dormitory on 14 and 15 June 2009, <http://www.nedayezadi.net>, 26 September 2014; copyright © 2011 *Voice of Freedom*. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figures 4.4 are a montage of color photographs of the Bassij military attacks on the University of Tehran and its dormitories on 14 and 15 June, 2009. As first photograph shows the security force hitting people, as the second photgrph depicts the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is beating a women, as the third photograph represents, people try to save a man who is beaten by pro-

government Basij militias, as the fourth photographs show the Islamic Republic of Iran's Basij forces; volunteer paramilitary organization operating under the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) try to force open the Tehran University's closed main door, but, they failed and, then they tried to remove the fence and enter the university. As fifth photographs show that pro-government Basij militias removed the fences and entered the university and brutally repress the university and student. As sixth photograph shows an image of Mir Hossein Mousavi is seen (lower left), fixed to a desk with a smashed computer monitor in a room in a Tehran University dormitory, as photographs 7-8-9-10 shows the results of the attacks on dormitories and destruction of libraries, computer labs and doors and the brutal repression of the Green Movement's activists and students

At the connotative level, Figure 4.4 connotes widespread protests of the Iranian students against the results of the 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election and it also connotes widespread and systematic military attacks on university and student dormitories to repress the Iranian students' movements and Green Movements activists. Also it stands for militarization of domestic space, everyday life and violence during the Iranian Green Movement's protests.

At the mythical level, the thesis associates Figure 4.4 with Islamic militarism, Islamic systems and policies, violence and brutality in the oppression of the Iranian student movements and the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's anti-criticism, scholastic and scholar's features. From their perspective, universities are considered as the sites of struggles and resistance against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies, then, they brutally oppress them and dismiss their voice from society and culture and politics. Three layers meaning of photographs of Basij military attack on University of Tehran and dormitory will be summarized in Table 4.3

**Table 4.3:** Three layer meaning photographs of Bassij military attack on University of Tehran and dormitory

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Montage of photographs showing the results of military attack on University of Tehran and dormitory on 14 and 15 June 2009	The Bassij military attacks on the University of Tehran and its dormitories on 14 and 15 June, 2009	Militarism, violence and brutality in the oppression of the Iranian student movements	Islamic militarism, Islamic systems and policies, violence and brutality in the oppression of the Iranian student movements and the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's anti-criticism, scholastic and scholar's features

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.



**Figure 4.5:** An amazing phenomenon with question and exclamation marks: 2 multiplied by 2 equal 24 million, <http://nedayeazadi.org>, 10 April 2015, copyright © 2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figure 4.5 is a close up photograph of the Iranian Green Movement's demonstration at the Tehran Azadi square on 15 Jun in 2009. In the

background of the photograph is the Tehran Azadi Tower and the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who demonstrate against the official results of the election. As you see, one of them carries a placard on which is written an amazing phenomenon with question and exclamation marks: 2 multiplied by 2 equals 24 million.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.5 connotes widespread protest against the official results of the Islamic Republic of Iran's 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election, A close up photograph of the Iranian Green Movement's demonstration stands for intimacy, the Azadi Tower: in Tehran; is a symbol of Tehran city and freedom and liberty, an amazing phenomenon placard with question mark and exclamation point stands for people's guess, doubt, uncertainty surprise and surprising on the election results and finally the placard's sentence; 24 million stands for the number of Mahmood Ahmadi Nejad's votes and cheating in the election results of the Islamic Republic of Iran's 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.5 demyth contradiction of the political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih when people vote, democracy and demand their right to sovereignty. In another words, political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih's anti-democracy, the people's sovereign rights, and votes policies. Based on the Islamic Republic of Iran's official and authoritative view, the legitimacy of political Islam is a divine right, and based on their interpretation from the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih, the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih; the supreme leader's authority is directly derived from divine right, and he is representative of both the big god, also Imam Zaman; Shia Muslims twelfth imam who are hidden and will appear in the future and he will his right to the jurisprudence. Therefore, based on their interpretation, people have no right to elect the president, because this is divine right and Imam Zaman's right that is given to the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih and Islamic Republic of Iran's authorities and

officials. Then, they can change the people's vote in favor of divine right and Imam Zaman's right. Three layers meaning of photography of an amazing phenomenon will be summarized in Table 4.4

**Table 4.4:** Three layer meaning of photography of an amazing phenomenon

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
A close up photograph of the Iranian Green Movement's demonstration at the Tehran Azadi square on 15 Jun in 2009	A close up photograph of the Iranian Green Movement's demonstration, the Azadi Tower, a placard on which is written an amazing phenomenon with question and exclamation marks: 2 multiplied by 2 equals 24 million	A close up photograph for intimacy, the Azadi Tower: in Tehran; is a symbol of Tehran city, an amazing phenomenon placard stands for people's guess, doubt, uncertainty surprise and surprising on the election results and finally the placard's sentence; 24 million stands for the number of Mahmood Ahmadi Nejad's votes and cheating in the election results of the Islamic Republic of Iran's 10 <sup>th</sup> presidential election.	political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih's anti-democracy, the people's sovereign rights, and votes policies and cheating in the election results of the Islamic Republic of Iran's 10 <sup>th</sup> presidential election

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members. Visual images as cultural signs can define the common shared identities of activists and long-term orientation of movements. Accordingly, visual materials are repositories of shared activist identities and cultures that are able to link different generations of protesters and different waves of contention.



1) Female supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi in Tehran before the presidential election of 2009, when the Green Movement rose out of massive street protests. photograph: Bun Chrtis/AP



2) Some the Iranian Green Movement's martyr's photography's



3) Mir-Hossein Mousavi is among protestors giving a speech on 15 Jun 2009



4) Mir-Hossein Mousavi is among protestors giving a speech on 15 jun 2009



**Figure 4.6:** Still images adopted from Hello Mir Hossein's video clip art, Mir Hhousein Mousavi among the huge people, <http://www.nedayezadi.net>, 7 February 2015; copyright ©2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figures 4.6 are still images adopted from the Hello Mir Hossein video clip art. The video clip starts with a beautiful jungle with sun shin. The narrator of the video clip starts with saying hello to Mir Hossein Mousavi. He says that less than few days it will get five years you were home arrested. The clip several times shows Mir Hossein Mousavi and his wife's picture, his supporter's demonstrations and campaigns, and some of the Iranian Green Movements martyr's photographs. In these photograph, Mousavi is giving a speech among the sea of people who rose up their hand with their digital cellphones and cameras or making news in demonstrations in Tehran on 15 June in 2009. The photographs show Mir Hossein Mousavi and his guards in the midst of vast crowd of participants which the Iranian Green Movements participants hold up their hand with their digital cellphones and digital cameras and take film and photo from Mir Hossein Mousavis speech and demonstrations for participant.

At the connotation level, Figures 4.6 connote the Iranian Green Movement's widespread activists who strongly support Mir Hossein Mousavie and strongly object to his house arrest. It also stands for house arrests of critical intellectuals and critical political activists under the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. Furthermore, the photographs that show that people of different social strata standing for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement activists, and the realization of citizen journalism so that each citizen plays a crucial role in coverage of protest movement events and stands for the ability of the citizens to employ digital technologies and digitalization and visualization of the Iranian Green Movement supporters cultural and political activities.

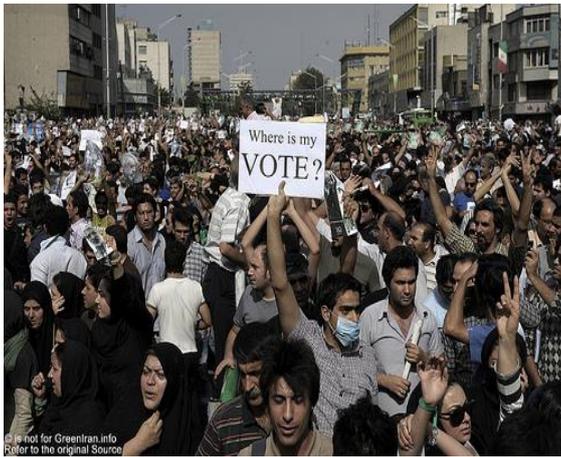
At the mythical level, Figures 4.6 demyht orthodox Shiite Islamic clergies view regarding the opponent of the Islamic system and Velayate-e-Faghih; jurist governance. Based on this Islamic sharia code, all people who are against the Islamic system and

Velayat-e-Faghieh; leader of the Islamic regime must be silenced, imprisoned, executed and whose blood can be spilled. According to their view, the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities believe that there must be no pity or compassion for Velayat-e-Faghieh dissents, and accordingly, they must be house arrested, arrested, imprisoned, assassinated and even executed. Accordingly, the article associates it to the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic states repression, totalitarianism, dictatorship, tyranny and absolutism. Also we associate it to the digitalization and technologicalization of the Iranian Green Movement activist's cultural and political activities and daily life. The following example also shows how the Internet became conduit [site] for the Iranian oppositional groups, Internet activists and subcultures to represent their collective identity. Three layer meaning of the Hello Mir Hossein video clip art will be analysed in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5:** Three layer meaning of the Hello Mir Hossein video clip art

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Still images adopted from the Hello Mir Hossein video clip art	Mir Hossein Mousavi and his wife's picture, his supporter's demonstrations and campaigns, and some of the Iranian Green Movement's martyr's photography, the Iranian Green Movements participants hold up their hand with their digital cellphones and digital cameras'	Widespread activists who strongly support Mir Hossein Mousavie and strongly object to his house arrest , the realization of citizen journalism	The digitalization and technologicalization of the Iranian Green Movement activist's cultural and political activities and daily life

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.



1) Where is my vote



2) The Iranian Green Movement youth activists



3) The Iranian Green Movement religious female activists carry Mir-Hossein Mousavi's pictures



4) Mir-Hossein Mousavi is among protestors giving a speech on 15 Jun 2009



5) A long shot of the Green Movement activists carrying a long green colored banner



6) Photography of the Green Movement activists carry a placard on which is written in the Persian language, the name of Mousavi



**Figure 4.7:** The Iranian Green Movements protest on 15 Jun in 2009, <http://www.nedayezadi.net>, 26 September 2014; copyright © 2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figures 4.7 are photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who protested the official result of the presidential election on 15 Jun in 2009. In Figures 4.7 (the first photograph) the Green Movement activists carry a placard on which is written: "Where is my vote?" and in Figures 4.7 (the second photograph) shows the Iranian Green Movements youth activists who are wearing green hats, green head bands, green wrist bands, green scarfs, and green T-shirts. In Figures 4.7 (the third photograph) the Iranian Green Movement religious female activists carry Mir-Hossein Mousavi's pictures. In in Figures 4.7 (the fourth) Mir-Hossein Mousavi is among protestors giving a speech on 15 Jun 2009. In Figures 4.7 (the fifth photograph) is a long shot of the Green Movement activists carrying a long green color clothes. In in Figures 4.7 (the sixth photograph) the Green Movement activists carry a placard on which is written in the Persian language, bold form and black color, the name of

Mousavi and the last photography shows them showing the “V” sign for victory and in support of Mir-Hossein Mousavi.

At the connotative level, the first photography connotes the demands for democratic political participation and political rights. The long shots represent the huge population of the Green Movement and Mir Hossein Mousavi’s supporters. While the other long shots connote the huge population of the Iranian Green movement’s protest and demonstration against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s state election policies, those who value their votes, freedom, liberty and democracy. The photographs show people of different social strata standing for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement activist. The photo that represents the religious women who carry Mir Hossein Mousavi’s pictures stands for widespread support of women and girls from the Iranian Green Movement. Finally, the last photograph depicts the widespread and massive support of the Iranian Green Movement activists for Mir Hossein Mousavi’s views and stands for the ability of the citizens to employ digital technologies and digitalization for political activities.

At the demythical level, Figures 4.7 connote the democratization, diversification, pluralization, collectivity and secularization of the Iranian Green Movements activists’ identity and culture despite of the domination of the clergies and political Islam over Iran’s macro social system, the Iranian Green Movement activists look for democracy, pluralism, and liberalism and secularism. Three layer meaning of photographs of the Iranian Green Movement’s protesters on 15 Jun in 2009 will be analyzed in Table 4.6.

**Table 4.6:** Three layer meaning of photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters on 15 Jun in 2009

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who protested the official result of the presidential election on 15 Jun in 2009	The photographs of "Where is my vote? second photograph shows the Iranian Green Movements youth activists, the Iranian Green Movements youth activists who are wearing green hats, green head bands, green wrist bands, green scarfs, and green T-shirts. The photographs show people of different social strata standing for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement activist.	The demands for democratic political participation and political rights, the huge population of the Green Movement and Mir Hossein Mousavi's supporters, The photographs show people of different social strata standing for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement activist.	The democratization, diversification, pluralization, collectivity and secularization of the Iranian Green Movements activists' identity and culture

Q2: "How may Internet be used by the Iranian oppositional groups as a site for organization and mobilization of public demonstrations against the Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system policy?" As has been mentioned several times, the Internet technology as network system facilitates and increases public political participation in international protests events as well as facilitating the organization of public demonstrations simultaneously in many different places. The following example shows the logistic functions of the Internet for organization and mobilization of public demonstration.



**Figure 4.8:** The 13 Aban-e-Sabs poster for organization and mobilization, <http://nedayeazadi.org/pics.php?sel=4>; 30 September 2014; copyright © 2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figure 4.8 is a poster for the continuation of the Iranian Green Movement's activists protest in 13 Aban; student day in the Islamic Republic of Iran's calendar in 2009. The poster is captioned with a sentence in bold and green in color at the top of the poster, which reads "protests are continuing and we are countless" reads the sentence at the bottom of the poster, which also carries the photograph of the Iranian Green Movement's activists who cover their faces with green color cloth with holes for his eyes on which is written "13" in bold and black "Aban-e Sabz" is in bold form and white color and at the bottom of the 13 Aban-e- sabz, it is written: "You are media" with three dots. At the bottom right corner of the poster carries pictures of Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Hujjat al Islam Mehdi Karroubi.

At the connotative level, the first sentence connotes the continuity of the Green Movement protests against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state policy; the covered faced stands for anonymity and unknown identity; the green color connotes the Iranian Green Movement and 13 Aban-e-Sabz stands for; November 4<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Aban in the Iranian calendar – which marks the anniversary of the US embassy takeover in Tehran; white color of the word "Aban-e-Sabz" stands for the peacefulness of the Iranian Green Movement's demonstration and Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Hujjat al Islam Mehdi Karroubi's photograph represents the call to their supporters to demonstration.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.8 stands for the Iranian Green Movements resistance against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state dictatorship and totalitarianism and struggle for democracy and freedom. It also stands for widespread and systematic of media censorship under the Islamic system. We also associate it with the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies against the Iranian Green Movements activists.

Three layer meaning of poster of a poster for the continuation of the Iranian Green Movement’s activists protest in 13 Aban-sabz in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7:** Three layer meaning of poster of a poster for the continuation of the Iranian Green Movement’s activists protest in 13 Aban-sabz

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
A poster for the continuation of the Iranian Green Movement’s activists protest in 13 Aban	A poster for the continuation of the Iranian Green Movement’s activists protest in 13 Aban-sabz, the sentence at the top of posters says “protests are continuing and we are countless, covering their faces with green color cloth, 13 Aban-e-Sabz, “You are media”, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Hujjat al Islam Mehdi Karroubi’s photograph	The continuity of the Green Movement protests, the continuity of the Green Movement protests and huge population of the Iranian Green movement, collectivity of their identity, anonymity and unrecognizability of identity and danger and threat marks the anniversary of the US embassy takeover in Tehran and organization time, widespread censorship and lack of media, the call to their supporters to demonstration.	The Islamic Republic of Iran’s oppressive policies against the Iranian Green Movements activists, widespread and systematic of media censorship under the Islamic system.

Q3: How dose the Internet became a conduit [channel] for Iranian Green movement activists to develop their solidarity and alliance to overcome the postmodern identity politics?” Kellner, with the emphasis on the politics of alliance and solidarity between oppositional groups and sub-cultures argues that the Internet networked system facilitates linkage between these groups for development of politics alliance and solidarity against dominant system. In Kellner’s words such as networking links labor, feminist, ecological, peace and other anti-capitalist groups, provide the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics. The following example shows alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement activist’s websites.



**Figure 4.9:** The first Screenshot of the link page in the Neday Azadi website, <http://www.nedayezadi.net>, and front page of the first screenshot of the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>; 30 April 2015; copyright © 2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figure 4.9 is the first screenshot of the link page in the Neday Azadi website; <http://www.nedayezadi.net>, and the front page of the first screenshot in the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>. The link page of the Neday Azadi website includes four categories as follows: link to news agencies and news websites, newspapers (published in Iran), agencies and news non-Farsi websites, and cultural websites.

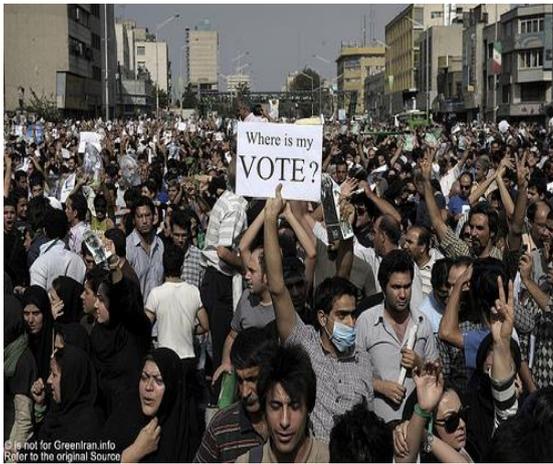
At the connotative level, Figure 4.9 connotes the online alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement liberal democrat activists and the Iranian reformist political writers and analysts. In other words, it stands for the online alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement liberal democrat activists and the Iranian reformist political writers and analysts and the online convergence between like-minded groups and divergence between reformist and oppositional groups.

At the mythical level, Figure 4.9 demythifies the expansion of doctrine of reformism, liberalism and democratization between both the Iranian Green movement activists and groups, which is a further example of offline alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green movement's activists. Three layer meaning of networked feature of the internet for development of alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement activist's websites in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8:** Networked feature of the internet for development of alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement activist's websites

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
The first screenshot of the link page in the Neday Azadi website; <a href="http://www.nedayezadi.net">http://www.nedayezadi.net</a> , and the front page of the first screenshot in the Green Path Movement website; <a href="http://www.rahesabz.net">http://www.rahesabz.net</a>	The first screenshot of the link page in the Neday Azadi website; <a href="http://www.nedayezadi.net">http://www.nedayezadi.net</a> , and the front page of the first screenshot in the Green Path Movement website; <a href="http://www.rahesabz.net">http://www.rahesabz.net</a>	The online alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement liberal democrat activists and the Iranian reformist political writers and analysts	The expansion of doctrine of reformism, liberalism and democratization between both the Iranian Green movement activists and groups, ideological convergence between like minded groups and ideological divergence between difference groups

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies that refer to the process of alternative culture, information and meaning production and dissemination by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members. Visual images as cultural signs can define the common shared identities of activists and long-term orientation of movements. Accordingly, visual materials are repositories of shared activist identities and cultures that are able to link different generations of protesters and different waves of contention.



1) Where is my vote?



2) The Iranian Green Movement's alliance demonstration



3) The Iranian Green Movement's youth activists



4) The Iranian Green Movement's alliance demonstration



5) The Iranian Green Movements alliance demonstration



6) The Iranian Green Movement youth activists demonstration



7) The Iranian Green Movement alliance protest



8) The Iranian Green Movement's huge population



**Figure 4.10:** The Iranian Green Movements alliance demonstration on the result of Iran's presidential election on 15 Jun 2009; <http://nedayeazadi.org>; 30 September 2014; copyright © 2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved



9) The Iranian Green Movement's religious female activists who carry moosavis picture



10) The some of the Amir Kabir's Universities faculties and students



11) Millions of The Iranian Green Movements supporters, gathered in Tehran on 15 June 2009, protesting against the election results



8) Mir Houssein Mousavis supporters protests



**Figure 4.10**, continued, Millions of The Iranian Green Movements supporters, gathered in Tehran on 15 June 2009, protesting against the election results



**Figure 4.10**, continued, Millions of The Iranian Green Movements supporters, gathered in Tehran on 15 June 2009, protesting against the election results



12) The Iranian Green Movement's protestors chanting motto



13) The Iranian Green Movement protestors raised their hand in "v" sign



Photo:Alireza Hakimifard Iranian Labour News Agency

14) A protest in Tehran, Azadi squer, June 15, 2009.



15) A protest in Tehran, Azadi squer, June 15, 2009



Figure 4.10, continued, Mir-Hossein Mousavi is among protestors giving a speech on 15 Jun 2009

At the denotative level, Figures 4.10 are long shot photographs of the Iranian Green Movement protestor's demonstration against the official result of the presidential election on 15 Jun in 2009. In the first photograph, the Iranian Green Movement protestors carry a placard asking "Where is my vote?" The second and third photographs show the majority of the protesters are youth and youthful, with the majority of them chanting slogans and clapping their hands, and most of them wearing green color masks, headbands, fingerbands, wristbands and some of them wearing green colored short-sleeved shirts. The photograph shows a long shot of the protest demonstrators who carry a long green colored banner, while some other photographs show people of different social strata: old and young, men and women, boys and girls, religious, secular and non-religious, the next picture shows religious women who carry Mir Hossein Mousavi's pictures, followed by two other pictures showing the mass demonstration, and another two long shots show a huge number of protestors and the Azadi Tower and the last photograph shows Mir Hossein Mousavi and his body gourds among the protestors who raise their cell phones and digital cameras for recording the events.

At the connotative level, Figures 4.10 can be associated with the alliance and solidarity among the Iranian Green Movement activists and protestors on Monday 15 Jun 2009.

At the connotative level, the long shots connote the huge population of the Iranian Green movement's protest and demonstration against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state election policies; those who look for their votes, freedom, liberty and democracy. The photographs those show people of different social strata standing for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement's activists. The photo that represents the religious women who carry Mir Hossein Mousavi's pictures stands for widespread support of women and girls from the Iranian Green movements. Finally, the last

photograph depicts the widespread and massive support of the Iranian Green Movement activists from Mir Hossein Mousavi's view.

At the mythical level, Figures 4.10 are associated with pluralization, diversity, collectivity, feminism, liberalization, and democratization of the Iranian Green Movements activist's culture, identity and politics. Three layer meaning of poster of a poster for the continuation of the Iranian Green Movement's activists protest in 13 Aban-sabz will be summarized in Table 4.9

**Table 4.9:** Three layer meaning of poster of a poster for the continuation of the Iranian Green Movement's activists protest in 13 Aban-sabz

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
The collective photographs of the Iranian Green Movement protestor's demonstration against the official result of the presidential election on 15 Jun in 2009	The collective photographs of the Iranian Green Movement protestor's demonstration against the official result of the presidential election on 15 Jun in 2009: "Where is my vote? The majority of the protesters are youth and youthful wearing green color masks, headbands, fingerbands, wristbands and some of them wearing green colored short-sleeved shirts.	Collective protest and resistance against the official result of the election the alliance and solidarity among the Iranian Green Movement activists and protestors, demanding votes, freedom, liberty and democracy, youthness of the Iranian green movement supporters, the green color stands for belief and faith in the Islamic religion, belief and trust in God, survival and immortality and belief in the Day of Resurrection support of religious women and girls from the Iranian Green movements	Pluralization, multiplicity, diversity, collectivity, feminism, liberalization, and democratization of the Iranian Green Movements activist's culture, identity and politics.

Q4: "How does the Internet become a site for the Iranian oppositional groups to express their political and cultural protest?" Based on the theoretical framework of the thesis, the Internet as a tool or as contested terrain can be used by oppositional groups as a tool and platform for direct expression of political protest and struggles. Signing an online petition is one tactic that has been used by oppositional groups, excluded and oppressed groups to mediate their political and cultural struggles against dominant systems and oppressive policies. The example below shows that the Iranian Green Movement

activists used the tactic for release of the Green Movement leaders. And the following section will analyze their visual online petition.



**Figure 4.11:** The first screenshot of the Nedaye Azadi website news on campaign for release of Aria Aram Nejead, [http://nedayezadi.org/news\\_cur.php?id=3019](http://nedayezadi.org/news_cur.php?id=3019); 30 September 2014; copyright © 2011 Voice of Freedom. All rights reserved

At the denotative level, Figure 4.11 is news of the Iranian Green Movement’s activist’s campaign for release of Aria Aram Nejead; artist and singer of the Green Movement who was arrested several times by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s security forces. According to the Neday Azady website, following continued /renewed detention of Aria Aram Nejead; the Iranian Green Movement’s artist and singer, a group of artists, activists and supporters of Green Movement organized a campaign and called for his release. The call asks the Iranian Green Movement activists and supporters to sign the petition on the Facebook of Iranian Green Movement’s artists.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.11 connotes the widespread and systematic summoning, detention and imprisonment of critical artists and singers who support the Iranian Green Movements in order to silence and repress the voice of the Green Movement.

At the mythical level, Figure 4.11 demyths the orthodox Shiite Islamic clergies' view on the opponent of the Islamic system and Velayat-e-Motlaghe-Faghih; absolut powr of jurisprudence. In another words, we associate it with the Islamic system, Velayat-e-Motlaghe-Faghih, jurisprudence absolute rule anti-critical art and artist's policies. Based on this Islamic Sariah code, all people who are against the Islamic system and Velayat-e-Faghih; the leader of the Islamic state must be silenced, imprisoned, executed and whose blood can be spilled. According to their view, the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities believe that there must be no pity or compassion for the Islamic system and Velayat-e-Faghih critics and dissenters. Accordingly, they arrested, imprisoned, assassinate and even executed them to silence their voice from society and media. Three layer meaning of direct expression of political protest and struggles will be summarized in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10:** Three layer meaning of direct expression of political protest and struggles

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Myth or mythology
News of the Iranian Green Movement's activist's campaign for release of Aria Aram Nejead; artist and singer of the Green Movement	News of the Iranian Green Movement's activist's campaign for release of Aria Aram Nejead; artist and singer of the Green Movement	The widespread and systematic summoning, detention and imprisonment of critical artists and singers who support the Iranian green movements	The Islamic system, Velayat-e-Motlaghe-Faghih, jurisprudence absolute rule anti-critical art and artists policies

In summary, visual semiotic analysis of the website shows that the World Wide Web as a contested terrain or as an alternative media has been used by the excluded and oppositional groups for promotion of their political struggles and agendas. The Iranian Green Movement's activists launched their website and mediated their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state oppressive policies. The findings

of the study confirm that the Internet as a contested terrain or site of struggle can be used by the excluded groups and oppositional movement's activists. For example, as Figure 4.1 shows, the website has been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists to promote their political struggles. Also, the findings of the study show that the Internet as contested terrain or as a site of struggles has been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for production and dissemination of alternative culture, information and meaning for representation and reconstruction of their collective identities. For example, as Figure 4.3 shows the website provides free access to censorious and forbidden books, political reports, and documents in order to circumvent the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's widespread and systematic censorship. For further example, as Figure 4.7 shows, the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for representation and reconstruction of their collective identity.

Furthermore, the findings of the analysis show that the Internet or the website can be used to organize and mobilize public demonstrations. For example, as Figure 4.8 shows, the Iranian Green Movement's activists have used the website to organize and mobilize mass demonstrations.

The data of this study show that the Internet as a networked system can be used by the oppositional movement for development of their alliance and solidarity with other organizations, groups and individuals. For example, as Figure 4.9 shows, there is a link between the Neday Azady website and the Iranian Green Path Movement's website. However, the study data show that there is a link between this group and other groups, but, it is a connection limited to like-minded groups and these groups are dismissed Iranian leftists and oppositional groups who also struggle against the repressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state which may enhance cyber

balkanization and fragmentation of virtual communities and oppositional groups to like-minded and weaken oppositional movements in favor of dominant systems.

Accordingly, it could be argued that the Internet as contested terrain or as an alternative media, on the one hand, can contribute to solidarity and integration of communities and on the other hand, the internet can enhance fragmentation and cyberbalkanization of the communities to like-minded groups.

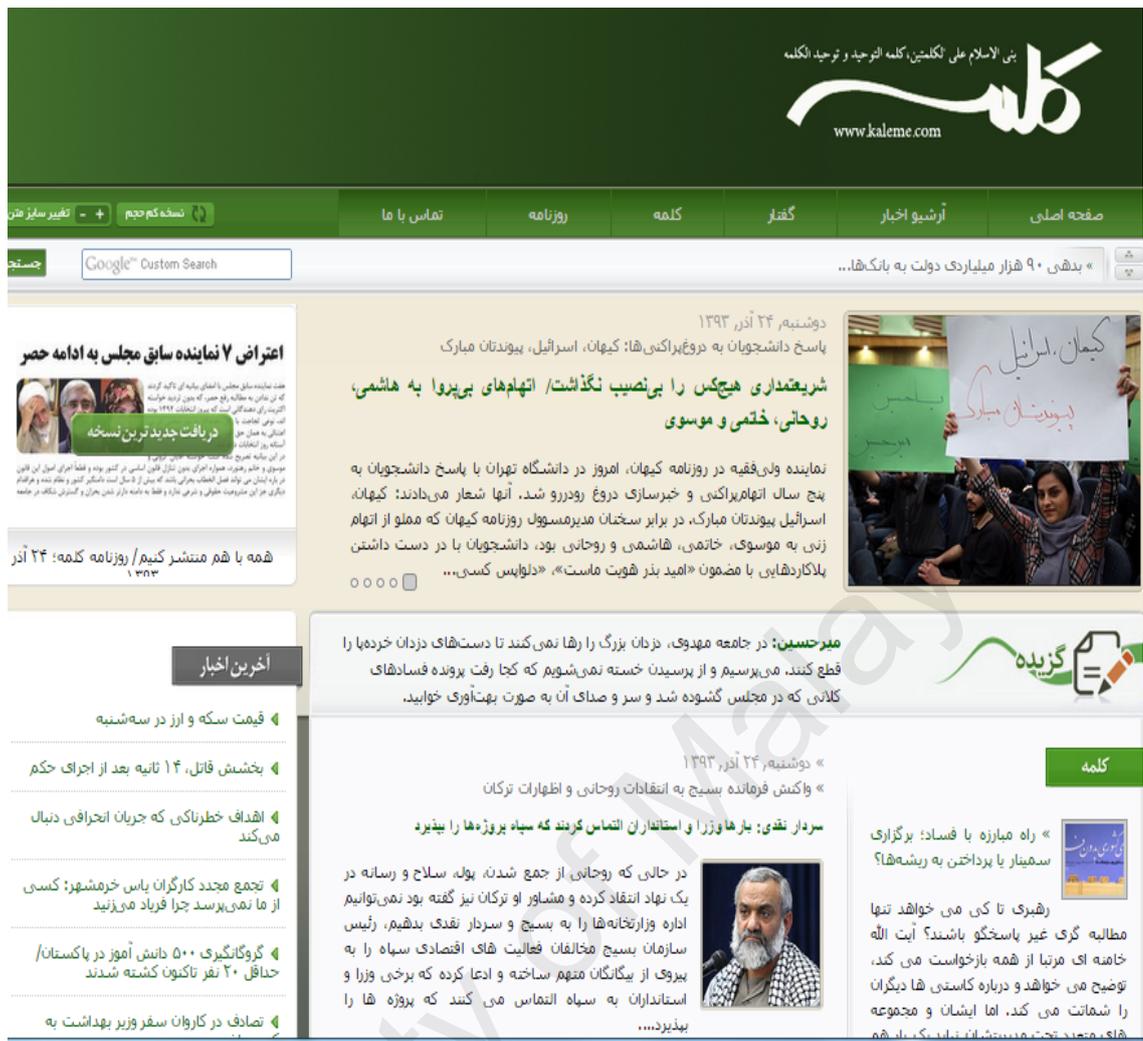
Moreover, the findings of this study show that the website has been used as a platform for direct expression of political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state oppressive policies. As Figure 4.11 shows the Iranian Green Movement's activists used the website as a tool for direct expression of their political struggles. Of course, it should be mentioned that the website operators do not use the full potential of the Internet technology as a weapon and target of direct expression of their political protests. For example, they have never used culture (political) jamming, hactivism, and email bombing/virtual sit in against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies.

The findings of the study show that the website does not use the full potential of the platform for promotion of their political projects. For instance, one of the Internet functions for the oppositional movements is direct expression of political dissent through culture jamming, signing online petitions and hacking other group's websites which are absent in this website, which can be attributed to a lack of critical media literacy or democratic management style and behavior of the political groups. Furthermore, the website usually closes the comment section and viewers have no opportunity to write comments and give their views of the website news they read.

#### **4.2.2 Kalame website**

The Website of Kalame is a news analysis website that has covered and continues to cover the Green movement's leader's views. The website has been probably launched by the Population of Monotheism and Cooperation that is one of the Iranian religious reformist political parties. Unofficially, it is claimed that the population is close to Mir Hossein Mousavi and the website is his official website. The website critically and analytically deals with the interpretation of the Islamic republic of state and mainstream media news. It has been probably run by the Iranian religious reformist organizations, party and groups who are looking for some reforms in the Islamic Republic of Iran's political structure. The website has been used as an alternative media against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state media. The Islamic republic of Iran's conservatives and hardliners are the targets of the website.

Major Question: How has the Internet been effectively used by Iranian oppositional groups and political movements for the promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran? The following example shows how the Internet has been effectively used by Iranian oppositional groups and political movements for the promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



**Figure 4.12:** The first screen shot of the Kalame website, <http://www.kaleme.com/> 16 December 2014; without permission

Figure 4.12 is the first screenshot of the Kalame website. Its URL is <http://www.kaleme.com>. The website title name is Kalame; in the English language: “word” and in the Persian language “کلمه”. Unfortunately, the website lacks a section devoted to about “US” section, so that talking about its identity is difficult. But, the website has been one of the most important websites that covered the Iranian Green Movement’s activities and events during and after the movement. In contrast the majority of the Iranian Green Movement’s activist’s websites and weblogs are inactive but the website is active and covers the Green Movements events and activities. Furthermore, the website has been written from inside of Iran. Therefore, while the

website is still active, written inside of Iran and covers the Iranian Green Movement's events, it is selected as case study in this thesis.

The header of the website is covered dominated by a dark green color. The green color is favorite color of Muslims. In the Moein (1999) Persian dictionary, the green color has been defined as a color that is obtained from a combination of yellow and blue and fresh and new and succulent. In Islamic culture, the green color stands for belief and faith in the Islamic religion, belief and trust in God, survival and immortality and belief in the Day of Resurrection. Dark green color stands for firm/true belief and faith in the Islamic religion, belief and trust in God, survival and immortality and belief in the Day of Resurrection day. Accordingly, at the mythical level, in Islamic culture and the context of the website, the dark green color could be associated with Islamic ideology, Islamism and Islamic orientation of the Kalame website operators. The website header also carries a sentence from Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Kashef al Ghaeni; (بنی الاسلام علی کلمتین: کلمة التوحید و توحید الکلمة) Islam is constructed based on two principles: the first principle is the worship of God and the second principle is consensus and unity of the Muslim community. The sentence connotes the belief in God and unity and solidarity among Muslim communities. At the mythical level, the sentence demythologizes Islamism, Islamic Unitarianism, and unification and solidarity between the website operators.

Furthermore, the header of the website carries the title of the website in bold form and is in contrasting white against the dark colored background. The word "Kalame" (کلمه), which in the Persian dictionary denotes a word and speech and in the English language denotes to word, it connotes Unitarianism and unity among Islamic communities. At the mythical level, the word demythologizes Islamism, Unitarianism, alliance and solidarity. In the context of the website, and Iranian religious and national culture, the white color of the

word “Kalame” stands for peace and purity. Moreover, the header of the website also carries the address of the website.

Link navigation of the website includes: the first page link, news archive, articles, klalme (word), newspaper, contact with us, light version, and changing of the text size. Under the link navigation strip is a space for to headline the latest news that in this case is related to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s government 90/000/000/000/000 Toman equal to 27/000/000/000 USD debts to the banking system. At the connotative level it connotes the Islamic government’s debt to Iran’s banking system and the financial problems of the Islamic government. Also, it connotes the inefficiency and incompetence of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s government economic management. On the left side of the strip is a search box in which viewers can search for their favorite topics. Under the headline of latest news box, is the website rotating headline box that includes latest news headlines that in this case are related to visual news reports on the Tehran university students protest in response to the managing editor of a conservative Iranian newspaper, in which the supreme leader is represented and Hossein Sharitmadary’s speech on the university. In this interview, Shariatmadary charged Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi; the Iranian Green Movement’s leaders as traitors and betrayers. Futhermore he accused Seyyed Mohammad Khatmai of contacting the Open Society Foundations (*OSF*). He also accused Hassan Rouhani and Hashemi Rafsanjani of widespread corruption and dependency on western countries and foreigners. In their response to him, the university’s students chanted a motto, raised a placard which said: “the Satan media, Raja, Fars, and Keyhan, Keyhan and Israel happy with your grafting”, “Ya Hossein, Mir Hossein,” and so on.

At the connotative level it connotes the contradiction between Iranian students and hardliners and the conservative government. Next to the website rotating headline box,

the Kalame's website deals with the protest of seven former parliament representatives to continue of the Green Movement's leader's house arrest. At the connotative level it connotes the house arrest and imprisonment of critical-political activists. At the demythical level it could be associated with the Islamic Republic of Iran's state's totalitarianism, dictatorship, tyranny and absolutism. From the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities perspective, any critique of the Islamic state's actions is considered a political crime. Based on their view, critical intellectuals who criticize the Islamic Republic of Iran's official and authority's oppressive policy should be punished. Under the website rotating headline box, is the selected news section box and the news item is on Mir Hossein Mousavi's unspoken words on the eight years sacred war. Mir Hoseein Mousavi says that in Mahdavi's society; imam Mahdi society, do not free big thieves to cut the hands of small thieves. Furthermore, he added: "I will ask and will not get tired of asking where the massive corruption case that was filed in the parliament was, but, discussion about them has been non-existent. At the connotative level it connotes widespread and systematic corruption between the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state officials and authorities and punishment of small thieves.

The main body of the website is divided into three columns. Starting from the right, the column is devoted to Kalameh, articles, thoughts, and links to Iran's Green media: Rasa YouTube channel, Rasa website and Frequencies of two latest links are inaccessible on this server. The Kalame section is allocated to Ali Bordbar's article about the struggles with corruption; holding seminars or dealing with its roots. In his article, Bordbar points to some notes on the role of the supreme leaders in widespread and systematic corruption in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foundations such as; the first point, which is the selective and discriminative contacts that have been received from a series/set of his behavior on corruption, the second point is about his non-responsibility and unaccountability and uncontrollability of absolute power. At the connotative level it

connotes the extension of widespread and systematic corruption in the political and economic structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state structure, foundations and organizations. In the following section, there will be a semiotic analysis of a text from Iran's green media: Rasa YouTube channel.



**Figure 4.13:** Rasa TV interview with Mehdi Karrubi, <https://www.youtube.com/>; 17 December 2014; without permission

At the denotative level, Figure 4.13 is a video clip of the Iran's Green Media; Rasa TV interview with Mehdi Karrubi on the Islamic Republic of Iran's plan to supervise parliamentary representatives on 13 Aban in 2010. The top left corner of the screen is covered with the Rasa TV logo that constitutes a green colored rectangle on which is written in Persian language (RASA); the abbreviation of Iran's Green Media. The still image that adopted from the video clip is a close-up shot of Mehdi Karroubi that shows Mehdi Karroubi is sitting on the comfortable sofa and looking at the camera. He wears a

white colored turban, abba, glasses, and long white beard and mustache. In this video clip, Karrubi deals with the Islamic Republic of Iran's plan on supervision of parliamentary representatives. Based on his report, the Islamic Republic of Iran's hardliners and conservative government intend to supervise the parliamentary members. They are going to choose a committee that has the right to send representatives for judiciary rebuke, invalidate his credentials and dismiss him from parliament.

At the connotative level, the close-up shot of Mehdi Karroubi connotes to intimate and personal node of the shot, sitting on the comfortable sofa stands for luxury life of clergies, his dress connotes to his religious personality and identity, his spectacle stands his intelligence or weakness of his eyes, and finally his interview stands for the weaknesses and attenuates of parliament and independent representatives in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic system and enmity and contradiction of the political Islam with parliament and people's sovereignty and real democracy.

At the mythical level, Figure 4.13 demythifies the political Islamic system's anti-parliamentarism, anti-republicanism, anti-democracy, people's vote and sovereignty. Based on the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities' view, the legitimacy of the political Islam is derived from God and Imam Zaman; Shia Muslims twelfth imam who are hidden and will appear in the future who give his right to the jurisprudences. Therefore, from their view, the people have no right to rule themselves and ruling society is divine and Imam Zaman's right, which in the absence of the Imam Zaman is considered to be Velayat-e-Faghih. In following section, three layers meaning of video clip of the Iran's Green Media; Rasa TV interview with Mehdi Karrubi on the Islamic Republic of Iran's plan to supervise parliamentary representatives will be summarized in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11:** Three layer meaning of video clip of the Iran’s Green Media; Rasa TV interview with Mehdi Karrubi on the Islamic Republic of Iran’s plan to supervise parliamentary representatives

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Myth or mythology
Still image that adapted from video clip of the Iran’s Green Media; Rasa TV interview with Mehdi Karrubi	Still image that adapted from video clip of the Iran’s Green Media; Rasa TV interview with Mehdi Karrubi on the Islamic Republic of Iran’s plan to supervise parliamentary representatives	The weaknesses and attenuates of parliament and independent representatives in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic system	The political Islamic system’s anti-parliamentarism, anti-republicanism, anti-democracy, people’s vote and sovereignty

The middle column includes the website news articles such as; the reaction of the Basij commander to Hassan Rouhani and Akbar Turkan’s critiques on the interference of Basij and the revolutionary guard corps in the economy. At the connotative level, it connotes the contradiction between the revolutionary guard corps and Basij commanders with the government in the revolutionary guard corps interference in economic activities. At the mythical level, it demythys militarism and military force interference in the economy under the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state.

The left column is allocated to the latest news of the website that includes; the prices of coin and dollar, acquittal of murder after 14 seconds from performance of case, and so on. In the following section there will be an analysis of the websites functions for the Iranian Green Movements.

Q1: “How can the Internet be used by the Iranian oppositional groups for dissemination and generation of alternative forms of information, culture, and meaning for reconstruction and representation of their collective identities against the dominant or mainstream identity?” The cognitive functions of the Internet refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement’s activists for the building of collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members. The Internet as “network contested terrain” facilitates alternative culture and information production which enables the representation and construction of a sense of collective identity, on the one hand, made possible by organizations, groups and individuals

knitting together which makes it possible for alliance and solidarity of the social movement's activists.



**Figure 4.14:** The Iranian Green Movement's activists protesting and demanding to know "where is my vote?", <http://www.kaleme.com/1392/04/12/klm-150322/> ; 11 October 2014; without permission

At the denotative level, Figure 4.14 color photograph shows the Iranian Green Movement's activists carrying a long banner on which is written: "Where is my vote?" From the top right hand side, of the banner is written in green in the Persian language; موج سبز; (green wave) and in the middle of the banner in bold type is written in Persian language رای من کجاست؟; (Where is My Vote?) And at the bottom of the banner is written in the English language in green color and in capital letters; WHERE IS MY VOTE? As can be see, the majority of the protesters are youths and young; the majorities of them raise their hands to show the "V" sign that stands for victory and carry Mir Hossein Mousavi's pictures; the majority of them wear green color masks, headbands, fingerbands, wristbands and some of them wear green color short-sleeved

shirts, and blue jeans. Some of the girls wear green colored shawls and some wrap it around their faces; we can also see some of the girls with blonde hair with loose hijab, and some of them wear sunglasses.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.14 connotes the Iranian Green Movement's activists protest against the election coup and cheating in the 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election on 15 June 2009. It also connotes the defense of citizen's political rights, votes, and sovereignty rights. It also stands for widespread and strong support of the Iranian Green Movement by the Iranian youth and young people. It connotes the contradiction and enmity of political Islamic state and Velayat-e-Faghih; jurisprudence absolute rule with the people's vote and sovereignty rights. As the photograph shows, their hair, dress style and make-up style stand for modern western culture and style.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.14 demythifies the contradiction of political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e-Faghih with democracy and people's sovereign rights. Based on the Islamic Republic of Iran's official and authoritative view, the legitimacy of political Islam is divine right, and based on their interpretation of the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e-Faghih, the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e-Faghih; Absolute power of jurisprudence; the supreme leader's authority is directly derived from divine right and Imam Zaman; Shia Muslims twelfth imam who is hidden and will appear in the future and he will give his right to the jurisprudence. Therefore, people have no right to rule themselves, form parliament and select president, because this is divine right and Imam Zaman's right. In following section, three layers meaning of photography of "Where is My Vote"? will be summarized in Table 4.12.

**Table 4.12:** The three layer meaning of photography of “Where is My Vote”?

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Myth or mythology
The photography of “Where is My Vote	The photography of “Where is My Vote? their hair, dress style and make-up style stand for modern western culture and style	Widespread and strong support of the Iranian Green Movement by the Iranian youth, young people and youthfulness, their hair, dress style and make-up style stand for mixture of the Iranian Green Movements youth activists Culture and identity with modern western culture and style	The political Islamic system’s anti-democracy, people’s vote and sovereignty rights

The following examples show that the Iranian Green Movement activists employed digital technology for dissemination and generation of alternative forms of culture, information and meaning for representation and reconstruction of collective identity and mediated their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s state media.



1) People with their smart cell phones recording Ashoura ceremony



2) Wounded people is treated



3) Blood dripping



4) Wounded people is treated



7) Security forces cars pass over the people



6) Security forces cars pass over the people



**Figure 4.15:** Screen shot of the documentary video clip dealing with Ashorah Sabz events in 2009; <http://www.kaleme.com>; December 18 2014; without permission

At the denotative level, Figures 4.15 are screen shots of a documentary video clip that was been taken by the Iranian Green movement's activists and published on the website of *Kalame*. The documentary video clip that has been titled “documentary of Ashouray 88; From lie to Reality” deals with Ashouray-e-Sabz events in 2009. The video clip starts with one sentence from Doctor Ali Shariati: “in a country where the media is controlled by the government, do not believe any speech, talk or world [news]”. The first section of the video clip deals with the distorted report that the Islamic Republic of Iran's television broadcasted about the Green Movement on the day of Ashouray-e-

Sabz. The second part the video clip gives a documentary report on the Iranian Green movement on the day of Ashura. The first screen shot shows some people with their smart cell phones recording the Shia Muslim's religious ceremony events. They are chanting "We are Green Movement and Hossain flagman" and "we are all with Mir Housein Mousavi". The next three screen shots show three injured people who were shot to death in their head. Two last screen shot show that the Islamic Republic of Iran security forces car drove twice over the Green Movement's activists injured body.

At the connotative level, Figures 4.15 connote the brutal repression of the Iranian Green Movements activists by the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state security forces in the Ashura ceremony, which, based on the twelfth imam Shiite religion fighting and bloodshedding in this month is unlawful, but, the Islamic security force brutally repressed the Green Movement's activists. They used weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for the repression of Shiite Muslims in the Haram month.

At the mythical level, the thesis associates Figure 4.15 Islamic militarism, Islamic system's violence and brutality in the oppression of the Iranian Green Movement's activists. Based on the twelfth Imam Shiite Islam orthodox ideology, fundamentalism and the Islamic Republic of Iran officials and authority's perspective, the Islamic system is divine right, then protest against it is equal to war against God. Based on Surat Al-Mā'idah verse 33 penalty code, 'the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world; and for them in the hereafter is a greater punishment. Based on this penalty code, the Islamic republic of Iran's theocratic state kills their opponents. In following section, three layers

meaning of still images adapted from the documentary video clip dealing with Ashouray-e- Sabz events in 2009 will be summarized in Table 4.13.

**Table 4.13:** Still images adapted from the documentary video clip dealing with Ashouray-e- Sabz events in 2009

<b>Sign</b>	<b>Denotative</b>	<b>Connotative</b>	<b>Myth or mythology</b>
Still images adapted from the documentary video clip dealing with Ashouray-e-Sabz events in 2009	Still images adapted from the documentary video clip dealing with Ashouray-e-Sabz events in 2009 that shows some people with their smart cell phones recording the Shia Muslim's religious ceremony events and show three injured people who were shot to death in their head.	The use of mass destruction weapons (MDW) for the repression of Shiite Muslims in the Haram month, citizen journalism, violence and brutality in the oppression of the Iranian Green Movement's activists.	Islamic militarism, Islamic system's violence and brutality in the oppression of the Iranian Green Movement's activists

The following examples show that the Iranian Green Movement activists employed digital technology for dissemination and generation of alternative forms of culture, information and meaning for representation and reconstruction of collective identity and mediated their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state media. Visual images as cultural signs can define the common shared identities of activists and long-term orientation of movements. Accordingly, visual materials are repositories of shared activist identities and cultures that are able to link different generations of protesters and different waves of contention.



1) “We are Green Movement and Hossain flagman”



2) The bullets were not fake



3) Basij militia are shooting people



4) The security car passed over martyr



**Figure 4:16:** The screen shot of a video clip on what really happened on Ashura 88, <http://www.kaleme.com>: 18 December 2014: without permission



5) The Green Movements activists treating wounded people and recording the event



6) The Green Movements activists treating wounded people and recording the event



7) Security forces cars pass over the people



8) The security forces car earlier being in the company of the security forces in the Vali Asr Street



Figure 4.16, continued

At the denotative level, Figure 4.16 comprises still images adopted from a documentary video clip on what really happened on the day of Ashura; on the tenth day of Muharram in the Islamic calendar and marks the climax of the Remembrance of Muharram (in 2009). The video clip includes several parts that show what really happened on the day of Ashura. At the first part protesters chant “we are Green Movement and Hossain flagman, at the second part protestors chant down with dictator, in the third part, they chants Allah-o Akbar, [he is] leader of the system,[he] thinks is Imam, in the fourth section, the Green Movement protestors chant “this is Hossain’s army and supporters of Mir Hossain.” The next section cites a sentence from Imam Hossain: “if you don’t have religion, at least be a free man in continue to write another sentence that these are freeman who said yes to Hussein’s freedom call on the day of Ashura. The next section deals with a peaceful rally with the motto of “Ya Hussain, Mir Hossain, do not be afraid, do not be afraid, we are all together, down with the dictator!”

