

Participation in Political Protest: Tracing Direct and Indirect Effects of News Usage and Social Interaction

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Abstract

The present article attempts to explain that social media is generally considered as an important source for expanding political protest via survey data obtained from 2628 Iranian youth. Using social media information, it is expected that political discussions within social media may also be expanded, thereby enhancing the willingness to participate in political protest. The results indicate that social media for news usage and the increase in the size of social networks presented in these media increases the willingness to participate in political protest either directly or indirectly and through the strengthening of political discussions. Moreover, using social media for social interactions, although not directly affecting participation in political protest, strengthens political discussions among political protesters.

Keywords: Social media use for news, Social media use for social interaction, Network size, Political discussions, Political protest.

Introduction

The huge volume of production, distribution and consumption of information has transformed the contemporary world into an information-driven world. These developments have strangely transformed lifestyles, business practices, education, and even entertainment and political propaganda, and has evolved into another world of "virtual worlds" (Gaidon et al., 2016). Among the areas where the discussions over the effect of the new information space on it is significant is the Internet users' political activities (Kim et al., 2016; Strandberg and Carlson, 2017; Dalisay et al., 2019). Due to the growing popularity as well as quantitative and qualitative growth of modern communication technology tools, it is no longer possible to shut our eyes on their social and political influences. People share their ideas in these new communication tools by representing digital language, and are separated from each other by the presence of time and space, but access each other via networks of physical instruments (Castells, 2015).

The new communication space is playing a major role in the field of power by taking public opinion, monitoring and directing it. Specifically, contemporary new media has found many variations in terms of quantity and quality, including a wide range of network-based, share-based, thread-based, message-oriented, and each and every public and specific audience (Bishop, 2014). Meanwhile, social media is one of the most influential information and communication technologies that affecting all aspects of human life (Skoric et al., 2016; Diehl et al., 2016; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Social media has become a widespread means of communication in the general public among users and with a wide geographical range within the national borders, and has

created areas of influence beyond the control of states and institutions of power in societies (Shirky, 2011). In fact, the new forms of modern media, according to many scholars, have created new public spaces for society, and even the political community has been heavily influenced by this interaction.

Social media is one of the most important means for conveying concepts and spreading political awareness and participation (Reuter and Szakonyi, 2013; Min and Wohn, 2018). In this regard, empirical evidence suggests that there is a kind of coexistence between the expansion of social media and the development of democratic culture in countries, so that some scholars believe that social media is an essential component of democracy. These media connect different elements of the discourse of democracy and create democratic behaviors and policies (Jha and Kodila-Tedika, 2018). The Internet and social media, with regard to features such as interactivity, synchronization of communication, homogeneity, lack of border surveillance, and lack of ownership of the network and censorship, have created a good environment for reviving the lost dimensions of political participation and democracy in advanced societies and strengthening democracy in developing societies (Hargreaves and Hartley, 2016; Castells, 2015).

New media in the form of cyberspace and social media seem to have been influential in expanding political participation, but they are contributing to overcoming the authoritarian regimes, keep members in touch, and guide the formation of new social movements. Generally, political demonstrations have been more effective (Valenzuela et al., 2016; Enikolopov et al., 2015). Accordingly, socio-political upheavals in the Arab countries in recent years, and especially the so-called "Arab Spring", are the latest form of protest social movements shaped in the Middle East; movements argued that the role of the new media was very effective on shaping and expanding protest (Breuer et al., 2015; Kharroub and Bas, 2016; Hänska, 2016). Moreover, political protest in the form of the Green Movement in 2009 as well as various protest in many cities of Iran in 2018 were among the political activities that social media seemed to play in their emergence, so that after the political protest in 2009, many social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. were filtered. In 2018, in addition to the previous media, Telegram and some other social media were introduced by political officials as one of the most important tools in the advent of the protest, which were later filtered by government officials (Featherman, 2015; Faris, DM, & Rahimi, 2015).

The present study first examines literature done on the relationship between social media usage and political protest. Then it points to the role of online political debate as a mediating variable in the relationship between social media and political protest. After that, it presents the operational definition of the research variables, the data collection method, and descriptive statistics. Following it, it investigates the relationships between variables using hierarchical regression and structural equation modeling. Finally, it discusses key research findings obtained from data using available theoretical literature.

Social media and political protest

Political participation is defined as an attempt to influence some political implications or to exercise control over political decision makers at governmental or non-governmental levels (Norris, 2009). In recent years, one

of the key factors influencing people's willingness to participate in politics is the Internet and online space (Tolbert and McNeal, 2003). The Internet has reduced the cost of political participation, and has somewhat paved the way for citizens to focus on political issues (Quintelier and Vissers, 2007).

In recent years, with the expansion of the Internet, the importance of these new technologies has increased in societies, and many researchers have been interested in researching how cyberspace is linked to political participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux and Zheng, 2014). The results of the studies done on this field divided the researchers into two optimistic and pessimistic groups: optimistic researchers believe that massive online political information can contribute to raising political awareness and strengthening political knowledge and participation (Toffler & Toffler, 1995). In particular, social media usage information is significantly linked to efforts to deepen the views of the online community, which in turn develops participatory practices in the political and civil field through the mobilization of efforts (Rojas & Puig-i-Abril, 2009).

On the contrary, pessimistic researchers claim that the Internet and social media do not contribute much to the formation of a public sphere. