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## Iran: Who is Quicker - the Hacker or the Twitter?

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## Iran: Who is Quicker - the Hacker or the Twitter?

### Abstract

For a moment we believed that we had entered into a new era of democratic movement. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Google–chat have given proof that regardless where people live, what background they have, what system they adhere to or what religion they practice: they want to share the injustice and violence that happens to them with the world. They seek awareness, help and support and moreover they look for an end to the unfair and violent treatment. So have thousands of people in Iran—and still they do. They use what is the most widely available, quickest and the cheapest way to communicate in order to bypass censorship and propaganda and to transport their messages through digital technologies. Fifty years ago they would have used radio, and two hundred years ago they used print media, as described by Darrell West in his article.

### Keywords

Human rights, Social media, Dissemination of information, Propaganda, Iran

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## **Iran: Who is Quicker - the Hacker or the Twitter?**

by Anja Mihr

For a moment we believed that we had entered into a new era of democratic movement. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Google—chat have given proof that regardless where people live, what background they have, what system they adhere to or what religion they practice: they want to share the injustice and violence that happens to them with the world. They seek awareness, help and support and moreover they look for an end to the unfair and violent treatment. So have thousands of people in Iran—and still they do. They use what is the most widely available, quickest and the cheapest way to communicate in order to bypass censorship and propaganda and to transport their messages through digital technologies. Fifty years ago they would have used radio, and two hundred years ago they used print media, as described by Darrell West in his article.

It would have been foolish to believe that the regime would not react and restrict these forms of communication. It would have also been foolish to believe that “freedom of information and expression” has found the ultimate way to bypass suppressive regimes. As long as there are authoritarian regimes in this world, freedom and rights will be oppressed by any means. But instead of pure propaganda battles between opposition leaders and Mahmood Ahmedinejad via radio or handbills, we are witnessing a “digital racing” between the rebellious youth and the Secret Service. Both sides know very well how to use these technologies and how to manipulate them. They use the same means and knowledge. Neither side has any technical advantage—the only difference is the speed. Who is quicker in submitting information and how fast can it be cracked or deleted, how fast can passwords be manipulated and chat rooms closed before they reopen again somewhere else in the cyberspace world. Thus, who is quicker – the hacker or the twitter?

Sadly enough we are not even shocked anymore about the propaganda and the terrible ill-treatment, the killings, the torture and the imprisonments of thousand of citizens by their own government. Iran’s prisons are currently overcrowded and thousand of people have disappeared in police custody. Somehow we did not expect differently. But what is rather new to us is the fact that we have become part of peoples’ destinies and lives in Iran. At any time of the day, online, in our living rooms we have been with them over the past weeks. Never before have millions of people all over the world been so close and in due time sharing and witnessing peoples pain and fears. Does this change our perception and support for their fight for justice and transparency? It may not appear so at the moment but it might do so in the long run. We have become more emphatic and share their vulnerability. Maybe it was the strange feeling that came over us, when we suddenly felt with Neda when she died—and while we were watching it online. That was awkward and we felt as though we were in the streets of Tehran too. Within hours there was an overwhelming virtual outcry for her. We had not experienced anything like it before, and millions of people felt deeply the death of a woman whom they had not known hours before.

And when the [UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon](#) urged the Iranian government to respect fundamental rights, the freedom of assembly and to end arrest, he was accused of meddling in internal affairs regardless of UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nevertheless, his appeal and the compassion by people around the world have changed the

quality of “meddling.” Neither the United Nations, nor human rights organizations or people throughout the world would tell the Iranian people whom they should vote for or what they ought to do differently. They simply ask to respect everybody’s freedom of expression, the right to assemble, to vote for whomever they like and to respect their physical integrity. They don’t ask for more than to respect Iranian values, their own constitution or international commitments.

In the long run, international appeals combined with a constant—however hindered—digital interaction could lead to change. Interestingly enough, Mahmood Ahmedinejad and the Guardian Council of the Constitution felt they had to react to the digital outcry by justifying their repression when they argued that it was in the interest of the democratic order and Iranian people. This reminds me of the propagandistic talks by the communist regimes in Eastern Europe just before they had to resign. When suppressive governments start to justify their oppressive policies, they concede their weakness and sooner or later capitulate. Digital communication technologies might accelerate a similar process in Iran. Thus, the question is not if the regime will fall, but rather when and how many more young lives it will take?

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