Furthermore, there are pictures to show the brutally and repression of the mourning people by the security forces. When the protesters peacefully rallied toward Revolution Street, the security forces suddenly attacked them with tear gas and opened fire on them, killing some of them. Besides the ruthless violence, the cars of the security forces were seen to smash into them and one care even drove over someone who had fallen on the road, although the Islamic Republic of Iran’s commanders and security forces denied it and claimed that the car was stolen, there were photographs that showed the same car earlier being in the company of the security forces in the Vali Asr Street.

At the connotative level, the first photograph connotes the collective identity of the Iranian Green Movement’s activists who call themselves “we” on the day of Ashura. Also it connotes the dictatorship and tyranny of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s supreme leader, the Islamic system, violence and brutality, deployment of military mass

destruction weapons (MMDW) against Green Movement protestors, and falsification and distortion of reality by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s TV and security forces.

At the mythical level, Figures 4.16 could be associated with the political Islamic system of brutality, barbarism, tyranny, violence and dictatorship. Based on the twelfth Imam Shiite Islam orthodox ideologies, fundamentalism and the Islamic Republic of Iran’s official and authoritative perspective, the Islamic system is divine right, then protest against it is equal to war against God. Based on Islamic sharia code, ‘the penalty for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world; and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment. Based on this penalty code, the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state kill their opponents. In following section, three layers meaning of still images adopted from a documentary video clip on what really happened on the day of Ashura Ashorah Sabz in 2009 will be summarized in Table 4.14.

**Table 4.14:** Three layer meaning of still images adopted from a documentary video clip on what really happened on the day of Ashura Ashorah Sabz

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Myth or mythology
Still images adopted from a documentary video clip on what really happened on the day of Ashura Ashorah Sabz	Still images adopted from a documentary video clip on what really happened on the day of Ashura Ashorah Sabz	The collective identity of the Iranian Green Movement’s activists who call themselves “we” on the day of Ashura, violence and brutality, deployment of military mass destruction weapons (MMDW) against Green Movement protestors, and falsification and distortion of reality by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s TV and security forces	The political Islamic system of brutality, barbarism, tyranny, violence and dictatorship, the Islamic falsification and distortion of reality by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s TV and security forces.

The following examples show that the Iranian Green Movement activists employed digital technology for dissemination and generation of alternative forms of culture, information and meaning for representation and reconstruction of collective identity and mediated their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s state media.



1) Millions of Mousavis supporters, gathered in Tehran on 15 June 2009, protesting the election results



2) Millions of Mousavis supporters, gathered in Tehran on 15 June 2009, protesting the election results



3) The people of different social strata



4) A long shot of the protest demonstration with protesters carrying a long green colored banner



**Figure 4:17:** The Iranian Green Movement activists protesting on 15 June 2009, <http://www.kaleme.com>; 18 December 2014, without permission



5) Wounded man brought to the demonstration in a wheelchair



6) An old woman who raises her hand in a "V" sign



7) The Iranian Green Movement's protesters chanting motto



8) Mehdi Karroubi among the Iranian Green Movement's demonstrators, he is given a rose flower



Figure 4.17, continued, the Iranian Green Movement's protestors with people of different social strata



9) The Iranian Green Movement religious female activists carry Mir-Hossein Mousavi's pictures



10) Protestors in Tehran, 15 June



11) Youths climbing up on the Azadi tower to write "only Mir Hossein Mousavi's" and "Ya Hossein, Mir Hossein"



12) Protestors in Azadi Square, Azadi Tower and long green cloths



Figure 4.17, continued, Mir-Hossein Mousavi is among protestors giving a speech on 15 Jun 2009

At the denotative level, Figures 4.17 are photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who protested the official result of the presidential election on 15 June in 2009. The first, second, third and fourth photographs are long shots that show the protestors and the Azadi tower; the fifth photograph shows one wounded man brought to the demonstration in a wheelchair who is wearing green colored finger bands and showing the "V" sign while the sixth photograph shows an old woman who raises her hand in a "V" sign. The next photograph shows people of different social strata, Mehdi Karroubi among the Iranian Green Movement demonstrators, and the next photograph is a long shot of the protest demonstration with protesters carrying a long green colored banner, Mir Hossein Mousavi and his body guards among the protesters; the next picture show religious women who carry Mir Hossein Mousavi's pictures, while the next two photographs show the massive size of the demonstration, and two photographs also show two youths climbing up on the Azadi tower to write Mir Hossein Mousavi's name.

At the connotative level, the long shots connote a huge population of the Iranian Green Movement's protest and demonstration against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state election policies and those who are looking for their votes, freedom, liberty and democracy. The photographs show people of different social strata standing together for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement activists. The photo that represents the religious women who carry Mir Hossein Mousavi's pictures stands for widespread support of religious non-religious women and girls from the Iranian Green movements. Finally, the last photograph depicts the widespread and massive support of the Iranian Green Movement activists from Mir Hossein Mousavi's view.

At the mythical level, Figures 4.17 depict the pluralization, diversity, collectivity, feminism, liberalization, and democratization of the Iranian Green Movements activist's

culture, identity and politics. In spite of more than 35 years the Islamic system imposes its twelfth imam Shiite Islam ideology on Iranian society, culture and politics, the Iranian Green Movement activists asking for their votes, citizens' rights, freedom, plurality, democracy and liberty, and so on. The following example shows the logistic functions of the Internet for organization and mobilization of public demonstrations. In following section, three layers meaning of photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters on 15 Jun in 2009 will be summarized in Table 4.15

**Table 4.15:** Three layer meaning of photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters on 15 Jun in 2009

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who protested the official result of the presidential election on 15 June in 2009.	Photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who protested the official result of the presidential election on 15 June in 2009.	The demands for democratic political participation and political rights, the huge population of the Green Movement and Mir Hossein Mousavi's supporters, the photographs show people of different social strata standing for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement activist, the "V" sign stand for victory of green movement, , rose flower true love, support of religious women and girls from the Iranian Green movements	The plurality, diversity, collectivity, feminism, liberalization, and democratization of the Iranian Green Movements activist's culture, identity and politics.

Q2: "How may Internet be used by the Iranian oppositional groups as a site for organization and mobilization of public demonstrations against the Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system policy?" As has been mentioned several times, the Internet technology as network system facilitates and increases public political participation in international protests events as well as facilitating the organization of public demonstrations simultaneously in many different places. The following example shows the logistic functions of the Internet for organization and mobilization of public demonstration.



**Figure 4.18:** Mir Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi at the people invitation to join the 22 Bahman rally, <http://www.kalame.com>, 18 December 2014; without permission

At the denotative level, Figure 4.18 is the *Kalame* website news about Mir Hussein Mousavi and Karroubie accepting the people's/public's invitation to join the 22 Bahman rally. Based on the *Kalame* news website, Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi objected to the continuation of the status quo, and protested against some sentences in relation to the execution of some Iranian citizens without observing due process.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.18 connotes the execution of political opponents because of repression of the Iranian democratic movement. The Islamic Republic of Iran's judiciary system executed some political prisoners because of repression of the Iranian Green Movement. It also connotes to fear of people to prevent their attendance in the 22 Bahman rally.

At the mythical level, Figure 4.18 demythifies the execution of political opponents in the political Islamic system. Based on Surat Al-Mā'idah verse 33 penalty code, 'the penalty

for those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger and strive upon earth [to cause] corruption is none but that they be killed or crucified or that their hands and feet be cut off from opposite sides or that they be exiled from the land. That is for them a disgrace in this world; and for them in the Hereafter is a great punishment ([http://quran.com /5/33](http://quran.com/5/33)). According to this Islamic sharia principle, the Islamic Republic of Iran's authorities and officials executed Iranian critical political intellectuals and opponents. In following section, three layers meaning of visual news report on Mir Hussein Mousavi and Karroubie accepting the people's/public's invitation to join the 22 Bahman rally will be summarized in Table 4.16.

**Table 4.16:** Three layer meaning of visual news report on Mir Hussein Mousavi and Karroubie accepting the people's/public's invitation to join the 22 Bahman rally

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Visual news report on Mir Hussein Mousavi and Karroubie accepting the people's/public's invitation to join the 22 Bahman rally.	Visual news report on Mir Hussein Mousavi and Karroubie accepting the people's/public's invitation to join the 22 Bahman rally.	The continuity of the Green Movement protests, the execution of political opponents because of repression of the Iranian democratic movement, the fear of people to prevent their attendance in the 22 Bahman rally.	The execution of political opponents in the political Islamic system, the religious elimination, dismiss and silence, fear and horror.

Q3: How does the Internet become a site for Iranian oppositional groups, Internet activists, and subcultures to develop their solidarity and alliance to overcome the postmodern identity politics? The finding of the study shows that the website dose not has any external link to other websites which could be analyzed cyber balkanization and fragmentation of the communities and oppositional groups. The following example shows how dose the Internet became conduit [site] for the Iranian oppositional groups, Internet activists and subcultures to represent their solidarity and alliance to overcome the postmodern identity politics.



1) Millions of Mousavis supporters, gathered in Tehran on 15 June 2009, protesting the election results



2) Millions of Mousavis supporters, gathered in Tehran on 15 June 2009, protesting the election results



3) The Iranian Green Movement protesters with people of different social strata



4) A long shot of the protest demonstration with protesters carrying a long green colored banner



**Figure 4.19:** Collective photography of the Green Movement activists protest on 15 Jun in 2009, <http://www.kaleme.com>; 18 December 2014, without permission

At the denotative level, Figures 4.19 are photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who protest against the official result of the presidential election on 15 Jun in 2009. The first and second photographs are long shot photography's that include protestors and Azadi tower, the third photography shows long shot of protest demonstration who carry a long green color clothes, the fourth photograph belong to people of different social strata: old and young, men and women, boy and girls, religious, secular and non religious, and the last photography shows Mir Hossein Mousavi and his body gourds among the protestors who raise their hand up with cell phones and digital cameras for recording the events.

At the connotative level, the long shots connote to huge population of the Iranian Green movement's protest and demonstration against the Islamic republic of Iran's state election policies those who look for their vote, freedom, liberty and democracy. The photographs that show people of different social strata stand for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement activist. Finally, the last photography depicts the widespread and massive support of the Iranian green movement activists from Mir Hossein Mousavi view and stands for equipment of the citizen to digital technologies and digitalization of political activities.

At the mythical level, the thesis associates Figure 4.19 the pluralization, diversity, collectivity, feministic, liberalization, democratization of the Iranian Green Movements activist's culture, identity and politics. Inspire of more than thirty five years the Islamic system impose its twelve imam Shiite Islam ideology to the Iranian society, culture and politics, the Iranian Green Movement activists asking their votes, citizen rights, freedom, plurality, democracy and liberty, and so on. In following section, three layers meaning of photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters on 15 Jun in 2009 will be summarized in Table 4.17.

**Table 4.17:** Three layer meaning of photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters on 15 Jun in 2009

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who protested the official result of the presidential election on 15 June in 2009.	Photographs of the Iranian Green Movement's protesters who protested the official result of the presidential election on 15 June in 2009.	The demands for democratic political participation and political rights, the huge population of the Green Movement and Mir Hossein Mousavi's supporters, the photographs show people of different social strata standing for plurality and diversity of the Iranian Green Movement activist,	The plurality, diversity, collectivity, alliance feminism, liberalization, and democratization of the Iranian Green Movements activist's culture, identity and politics.

Q4: How does the Internet become a site for Iranian oppositional groups to express their political and cultural protest? Based on the theoretical framework of the thesis, the Internet as a tool or as contested terrain can be used by oppositional groups as a tool and platform for direct expression of political protest and struggles. Signing an online petition is one tactic that has been used by oppositional groups, excluded and oppressed groups to mediate their political and cultural struggles against dominant systems and oppressive policies. The example below shows that the Iranian Green Movement activists used the tactic for release of the Green Movement leaders. And the following section will analyze their visual online petition for release of the Green Movement leaders.



**Figure 4.20:** Signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses

At the denotative level, Figure 4.20 is the public's demand to end the illegal detention of the Companions of the Green Movement: Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, Zahra Rahnavard and Fatemeh Karroubi. As an initial step of this campaign, a petition was prepared to obtain signatures from people across the world, addressed to the following officials and international bodies. The background of the poster is gray in color. From the left side, the first photograph is that of Zahra Rahnavard; Former Chancellor of Alzahra University, who is wearing a colorful scarf, chador, and glasses; the second photograph shows Mir Hossein Mousavi Khameneh, Prime Minister of Iran (1981–1989), Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran (1981–1981), who is wearing a simple hair style, white color hair, glasses, beard and moustache and suit; while the next photograph is that of Mehdi Karroubi, the chairman of parliament from 1989 to 2004, chairman of the National Trust Party, who is wearing a white colored turban, glasses,

beard and mustache; the photograph on the extreme right is that of Fatemeh Karroubi, the wife of Mehdi Karroubi, who is wearing black chador, and glasses.

At the connotation level, Figure 4.20 connotes house arrest of the politically critical leaders and intellectuals in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic system. Also, it connotes the lack of freedom of expressions in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state so that everybody who criticizes the political system will be arrested or put under house arrest.

At the mythical level, Figure 4.20 demythifies the orthodox Shiite Islamic clergies' view of the opponent of Velayate-e-Faghih; jurist governance. Based on this Islamic sharia code, all people who are against Velayat-e-Faghih; leader of the Islamic regime must be silenced, imprisoned, executed and whose blood can be spilled. According to their view, the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities believe that there must be no pity or compassion for Velayate-e-Faghih dissenters; accordingly, they are put under house arrest, arrested, imprisoned, assassinated and even executed. In following section, three layers meaning of visual signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses will be summarized in Table 4.18.

**Table 4.18:** Three layer meaning of visual signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Myth or mythology
Poster of visual signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses	Poster visual signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses	House arrest of the politically critical leaders and intellectuals in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic system, lack of freedom of expressions in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state	The orthodox Shiite Islamic system's and Velayate-e-Faghih anti-criticism, anti-critics, opposition and scholarship features

In summary, the findings of this study demonstrate that the new information and communication technologies; small digital cameras, smart cellphones, the Internet and

the World Wide Web have been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists to promote their political projects and ends. For example, as Figure 4.12 shows, the World Wide Web has been used by the Green Movement's activists as a multimedia for promotion of their political interests and ends. The findings of the study show that the Iranian Green movement's activists mediated their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state oppressive policies. The visual semiotic analysis of the website shows that the Iranian Green Movements activists deployed digital technologies as contested terrain or as alternative media for promotion of alternative forms of information, culture, meaning for representation and reconstruction of collective identity. For instance, as Figures 4.14, 4.15, 4.16 and 4.17 demonstrates, the Iranian citizens employed digital technologies for the promotion of an alternative form of information and meaning for representation and reconstruction of their collective identity. Similar to the other websites, the website was successful in the production and dissemination of alternative news, information and knowledge against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's widespread and planned censorship. However, the reality is that the internet as contested terrain or as an alternative media has created dynamic and complex space in which excluded groups can represent and reconstruct their oppositional identity. But, another reality is that the representation of oppositional identity facilitates the recognition of oppositional identity by totalitarian states, which enable the repression of oppositional groups and the Internet activists. Consequently, the oppositional groups and subcultures avoid representing their identity on their websites and weblogs. For example, the visual semiotic analysis of the website of *Kalame* shows that the operators of the website avoid representing their identity.

The findings of the analysis show that the Internet or the website can be used by oppositional movements for organization and mobilization of public demonstrations. For instance, as Figure 4.18 shows the website has been used by the Iranian Green

Movements spiritual leaders for organization and mobilization of mass demonstrations. Moreover, the Internet as a tool or as contested terrain has been used by the oppositional groups as a platform and tool of direct expression of political protest and struggles. For example, as Figure 4.20 shows the Iranian Green Movement activists have used the Internet for direct expression of their political struggles. Of course, it should be mentioned that the website operators do not use the full potential of the Internet technology as weapon and target of direct expression of their political protests. For example, they have never used culture jamming, hactivism, and email bombing/virtual sit-in against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies.

Besides, the website does not have any link to the other oppositional group's websites, which can be interpreted as weak connection of the Green Movement activist's website to other groups and cyber balkanization of the group. The website lacks a counter program that facilitates counting the number of people who have visited the website. The website operators do not use full potential of the World Wide Web for promotion of their political struggles. While the World Wide Web as multimedia facilitates the use of a mixture of textual, visual and verbal components to give real information, but the organization does not use visual potential of the technologies for promotion of their political struggles. Furthermore, the website usually closes the comment section and viewers have no opportunity to write comments and give their views of the website news they read. However, the website criticizes Islamic system's oppressive policies but the website has never sharply criticized Islam and the Islamic system's main principles and ideologies as a source of totalitarianism and ideological system. Furthermore, the findings of the study show that the website censored the Iranian Green Movement's radical mottoes and behavior in the Qudes Day demonstration.

### 4.2.3 Green Path Movement website

Green Path Movement website is analytical news network that is organized by the Iranian religious reformist political writers and analysts. According to the Green Path Movement website, the section about us, “the Green Path Movement is a strategic, analytic and news network that is published because of promotion, strength of the Iranian reformist political writers and analysts”. Furthermore, it is proposed that “the network, until future notice, be run overseas duo to Iran’s current situation. But its approach is entirely adopted with the Iranian Green Movement aspirations and goals for the sake of the Iranian nation sovereignty in their own destiny. The media network produces and publishes content with regard to countries current possibilities, opportunities and constraints.



**Figure 4.21:** The Green Path Movement Web page titled ‘About Us’, <http://www.rahesabz.net>; 26 June 2013; copyright © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

According to the website and based on Figure 4.21, the various sections include: section about us; the Green Path Movement (Jaras: abbreviation form of Green Path Movement

in Persian language) is an Iranian network, independent, egalitarian, ethical, freed, secular, human rights defender, democratic, Islamic, anti-violence, anti-the jurisprudence absolutism rule and dictatorship and follower of realism and moderation. The details of the above 10 goals are as follows; 1) Iran's national interest is the first priority of the network. 2) The Green Path Movement, although, use the full capabilities of the international communities and civil society organizations for defense of Iranians' rights. But it puts Iran's dependency at the cornerstone of his work. The network financially depends on the citizen's gifts, and absolutely at any level/stage will not use the foreign government financial aids. 3) The Green Path Movement considers/put justice as frontispiece of the human being's social aspirations and believes in all citizens' equal rights before the law regardless of their religion, gender, political view, and privet lifestyles 4) the network necessitates observance of an ethical code in all its activities and permits achievement of their aspiration only through ethical codes. 5) The Green Path Movement has been the defender of freedom and oppose with each form of despotism especial religious despotism. The network considers/knows the absolute rule of the Jurist; "Vellayat-e-Motlaghe Faghieh"; the absolute rule of the supreme jurist as a clear example of religious despotism at the current time. 6) The network committee itself to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants concomitant. 7) The network considers democracy as the less harmful way of run/management of society. 8) The Green Path Movement believes in compassionate Islam; Rahmani Islam, promotes the values of the Qur'an, the Prophet's teachings and the Allavi's teachings; belief in the democratic presence of Muslims in the public sphere in safe competition with other social groups; oppose granting privilege or discriminative acts based on citizens religion. It believes in the separation of religious institution from state [political] institution (Secularism). 9) The Network disagrees with violence at all levels, including brutal literature, and believes in peaceful ways. 10) The

method of the Green Movement is moderation, realism, avoiding extremes and cooperation with other social groups. The above 10 goals represent and reveal the Green Path Movement's identity as: nationalist, dependent, religious, reformists, moderate, social justice, equality and human right supporters, anti-absolute rule of jurisprudence, liberal, secular, democrat and so on. Interestingly, while the majority of them are clergies, Muslims, and religious writers, they are striving for secularism, democracy, and human rights and struggle against the absolute rule of the Jurist; "Vellayat-e-Motlaghe Faghieh"; and consider it as a clear example of religious despotism at the current time. The brief review of the websites principles illustrate that the identity is social constructed, flexible, fluid and multiple, and the Iranian religious reformists writers identity transformed from religious to secular, anti religious and jurisprudence absolute rule and democrat. In the following section, their website home page will be analyzed.

Major Question: How has the Internet been used by Iranian oppositional groups and political movements for the promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran? The following example shows how the Internet has been effectively used by Iranian oppositional groups and political movements for the promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



**Figure 4.22:** The first screen shot of the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>; 26 June 2013; copyright © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

Figure 4.22 is the first screen shot of the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>; and its title name is the Green Path Movement; جنبش راه سبز with its abbreviation in Persian language; جرس. The most useful starting point of understanding the group's identity is understanding the meaning of the group's name. At the denotative level, it stands for the Iranian Green Movement supporter's identity; the Iranian Green Movement refers to a political movement that arose after the 2009 Iranian presidential election, in which protesters demanded their votes and the removal

of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from office. At the connotative level, it connotes the Green Path Movement is a strategic, analytic and news network that is publishing because of the propagation, strengthening and promotion of the Iranian Green Movement's aims by the Iranian reformist's political writers and analysts. According to the Green Path Movement; section about us the Green Path Movement is a strategic, analytic and news network that is publishing because of the propagation, strengthening and promotion of the Iranian Green Movement's aims by the Iranian reformist's political writers and analysts. Furthermore, it is proposed that "the network, until future notice, will be run overseas due to Iran's current bottlenecks. But its approach entirely adopts the Iranian Green Movement's aspirations and goals for the sake of the Iranian nation's sovereign rights in their own destiny. The media network produces and publishes content with regard to the country's current possibilities, opportunities and constraints.

As usual we start from the header of the website: at the top of the header of the website is embedded a calendar of the website: the Persian, Islamic and Gregorian calendars that show the website is updated, dynamic and active and multicultural and plural. At the top left had side of the header of the website is a link to: home, Mobil/manuscript that provides access to the latest news, about us, contact us and help us. The header of the website is dark green in color, title name, sunshine, Azadi Square Tower, demonstration, Allah-O-Akbar; green color in Iranian culture is a sign of fertility, regeneracy, life, hope, happiness, spring and youth. In Islamic culture, it stands for firmly belief in Islam, God and the Day of Resurrection. The title represents this network's identity as a supporter of reform and the Iranian Green Movement, demonstration with raised hand and the "V" sign that symbolizes victory of the Iranian Green Movement; the sun's rays and sunlight is a sign of brightness and intelligence of the Iranian Green Movement's activists and the word of Allah-O-Akbar is a sign of belief in god and Islamic ideology. Under the header of the website is a strip that offers

link navigation including: political, economic, social, cultural, visual, archive, and links. Under the strip is a space for headlining the latest news that in this case is related to disagreement of the Minister of the Interior with continue of the activities of the Iranian Teachers Association which represents an unlawful teachers union and syndicated under the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state and at the mythical level is associated with Islamic system's anti-syndicalism and unionism and repression of syndicates and unions under the Islamic system.

The main body content of the website is covered with the website rotating headline box that includes latest news headlines that in this case are related to the association of former parliamentary representatives in a message to Hassan Rouhani demanding the opening of the domestic political space, siege of the Green Movement leaders and release of political prisoners that stands for oppression of critical political activism that at the connotative level represents the oppressive domestic policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. at the mythical level it demyth the Islamic system's dictatorship and despotism, tyranny and repressive policies. At the left side of the rotating headline box is a rectangle that is titled the editorial selection that includes texts the editor selects; statement from the head of guilds of Iranian cinema houses and Sattar Beheshti's; Sattar Beheshti was an Iranian blogger who died under torture in custody; family lawyer says that they do not send a case to court which is dependent on the Islamic judiciary system and torture in the Islamic Republic of Iran's prisons. At the mythical level it demyths the Islamic Republic of Iran's brutality, cruelty and violence and its anti criticism and critics.

Other space of the main body of the website is divided into three parts or three columns which the viewer starts reading from the right. The right side is allocated a green leaf that is covered with articles from Iranian reformists such as: Mohammad Taghi Fazel

Maibody'd article on necessity of moderate discourse in religious cultural sphere; Morteza Kazemian's article on: the Green Movement from shadow to box and so on. The middle column is allocated to thoughts that include: Hassan Paya's article about: religious technology: what is it and the possibility of realization: Abdolkarim Soroush's article about: Mohammad (PBUH) narrator of messages/prophecy dreams and so on.

Next is the column on the right that is titled Ghalam; which deals with some articles such as: Mohammad Reza Ghasemei's article on: meaning and concept of democracy in our easy language, Taymaz Azimi's article about: moderation and so on. The next rectangle deals with the guests articles: Abbas Abdi's article on; dual line of Compromise and resistance; Mostafa Ezadi's article on rightists' view on Hassan Rohani; next rectangle is titled "Iran and the world" that deals with news of Iran and the world and the last rectangle titled "Citizens Write" that include, Amire Razaghi's: letter to Hassan Rohani and Ehsan Samsam's letter to people selected chief and so on.

The middle column that is titled "Dialogue" includes a website interview with some political activists, prisoners' families and Figures such as; Interview with Amir Hossein's Family, Mehdi Tajic's interview with Ali Mazroee; "I am a supporter of multiple governments." The next part is allocated to visual and vocal topics" that includes; letter of Ayatollah Tahery; to his family from exile, and motto of Mir Hossein's release is our third happiness and so on. The next part is allocated to more information such as; Amir's piece on; "Hardliners and Hassan Rouhani's government and Hamid Rasaes article; "Guardian Council thinks in this analysis" and so on, while the final part of this section deals with some historical documents like; Ayatollah Azari Ghomei's letter to the Resalat Foundation and Ayatollah Taheries' article about the 2009 election.

In the left column there is the Website Editorial touching on some important topics: a commentary on the current presidential election; Ayatollah Taheries' 50 years struggle against despotism, particularly during the eras of the despotic Pahlavi and the Khomeini regime; the Green Plan, online survey, and other events, The Green Movement's daily writing, RSS feed, Newsletter, calendar, call for cooperation, the network's need for Iranian help, financial supporters of the network and also the social network including YouTube, which a video-sharing website. The YouTube logo has two features. The first feature sees 'You' written in black whereas 'Tube' is bounded by a red outlined rectangle distinguishing it from the first one.

The company's slogan "Broadcast Yourself", can be seen below the two logo features, The use of striking colors like black, white and red reflect the popular appeal of YouTube. The red color gives the logo a bright and attractive look whereas black and white appeal to a broad spectrum of viewers. Another feature of the Editorial is Friend Feed, which is a real-time feed aggregator that consolidates the updates from social media and social networking websites, social bookmarking websites, blogs and micro-blogging updates, as well as any other type of RSS/ Atom feed, Tweeter, with a logo that has a white colored "t" on a light blue background symbolizing an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short 140-character messages called "tweets", The blue color in the Twitter logo signifies communication, reliability and commitment in service, whereas the white color stands for purity and emotion There is also Facebook: with a logo that has white on a light and dark blue background. This symbol connotes Facebook which is a very popular social networking site and the two-tone blue makes it seem shiny, new and exiting. Also included is LinkedIn. The last part is allocated to the sign-off which includes the address and logo, and at the footer are navigation links as well as copyright statement.

Q1: “How has the Internet been used by Iranian oppositional groups for the generation of alternative forms of information and culture beyond the limits of the local?” Based on theoretical framework of the Internet and oppositional movement theory, the Internet has cognitive functions for socio-political movements. The cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by the social movement’s activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members. The example below shows the role of the net for promotion of alternative information, news and meaning by social movements for the purpose of establishing a collective identity.



**Figure 4.23:** Video grab showing plainclothes security and Basij members attacking the house and office of the Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Sanei, ; <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/18295>, 10 October 2014; © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

At the denotative level, Figure 4.23 is still image that adapted from second video from five video clips on plainclothes security and Basij members in a midnight attack on the houses and offices of the Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Sanei. It should also be

mentioned that the video clip selected for this website was one of five video clips. In this video clips, Basij and plainclothes security personnel attacked the two prominent Shias, the top marja' taqlīdī or marja' dīnī and went about destroying furniture, doors, windows and damaged whatever else they could in the middle of the night.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.23 connotes widespread and systematic repression and elimination of the shi'a Mojtahe dian and marajeseocratic (marja' taqlīdī or marja' dīnī) in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state for weakening their authority in the Islamic society. It also connotes widespread and systematic repression and control of critics of Ayatollah Ali Hosseini Khamenei: the second and current Supreme Leader of Iran. In other words, the independent and critical shi'a Mojtahe dian was a serious threat to Ayatollah Khamenei's absolute power and dictatorship.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.23 demyths the concept of Velayat-e-Faghieh in the Islamic Republic of Iran's official and authoritative view about critical political activists the independent and critical shi'a Mojtahe dian. For example, Ayatollah Khamenei, the current and supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran in defining Velayet-e-Faghieh states that: Velayat-e-Faghieh is the rule of fully qualified jurisprudence in the absence of [Imam Mahdi] and it is a branch of the Imam's rule that is Prophet Muhammad's rule. Accordingly, opposition and critique of the supreme leader's rule is equal to opposition to God's prophet Mohammad and the Twelfth Imam of Shia rule, the charge for which could be prison, dismissal and repression; then, the Shia Maraje must be a supporter and follower of the Islamic Republic of Iran's state and supreme leader, otherwise, there will be dismissal, elimination and attenuation from Iran's society and culture. Therefore, based on this view, they strive to dismiss, eliminate, attenuate and oppress the Iranian independent Shia Maraj-e-taqlid authorities from the society, culture and politics. In following section, three layers meaning of video clips on

plainclothes security and Basij members in a midnight attack on the houses and offices of the Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Sanei will be summarized in Table 4.19.

**Table 4.19:** Three layer meaning of video clips on plainclothes security and Basij members in a midnight attack on the houses and offices of the Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Sanei

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Video clip on plainclothes security and Basij members in a midnight attack on the houses and offices of the Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Sanei	Video clips on plainclothes security and Basij members in a midnight attack on the houses and offices of the Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Sanei	Widespread and systematic repression and elimination of the shi'a Mojtabedian and marajeseocratic (marja' taqlidi or marja' dīnī) in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state for weakening their authority in the Islamic society	Islamic militarism, Islamic systems and policies, violence and brutality in the oppression of the Iranian student movements and the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's anti-criticism, scholastic and scholar's features.

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.



**Figure 4:24:** Video grab from Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi after he was shot to death and before his transfer to hospital, <http://www.rahesabz.net>; 10 October 2014; © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

At the denotative level, Figure 4.24 is a video clip of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi, the nephew of Mir Hossein Mousavi after he was shot and before his transfer to hospital. At the beginning of the video clip, Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi is asked where he is shot. A voice answer that he was hit in the chest and a woman point to the wounded blood spot on his chest. Somebody treats him and asks him to open his mouth and stick out his tongue to put some honey on it. The following is a transcript of the conversation that takes place: Somebody asks: Is there a nurse here? Woman: I am a nurse. I'm calling the hospital. A man: Please switch on the lights. I need some light. Someone (shouts): Sir! Do not turn his body because of the bullet. The man treating the victim: Miss, please move back a little. Women: I am a nurse. The man treating the victim: Miss, I'm going to raise his head. His head should be up. Miss, please bring a pillow or something. Close the door. The children bring out the car. Somebody: Do not pull him. Somebody: They are shooting bullets; shooting bullet on the day of Ashura. Somebody 3: Put something under his feet. Nurse: For God's sake answer the phone. The hospital is not answering the phone. (Hospital answers) This is Mir Hossein Mosavis nephew. Ali Habbibi: Please give me a pillow. Put something under my head.

The video cameraman moves out of the house and interviews some people on the street. Of course, the camera zooms on the feet of those interviewed. The one interviewed wears blue jeans. He says that they attacked Shadman Street. With a Patrol car they smashed into people. It is revealed that one person was shot; witnesses report that one of them was a child, 10 or 12 years old. The camera man turns the camera toward the crowd gathered. They are chanting: "Mir Houssein! Mir Houssein! Ya! Mir Houseein!"

The cameraman goes back inside the house and continues his job. They strive to save the victim; they call for a car to transport him to hospital, someone announces that the car is ready. Ali Mousavi Habibies wife refuses to transfer her husband to hospital. She

says that he will not go with anybody. The car is ready. She says that he is Mir Houssein Mousvis's nephew and she will not allow him, to go. Man (shouting): Don't say that! Mr.Ali should go to hospital. Cameraman shows the wounded person and zooms in on the bullet wound. They say that he should be transferred to the hospital. He is bleeding and he must go to hospital. At last they transfer him to the hospital but later it was learned that he passed away on the way to the hospital.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.24 connotes the terror faced by opponents, the politically critical and the dissenter's family and relatives inflicted by the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's security forces who oppress opponents and critics. In this case, the Islamic Republic of Iran's intelligence services secretly terrorized Mir Hossein Mousavie's nephew, because of in their efforts to repress the Iranian Green's leaders.

At the mythical level, Figure 4.24 demyths the Shia Islamic code about Islamic terrorism or murder of opponents of Velayate-e-Motlaghe-Faghih; jurist governance. Based on this Islamic sharia code, all people who are against Velayat-e-Faghih; leader of the regime must be executed and whose blood can be spilled. Based on this Islamic code, the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities believe that there must be no pity or compassion on Velayat-e-Faghih dissenters. Accordingly, they terrorize, kill, massacre, murder the Islamic Republic of Iran's critical intellectuals and opponents and their families and kinship to silence them. In following section, three layers meaning of of video clip of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi, the nephew of Mir Hossein Mousavi after he was shot and before his transfer to hospital will be summarized in Table 4.20.

**Table 4.20:** Three layer meaning of video clip of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi, the nephew of Mir Hossein Mousavi after he was shot and before his transfer to hospital

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Video clip of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi, the nephew of Mir Hossein Mousavi after he was shot and before his transfer to hospital	Video clip of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi, the nephew of Mir Hossein Mousavi after he was shot and before his transfer to hospital	The terror faced by opponents, the politically critical and the dissenter's family and relatives inflicted by the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's security forces	Twelver Imam Shia Islam code about the terror of opponent of Velayate-e-Faghih; jurist governance and political Islamic system: Twelver Imam Shia Islam terrorism, elimination and dismiss of critical political activists.

Further examples on the cognitive functions of the Internet or the World Wide Web as an alternative media for promotion of their alternative views and news are presented in the sections that follow.



**Figure 4.25:** Islamic Republic of Iran's TV program about very closeness of appearance of Imam Mahmadi, 11 October 2014 © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

At the denotative level, Figure 4.25 is the Islamic Republic of Iran's TV program about the very closeness of appearance of imam Mahmadi; imam Zaman; Shiite Muslim twelfth imam who is hidden and will appear in future with. In this video, executers read some narrative from one book; according to the narratives it is cited that Shoab-Ibn-e-

Saleh started his movement 72 months before the appearance of his movement. He was selected by Seyyed-e-Khorasani as a division commander and after pledging allegiance to imam zaman was appointed commander of the Imam Zaman division. The second executor according to the narrative includes some features of Shoaib-Ibn-e-Saleh. At least the executors claim that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is Shoaib-Ibn-Salaeh; division commander of Seyyed-e-Khorasani.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.25 connotes inducement to public opinion that Ahmadinejad is Shoaib-Ibn-e-Saleh and Ayatollah Khamenei as Imam Zaman for legitimacy of the fascist regime. It also stands for the Islamic Republic of Iran's state populism, demagoguery and superstitions.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.25 demythifies the Shiite's Twelfth Imam of Muslim ideology and belief in Mahdavidism and Mahdaviat and appearance of Imam Zaman as savior of the human world. Shiite Twelfth Imam Muslims believe that the twelfth imam has been hidden and absent, and in future will reappear. The Islamic Republic of Iran's officials and authorities strive to induce to people to believe that Ahmadi Nejad is Shoib-Ibn-e-Saleh and Khamenei is Imam Zaman for legitimization of the Islamic Republic of Iran's leaders. In following section, three layers meaning of video clip that adapted from the Islamic Republic of Iran's TV program about the very closeness of appearance of imam Mahmadi will be summarized in Table 4.21.

**Table 4.21:** Three layer meaning of video clip that adapted from the Islamic Republic of Iran's TV program about the very closeness of appearance of imam Mahmadi

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
The Islamic Republic of Iran's TV program about the very closeness of appearance of imam Mahmadi	The Islamic Republic of Iran's TV program about the very closeness of appearance of imam Mahmadi	Inducement to public opinion that Ahmadinejad is Shoaib-Ibn-e-Saleh and Ayatollah Khamenei as Imam Zaman for legitimacy of the fascist regime. It also stands for the Islamic Republic of Iran's state populism, demagoguery and superstitions.	The Shiite's Twelfth Imam of Muslim ideology and belief in Mahdavidism and Mahdaviat and appearance of Imam Zaman as savior of the human world, the Islamic Republic of Iran's state populism, demagoguery and superstitions.

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.



1) The two moral security forces point to another Iranian women Manto's short sleeves



2) The security forces van and some arrested women



3) Some of women guide to the security forces car



4) The security forces point to her slipper and toes



5) The moral security forces guide her toward the security forces van to the investigation and filling up the commitment forms



6) The moral security forces point to one Iranian appears neck and arrest her.



**Figure 4.26:** Visual report of the Moral Security Plan, <http://www.rahesabz.net>; 10 October 2014 © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

At the denotative level, Figure 4.26 is a visual report of the Moral Security Plan in which The Islamic Republic of Iran's the moral security plan police forces arrest the girls who don't like follow Islamic Republic of Iran's standard dress code. The first photograph the two moral security forces who wearing chador point to another Iranian women short sleeves who wearing scarf, Manto, trouser with her hand bag, point to the women Manto's short sleeve, the second photograph shows the security forces van and some arrested women who should fill up commitment form and may sent to jail or court, the third photography some of women guide to the security forces car, the forth photograph shows another women who wearing slipper so that his toes is appear and the security forces point to her toes, and the fifth photograph they guide her toward the security forces van to the investigation and filling up the commitment forms and the six photographs shows that the moral security forces point to one Iranian appear neck and arrest her.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.26 it connotes to compulsory of hijab and veiling for Muslim women and repression of Iranian women and youth movement and persecution of the women in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic system.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.26 demyths compulsory of hijab and patriarchies and patrimonialism of the feature of the Islamic dress code for women. Base on this Islamic code Muslim women and girls should cover their body from head to toes. Based on this Islamic code, Islamic Republic of Iran theocratic system arrest, torture and imprison some of Iranian girls who do not like follow the systems standards. In following section, three layers meaning of a visual report of the Moral Security Plan will be summarized in Table 4.22.

**Table 4.22:** Three layer meaning of a visual report of the Moral Security Plan

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Visual report of the Moral Security Plan in which The Islamic Republic of Iran's the moral security plan police forces arrest the girls who don't like follow Islamic Republic of Iran's standard dress code	Visual report of the Moral Security Plan in which The Islamic Republic of Iran's the moral security plan police forces arrest the girls who don't like follow Islamic Republic of Iran's standard dress code	Compulsory of hijab and veiling for Muslim women and repression of Iranian women and youth movement and persecution of the women in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic system.	Compulsory of hijab and patriarchies and patrimonialism of the feature of the Islamic dress code for women.

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.



**Figure 4.27:** Video clip of Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi speech on people sovereignty right in political Islamic system in Mashahd city in 2010, <http://www.rahesabz.net>, 10 October 2014 © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

At the denotative level, Figure 4.27 is a still image of video clip from Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi speech on people sovereignty right in political Islamic system in Mashahd city in 2010. In this video clip, he claims that this rule must be establish based on Islam and permission of real Wali Amare of innocent Imam that have given to jurisprudences. Without his permission the rule is usurping, based on his interpretation [I suppose Khomeini], the rule is Taghoot. This point is difference between this rule with other Republic system. What give divine legitimacy to this rule is because of it drives from Imam Zaman. Therefore, if somebody has qualification, managerial competency and entirely people acceptability, without the jurisprudence permission, he dose not right to rule to us. In this section, the video clip show one most important sentence of Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi on people right on a page; what are the people that give somebody right, unless the people themselves have such right to give somebody else. Again the video clip shows Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi sentence

about the people right that says; what are the people that give somebody right, unless, the people themselves have such right to give somebody else. The people determine and elect somebody as president whom rule/govern their countries, whatever they want they done. What right the people have that determine president who rule their country. Again what right the people have. Law or regulation is that the god says. The executive of the law or regulation is whom that whom that god has determined him or her.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.27 connotes contradiction and enmity of political Islamic state and Velayat-e-Motlaghe Faghih; jurisprudence absolute rule with the people's sovereign rights.it also stand for dictatorship and despotism political Islamic system.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.27 demyths the contradiction of the political Islam and Velayat-e-Faghih with genuine democracy and people's sovereign rights. political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih anti-democracy, the people's sovereign rights, and votes policies. Based on the Islamic Republic of Iran's official and authoritative view, the legitimacy of the political Islam derived from Imam Zaman; Shia Muslims twelfth Imam who is hidden and will appear in the future and he will give his right to the jurisprudence. Therefore, from his view, the people have no right to rule society claiming divine right and Imam Zaman right which in the absence of the Imam Zaman, is considered to be Velayat-e-Faghih. It demyth Islamic system dictatorship, despotism, anti-democratization features. In following section, three layers meaning of Video clip of Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi speech on people sovereignty right in political Islamic system in Mashahd city in 2010 will be summarized in Table 4.23.

**Table 4.23:** Three layer meaning of Video clip of Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi speech on people sovereignty right in political Islamic system in Mashahd city in 2010

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Video clip of Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi speech on people sovereignty right in political Islamic system in Mashahd city in 2010	Video clip of Mohammad Taghi Mesbah Yazdi speech on people sovereignty right in political Islamic system in Mashahd city in 2010	Contradiction and enmity of political Islamic state and Velayat-e-Motlaghe Faghih; jurisprudence absolute rule with the people's sovereign rights	The political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlaghe Faghih anti-democracy, the people's sovereign rights, and votes policies, it demyth Islamic system dictatorship, despotism, anti-democratization features.

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.

**Figure 4.28:** Abolfazl Ghadyani's published letter from Evine prison about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of velayat-e-motlaghe-faghih in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state

At the denotative level, Figure 4.28 is Abolfazl Ghadyani's publicly published letter from Evine prison about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of 'Velayat-e Motlaghe-e Faqih in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state.

Abolfazl Ghadyani; a member of Mojahedin Khalgh Organization (MKO); an imprisoned political activists and critic of the Islamic Republic of Iran's supreme leader's despotism argues that the Nasser al-Din Shah's sultanate in the name of the 'Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih has been reproduced and established. In this letter he argue that 34 years after the Islamic Revolution the ominous shadow of religious despotism has fallen onto the innocent people of the nation, and our revolution did not achieve its purpose and we have failed. Abolfazl Ghadyani in his letter wrote that “ our revolution is unsuccessful and we are defeated because of what we raised against it, which was absolute sultanate and personal ruling and now that relationship again has been reproduced and reestablished within the template of' the Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih. At that day says that shah is above of laws, and today they introduce Valieh-e-Faghih above and dominate on constitution. he also shamelessly not only violate the 1979 revolution ideals but also constitutional achievements, and he took the country to Nasser al-Din Shah's era , and with issuance of what he calls rule decree; Hokm-e-Hokomati, personally issued law and in his speech has issued be blind and be deaf.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.28 connotes the reproduction and reestablishment of an absolute despotism sultanate in the name of the Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih and religious despotism. Also it connotes a similarity of the political Islam to the former monarchy system of Iran and replacement of another monarchy regime is ruling in this country and nothing has been changed for the local people.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.28 demyths the Islamic dictatorship and despotism of the concept of the Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih; absolute rule of the supreme jurisprudence in the political Islam. It demyths the Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih and political Islamic leadership as monarchism and replacement of the political Islam with monarchism and sultanate. Based on opponents of the Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih

interpretation, Valeih-e-Faghih; the supreme leaders authority directly derived from divine right and god, and he is representative of God and the hidden Imam; imam Mahdi Shia the twelfth imam on earth. Then only has he the right to rule society. In following section, three layers meaning of Abolfazl Ghadyani's published letter from Evine prison about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of velayat-e-motlaghe-faghih in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state will be summarized in Table 4.24.

**Table 4.24:** three layer meaning Abolfazl Ghadyani's published letter from Evine prison about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of velayat-e-motlaghe-faghih in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
Abolfazl Ghadyani's published letter from Evine prison about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of velayat-e-motlaghe-faghih in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic stat	Abolfazl Ghadyani's published letter from Evine prison about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of velayat-e-motlaghe-faghih in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic stat	The reproduction and reestablishment of an absolute despotism sultanate in the name of the Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih and religious despotism.	The political Islam and the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e Faghih anti-democracy, the people's sovereign rights, and votes policies, it demyth Islamic system dictatorship, despotism, anti-democratization features.

Q2: "How can the Internet be used by the Iranian oppositional groups as a site for organization and mobilization of public demonstrations against the Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system policy?" The Internet as contested terrain has extended the multiple public spheres where public political participation can facilitate the organization and mobilization of public demonstrations. The following example shows how the Internet website has logistic functions for the Iranian oppositional groups to call people for a demonstration on Qudes day.



**Figure 4.29:** The first screenshot of the Green Path Movement website news report on Mir Hossein Mosavie’s participation in the Qudes Day demonstration, <http://www.rahesabz.net>; 1 March 2014; © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

At the denotative level, Figure 4.29 denotes the Green Path Movement’s news about Mir Hossein Mosavie’s attendance at the demonstration on Qudes Day in 2009. According to the Green Path Movement network; the Mir Hossein Mosavie offices issued a statement in response to people repeated calls for the presence of Mir Hossien Mousavi at the Qudes day demonstration and confirmed that Mr Hossein Mousavi would join the Iranian people on the Qudes universal day rally.

At the connotative level, Qudes Day connotes Imam Khomeini’s valuable remembrance and heritage. On Qudes day the libertarian world rose against occupation and organized rape. The Qudes day is a day of celebration of resistance and defense of the oppressed. As imam said; “We defend the oppressed and attack the oppressors. Indeed, who does not know that the Palestinians oppressed nations and their Qudes are symbols of oppression while the Zionist occupier regime is a symbol of repression and rape in the contemporary world. The assembly of the Imam Khomeini Line Forces invites all

Iranian people and the whole world to liberate with their informed participation and passionate attendance on Qudes day rally to celebrate this great day and condemn all forms of oppression, rape and repressions.” Furthermore, this text added that; “according to Hayat-e-now; also the coordinating Council of Reformist Front invited.” Also, at the connotative level we associate it with Iranian reformist’s opposition to governmental violation, tyranny, occupation, rape, forging and oppression and governmental terrorism and Iranian reformist resistance against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s government terrorism, occupation and violence.

At the demythical level, Figure 4.29 demyths the day in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s political culture. Based on this cultural code, Israel has occupied Palestinians lands, and then all Muslims demonstrate against this occupation. The Iranian Green Movement’s protesters also believe that the Islamic government has occupied Iran and they protest against their occupation. Also, at the demythical level it demyths the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state occupation of Iranian land. In following section, three layers meaning of the Green Path Movement website news report on Mir Hossein Mosavie’s participation in the Qudes Day demonstration will be summarized in Table 4.25.

**Table 4.25:** Three layer meaning of the Green Path Movement website news report on Mir Hossein Mosavie’s participation in the Qudes Day demonstration

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
The first screenshot of the Green Path Movement website news report on Mir Hossein Mosavie’s participation in the Qudes Day demonstration	The first screenshot of the Green Path Movement website news report on Mir Hossein Mosavie’s participation in the Qudes Day demonstration	The continuity of the Green Movement protests, Iranian reformist’s opposition to governmental violation, tyranny, occupation, rape, forging and oppression and governmental terrorism and Iranian reformist resistance against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s government terrorism, occupation and violence.	The Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state occupation of Iranian land.

The following further example shows the cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building and representing of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members.



1) Long shot of the Iranian Green Movement supporters who demonstrate against the Islamic Republic for its ambiguous policy on the Qudes day in 2009



2) The Iranian Green Movement's supporters protest on the Qudes day in 2009



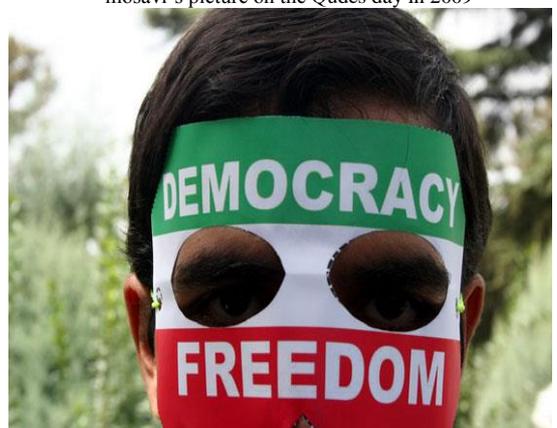
3) The Iranian Green Movement supporters protest on the Qudes day in 2009



4) The Iranian Green Movement supporters carry up mosavi's picture on the Qudes day in 2009



5) The Iranian Green Movement supporters carry a long banner on the Qudes day in 2009



7) Close up shot of the one of the Iranian Green Movement supporters wraps Iran's three-colored flag without the Islamic Republic of Iran emblem over his face and with the words "democracy" and "freedom" prominently displayed



**Figure 4.30:** Photo montage of the Iranian Green Movement supporters demonstration on Qudes day in 2009, <http://www.rahesabz.net>: 2 February 2015; © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

At the denotative level, Figures 4.30 are photographs of the Iranian Green Movement supporters who demonstrate against the Islamic Republic for its ambiguous policy on the Qudes Day in 2009. The first photograph is a long shot of the Iranian Green Movement supporters who demonstrate against the Islamic Republic for its ambiguous policy on the Qudes day in 2009. In the second and third photographs participants are seen raising green colored placards on which is written “Russia, shame on you, No Gazzah. No Lebanon. Just Iran plateau” and so on, while the fourth photograph shows the protestors carrying Mir Houssin Mousvai’s picture. In the next photograph, the Green Movement participants carry a large piece of green colored cloth. In the next photograph one of the Iranian Green Movement supporters wraps Iran’s three-colored flag without the Islamic Republic of Iran emblem over his face and with the words “democracy” and “freedom” prominently displayed. Finally, the last photographs shows protesters who carry pieces of green colored cloth, balloons and raise their hands showing the “V” sign.

At the connotation level, Figure 4.30 connotes the Iranian Green Movement's disagreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran's state foreign policy against Palestine, Lebanon and United States. Also it connotes the series of contradictions and conflicts between the Islamic Republic of Iran's opponents and proponents in Iranian society. It also connotes the Iranian Green Movement's activists' struggle and resistance against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic system of tyranny and oppression. It stands for collectivity, secularization, democratization, nationalism, and peacefulness of the Iranian Green movement's identity.

At the demythical level it demythifies the Qudes day in the Islamic Republic of Iran's political culture. Based on this cultural code, Israel has occupied Palestinians lands, and then all Muslims demonstrate against this occupation. The Iranian Green Movement's protesters also believe that Islamic government occupied Iran and they protest against their occupation. In following section, three layers meaning of the Green Path Movement website visual news report on the Iranian Green Movement activists in the Qudes Day demonstration will be summarized in Table 4.26.

**Table 4.26:** Three layer meaning of the Green Path Movement website visual news report on the Iranian Green Movement activists in the Qudes Day demonstration

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
The Green Path Movement's website news report on the Iranian Green Movement activists in the Qudes Day demonstration	The Green Path Movement website news report on the Iranian Green Movement activists in the Qudes Day demonstration	The continuity of the Green Movement protests, Iranian reformist's opposition to governmental tyranny, occupation, rape, forging and oppression and governmental terrorism and Iranian reformist resistance against the Islamic Republic of Iran's government terrorism, occupation and violence.	The Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state occupation of Iranian land.

Q3: How does the Internet become a site for Iranian oppositional groups, Internet activists, and subcultures to develop their solidarity and alliance to overcome the

postmodern identity politics? Kellner, with the emphasis on the politics of alliance and solidarity between oppositional groups and sub-cultures argues that the Internet networked system facilitates linkage between these groups for development of politics alliance and solidarity against dominant system. In Kellner's words such as networking links labor, feminist, ecological, peace and other anti-capitalist groups, provide the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics. The following example shows alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement activist's websites:



**Figure 4.31:** The first screenshot of the link page for the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net> and front page of the first screenshot of the Voice of Freedom Website Homepage; <http://www.nedayezadi.net>, copyright © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement

At the denotative level, Figure 4.31 is the first screenshot of the link page of the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net> and front page of the first screenshot of the Neday Azadi website; <http://www.nedayezadi.net>. The link page of the Green Path Movement website includes seven categories as follows; link to news agencies and news websites, foreign news websites, personal websites and weblogs, newspapers (published in Iran), cultural and application websites, radio and television, and organizations and institutions.

At the connotative level, Figure 4.31 connotes online alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement liberal democrat activists and the Iranian reformist political writers and analysts. Also, it connotes alliance and solidarity between like-minded groups.

At the mythical level it demythys the expansion of the doctrine of reformism, liberalism and democratization between both the Iranian Green Movement activists and groups. There are further examples of offline alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement's activists. In following section, three layers meaning of networked feature of the internet for development of alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement activist's websites will be summarized in Table 4.27.

**Table 4.27:** Three layer meaning of networked feature of the Internet for development of alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement activist's websites

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Mythology
The first screenshot of the link page for the Green Path Movement website; <a href="http://www.rahesabz.net">http://www.rahesabz.net</a> and front page of the first screenshot of the Voice of Freedom Website Homepage; <a href="http://www.nedayezadi.net">http://www.nedayezadi.net</a>	The first screenshot of the link page for the Green Path Movement website; <a href="http://www.rahesabz.net">http://www.rahesabz.net</a> and front page of the first screenshot of the Voice of Freedom Website Homepage; <a href="http://www.nedayezadi.net">http://www.nedayezadi.net</a>	The online alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement liberal democrat activists and the Iranian reformist political writers and analysts	The expansion of doctrine of reformism, liberalism and democratization between both the Iranian Green movement activists and groups, ideological convergence between like minded groups and ideological divergence between difference groups

Q4: “How does the Internet become site for the Iranian oppositional groups to directly express their political and cultural protest?” The following example shows the tactical function of the Internet for direct expression of political struggles.



**Figure 4.32:** Signing online petition for the release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi and their spouses, <http://www.rahesabz.net>: 2 February 2015; © All rights reserved by the Green Path Movement 2010

At the denotative level, Figure 4.32 denotes public’s demand calling for an end to the illegal detention of the Companions of the Green Movement: Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, Zahra Rahnavard and Fatemeh Karroubi. As an initial step of this campaign, a petition was prepared to obtain signatures from people across the world, addressed to the following officials and international bodies.

At the connotation level, Figure 4.32 connotes the house arrest of the political critical leaders and intellectuals in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic system. Also, it

connotes lack of freedom of expressions in Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state so that anyone who criticizes the political system will be arrested or put under house arrest.

At the mythical level, Figure 4.32 demythifies orthodox Shiite Islamic clergies’ view about the opponent of Velayate-e-Faghih; jurist governance. Based on this Islamic Shariah code, all people who are against Velayat-e-Faghih; leader of the Islamic regime must be silenced, imprisoned, executed and whose blood can be spilled. According to their view, the Islamic Republic of Iran’s officials and authorities believe that there must not be any pity or compassion for Velayat-e-Faghih dissenters; accordingly, they are put under house arrest, arrested, imprisoned, assassinated and even executed. In following section, three layers meaning of visual Signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses will be summarized in Table 4.28.

**Table 4.28:** Three layer meaning of visual Signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses

Sign	Denotative	Connotative	Myth or mythology
Poster of visual signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses	Poster of visual signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses	House arrest of the politically critical leaders and intellectuals in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic system, lack of freedom of expressions in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state	The orthodox Shiite Islamic system’s and Velayate-e-Faghih anti-criticism, anti-critics, opposition and scholarship features

In summary, the findings of this visual semiotic analysis of the website shows that the Internet as contested terrain or site of conflict can be used by the Iranian oppositional movement’s activists to promote their political projects and interests. The Iranian Green Movement’s activists launch their website and produced their alternative forms of culture, information, and knowledge for a global audience. For example, Figure 4.22 shows the Iranian Green Path Movement’s activists to launch their website and represent their culture, ideology, identity and political views. The Internet as a dynamic and complex space provides for the environment on which excluded groups and social

movement's activists can represent their culture, values and norms. The Iranian Green path movement's activists have used the space for reproduce their culture, values and norms. They allocated a space to represent their cultures and ideology and identity: about us section. According to the website; section about us; the Green Path Movement (Jaras) is Iranian network, independent, egalitarian, ethical, freedom, human rights defender, democratic, Islamic, anti-violence and follower of realism and moderation. According to the Green Path Movement website; section about us; the Green Path Movement is a strategic, analytic and news network that is published because of promotion, strength of the Iranian Green Movement by the Iranian reformist political writers and analysts.

The findings of the study show that their identity transformed from Iranian religious groups to religious, secular, democrats and liberal. In other words, the Iranian religious group's identity transformed from a fixed political Islamic system supporter to a fluid, plural and multiple identity of religious, secular, democrat, liberal and anti-Absolut power of Velayat-e-Faghih. Furthermore, the findings of this study show that the Iranian Green Path 'Movement's activists were transformed and challenged the Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system's ideology, codes, and myths. Through critical coverage of visual reports, news reports, news articles speeches and critical analysis of news and reports they reconstructed, transformed and transmitted a dominant grabs of ideological codes and myths. For example, Figure 4.23 offers video grabs of plainclothes officials and the Basij members attacking the grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Sanei houses and offices shows that the Iranian Green Movement Path movement's activists deconstruct the Islamic Republic of Iran's official and authoritative ideas and beliefs in systematic and organized dismissals, attenuation and elimination of the Shia independent and grand Ayatollah and Mojtahid's from society and system. For a further example, Figure 4.25 presents video grabs of the Islamic Republic of Iran's TV

program about intimate closeness or similarity of appearance of Ahmadinejad to Shoaib-Ibn-e-Saleh and Ayatollah Khamenei to Imam Mahmadi, which connotes inducement of public opinion that Ahmadinejad is Shoaib-Ibn-e-Saleh and Ayatollah Khamenei is Imam Zaman for legitimacy of an illegitimate fascist regime. At the demythical level it demyths the Shiite Twelfth Imam in Muslim ideology and belief in Mahdavisism and Mahdaviat and the appearance of Imam Zaman as savior of the human world.

Furthermore, as is shown in Figure 4.28, Abolfazl Ghadyani's publicly published letter from Evine prison is about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of velayat-e-motlaghe-faghih in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state shows that the Iranian Green Movement path activists transmit the dominant system code and myth on the Velayat-e-Motlagh-e-Faghih principle.

Moreover, the findings of this visual semiotic analysis demonstrate that public affordability of digital technologies has equipped the citizens with media technology which facilitates citizen journalism so that the citizens themselves play the role of journalism and record, publishing and disseminating documentary and real visual news and reports. In contrast, state media, mainstream media and conglomerate media, the alternative media of unedited texts and contents is more real and valuable. For example, Figure 4.24 presents still images from a video grab of the terror shooting of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi, the nephew of Mir Hossein Mousavi; approves the thesis argument about the role of alternative media in the hands of people to accurately; factually and truthfully represent social, cultural and political reality.

Moreover, the findings of this study show that the Internet can be used by the oppositional movement's activists for organization and mobilization of public

demonstrations. Figure 4.29, the first screenshot of the Green Path Movement website on Mir Hossein Mosavie's participation in the Qudes Day demonstration shows how the Iranian Green Movement's activists used the Internet for organization and mobilization of a mass demonstration.

Additionally, the findings of this study show that the Internet as a network system facilitates links between groups and virtual communities so that the communities and groups can connect together. Figure 4.31 shows screenshots of the link page for the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net/>; the front page of the link page of the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net> and front page of the Neday Azadi website; <http://www.nedayezadi.net> which shows the Internet facilitates links between communities and like-minded groups.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also show that the Internet can be used by oppositional movement's activists to represent and reconstruct a collective identity. In Figure 4.30 the photo montage shows the Iranian Green Movement's protesters and the Iranian Green Movement's activists representing their collective identity on their websites and webpages.

Moreover, the Internet as a tool or as contested terrain has been used by the oppositional groups as a platform and tool of direct expression of political protest and struggles. For example, as Figure 4.32 shows the Iranian Green Movement activists have used the Internet for direct expression of their political struggles.

Of course, the findings of the study show that the website, similar to other websites, does not exploit the full potential of the website for promotion of their political projects. For instance, one of the Internet functions for the oppositional movements is direct

expression of political dissents through culture jamming, signing online petitions and hacking other group's websites, which absent in this website, which can be attributed to lack of critical media literacy or democratic management style and behavior of the political groups. The findings of the study show that the website censored the Iranian Green Movement's radical mottos in the Qoudes day demonstration, however, the website well covered the Qoudes day report on video

### **4.3 Results and findings**

As has been mentioned several times in this thesis, this study assesses the opposition's deployment of the Internet by wide variety of the Iranian opposition groups and the opposition movement's activists for promotion of their own political interests and projects, and advancement of their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. Toward this end, it seeks to articulate whether and if so, how new information and communication technologies and revolutionary changes can help to oppress, subordinated and sub-cultural groups to resist a society's hegemonic culture and ideologies, and reproduce and circulate their own progressive and alternative culture, ideologies and identities, which may challenge established societies' culture and politics for an egalitarian and better world. For purposes of the thesis, it visually and semiotically analyzed the messages and meanings of their alternative media's texts, images and photographs, focusing on the implications for understanding the operation of power structure and ideological domination of society in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

#### **4.3.1 Results for the main research question**

Drawing from Kellner's (2000a, 2002b, 2005) perspective on the oppositional deployment of the Internet for promotion of political projects, it is argued that the Internet as contested terrain or as alternative media or site of political struggle can be

used by excluded and subordinated groups or oppositional movement activists to advance their political and cultural struggles. Based on Kellner's (2003b) perspective, the main research question is set. The main research question analyzes how the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movements to promote their own political interests and progress of their political and cultural struggles.

The first key finding of the thesis shows that the Internet as contested terrain or as alternative multimedia has been used by several diverse the Iranian Green Movement's activists to promote their political ends and concerns. For example, in Figure 4.1, first screen shot of the *Neday Azadi* website shows the Iranian Green Movement's activists: the Iran's Freedom Movements activists or liberal democrats using the Internet or the World Wide Web for the promotion of their political interests and aims. They have mediated their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's totalitarian state's oppressive policies. Also, in Figure 4.12 the first screen shot of the *Kalameh* website shows the Iranian Green Movement's activists using the website for the promotion and circulation of their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. For instance, as Figure 4.22 shows, the Iranian Green Movement's activists are using the Internet for the promotion of their struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's oppressive policies. These examples clearly show the Internet or the World Wide Web as "contested terrain" or "alternative multimedia" or as a site of conflict that can be used by the Iranian opposition movement's activists for the promotion of their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. Furthermore, the findings of the study make it clear that the Iranian opposition groups and opposition movement's activists have mediated and circulated their political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's oppressive policies. They have challenged the Islamic Republic of Iran's status quo of culture and politics. Actually, the Iranian Green

movements launch their websites, then, the Iranian Green movement's activists as citizen journalists record the social movement events, after that, the Iranian Green Movements activists disseminate the information and news via the internet and world audience can watch them. Therefore, in response to the main research question, it could be argued that the free, fair and democratic Internet can be used as alternative media by the oppositional movement and they can promote their cultural and political struggles against totalitarian system.

#### **4.3.2 Results for specific research question one**

To answer the main research question several specific questions were set as follows: the first specific question was "Q1: How may the Internet be used by the Iranian oppositional groups for dissemination and generation of alternative forms of information, culture, and meaning for reconstruction and representation of their collective identities against the dominant or mainstream identity? The answer is that some of the Iranian opposition groups' websites homepages and meaningful visual texts were analyzed and their result will be discussed in the following section.

The first key finding of the thesis illustrates that the rapid growth of Internet technologies as a contested terrain or alternative multimedia facilitates revolutionary knowledge and information production, which have made it possible to circumvent the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state-sanctioned media censorship and filtering. The majority of these political opposition sub-cultures have become inappropriate in mainstream dominant cultures and politics. As such, they have (re)produced oppositional cultures and novel alternative voices and practices against the dominant system's culture and politics on their website homepages. They transmit dominant system cultural codes and myths and reproduce their codes and myths so that they challenge dominant system ideological legitimacy. For example, as Figure 4.24 with its

video grabs of the shooting of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi before his transfer to hospital, which show that the Iranian Green Movement's activists record the reality of political real events and disseminate them via the Internet. They have (re)produced oppositional cultures and novel alternative voices and practices against the dominant system's culture and politics on their website homepages. They transmit dominant system cultural codes and myths and reproduce their codes and myths.

The second key finding of the thesis illustrates that the Internet as a dynamic and complex space has been used by the Iranian opposition groups and sub-cultures for the generation of alternative forms of information, culture and meaning beyond the limits of the local media. For example, as shown in Figure 4.28, Abolfazl Ghadyani's published letter from Evine prison id about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of Velayat-e-Motlagh-e-Faghieh in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state, which demonstrates that the Internet as alternative media can be used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for the production and dissemination of an alternative form of information, news, and views for their audience and activists. A further example, as Figure 4.24 with its video grabs of the shooting of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi before his transfer to hospital, which show that the Iranian Green Movement's activists record the reality of political real events and disseminate it via the Internet. In Figure 5.4, the montage of photographs of military attacks on the University of Tehran and its dormitories on 14 and 15 June 2009 is another illustration of how the Iranian Green Movement's activists have used Internet technologies for the production and dissemination of alternative information and meaning for local and global audiences. In Figure 4.15, the video grabs of the Ashorah Sabz events show that the Iranian Green Movement's activists use the digital technologies for recording, and disseminating of Ashuray Sabz news events and facts.

As result, the finding of the thesis shows that the Internet as an alternative media have been used by the Iranian social movement's actors, opposition groups, citizens and independent journalists and facilitated the production and dissemination of alternative information, knowledge and meanings. Therefore, in the context of the thesis, it can be argued that the new information and communication technologies that have been used by citizens are revolutionary, and especially the visual information that has been produces by citizens as alternative information and culture can challenge the dominant system's *status quo* of culture and politics. The information produced in the social context, represents social, political, cultural and economic reality. It should be mentioned it that however new information and communication technologies are suitable tools and instruments that can be used by excluded and oppressed groups to produce and disseminate alternative culture and information to challenge the dominant system's ideological codes and practice, the government should allow the use of the technologies. If the totalitarian government refuses let them utilize the technologies and brutally oppresses those who use the technologies, citizens would prefer not to use the technologies or self-censor their alternative media.

The cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for the building of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members. Drawing from the theoretical framework of the thesis the second specific research question is set: "Can the Internet be a new resource or how can the Internet be used by Iranian oppositional groups and subcultures for the construction and representation of collective identities against a dominant or mainstream identity?"

The third key finding of the study shows that the Internet or the Web as a dynamic and complex space can be used by the Iranian Green Movement for construction and

representation of collective identities against a dominant or mainstream identity. For example, Figure 4.7 shows that the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for representation and reconstruction of their collective identity. For instance, Figure 4.17 demonstrates that Iranian citizens employed the digital technologies for promotion of an alternative form of information and meaning for the representation and reconstruction of their collective identity. As shown in Figure 4.30 the photo montage of Iranian Green Movement protesters shows the Iranian Green Movement's activists representing their collective identity on their websites and webpages.

Therefore, the finding shows that the Internet as a complex and dynamic space has created multiple public spheres wherein excluded and oppressed groups can produce and disseminate a tremendous amount of alternative information and meaning for building their collective identity against the mainstream identity. The thesis findings show that the free and democratic Internet as contested terrain potentially is a suitable place for representation and reconstruction of an oppositional identity.

### **4.3.3 Results for specific research question two**

“How can the Internet be used by Iranian opposition groups as a site for organization and mobilization of public demonstrations against the dominant system policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran?” The Internet may enhance political participation, organization and mobilization among traditional excluded or under-represented groups and individuals in the political process. This thesis finding shows that the Internet can be used by oppositional political movements for organization and mobilization of protest activities. A typical example of the organizational function of the Internet is its widespread use by Iranian Green Movement's leaders and activists for the organization and mobilization of public demonstrations. Figure 4.8 shows the Iranian Green

Movement's activists and leaders using the website for organization and mobilization of mass demonstrations. Figure 4.29 presents the first screen shot of the Green Path Movement's website on Mir Hossein Mosavie's participation in the Qudes Day demonstration and shows the Iranian Green Movement's activists using the Internet for organization and mobilization of a mass demonstration. As a result, the findings of this study confirm that the Internet can play a significant role in organizing and conducting successful cyberprotests under the (semi) authoritarian regimes. Similar to Vegh's (2003) argument, the findings of the study illustrate that the net and the websites, on the one hand, provide the Iranian Green Movements with a cheap and fast means of communication which facilitates calling people for online and offline organization and mobilization of public demonstrations and protests. In contrast to Vegh's (2003) argument the findings of this study show that the Internet and the World Wide Web, on the other hand, facilitated the disorganization of public demonstrations by informing the Islamic Republic of Iran's security forces regarding details of the demonstration such as time and place. Consequently, it can be argued that the Internet as a tool has dual functions for organization and disorganization of public demonstrations so that both the dominant forces and struggles can use the technologies for promotion of their own political and cultural aims and projects.

#### **4.3.4 Results for specific research question three**

“How dose the Internet provide the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the postmodern identity politics?” New information and communication technologies and Internet technologies because of the networking feature through linking; mailing, chatting, provides the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that on the one hand, the Internet as contested terrain or as alternative media can be used by the opposition groups for alliance and solidarity; on the other hand, it also may increase the groups' polarization

and fragmentation into like-minded groups. For example, the link map of the Neday Azadi and the Green Path Movement websites show that the both websites link to some websites, while, the Kalame website does not have any external link to other websites. For example, as shown in Figure 4.9, there is a link between the Neday Azady website with the Iranian Green Path Movement's website. However, the study data show that there are links between this group and other groups, but, the connection is limited to like-minded groups and these groups dismiss Iranian leftists and opposition groups who also struggle against the repressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. Accordingly, it can be argued that the Internet as contested terrain or as an alternative media, on the one hand can contribute to solidarity and integration of communities and on the other hand, it can lead to fragmentation and cyberbalkanization of communities to only the like-minded groups.

Therefore, the findings of this study support some of the arguments put forth by Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (1996b) who have argued that new information and communication technologies can link geographically-separated people and help them locate interesting or compatible resources. Although these attributes have the potential to bridge gaps and unite communities, they also have the potential to fragment interaction and divide groups by leading people to spend more time on special interests and by screening out less preferred contacts. Therefore, the Internet technologies as tools can be used by the opposition groups for development of their alliance and solidarity as well as enhance fragmentation and cyberbalkanization of the communities to only like-minded groups.

#### **4.3.5 Results for specific research question four**

“How can the Internet be used as a site of direct expression of virtual struggles?” The Internet as contested terrain has been used by the Iranian opposition groups and Iranian

political activists as a weapon and target of direct expression of political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's clerical-military totalitarian system's oppressive policies. As Figure 4.11 shows, the Iranian Green Movement's activists use the website as a tool and platform for direct expression of their political struggles. For example, as Figure 4.20 shows, the Iranian Green Movement activists have used the Internet for direct expression of their political struggles. For more examples, there is Figure 4 32 featuring the signing of an online petition for the release of Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi and their spouses, which show the Iranian Green movement's activists have used the Internet for direct expression of their political struggles. It should also be mentioned that the website operators do not use the full potential of the Internet technology as a weapon and target of direct expression of their political protests. For example, they have never used culture (political) jamming, hactivism, and email bombing/virtual sit in against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. The findings of the study show that the full potential of the websites is not fully exploited for promotion of their political projects. However, the Iranian opposition groups do not use the full functions of the Internet technologies toward this end. While there are several deferent ways in which the Iranian oppositional cyberactivism can use the Net as a weapon and target of resistance against the Islamic system, they merely use some functions of the technologies toward these ends. The first and common way that the Iranian opposition groups use the Internet is the creation of alternative and protest websites. The alternative websites and weblogs and social network media mushroomed via the Iranian Internet such as; the *Neday Azadi* website; <http://www.nedayeazadi.net>, the *Kalame* website; <http://www.kalame.com>, the *Green Path Movement* website; <http://www.rahesabz.net> among many others.

#### **4.3.6 Result for research methodology**

The main purpose of the study is to explore how the Iranian Green movement and groups deployed the Internet or the web as a contested terrain or alternative media for the promotion of their own political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. For the purpose of the study, the messages and meaning of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages and visual texts analyzed, focusing on the implications for understanding the operation of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. In this thesis, the study will develop a visual semiotic analysis of computer-based communication through an electronic medium: the World Wide Web.

For the purpose of this study, Roland Barthes's visual semiotic approach is deployed for analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages and their visual texts. The visual semiotic analysis revealed that the visual semiotic analysis of political websites is more suitable method than quantitative content analysis of the oppositional group's websites. Furthermore, the visual semiotic analysis revealed that the oppositional group's alternative websites texts disclosed the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state oppressive policies in Iran's society. Moreover, the visual semiotic analysis revealed, visualized and disclosed the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's hegemonic ideology in Iran's society.

The finding of the thesis shows that alternative media activists may challenge dominant system's hegemonic culture, identity, ideology, myth and code through critical coverage of their political activities and events through their visual texts especially photography and video clips that produce and disseminate via the Internet. For example, as Figure 4.24 with its video grabs of the shooting of Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi before his transfer to hospital, which show that the Iranian Green Movement's activists record the

reality of political real events and disseminate them via the Internet. They have (re)produced oppositional cultures and novel alternative voices and practices against the dominant system's culture and politics on their website homepages. They transmit dominant system cultural codes and myths and reproduce their codes and myths.

As a result, the empirical analysis of the thesis is thus given an alternative explanatory methodology for analysis of alternative media. The finding of the thesis posits that visual semiotic analysis could be accepted as appropriate and adequate research methodology for analyzing alternative media. Similar to O'Neill (2008) argument, the thesis suggests that older semiotic approaches, while useful, are not enough in themselves. In order to be useful to Human Computer Interaction (HCI), the relevant aspects of semiotic theory must be integrated with an understanding of interactive interpretation, in such a way, as to produce a semiotics of new interactive media that is capable of articulating its specific characteristics.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be said that the Internet revolutionized public political participation and interaction with totalitarian governments so that citizens can present their culture, identity and political views. Undoubtedly, the Internet as a "contested terrain" or as an "alternative media" has created multiple public spheres where several different groups can present their culture, identity and political perspectives. The Iranian opposition movement's activists also have used the technology for promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive and tyrannical policies. The Internet generally, and the World Wide Webs particularly, mediated the excluded and opposition groups' political and cultural struggles. The several different opposition groups and subcultures have used the technologies to advance their political struggles and challenge the *status quo* of culture and politics. Therefore, it can be

argued that the Internet has several functions for the promotion of political struggles as follows: oppositional political movements and protest politics take advantage of ICTs for production and dissemination of alternative forms of culture and knowledge and meaning, representation and reconstruction of collective identity, organization and mobilization of public demonstrations, transnational networking formation, direct expression of political struggle, community formation and so on.

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## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

The main thesis of the research is that the new information and communication technologies, especially the Internet and the World Wide Webs as contested terrain or as alternative media have facilitated political and cultural struggle against oppressive policy of dominant systems and totalitarian states. The current research investigated how the Internet has been used by the Iranian oppositional groups for promotion of their own political interests and concerns. With the advance of new information and communication technologies in Iran, Iranian opposition and oppressed groups as well as mainstream groups have deployed the Internet technologies for promotion of their political and cultural struggle. Accordingly, the main question that arises is whether and if so how, these changes can enhance or help the oppressed, subordinated and sub-cultural groups resist society's hegemonic culture and ideologies, and reproduce and circulate their own progressive and alternative culture, ideologies and identities which may challenge the culture of established societies for the sake of an egalitarian and better world. Toward this end, Kellner's (1999b) critical theory and radical politics have been used for analysis of the Iranian Green Movement's websites homepages and visual texts.

### 5.2 Kellner's critical theory of technology and radical politics

As has been mentioned before in the first chapter, this study analyzes the opposition's deployment of the Internet and the World Wide Web by the Iranian political activists and political opposition groups, with an eye on Kellner's (Kahn & Kellner, 2007; Kellner, 1989) critical theory and radical democratic politics. Kellner (1999) has argued that information and communication technologies and the Internet's revolutionary

advances pose two main challenges to critical theory and radical democratic politics. According to Kellner's (1999b) approaches, critical theory based on orthodox Marxian theory with economic and technological determinism is unable to explain the new information and communication technologies revolutionary effects on social changes and political struggles in capitalism and market dominant system as well as state domination. Accordingly, he argues that it is necessary to re-theorize and reconstruct new critical theory to be able to explain these great changes. Also, from Kellner's viewpoint, the second challenge is how to utilize these technologies to promote democratization and empowerment of societies and oppressed groups. From Kellner's point of view, the important point is that the new information and communication technology must be used for the promotion of democratization and empowerment of oppressed and subcultural groups, those who are dismissed from media, culture, society and politics. Therefore, Kellner, as a third generation of critical theorists, tries to re-theorize a critical, constructive and democratic approach of new technologies and radical democratic politics.

With these ends in view, Kellner (1999b) suggests some ways to theorize the new technologies revolutionary effect on social and political transformation without falling into either economic or technological determinism perspective, as well as unwarranted optimistic and pessimistic perspectives. To make way for new critical theory, Kellner criticizes (1999b) orthodox Marxian theory for its one-dimensional perspective that claim new technologies and media as forces of production used by capital for mediatization of capitalism culture, hegemony and domination all over the globe. The prominent Orthodox Marxist theorists who have been criticized are Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) who argue that media and new technologies expand bourgeois and capitalist culture and values which promote the dominant ideology, constructing viewers as passive consumers of dominant norms.

In contrast to the orthodox Marxist's one-sided perspective, Khan and Kellner (2006) argue that technologies are tools that both groups; ruling classes and strugglers can use for promoting their own ends and interests. Neoliberals have deployed new technologies to promote capitalism culture, as well as opposition groups and movements can use technologies to promote democracy and social justice on local and global scales. From Kellner's view point, therefore, the orthodox Marxist charge technological and economic determinism because they emphasize more on new technologies and economy and ignore human being's creativity and motivation, while human beings are able to employ, reshape and reconstruct these technologies for promotion of their progressive interest and agendas. They can refunction and turn them into instruments for democratization and revolutionization of societies.

In addition, Kellner (1999) argues that critical theorists or all those who are going to theorize new technologies effect and use on radical democratic politics and societies transformation, should consider new technologies as tools or instruments that can be reconstructed, reshaped, reformed by human beings for their "self-valorization", "self-empowerment", "self-representation" and struggle for democracy and egalitarian societies.

Based on Kellner's (2001) argument, political struggle mediated by Techno-politics in the age of new technologies. From his point of view, Techno-politics is defined as use of new technologies such as computer and the Internet to advance political goals. From his perspective, politics has been mediated by the technologies, and new technologies are playing a crucial role in politics and all realms of social life.

As to whether globalization renders revolution in the classical Marxian tradition obsolete, Kellner (2001) further argues that "much significant political struggle today,

especially resistance to globalization, is mediated by techno-politics. The use of computer and information technology is becoming a normalized aspect of politics, just as the broadcasting media was some decades ago. From Kellner's perspective, deploying computer-mediated technology for techno-politics, however, has opened new terrains of political struggle for voices and groups who have been excluded from the mainstream media and thus has increased the potential for resistance and intervention by opposition groups.

Kellner (1997) argues that the new technologies revolutionarily change everything in our daily life. His theories the main argument is that the Internet as contested terrain has been used by both mainstream cultural and sub-cultural groups for the promotion of their own political interests and concerns, which contribute a progressive cultural and political struggle, and help to reproduce their alternative forms of culture and identity and intensify their political struggle and facilitate opposition political movements which seriously challenged the status quo of culture and politics.

Furthermore, Kellner (2000b) has argued that the Internet potentially helps the revitalization of multiple public spheres, which maximize public communication and interaction so that the excluded or oppressed groups as well as mainstream and dominant groups can join and reproduce their progressive and alternative reading and meaning against society's dominant cultures, represent their opposition identity and develop their alliance and solidarity.

Kahn and Kellner (2005) argue that the Internet is a complex series of reconstructive models of citizenship and new forms of political activism, even as the Internet itself reproduces a logic of capitalism and becomes co-opted by hegemonic forces. From this viewpoint, the Internet creates a virtual space and environment in which citizens and

communities can interact as tentative forms of self-determination and control from below. From their view, which follows Reingold's view, the Internet as contested terrain creates a complex and dynamic space wherein "dumb mob" citizens are transformed into "smart mob" citizens who struggle against inequality, discrimination, and injustice to gain a more direct democracy.

In contrast to postmodern "identity politics" perspective that promotes apolitical individualism, social atomized, fragmented, disintegrated, disconnected and cyber-balkanized individuals, community, and society, Kahn and Kellner (2004) attempt to promote politics of alliance and solidarity between different diverse groups and sub-cultures. From their perspective, the Internet network system facilitates linkage between diverse groups and communities that provide a basis for the development of politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitation of postmodern identity politics (Best & Kellner, 1998).

Therefore, as Khan and Kellner (2005) argue, technologies are tools that both dominant and resistance forces, can use for promoting their own ends and interests. Neoliberals, conservatives and totalitarian state powers have deployed new technologies to promote capitalist culture, as well as opposition groups and movements can use technologies to promote democracy and social justice on local and global scales. The political battles of the future may well be fought in the streets, factories, parliaments, and other sites of past conflicts, but all political struggles are now mediated by media, computer, and information technologies and increasingly will be so.

Drawing from Kellner's (1999b) perspective, accordingly, the main question of the thesis is whether and if so how, new revolutionary information and communication changes can enhance or help the oppressed, subordinated and sub-cultural groups to

resist society's hegemonic culture and ideologies, and reproduce and circulate their own progressive and alternative culture, ideologies and collective identities and solidarity which may challenge the established societies culture for an egalitarian and better world. The question has never been answered by anybody and this research is going to answer the question.

### **5.3 Discussion about the main research question**

Following Kellner's (2003a) perspective, the main research question of the thesis consists of how the Internet has been used by the Iranian Green Movements supporters for the promotion of their own political interests and concerns. In other words, how are the Iranian Green Movement activists using new technologies to advance a diversity of political struggles and movements against the oppressive policy of the Islamic republic of Iran's theocratic state? The findings of the study support some of the arguments put forth by Kellner (1999b; Douglas Kellner, 2001) regarding the deployment of the Internet by excluded and opposition grouse for the promotion of their political interests and agendas. The findings of the study show that the Iranian Green Movement's activists have been using the Internet and the web sites as an instrument of political struggle to mediate and circulate their struggle against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's totalitarian state. Instead of widespread and systematic control and repression of the Internet activists, the Iranian Green Movements activists have reconstructed, reshaped, reformed and reused the technologies for their "self-valorization", "self-empowerment", self-representation and mediation and circulation of their struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state.

Kellner's (2001) techno-politics perspective places more emphasis on the contested feature of techno-politics, while, there is some truth in his argument, but, another truth

is that techno-politics is not fair, democratic and contested terrain under totalitarian state such as the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state, because, the totalitarian state is widespread and systematically interferes in virtual sphere and brutally and ruthlessly oppress their opponents and dissents. Therefore, it can be argued that Kellner's (2001) perspective pays less attention to the totalitarian state's hegemonic use of the Internet. Therefore, the thesis argues that the Internet as alternative media can be used by the excluded groups and sub-cultures to advance their political struggles against totalitarian systems dominant and oppressive policies, but, there is a price to pay.

Additionally, Kahn and Kellner's (2004) perspective is technologically deterministic about the role of the Internet in transforming ordinary people's identity or personage from dumb mobs into smart mobs and opposition agents against dominant systems. In contrast to their perspective, the study refrains from technological determinism and argues that technology itself is unable to create opposition agents against the totalitarian states. But, opposition groups and subcultures who have access to the Internet and computer technologies can represent their opposition identity. Thus, the thesis argues that technologies are unable to create new opposition agencies, but, the technologies can be used by the opposition groups, subcultures, critical intellectuals, and political activists who have been dismissed from mainstream media and politics for the promotion of their political interests and agendas.

Let us start at the traditional heart of orthodox Marxist theories. In contrast to the orthodox Marxist's technological and economic determinism perspective (Schiller, 2000; Webster, 1999), that claimed the Internet reinforced, strengthened, and reestablished the ruling forces of totalitarian state, the findings of this study show that information and communication technologies as contested terrain or an alternative media can be used by both ruling forces and strugglers for promoting of their political

interests and ends. The finding of the study shows that instead of widespread and systematic control and censorship of the Internet, the Iranian Green Movements activists reconstructed, reshaped, reformed and reused the technologies for their “self-valorization”, “self-empowerment”, self-representation and mediated and circulated their struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic republic of Iran’s theocratic state. The thesis finding shows the Internet as a “contested terrain” or as an “alternative media” used by several diverse kinds of Iranian opposition groups and social movement activists for promotion of their own political interests and concerns. In other words, the thesis finding shows that many Iranian opposition groups from right to left have been using the Internet and Web Pages as an instrument of political struggles to mediate and circulate their struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state’s oppressive policies. For example, Figure 4.1 shows the first screen shot of the Neday Azadi website and indicating that the website can be used by the Green Movement’s activists for promotion of their political struggles. For a further example, Figure 4.12 which features the first screen shot of the *Kalame* website shows the Iranian Green Movements activists launched their own website to advance their cultural and political struggles against the tyrannical and repressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s conservative government. For more examples, see Figure 4.22, featuring the first screenshot of the *Green Path Movement* website homepage, which shows the Iranian Green movement’s activists have used the Internet as an alternative media for the promotion of their movements. Of course, it should be mentioned that these are only a very small number of the Iranian opposition groups’ websites, and are restricted to those that have been analyzed in this study. Many other similar websites exist hosted by a lot of Internet sub-cultural communities and groups who are gathered around the virtual sphere and represent their alternative forms of culture, identity and politics against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s theocratic state’s hegemonic culture and politics.

They challenge the Islamic Republic of Iran's ideological codes and myths and transmit its coded and myths and reproduce their own meaning and grammars.

In contrast to the proponents of the new information and communication technologies (Grossman, 2009; Howard et al., 2011; Michaelsen, 2011) the optimistic view claims that the Internet or new media substantially strengthens opposition movements in Iran and "Arab Springs". The findings of the study show that that the Internet has been seriously utilized by the Islamic Republic of Iran's totalitarian system for control, surveillance, and suppression of the Iranian Green Movement.

Furthermore, instead of the widespread and systematic control and suppression of the Green Movement's activists, the Internet also contributes to fragmentation and "cyberbalkanization" of communities and groups them into "like-minded" groups which may weaken the Iranian Green Movement.

In contrast to the opponents of information and communication technologies (Morozov, 2011) pessimistic outlook that claimed the Internet reinforced, strengthened, and reestablished the ruling forces of totalitarian state, while the findings of the study show that instead of widespread and systematic control and censorship of the Internet, the Iranian Green Movements activists reconstructed, reshaped, reformed and reused the technologies for their "self-valorization", "self-empowerment", self-representation and mediated and circulated their struggles against the oppressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state.

Rather different from the Habermas (1991) perspective on the structural transformation of the press from the public oriented to commercial oriented public sphere institution, the findings of the study show that the new information and communication technology

unlike the mainstream and state media make it possible to extend the environment in which the Iranian excluded groups deal with to the most important social, economic, cultural, and political issues. Thus, it can be argued that the social affordability of the new communication technologies for the excluded groups realized the independent and free and democratic media so that the opposition groups can mediate their cultural, political, social, and economic activities. They can deal with the most important social, cultural, political and economic issues on their websites.

In response to the main research question, it should be mentioned that the Internet and website as alternative Internet or as an alternative media can be used by the excluded groups for promotion of their own political projects and ends. Through the opposition deployment of the Internet and the World Wide Webs, they mediated their political struggle against dominant system ideology and produce their own meaning, thoughts and beliefs and challenge the dominant system ideological codes and myths. For example, As presented in Figure 4.20 the first screen shot of the *Kalame* website shows the Iranian Green Movements activists launch their own website for to advance their cultural and political struggles against tyrannical and repressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's totalitarian state.

In summary, as our overall result shows, it can be argued that the Internet as contested terrain, site of conflict or as alternative multimedia can be used by the Iranian opposition groups and opposition political movements for promotion of their political ends and projects. Furthermore, the study findings show that the new information and communication technologies are viable and useful tools for social-political movements in dealing with the totalitarian state's oppressive policies. They can mediate their political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system's *status quo* of culture and politics. However, there has been no political revolution

against the Islamic Republic of Iran's political structure, but, the study finding suggests that Iran is undergoing a "public political communication revolution" that is expanding prospects of the Iranian citizen's unofficial democracy. This study believes that this communication revolution is a cultural and social revolution, because the ordinary people have access to alternative culture and information which will change their political attitude and identity which may increase prospects of genuine democracy in Iran. But, it should be mentioned that the Internet as alternative media or as a site of conflict does not function for democratization on its own, but is embedded in the real life things that the Internet activists do.

Some media scholars argue that the Internet as an alternative media or as a contested terrain can be used by excluded and subordinated groups for gaining, promoting, and disseminating alternative forms of culture, information and knowledge. For example, Atton (2001) argues that alternative media is crucially about offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production to produce and disseminate their information and knowledge. The findings of the study support some of the arguments put forth by Atton (2001) argues on the role of the new media and internet activism on opposition politics. The Iranian opposition movements have used the Internet as alternative media for promotion of their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state media. Also, the Internet as contested terrain or alternative media is not so easily controlled by the Islamic Republic of Iran's government or other single interest. The free flow of information on the Iranian Internet is too overwhelming, making state control almost impossible or at least very difficult. In addition, the Internet as a networked system has limited local state control capability; and on weekends the Islamic Republic of Iran's state rules and regulations on the control on it. The findings of the study approve the Atton argument about the role of alternative media in production and dissemination of alternative

information and culture. For example, as featured in Figure 4.15 screen shot of the documentary video clips about Ashorah Sabz events in 2009; it shows the Iranian Green Movement activists use the Internet as alternative media for production and dissemination of alternative information and news against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state media.

Some observers challenge the originality and reliability of alternative information in cyberspace. They state that information in cyberspace is unreliable, because of lack of gatekeepers and obligatory checking procedures. For example, Rucht (2004) has claimed that information in cyberspace is unreliable because there are no obligatory checking procedures. However, his argument is generally true, but his reasons are inaccessible and dubious. In response to him, the study argues that the lack of gatekeepers does not necessarily relate to the reliability of information in cyberspace. However, sometimes gatekeepers may censor real information and knowledge and publish misinformation on mass media and mainstream media for manipulation of public opinion. The visual texts; photographs and video clips that are reproduced in cyberspace may represent real and reliable information and news especially the unedited visual reports those produced by citizen journalists and activists from the scene of events.

In contrast to the view of Rucht, the findings of the studies demonstrate that some unedited visual information and news produced and disseminated on the Iranian Green Movements websites are reliable, valid and real information. For typical example, Figure 4.4 is a photo montage of military a attack on the University of Tehran and its dormitories on 14 and 15 Jun 2009, depict real, reliable, and valid information and news. For example, Figure 4.16 is a video grab on what really happened on Ashura 88, and shows real and reliable information and news.

Furthermore, some semioticians also claim that media texts represent reality rather than record or reproduce reality. For instance, Chandler claims that “all media texts, however 'realistic', are representations rather than simply recordings or reproductions of reality” (Chandler, 2000). In contrast to the Chandler’s claim, the thesis could be argued that the new information and communication technologies in the hands of people facilitates recording and reproduction of reality rather than represent reality. In fact, unedited photographic images that recorded by people and published by them on virtual sphere reproduce social, political, cultural and economic reality. For example, the Iranian Green Movement activists several times recorded the events and published them on the Internet and cyberspace. In Figure 4.24 still images from video grabs from Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi; the nephew of Mir Hossein Mousavi after was shot and before he was rushed to hospital. This shows the Internet can be used by social movement activists for production and dissemination of alternative information and meaning for their members and others to build their collective identities. Figure 4.4 is a montage of photographs showing a military attack on University of Tehran, illustrating the point that ICT’s have been used by the Green Movements activists for production and dissemination of alternative information, knowledge and news.

Different from the postmodern scholar’s (Baudrillard, 1983a, 1983b; Baudrillard & Levin, 1981) perspective of mass media images that are meaningless, flat, shallow and superficial Kellner’s (2003a) perspective argues that media images are meaningful and ideological, especially the unedited, unrevised, and unaffected photographs and video clips, which are meaningful and ideological. This is similar to Barthes’s (1977) perspective that argues the photograph represents and reveals the culture and ideology of dominant systems and totalitarian states. The article argues that the alternative media photography and video clips critically depict the totalitarian state’s hegemonic culture, identity, and ideology.

Some new media and social movement scholar states: “Because of the highly temporary nature of the Internet itself, online information tends to disappear whereas information on traditional media is usually archived and accessible” (Della Porta & Mosca, 2005, p. 184). From their perspective, online information in contrast to the mass media information tends to disappear soon. Partially, it should be mentioned that their argument is correct, but, generally, their argument is incorrect, possibly because some information may disappear from some websites and weblog, while, the information will be available in another website and weblog.

Some media scholars argue that the profit motive is a factor in the choices that the Press makes in coverage of given issues. For example, Habermas (1991) argues that, “The homogenization of the news services by monopolistically organized press agencies was soon followed by the editorial homogenization of smaller papers[media] through the sharing of plates and the advent of factories producing inserts” (Habermas, 1991, pp. 185-187). The finding of the study condemns Habermas’ view on homogenization the some news service of the alternative media with the conglomerates and mainstream media. The visual semiotic analysis of the website of Kalame shows that the Iranian Green Movements activists deployed digital technologies as contested terrain or as alternative media for promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran’s mainstream media. For example, Figure 4.15 and 4.16 are series of video grabs on what really happened on Ashura 2009, showing real and reliable information and news against falsification and distortion of reality by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s TV and security forces.

Boyd (2003) argues that “Social movements can use the Internet to bypass mainstream media gatekeepers or repressive governments and communicate directly with their constituencies and the broader public” (cited in Stein, 2009, p. 750). The finding of this

thesis also shows that the new information and communication technologies, especially Internet as a contested terrain or an alternative media facilities the creation of alternative media for publication and dissemination of alternative cultures and information beyond the local mainstream and state media limitation. For example, Figure 4.1 features the first screen shot of the *Neday Azadi* website, showing the Iranian Green Movement activists using the Internet as alternative media to circumvent the Islamic Republic of Iran's mainstream media. For instance, in Figure 4.3 the screenshot of pages from the Book of crime without punishment shows that the Internet can be used by social movement activists for production and dissemination of alternative information and knowledge that is not available Iran's media and society.

Although the Internet can be particularly important under authoritarian regimes, where protest activities and independent news media are severely constrained, there are examples where the authorities have effectively blocked and suppressed activity within their own borders. For example, the websites maintained by the Iranian Green Movement activists were blocked several times and constrained by the Islamic Republic of Iran's cyber Army.

It should mentioned that the Internet technologies as alternative media or as contested terrain however make possible the production and dissemination of alternative culture and information, but, they increase the divide between the information "haves" and "have-nots". Since just 60% of Iran's populations have access to the Internet, then, 40% of their populations still have no access to the Internet, and 30% are the rural population of Iran and 10% are urban. Therefore, there is danger of a digital divide between haves and have-nots which may create a ruling knowledge elite and aid the powers of centralization.

Therefore, unlike the mass media, mainstream media, the Internet as contested terrain or alternative media is not so easily controlled by the government or other single interest. The free flow of information on the Internet is too overwhelming, making state control almost impossible or very difficult to control. In addition, the Internet as networked system limits local state control capability, and weekend state rules and regulations the control on it. The complexity and dynamics of the Internet technologies and lack of infrastructure make the Net all the more difficult to control. Moreover, the Internet makes citizens both global and local in access, in other words, they are “glocal”. These “glocal” citizens are able to have access to news, information and revolutionary culture from abroad that was previously not available in Iran. This has undermined not only government ability, but also the legitimacy of the government in controlling the free and democratic flow of alternative culture and information. Aside from misinformation that has been produced by some alternative media, when public opinion is influenced by the Internet with its alternative sources of culture and information, the idea of allowing the government to control it is rejected, either overtly by public acts of resistance or covertly through underground alternative culture and information networks using the Internet.

To summarize, a free and democratic Internet technology in the hands of people can make possible a revolution in alternative form of culture and information which might challenge the monopoly control of culture and information by the totalitarian regimes. In other words, easy access to new information and communication technologies and availability of the alternative media in the hands of people make possible production of real information and representation of reality in a country like Iran where the government controls information and news production.

Actually, the Iranian Green movements launch their websites, then, the Iranian Green movement's activists as citizen journalists record the social movement events, after that, the Iranian Green Movements activists disseminate the information and news via the internet and world audience can watch them. Therefore, in response to the main research question, it could be argued that the free, fair and democratic Internet can be used as alternative media by the oppositional movement and they can promote their cultural and political struggles against totalitarian system.

#### **5.4 Discussion on the cognitive function of the Internet in reconstruction and representation of collective identities**

The current study argues that the Internet has cognitive functions for opposition-social movements. The cognitive functions of the Internet technologies refer to the process of alternative culture and information production by social movement's activists for representation and reconstruction of a collective identity and meaning for themselves and their members. Elaborating on cognitive practices of social movements, Eyerman and Jamison (1991) define knowledge production primarily as a process by which social movements generate identities and meaning for themselves and their members (cited in Baringhorst, 2008, p. 68).

The finding of the thesis supports Kahn and Kellner's (2005) argument that the Internet as dynamic and complex space can be used by the opposition movements for production of alternative forms of information and meaning for representing and reconstructing their collective identity. For example, Figure 4.22 features the first screen shot of the *Green Path Movement* website showing the Green Path Movement activist's using the website for production of information and meaning for representation and reconstruction of their collective identity. According to the *Green Path Movement* website; section about us, the Green Path Movement consider themselves as "we who

belong to the Iranian reformist's political writers and analysts." According to the website; section about us; the Green Path Movement (Jaras) is an Iranian network, independent, egalitarian, ethical, free, human rights defender, democratic, Islamic, anti-violence and follower of realism and moderation. Finally, they represent multiple and flexible identity including Iranian, religious, reformist, secular and democrat. For another example, Figure 54.1 is a visual semiotic analysis of the first screen shot of the *Neday Azadi* website showings the Iranian Freedom Movement activists representing their identity on their websites.

Some media scholars have proposed that new information and communication technologies make social movements hard to control: that this overload of information flow complicates consensus in decision-making and reduces the ability of networks to maintain a unified, neat and collective identity. For example, Bennett (2003) has suggested that ICTs make social movements hard to control: that this increased information flow complicates decision-making and reduces the networks' ability to retain a collective identity (cited in Pickerill, 2009). The finding of the study supports the Bennett argument on the role of the Internet in information flow overload, which complicates consensus in decision-making and reduces the ability of networks to maintain a unified, neat and collective identity. A brief review of the Iranian Green Movement activist's websites will show that the construction of collective identity is difficult for the Iranian opposition groups. While ideological contradiction is fundamental and high, and the Internet highlights the ideological contradiction, then, it complicates decision-making and reduces the networks' ability to retain a collective identity. For example, the ideological contradiction between the Iranian Green Movement activists and the Iranian Secular Greens is fundamental and basic, which reduces the network ability to retain a collective identity.

Some scholars also criticize the networked individualism as a limiting factor to building collective identity. From their perspective, the widespread extension of individualism culture and expansion of individualism via network makes it potentially more difficult to generate the trust necessary for individuals to co-ordinate collective action and build collective identity. For instance: Castells (2001) has suggested that “there is a rising prominence of individualism in society, that the individual has become more important than the collective. When this is combined with ICTs the result is a networked individualism where ‘individuals build their networks, online and off-line, on the basis of their interests, values, affinities, and projects’ rather than local place-based affinity” (Castells, 2001:131).

Similar to Castells (2001) approach that argue the widespread extension of individualism culture and expansion of the individualism via network make it potentially difficult to generate the trust necessary for individuals to co-ordinate collective action and build collective identity, the finding of the study demonstrates that the Iranian Green Movement activists and groups merely look for their interests, values, beliefs, affinities and political projects, which reduces the ability of networks to maintain a unified, integrated, and collective identity. For example, the website of *Kalame* that does not have any external link to the other Iranian Green Movements websites and groups could be a typical example for networked individualism. Surprisingly, different from Castells’ (2001) approach on raising individualism in society, the finding of the study shows that there exist unity, alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement’s protestors on demonstration on 15 Jun 2009. For example, Figure 4.7 features a photo montage of the Iranian Green Movement’s protest on 15 Jun 2009 showing the Iranian Green Movement activists together representing their collective identity. Figure 4.17 features a photo montage of the Iranian Green Movement’s protestors showing the Iranian Green Movement’s activists

several times publicly demonstrating against the Islamic Republic of Iran's election policies.

In contrast, the Castells networked individualism view, Soon and Kluver (2014) concluded that in contrast to the common view of blogging as a highly narcissistic activity, their study explicates how blogging is a communal activity and the emergence of a collective identity which drives collective action. Their study revealed that “shared consciousness”, “distinctive blogging practices”, and the articulation of a common adversary contribute to the development of a collective identity. Moreover, their study shows that “identity multiplicity points to the emergence of “individualized collectiveness, which extends beyond networked individualism and is reinforced by offline participation in activism and pre-existing social ties with other activists”(Soon & Kluver, 2014, p. 500). The findings of the study support Soon and Kluver's findings on blogging and the development of collective identity that some Iranian Green Movements websites activists try to connect with the other groups. For example, in Figure 4.9 the first screenshot of the link page of the *Neday Azadi* website; <http://www.nedayezadi.net> and front page of the first screenshot of the Green Path Movement website; <http://www.rahesabz.net> shows the Iranian Green Movement's activists trying to connect to other Iranian Green Movement activists to develop a united, neat, and collective identity.

Therefore, the findings of the study show the Internet as complex and dynamic space, which has created multiple public spheres wherein excluded and oppressed groups can produce and disseminate a tremendous amount of alternative information and meaning to build their collective identity against the mainstream identity. Furthermore, the findings of the thesis show that the free and democratic Internet as a “contested terrain” or as an alternative media potentially is a suitable place for representation and

reconstruction of opposition identity. As the study findings show the Iranian opposition groups represent multiple identities against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state mainstream identity. The Iranian opposition groups represent multiple identity that is composed of several different groups such as; republican, nationalist, secular democrat, liberal democrat, socialist democrat, and so on. The findings of the study also support Douglass Kellner's theory on the role of the new information and communication technologies in representation and reconstruction of opposition identities against the mainstream identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran state. The Internet as a tool can be used by the excluded groups for self-representation and development of the collective identity.

#### **5.5 Discussion about the logistic function of the Internet as a site for organization and mobilization of public demonstration**

The Internet may enhance political participation, organization and mobilization among traditionally excluded or underrepresented groups and individuals in the political process. The logistic functions of the Internet for political protest mobilization are related to the technologies ability to bring several different and diverse kinds of groups together to oppose a dominant system and ruling forces oppressive policies at the same time and in many different places in international and national levels. Baringhorst proposed that, "Computer-mediated communication media have significantly increased the frequency and participation in transnational protest events and have enabled collective actors to organize protest rallies at the same time in many different places" (Baringhorst, 2008, p. 66). From Baringhorst's view, the Internet technology as network system facilitates and increases public political participation in international protests events and also facilitates organization of public demonstration at the same time in many different places.

Baringhorst (2008) also argues that transaction costs of protest mobilization events have been reduced by the Internet technology because of its high speed and spatial range of communication. The highly networked structure of the Internet technology also allow information and culture to be exchanged easily, cheaply, quickly and globally via virtual sphere. From his view, the Internet is an inexpensive and convenient technology so that sending messages via electronic mail is far less expensive than using the other technologies such as telephone and fax, especially when activists must communicate over long distances and reach members of the network who live in remote areas. Moreover, organizers can distribute campaign materials (posters, photographs, recordings, and the like) far more cheaply - and, of course, more rapidly and easily - than would be the case if they used the postal mail or other means to distribute physical copies of the materials. Similar to Baringhorst, Della Porta and Mosca (2005) argue that “the Internet provides social movements with a cheap and fast means of international communication which simplifies mobilization and favors highly flexible, loose organizational structures” (p. 168).

From their view, the Internet and the World Wide Web as an international network structure make possible international communication so that opposition movement’s actors can communicate together which makes for easy international political protest mobilization. The findings of the study shows that the Internet generally, the World Wide Web particularly, facilitates public political participation so that opposition groups and excluded groups can participate in political discussion and debate. For example, Figure 4.1 features the first screen shot of the *Neday Azadi* website; <http://www.nedayezadi.net> which shows the Iranian Freedom Movement as an excluded group from the Islamic Republic of Iran’s state and mainstream media and political structure, launched their website and take part in political activities and events. For instance, Figure 4.24 features the first screen shot of the *Green Path Movement*

website; <http://www.rahesabz.net> showing that the Iranian Green Path Movement activists who are dismissed from Iranian society, culture, and media has launched their website to advance their political projects and concerns. Therefore, it can be argued that the Internet or the World Wide Web inherently facilitates public political participation so that excluded and dismissed groups can participate in political discussion and debates.

Furthermore, the findings of the study illustrate that the Internet and the Web provide the Iranian Green Movements with a cheap and fast means of communication, which simplifies organization and mobilization of public demonstrations. As Baringhorst (2008) argues, Internet technology has reduced the transaction costs of protest mobilization events because of its high speed and spatial range of communication. For example, Figure 4.8 features the 13 Aban-e-Sabs poster, which shows the Iranian Freedom Movement calling people to continue the Iranian Green Movement activists' protest and demonstration on 13 Aban; student day in the Islamic Republic of Iran's calendar in 2009. For instance, Figure 4.29 features the first screenshot of the *Green Path Movement* website on Mir Hossein Mosavie's participation on Qudes Day demonstration. The Iranian Green Movements activists have used the website for calling people to join the demonstration and rally against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state's oppressive polices. Therefore, it can be argued that the Internet and the World Wide Web can be inherently used by the opposition movement for organization and mobilization of public demonstrations.

Similar to Vegh's (2003) argument, the findings of the study illustrate that the Net and the websites, on the one hand, provide the Iranian Green Movements with a cheap and fast means of communication, which facilitates calling people for online and offline organization and mobilization of public demonstrations and protests. However, different

from Vegh's (2003) argument is the finding of the study which shows that the Internet and the World Wide Web, on the other hand, facilitate the disorganization of public demonstration by informing and creating awareness among the Islamic Republic of Iran's security forces of details of the demonstration such as day, time and place. Consequently, it can be argued that the Internet as a tool has dual functions for organization and disorganization of public demonstrations so that both the dominant forces and strugglers can use the technologies for promotion of their own political and cultural aims and projects.

Moreover, the findings of the thesis confirm Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) argument on the role of the Internet as an open network tool which could closely knit a diverse range of activists, groups and social movement organizations together and coalesce the different groups in coordinated actions against the dominant system both offline, in the streets, as well as online, in cyberspace. However, while there is clearly truth in such statements, it could be argued here that the Internet in developing countries and authoritarian regimes still is a state controlled technology, and totalitarian regimes are finding several ways in which to control and counter its usage and political effects. Therefore, their view becomes technologically deterministic because they ignore totalitarian governments' intervention in monitoring, surveillance and control of the Internet network as well as their one-dimensional view because they merely deal with the positive dimension of the Internet network and ignore its negative dimension.

To sum up, protest politics takes logistic advantage of new information and communication technologies to increase public political participation and organization of protest demonstrations. The fluidity and interactivity offered by ICTs facilitate citizen engagement in organization of collective actions before and during the protest mobilization. The utility of ICTs for protest politics is particularly worthy of attention

given that social movements are one of the most popular forms of civic engagement in politics in a contemporary society. Of course, this does not mean that the Internet technology causes the increase of public political participation and organization of political demonstration. In fact, it can be argued that the Internet as contested terrain or as alternative media can be used by opposition groups and social movements for organization of public demonstration. Perhaps the most far-reaching advantage of Internet technology is its ability to reduce transaction costs. At the broadest level, the highly networked structure of the Internet allows information to be exchanged cheaply, quickly and globally. Free e-mail services are commonplace on the Internet while newsgroups and message postings are likewise available at no cost. Perhaps, more importantly, these low-cost Internet technologies offer access to a truly global network. This global network allows actors to transmit and share information throughout the world almost in real time. The networked structure of the Internet finds the quickest and most effective route for information flow. Websites from anywhere in the world takes only seconds to view while e-mails can circle the globe in an instant. The Internet therefore enables political actors to share and disseminate political information at reduced costs and gives these same actors access to a pervasive venue with global reach.

## **5.6 Discussion on the networking function of the Internet**

There are heated discussions between media scholars about the role of the Internet in integration and solidarity of communities and social movements. For example, Kahn and Kellner (2004) attempt to promote politics of alliance and solidarity between different diverse groups and sub-cultures. From their perspective, the Internet network system facilitates linkage between diverse groups and communities that provide a basis for development of politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitation of postmodern identity politics. Also, their argument is supported by other empirical work,

such as Wellman and Hampton's (1999) findings that show the Internet-mediated-communication reinforced ties with neighbors.

In contrast to Kahn and Kellner's (2004) perspective, postmodern "identity politics" perspective promotes apolitical individualism, social atomized, fragmented, disintegrated, disconnected and cyber-balkanized individual, community, and society. From their perspective the Internet is unable to create the necessary trust and strong ties that are necessary to build a sustainable network of activists (Castells, 2001; Diani, 2000). For example, Castells (2001) argues that the widespread extension of individualism culture and expansion of the individualism via network make it potentially difficult to generate the trust necessary for individuals to co-ordinate collective action and build collective identity. For instance, Charles Tilly (2004) has argued that "Net-based protest networks would not be able to generate strong organizational ties and a strong intensity of moral obligations among network members"(cited in Baringhorst, 2008, p. 71). Furthermore, Kavanaugh et al. (2005) contend that the Internet is a 'weak-tie instrument' par excellence.

Similar to Kahn and Kellner's (2004) perspective that argues the World Wide Web's networked feature facilitates a link between several diverse subcultures and groups which promote politics of alliance and solidarity between diverse groups and sub-cultures, the study data show that the Internet as networked system can be used by the opposition movement for development of their alliance and solidarity with other organizations, groups and individuals. For example, Figure 4.9 features a link between the Neday Azady website with the Iranian Green path Movement's website. However, the study data show that there is a link between this group and other groups, but, it is a connection limited to like-minded groups and these groups dismiss Iranian leftists and

opposition groups who also struggle against the repressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state.

In contrast to Kahn and Kellner's (2004) perspective that argues the World Wide Web's networked feature facilitates links between several diverse subcultures and groups which promote politics of alliance and solidarity between diverse groups and subcultures, the finding of the study show that there is no external link between the website of *Kalame* and the other Iranian Green Movements activists website which can be interpreted as weak connection of the Iranian Green Movement activist's website to other groups. The findings of the study show that the Internet technology as a tool facilitates linkage between the communities which can develop alliance and solidarity, but the community's interests and ideological contradiction do not let them develop their alliance and solidarity. For example, Figure 4.12 features the first screen shot of the *Kalame* website; <http://www.kalame.com/> showing the website does not have any external link to other Iranian Green Movement's activists and groups which indicates weak connection between the subculture and the Iranian Green Movement.

Similar to postmodern media scholars such as Castells (2001) approach that argue the widespread extension of individualism culture and expansion of the individualism via network make it potentially difficult to generate the trust necessary for individuals to co-ordinate collective action and build collective identity, the findings of the study demonstrate that some Iranian Green Movement activists and groups merely look for their own interests, values, beliefs, affinities and political projects which reduces the ability of networks to maintain a unified, integrated, and collective identity. For example, the website of *Kalame* does not have any external link to other Iranian Green Movements websites and other groups, and this is a typical example of networked individualism. Surprisingly, different from postmodern media scholars like Castells

(2001) approach on raising individualism in society, the findings of the study (see Figures 4.7 and 4.10) show that there exist online and offline unity, alliance and solidarity between the Iranian Green Movement's protestors on demonstration on 15 Jun 2009.

Therefore, it can be argued that the new information and communication technologies as a contested terrain or as an alternative media, on the one hand can contribute to solidarity and integration of communities and on the other hand, the new information and communication technologies can enhance fragmentation and cyberbalkanization of the communities to only like-minded groups. The opposition groups can reshape, reform, and reconstruct the technologies for development of their alliance and solidarity. The fragmentation and solidarity of the opposition movements depend on the opposition movement activist's objective, attitudes, motivation, interests, feelings, social aspirations, collective identity, ability, critical media literacy and so on. They can use the technologies for development of their alliance and solidarity and fragmentation and cyberbalkanization of the communities to like-minded groups

### **5.7 Discussions on the tactical function of the Internet for direct expression of political struggles**

Following the framework of the study, the thesis argues that the Internet as a site of struggle or as a tool can be used by opposition groups as a weapon and target of direct expression of political protest and struggles. Baringhorst (2008) argues that practices of civil disobedience play a significant role in the action repertoire of social movement actors. Hick and McNutt (2002) define the term electronic advocacy as "the use of high technology to influence the decision-making process, or to the use of technology in an effort to support policy-change efforts" (cited in Della Porta & Mosca, 2005, p. 175).

The typology of online and offline action repertoire that is represented here is borrowed from Van Laer and Van Aelst's (2010) model that highlights the internet functions for opposition politics. Based on their model, on the one hand, the Internet facilitates and supports (traditional) offline collective action in terms of organization, mobilization and transnationalization and, on the other hand, creates virtual modes of collective action in terms of online petitions and email bombings, virtual sit-ins to hacking the websites of large companies, organizations or governments. Their model makes a distinction between real action and virtual action. From their perspective, "first of all, there is the distinction between 'real' actions that are supported and facilitated by the Internet and 'virtual' actions that are Internet-based" (cited in Vegh, 2003). Both the 'old' repertoire, supported by the Internet and the 'new' or modified online tactics concatenate in a new 'digitalized' social movement repertoire of collective action. Second, they introduce a classic dimension that makes a distinction between tactics with low and high thresholds and show how the Internet may have lowered action related barriers. Therefore, from their view, most widely known and used forms of online protest action consist of; creation of alternative and protest websites, hactivism, culture jamming, email bombing/virtual sit in, signing online petition, organization of opposition campaigns and so on. In the following section, the opposition functions of the Internet will be discussed one by one.

The findings of the study support Van Laer and Peter Van Aelst's (2010) model on the role of the Internet as a weapon and target of direct expression of political protest and struggles. Besides their model, the first and most widely known and used forms of online protest action consist of the creation of alternative and protest websites and weblogs. As Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) argue the Internet provides social movements with alternative channels for the production of media, thereby circumventing mainstream media channels but taking advantage of the same

possibilities of the new Internet space to publish and disseminate alternative points of view about political and cultural struggles. The Iranian Green Movement activists have used the internet for creation of alternative media for promotion of their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state. For example, Figure 4.1 features the first screen shot of the *Neday Azadi* website showing the Iranian *Voice of Freedom* launched their website and mediated their political struggles for promotion of democracy and freedom. Figure 4.22 features the first screen shot of the *Green Path Movement* website showing the Iranian Green Path Movements activists have created their alternative website and mediated their political struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies.

Besides their model, the second and most widely known and used forms of online protest action consist of email bombing/virtual sit in; *E-mail-bombing* consists of sending emails to a website or a server until it overloads and gets jammed. E-mail bombing, according to (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010, p. 11) is a more destructive form of online petition, which comprises large amounts of emails sent to an email account of or to a target system, in order to pin down the targeted mailing server, demonstrating the extent of support for a specific cause. Our findings show that the Iranian opposition movement and the Green Movement activists do not use the tactic against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state websites.

Besides their model, the third and most widely known and used forms of online protest action consists of Netstrike; another form of online protest. According to Freschi (2002) netstrick has been proliferated in recent years among radical organizations as a 'virtual practice for real conflicts' through StranoNetwork.

**Hactivism**; another form of tactical function of the Internet for opposition politics is hacktivism. The findings of the study show that the Iranian opposition groups and the Iranian Green Movements activists do not use these tactics against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state media.

Besides their model, culture jamming is another function of the Internet for opposition group's resistance and struggle against established societies hegemonic culture and politics. The Iranian opposition movements do not use this tactic for resistance and struggle against established societies hegemonic culture and politics.

Besides their model, signing online petition is another form of tactical function of the internet for social movement activists to direct expression of their political struggles. The findings of the study show that some of the Iranian opposition groups and Internet activists take advantage of the Internet's facility for mass communication and use online petitions to seek political, social and cultural aims. For example, Figure 54.20 features the signing online petition for the Release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi & their Spouses; <http://www.kaleme.com/1390/05/25/klm-69446>, showing, the Iranian Green Movement's activists using the tactic for direct expression of their political struggles. Of course, it should be mentioned that the Iranian opposition groups pay less attention to these tactical functions of the internet promotion of their political struggles.

Therefore, it can be argued that the Internet as a tool or as a contested terrain can be used by opposition groups as a weapon and target of direct expression of political protest and struggles. But, the majority of the Iranian opposition groups are unable to use the full potential of the technologies for promotion of their cultural and political struggle.

## **5.8 Discussion on the research methodology**

The main purpose of the study is to explore how the Iranian Green Movement and groups deployed the Internet or the web as a contested terrain or alternative media for the promotion of their own political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. For the purpose of the study, the messages and meaning of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages and visual texts analyzed, focusing on the implications for understanding the operation of power in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. In this thesis, the study will develop a visual semiotic analysis of computer-based communication through an electronic medium: the World Wide Web.

For the purpose of this study, Roland Barthes's visual semiotic approach is deployed for analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages and their visual texts. The visual semiotic analysis revealed that the visual semiotic analysis of political websites is more suitable method than quantitative content analysis of the oppositional group's websites. Furthermore, the visual semiotic analysis revealed that the oppositional group's alternative websites texts disclosed the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state oppressive policies in Iran's society. Moreover, the visual semiotic analysis revealed, visualized and disclosed the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state hegemonic ideology in Iran's society.

Similar to Barthes's (1972, 1977) semiotic perspective that argued mass media photographs represent dominant system's hegemonic cultures and ideologies in different ways, the thesis argues that semiotics, or semiology, is a system of signs or signification that forms the content of culture and ideology of societies. In contrast to the Barthes's semiotic theory, the finding of the thesis shows that alternative media activists may challenge dominant system's hegemonic culture, identity, ideology, myth

and code through critical coverage of their political activities and events through their visual texts especially photography and video clips that produce and disseminate via the Internet.

Difference with the postmodern scholar Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 1983a, 1983b; Baudrillard & Levin, 1981) perspective who claim the mass media images are meaningless, flatness, depthlessness, superficial and simulated, similar to Kellner (2003a) perspective that argues mass media images are meaningful and ideological, the thesis argues that the alternative media photography's; especially, unedited, unrevised, and unaffected photography's and video clips are meaningful, depth and ideological.

Furthermore, similar to Aiello (2006) study that discuss how social semiotics is contributing to advancing the field of critical visual analysis, the thesis discuss that visual semiotics is also contributing to advancing the field of critical visual analysis. The findings of the study support some of the arguments put forth by Aiello (2006) regarding Aiello about the critical ends of social semiotics can benefit greatly from a closer – critical and political – reading of Barthes' *Mythologies* (1970/1990) as well as an increased concern with the role of perception in visual signification. In contrast to Aiello (2006) argument, the thesis argues that however the Barthes's semiotic theory is useful, but, it should be revised and rethorized to be suitable for the analysis of alternative media because activists may challenge dominant system's hegemonic culture, identity, ideology, myth and code through critical coverage of their political activities and events through their visual texts especially photography and video clips that produce and disseminate via the Internet.

The finding of the study supports Hassan & Van Leeuwen's (2008) argument on semiotics fits the multimodal text analysis very well. Similar to their finding, the

finding of the thesis posits that visual semiotic analysis could be accepted as appropriate and adequate research methodology for analyzing alternative media.’

Similar to Selg (2011) argument on semiotics is a fruitful complement to the theory of hegemony. The finding of the thesis shows that visual semiotic analysis of alternative media may challenge dominant system’s hegemonic culture, identity, ideology, myth and code through critical coverage of their political activities and events through their visual texts especially photography and video clips that produce and disseminate via the Internet.

Finding of the thesis support Philipps (2012) argument on research on protest events or social movements rarely employs visual analytic procedures. Similar to Philipps (2012) perspective that argue a research sample of visual protest material show how applied visual methods can increase the outcome of protest or social movement research, the thesis argue that critical visual semiotic analysis of social movements and contentious politics can increase the outcome of protest or social movement research.

Davis (2012) research that explores the way queer political groups as social movement use symbolic capital in their web presences and seeks to read semiotically how images deployed in queer Internet spaces can create and reinforce queer identities. From his perspective, the process of reinforcement queer identity takes place through the generation of heterodoxic discourses, embedded within the code system, and denotative signifying level of queer symbolisms. These discourses generate moments when radical breaks between the heteronormative power structures and actors are possible. The writer explores that how these semiotics as seen through Bourdieu’s theories are in relation with the concept of counterpublics. Similar to his study, finding of the thesis shows that social movements use symbolic capital in their websites presences and how

photographs deployed in the Iranian Green Movements websites can create and reinforce their identity.

Finding of the thesis supports Khatib (2012) argument on image centered at the heart of political struggles which replace other pictures. The visual semiotic analysis of alternative media revealed that visual culture centered at the heart of political struggles and collective resistance. For these reasons, the visual semiotics analysis will be deployed for analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's websites home pages with special attention devoted to visual texts; photography and image for deeply and fully grasp of the Iranian oppositional group's websites visual texts meaning.

Additionally, the finding of the thesis supports Nicole Doerr and Simon Teune (2013) argument on the necessity of visual analysis of social movements and protests. From their point of view, Visual analysis is the development of concepts and methods to study visual elements of the mobilization, framing, diffusion, and resonance of protest and social movements. As they argue the instead of visual turn in the humanities and cultural studies inspired a theoretical debate about the "power of images" in political conflict, few social movement scholars have adjusted their focus to the visual realm. They further argue that although it is widely acknowledged that visible manifestations are a vital part of social movements and their reception in the public sphere, analysts of social movements have relied almost entirely on text-based concepts and methods. Similarly, the thesis argues that social movements scholars should adjusted their focus to the visual semiotic analysis of social movements. that is because, the visual semiotic analysis of newsocial movements reveal and articulated dominant system hegemonic ideology and culture.

Beside, the finding of the thesis support Axel Philipps (2013) findings that shows how applied visual methods can increase the outcome of protest or social movement research and how visual analysis provides extra information for supporting or rejecting interpretations, thus demonstrating that visual methods are an important tool in the triangulation of empirical methods.

Furthermore, the finding of the thesis supports Bouzida (2014) argument that Media studies need a new spirit like the semiological method from the Barthesian perspective in the qualitative analysis level to go beyond the text or the image which is open to an infinite number of interpretations. As Bouzida (2014) argues Barthes works show new semiotics doctrine that allowed analyzing the signs system in media to prove how even nonverbal communications give connotative meanings. From Bouzida point of view, Roland Barthes approach is highly applied in media studies that concentrate upon semiological analysis of such varied media domains as advertising, cinema, films, video clips, and caricature. As Bouzida (2014) state “the influence of Barthes works turned semiotists in communication and information sciences to study the different media images in order to investigate the symbolic interaction of verbal and nonverbal signs applying semiology as a qualitative method that viewed these signs as a text communicates significant meanings by rereading, giving interpretations and connotations to these media signs broader than its primary sense through frequent associations” (p. 1001). In continue, the author argues that Barthes made great contribution in this field i-e the textual image analysis in order to extract its connotations and the mediated significance which is accordingly based on functional order of culture and ideology.

The finding of the study support Megan Strom’s (2015) studies that examines the visual representation of ideologies in 15 news photographs published in Spanish-language

print media in the Midwest of the USA with the goals of understanding how ideologies are expressed visually in a culture that has received little treatment in the previous literature and of determining the potential for these photographs to challenge the negative semiotic treatment of Latin@ immigrants in the USA. Similar to Strom's (2015) finding, the findings of the study shows that alternative media that has been created by a socially subordinated group can use photojournalism to represent images that challenge the hegemonic structure and, ultimately, promote a more positive image of excluded and oppositional groups via the Internet and the web.

As a result, the empirical analysis of the thesis is thus given an alternative explanatory methodology for analysis of alternative media. The finding of the thesis posits that visual semiotic analysis could be accepted as appropriate and adequate research methodology for analyzing alternative media. Similar to O'Neill (2008) argument, the thesis suggests that older semiotic approaches, while useful, are not enough in themselves. In order to be useful to Human Computer Interaction (HCI), the relevant aspects of semiotic theory must be integrated with an understanding of interactive interpretation, in such a way, as to produce a semiotics of new interactive media that is capable of articulating its specific characteristics.

Therefore, it seems semiotic/visual semiotic analysis is a suitable method for analysis of alternative media cultural studies. As O'Neill (2005) argues the Internet is revolutionary transforming our world by providing mediating and communicating opportunity. Arguably, these transformations in media result in transformations of the familiar signifying systems that surround us. Thus, a semiotics of new media must be explored in order to understand how we interact with these new media sign systems. Third, to fully grasp the meaning of the Iranian oppositional group's websites, images, signs, and symbols suggests that Barthes's visual semiotic analysis is the proper method because

of its emphasis on the meaning of media messages. Barthes's semiotic analysis model is a mixed system in which different kinds of matters are involved (sound and image, objects and writing, etc.), and, because websites as multimedia use a mixture of sounds, images, video, and written text for promotion of information, the Barthes's semiotics model is preferred. The visual semiotic analysis of the Iranian oppositional group's websites is the appropriate method to represent cultural meanings and social reality. The visual semiotic analysis of the oppositional group's websites home pages and materials will help us to understand the political Islamic system of culture and ideology. Although visual images and photography address cultural meaning and power, the visual semiotics analysis of the websites images and photography can address the cultural meaning and power relation in the Islamic system. Consequently, the study argue that the media semiotics and especially visual semiotic analysis can be a very useful method or tool in textual analysis in terms of uncovering the hidden meaning of media texts. Then it can be used the principle of the semiotics to analyze the alternative media texts

## **5.9 Conclusion**

In summary, there are some main conclusions to be drawn from the above discussion. The Internet and the World Wide Web are socially affordable technologies, then, they can be used by the opposition movements for promotion of their political and cultural struggles. As findings of this study demonstrate, in spite of widespread and systematic control of the Internet, the Iranian Green Movement activists have used the technologies to advance their political struggles. Additionally, the Internet technologies mediated the Iranian opposition movement's political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. Furthermore, the Internet or the World Wide Webs are multifaceted technologies where information, knowledge and culture are easily and quickly distributed. The web publishing is a simple and inexpensive solution

for disseminating alternative information, knowledge, and culture so that opposition movement activists can produce alternative information, knowledge and meaning for building of their collective identity. Moreover, the Internet and the World Wide Web allow social movement organizations to form their own message and identity rather than relying on the mass media. In addition, the Internet technologies as alternative media can be used as powerful and effective tools for the emergence and maintenance of the opposition movements. However, the Internet as alternative media or site of conflict can be used by the Iranian opposition movements as well as it can be used by the state for surveillance and oppression of the Iranian opposition movements. In other words, the Internet as alternative media tool provides dual function for emergence and maintenance of opposition movements and the oppression of the opposition movements.

In spite of the censorship, control and filtering and blocking of the Internet, findings of the study demonstrated that the World Wide Web has been used as a media by the Iranian opposition movements. The Internet, on the one hand, helps to diffuse the ideological message of the Iranian opposition movements, the Internet, on the other hand, highlighted the ideological contradiction between the Iranian opposition movements. In spite of widespread and systematic censorship, filtering, blocking and brutal oppression of the Internet activists under the Islamic state in Iran, the Internet has been used by the Iranian opposition movement activists and it challenges the dominant system's *status quo* of culture and politics. Moreover, the Internet technologies broaden the reach of the social movement to an international audience that can also be an important catalyst for change.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter is presented in five sections; a summary of the thesis, and findings, discussion, conclusions, implications, and recommendation for future study. As mentioned earlier in the first chapter, the main argument of the thesis is that the new information and communication technologies, especially, the Internet and particularly the World Wide Web as contested terrain or as alternative media can be used by the excluded groups and opposition movement for promotion of their political and cultural struggles. This thesis has endeavored to explain how the new information and communication technologies have been employed by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for promotion of their own political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's oppressive policy. With the increased growth of new information and communication technologies in Iran, the Iranian opposition and oppressed groups as well as mainstream groups, have deployed the Internet and websites for promotion of their own political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state. Accordingly, the main question that arises is whether and if so how, these changes can enhance or help the opposition, oppressed, subordinated and sub-cultural groups to resist society's hegemonic culture and ideologies, and reproduce and circulate their own progressive and alternative culture, ideologies and identities, which may be to challenge the established societies culture and politics for a democratic, egalitarian and better world.

### **6.2 Summary of the study**

New information and communication technologies (NICTs), especially, the Internet has facilitated political and cultural struggles so that excluded groups promote their political

and cultural struggles against the dominant system of hegemonic culture and politics and challenge the status quo of culture and politics. The study was conceived to investigate how the Internet or the Web can be used by the Iranian opposition movements for promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. To answer the question, a revised form of Kellner's (1999b) Perspective Critical Theory of technology and radical politics was deployed as the theoretical framework of the thesis. From his perspective, critical theory based on orthodox Marxist theory with economic and technological determinism was unable to explain the new information and communication technologies revolutionary effects on social changes and political struggles in capitalism and a market dominant system as well as state domination.

In contrast to the orthodox Marxist one-dimensional perspective, Kahn and Kellner (2007) argue that technologies are tools that both groups, ruling class and strugglers can use for promoting their political and cultural ends and interests. Neoliberals have deployed the new technologies to promote capitalism culture, as well as oppositional groups and movements which can use these technologies to promote democracy and social justice on local and global scales. Kellner (1999b) believes that the Internet technologies as tools or instruments can be reconstructed, reshaped, and reformed by human beings for their "self valorization", "self-empowerment", and "self-representation" to promote their own political progressive interests and agendas.

Kellner (2001) further argues that much significant political struggle today, especially resistance to globalization, is mediated by techno-politics. The use of computer and information technology is becoming a normalized aspect of politics, just as the broadcasting media was some decades ago. Furthermore, Kellner also argues that deploying computer-mediated technology for techno-politics, however, opens new

terrains of political struggle for voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media and thus increases the potential for resistance and intervention by opposition groups.

Kellner (1997, 2000b) has also argued that the Internet potentially helps the revitalization of multiple public spheres which maximize public communication and interaction so that the excluded or oppressed groups as well as mainstream and dominated groups can join and reproduce their progressive and alternative reading and meaning against societies' dominant cultures, represent their opposition identity and develop their alliance and solidarity.

Drawing from Kellner's (2003a) perspective, the main argument of the study is that the Internet as contested terrain has been used by both Iranian mainstream cultural and sub-cultural groups for the promotion of their own political interests and concerns, which contribute a progressive cultural and political struggle, and help to reproduce their alternative form of cultures and identities and intensify their political struggle, facilitating oppositional political movements which seriously challenge the status quo of culture and politics.

Kahn and Kellner (2005) maintain that the Internet is a complex series of reconstructive models of citizenship and new forms of political activism, even as the Internet itself reproduces a logic of capitalism and becomes co-opted by hegemonic forces. From this viewpoint, the Internet creates a virtual space and environment in which citizens and communities can interact as tentative forms of self-determination and control from below. From their view, which follows Reingold's view, the Internet as contested terrain creates a complex and dynamic space wherein dumb mob citizens are transformed into smart mob citizens who struggle against inequality, discrimination, and injustice to gain a more direct democracy.

In contrast to postmodern's "identity politics" perspective that promotes apolitical individualism, social atomized, fragmented, disintegrated, disconnected and cyber-balkanized individuals, community, and society, Kahn and Kellner (2004) attempt to promote the politics of alliance and solidarity between diverse groups and sub-cultures. From their perspective, the Internet network system facilitate linkage between divers groups and communities that provide basis for development of politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics (Best & Kellner, 1998).

Therefore, as Khan and Kellner (2005) mention, technologies are tools that both dominant and resistant forces can use for promoting their respective ends and interests. Neoliberals, conservatives and totalitarian state powers have deployed new technologies to promote capitalist culture, as well as oppositional groups and movements, which can use technologies to promote democracy and social justice on local and global scales. The political battles of the future may well be fought in the streets, factories, parliaments, and other sites of past conflicts, but all political struggles are now mediated by media, computer, and information technologies and increasingly will be so.

Therefore, constituting a coherent framework for understanding the deployment of the Internet by excluded, oppressed and opposition groups in authoritarian societies, Kellner's critical theory of technology and radical democratic politics has been deployed as a framework for analysis of Iranian opposition group's websites and homepages. Kahn and Kellner (2004) summarize the diverse roles that the Internet plays in the dynamics of opposition political movements as follows: organization and mobilization of public demonstration, production and dissemination of alternative forms of information, culture and meaning for representation and reconstruction of opposition

identity, developing networks of solidarity and alliance and direct expression of political protests.

A qualitative method approach, semiotic analysis, was conducted to identify stylistic and substantive meaning of the Iranian opposition group's websites, homepages and texts. Toward this end, the current research applied Roland Barthes's visual semiotic model to analyze the Iranian opposition group's websites, homepages, and texts meanings, codes, and myths. According to Chandler (2000) Roland Barthes' Semiotics perspective has three levels of signification, which consist of; the first (denotative) order (or level) of signification, which is seen as primarily representational and relatively self-contained. The second (connotative) order of signification reflects 'expressive' values which are attached to a sign. In the third (mythological or ideological) order of signification, the sign reflects major culturally-variable concepts underpinning a particular worldview - such as Twelve Imams Shiite Islamic system extremism, terrorism, masculinity, brutality and violence, Twelve Imams Shiite Islamic system and clergies sultanism, Twelve Imams Shiite Islamic, Twelve Imams Shiite Islamic totalities, Islamic patriarchies', Twelve Imams Shiite Islamic system anti-democracy, Twelve Imams Shiite Islamic system militarism, Twelve Imams Shiite Islamic system corruption and so on.

### **6.3 Summary of findings**

Based on the theatrical framework of the study, the key findings that emanated from the study are as follows: the first key finding of the thesis shows that the Internet as an alternative multimedia has been used by many of the Iranian opposition groups and the Iranian Green Movement's activists for promotion of their political ends and concerns. They mediated their political and cultural struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's oppressive policies. For example, Figure 4.1 features the first screen

shot of the *Neday Azadi* website, showing the Iranian Green Movement activists launching their website to promote their cultural and political struggles. For another example, Figure 4.12 shows the World Wide Web has been used by the Green Movements activists as a multimedia platform for the promotion of their political interests and ends. Therefore, the first key finding of the study demonstrated the Internet or the World Wide Web as an alternative media has been used by the Iranian opposition's political sub-cultures. The majority of these opposition sub-cultures mediated their political and cultural struggles to advance their political projects and concerns.

The second key finding of the thesis illustrates that the Internet as a dynamic and complex space has been used by the Iranian opposition groups and sub-cultures for the generation of alternative forms of information, culture and meaning beyond the limits of the local media. For example, Figure 4.28 features Abolfazl Ghadyani's published letter from the notorious Evine prison about the reproduction and establishment of the sultanate in the name of Velayat-e-Motlaghe-Faghieh in the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state, thus demonstrating the Internet as an alternative media can be used by the Iranian Green Movement activists for production and dissemination of an alternative form of information, news, views for their audience and activists. In another example, Figure 4.24 features video grabs from the video clip on Sayed Ali Habibi Mousavi after he was shot and before he was sent to hospital. These video grabs (and the video clip) show that the Iranian Green Movement activists record the real political events and disseminate them via the Internet. Figure 4.4 is a montage of photographs detailing the military attack of University of Tehran and its dormitories on 14 and 15 June 2009, which illustrates that the Iranian Green Movement's activists have used the Internet technologies for production and dissemination of alternative information and meaning for local and global audiences.

Therefore, the second key finding of the study illustrates that the fast growth of Internet technologies as a contested terrain or alternative multimedia facilitates revolutionary knowledge and information production that circumvents the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state-sanctioned censorship.

The third key finding of the study shows the Internet or the Web as a dynamic and complex space that can be used by the Iranian Green Movement for construction and representation of collective identities against dominant or mainstream identity. For example, Figure 4.7 features the Internet being used by the Iranian Green Movement's activists for representation and reconstruction of their collective identity. For instance, as Figure 4.6 demonstrates, the Iranian citizens employed the digital technologies for promotion of alternative forms of information and meaning for representation and reconstruction of their collective identity. Figure 4.28 reveals a montage of photographs of Iranian Green Movement protesters representing their collective identity on their websites and webpages. The findings of the study support the notion of the Internet as a tool that can be used by the opposition movements for production of alternative forms of information and meaning for building their collective identity.

The fourth finding the current study shows that the Internet has been used by the Iranian opposition groups and sub-cultures for organization and mobilization of public demonstrations against the Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant system policy in the Iranian Green Movement's protests. The public affordability of the Internet potentially maximizes public political communications and interactions so that it facilitates organization of their political activities at the same time in many different places. For example, Figure 4.8 presents the 13 Aban-e-Sabs poster in which the Iranian Green Movement activists call people to continue their protest on 13 Aban; student day in the Islamic Republic of Iran's calendar, which shows the Iranian Green Movement activists

calling people for a demonstration. Another example is Figure 4.29 which features the first screenshot of the *Green Path Movement* website announcing the participation of Mir Hossein Mosavie in the Qudes Day demonstration.

Therefore, the findings of the study illustrate that the Net and the websites, on the one hand, provide the Iranian Green Movements with a cheap and fast means of communication which simplifies organization and mobilization of public demonstrations and protests, and, the Internet and the World Wide Web, on the other hand, facilitating the disorganization of public demonstration by the Islamic Republic of Iran's security forces. As soon as, the Iranian Green movement activists called for a public demonstration, the Islamic Republic of Iran's security forces were also able to obtain the same information pertaining to the day, time and place of the Qudes Day rally and thus were in a position to try and disorganize it. Thus, it can be argued that the Internet as a tool has dual functions for organization and disorganization of public demonstration so that both the dominant forces and strugglers can use the technologies for promotion of their respective political and cultural aims and projects.

The fifth finding of the study is that the Internet provides the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to overcome the postmodern identity politics. The finding of the thesis demonstrates that on the one hand, the Internet as contested terrain or as alternative media can be used by the opposition groups for alliance and solidarity, on the other hand, it also may increase the groups' polarization and fragmentation into like-minded groups. For example, the link map of the *Neday Azadi* and the *Green Path Movement* websites show that the both websites link to some other websites, while, the *Kalame* website does not have any external link to any other website. For example, Figure 4.9 shows there is a link between the *Neday Azady* website with the Iranian Green Path movement's website. However, the study data show that there is a link

between this group and other groups, but, its connection is limited to like-minded groups and these groups are the dismissed, Iranian leftists, and opposition groups who also struggle against the repressive policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state. Accordingly, it can be argued that the Internet *as* contested terrain or as an alternative media, on the one hand can contribute to solidarity and integration of communities and on the other hand, it can encourage fragmentation and cyberbalkanization of the communities to the like-minded groups.

The findings of the thesis also support some of the arguments put forth by Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (1996a) who argued that new Information and communication technologies can link geographically separated people and help them locate interesting or compatible resources. Although these attributes have the potential to bridge gaps and unite communities, they also have the potential to fragment interaction and divide groups by leading people to spend more time on special interests and by screening out less preferred contacts. Therefore, the Internet technologies as tools can be used by the opposition groups for development of their alliance and solidarity as well as enhance fragmentation and cyberbalkanization of the communities into like-minded groups.

The sixth finding of the study is that the Internet as a tool or as a contested terrain has been used by the Iranian opposition sub-cultures and groups as a weapon and target of direct expression of their own political protest and struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's oppressive policies. Figure 4.11 shows the Iranian Green movement's activists used the website as a tool for direct expression of their political struggles. For example, as Figure 4.20 shows, the Iranian Green Movement activists have used the Internet for direct expression of their political struggles. For more examples, Figure 64.32 features signing online petition for the release of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi and their Spouses, which shows that the Iranian

Green movement activists have used the Internet for direct expression of their political struggles. Of course, it should be mentioned that the website operators do not use the full potential of the Internet technology as weapon and target of direct expression of their political protests. For example, they have never used culture (political) jamming, hactivism, and email bombing/virtual sit in against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies.

The findings of the study show that the websites do not exploit the full potential of the website for promotion of their political projects. While there are several different ways in which the Iranian opposition cyberactivism can use the Net as a weapon and target of resistance against the Islamic system, but, they merely use some functions of the technologies toward this end. The first and common way that the Iranian opposition groups are using from the Internet is the creation of alternative and protest websites. The alternative websites and weblogs and social network media mushroomed via the Iranian Internet such as; the *Neday Azadi* website; <http://www.nedayezadi.net> the *Kalame* website; <http://www.kalame.com>, the *Green Path Movement* website; <http://www.rahesabz.net> and so on. Finally, it should mentioned that the findings of this thesis show that the Iranian opposition groups do not effectively use the full potential of the new information and communication technology for direct expression of their cultural and political struggles.

We can summarize the main findings of the thesis as follows: (i) New information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the Internet and the World Wide Web as contested terrain, site of struggle, or alternative media that can be used by the opposition groups, oppressed groups and sub-cultures for generation of alternative forms of information and cultures beyond the state and mainstream media; (ii) New information and communication technologies (ICTs) and Internet facilitates

representation and reconstruction of the oppositional group's identity; (iii) New information and communication technologies (ICTs) and Internet facilitates representation and reconstruction of opposition identity; (iv) It has also enabled them to reach much broader audiences than they previously could achieve, thereby expanding the reach of 'local' groups, something which in turn impacts upon activists' understanding of their own identity and place within opposition to war; (v) New information and communication technologies that have been used by Iranian oppositional groups to increase their capacity to collect, collate and distribute information from disparate locations; (vi) the new information and communication technologies can be used by the opposition groups and movements for alliance and solidarity between opposition group's movement's activists;(vii) the new information and communication technologies can be used by opposition movement for organization and mobilization of public demonstration; (viii) the new information and communication technologies can be used by the opposition movements for building their communities and societies; (ix) the new information and communication technologies can be used by opposition movements for global networking their protests. It should also be mentioned that these are positive functions of the new technologies for social movements, while we know the new information and communication technologies have negative functions for social movements.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

In this study the author focused on how new information and communication technologies; the Internet and the World Wide Web can be used by the Iranian opposition groups and sub-cultures for promotion of their political and cultural struggles. This thesis was undertaken to study contemporary new oppositional movements; the Internet use by the Iranian opposition movements online and offline for purposes of alternative forms of cultures and information production, representation and

reconstruction of collective identity and development of alliance and solidarity between the movements activists to facilitate movement struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's oppressive policies. The conclusion of the thesis will be presented based on the studies research question as follows;

To conclude, our data support the oppositional deployment of the Internet technologies or the World Wide Web by the Iranian Green Movement activists for promotion of their political and cultural struggles against the Islamic Republic of Iran's state's oppressive policies. At the same time, the study data confirm that the Internet technologies or the World Wide Web mediated the Iranian opposition group's political struggles. At the same time, our data show that the Iranian opposition groups unable to use full potential of the technologies for promotion of their political and cultural struggles.

All the data show that the Internet and the World Wide Web potentially enabled the Iranian opposition groups to reproduce, republish and disseminate alternative forms of information, cultures, meaning challenges the public and state governing cultures. As Kahn and Kellner (2003) have argued that the Internet and multimedia technological advances have created a dynamic and complex environment in which sub-cultures represent their alternative forms of culture, information and knowledge against dominant system's *status quo* of culture and politics. From their perspective, the Internet sub-cultures transmit and challenge dominant or governing cultural forms, themes and represent their own new grammars, meanings and practices. It should be added that instead of transmitting and challenging the dominant system culture and politics, the Iranian opposition sub-culture challenges the Islamic Republic of Iran's theocratic state's hegemonic ideologies and myths. They argue the new sub-cultures which gather around the Internet, seek to circumvent dominant system codes through

access to a wealth of global information directly and quickly and disseminate alternative information all around the world.

The findings of the study illustrate that the Internet and the Web provide the Iranian Green Movements with a cheap and fast means of communication, which simplifies mobilization and organization of public demonstration. Similar to Vegh's (2003) argument, the findings of the study illustrate that the Net and the websites, on the one hand, provide the Iranian Green Movements with a cheap and fast means of communication which facilitates the calling of people for online and offline organization and mobilization of public demonstrations and protests. And in contrast to Vegh's (2003) argument, the findings of this study show that the Internet and the World Wide Web, on the other hand, facilitate the disorganization of public demonstration by informing and creating awareness of the Islamic Republic of Iran's security forces from details of demonstration time and place. Consequently, it could be argued that the Internet as tools has dual functions for organization and disorganization of the public demonstration so that both the dominant forces and strugglers can use the technologies for promotion of their respective political and cultural aims and projects.

The study data show that the Internet and the World Wide Web can be used by the oppositional movement's activists for representation and reconstruction of opposition identities against the mainstream identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran state. At same time the data illustrate the Internet as tool that can be used by the excluded groups for self-representation and development of the collective identity. However, our data confirm Cross (2010) argument about the Iranian Green movement supporter identity; Mousavi's supporters were slightly wealthier, more urban, more educated, and more tech-savvy supporters. Also our data support Golkar's (2011) argument about the Iranian Green Movement's collective identity on which he argued that "the Green

Movement attracted a huge support base from groups with very different ideologies - from Islamist modernists to secular dissidents, from Marxists to liberals”(p. 54)

The thesis data show that the new information and communication technologies as a contested terrain or as an alternative media, on the one hand, can contribute to solidarity and integration of communities and on the other hand, the new information and communication technologies can encourage fragmentation and cyberbalkanization of the communities into like-minded groups.

Our data show that the Internet as a tool or as a contested terrain can be used by opposition groups as a weapon and target of direct expression of political protest and struggles. But, the majority of the Iranian opposition groups are unable to use the full potential of the technologies for promotion of their cultural and political struggle.

The study data demonstrate that the new information and communication technologies (NICTs) have given rise to networked communities useful in organizing, coordinating, supporting and maintaining ‘real life’ activism. Or in other words, the study data demonstrate that the Internet as networked system has been used as an effective tool for creation of virtual communities.

## **6.5 Implications of the study (Theory and Practice)**

This study is one of few studies on visual semiotic analysis of the oppositional deployment of new information and communication technologies by social movements and opposition groups in Iran. It is the first attempt to use the systematic method with a holistic view to explore the oppositional deployment of the Internet, by excluded groups and sub-cultures for progressive and democratic social political and cultural change in Iran. The analyses and findings from this study suggest numerous research avenues not

addressed in this study; the findings of the study could be developed for potential future research projects on the role of the Internet usage in grassroots social movements. At the same time, the study findings can be applicable to similar non-free states where dissidents also can successfully use cyberprotest in their fights against the regimes in power. Also, the study findings may be applicable to media educators and social movement theorists who are attempting to develop a theoretical framework for analysis of the Internet usage and opposition politics. The findings of the study can be applicable for excluded, sub-ordinated and sub-cultural groups who are dismissed from societies cultural, political and economic structures, struggle against dominant system's oppressive policies for equality, social justice and real democracy. Furthermore, the findings of the study will be applicable, especially in an Islamic society context, for pro-Islamic system supporters who strive for political Islam.

#### **6.6 Recommendations for future research**

The findings of this study could be used as guidelines to develop analysis of oppositional deployment of new information and communication technologies; the Internet and the World Wide Web by social movements, opposition groups and oppressed groups who are dismissed from society's mainstream culture, politics and media. As an example, regarding the great impact of the Internet technologies on new social movements, further research needs to measure the effect of the alternative media in their audience reception. Furthermore, further studies can be conducted on the role of "critical media literacy" and its relation with "radical democratic politics" on the Iranian Internet, education system and policy. Moreover, further research can be conducted on the role of social network media on emergence and maintenance of (new) social movements. In the way, it remains for further research to analyze the impact of citizen journalism on new social movements. Finally, future researches can look to analyze oppositional deployment of the Internet by Internet sub-cultures, oppressed and

subordinated groups for promotion of their own political interests and agendas. Additionally, further research can be done to analyze the political economy of the alternative media and the Internet technologies that have been used by the Iranian opposition groups for promotion of their own political struggles. Also, further research needs to explore opposition deployment of the Internet and the World Wide Web by the Iranian women's movements and feminist's rights activists. Besides, further research needs to explore the opposition's deployment of the Net and the Web by the Iranian movement's activists. Likewise, further research needs to explore the impact of globalization, technological revolution and radical democracy prospects for comprehensive and sustainable development in Iran. Further research also needs to explore the role of alternative media in representation of social, political, economic and cultural reality.

#### **6.7 Contributions of the study**

The work's most significant contributions are to be found in the frameworks it suggests for oppositional deployment of the Internet by excluded groups or social movement activists for promotion of their political and cultural struggles. The studies biggest contributions are to be found in the frameworks it suggests for the visual semiotic analysis of opposition movements' websites, homepages, and texts. Another significant contribution of the study is that it has been able to apply visual semiotic analysis on the World Wide Web's links based on connection with the other websites for the first time. The majority of the former researches merely dealt with quantitative analysis of the World Wide Web's links to other websites. They merely counted the number of links; internal and external links that connect the website to other websites and text to other websites texts, but, the current study was successful in applying visual semiotic analysis of the websites' links to both websites and website texts. For example; Figure 5.8 features the first screenshot of the link page in the *Neday Azadi* website;

<http://www.nedayezadi.net>, and front page of the first screenshot of the *Green Path Movement* website; <http://www.rahesabz.net>; showing the Iranian *Neday Azadi* website link to the *Green Path Movement* website Homepage which is analyzed in this study.

Another valuable contribution of the study is that mythology of political Islam as a kind of ideological system. The mythology of the political Islamic system will inform us of the negative dimension of the political Islamic system. Another valuable contribution of the study could be methodological contribution of the thesis that is related to the visual semiotic analysis of political websites as multimedia texts. One more main contribution of the study to semiotics can be seen in explicating the aspect of power (hegemony) in the constitution of meaning and hence politicizing the semiotic field. Additional significant contribution of the thesis can be seen in the development of a theory of a visual political semiotic model of new media and communication technology.

Additional significant contribution of the thesis can be seen in the development of a media system that represents social, political and economic and cultural reality. In contrast to the mass media theorist's argument about unreliability of mass media spectacles, the study findings show that alternative media in the hands of citizens and people facilitate representation of social, political and cultural reality. This study contributes the knowledge of how the Internet or the Web can be used by the excluded groups for promotion of their political struggle for social justice and real democracy. Additional significant contribution of the thesis can be seen in the development of empirical evidence on the oppositional deployment of the Internet and World Wide Web for promotion of real democracy and social justice and equality.

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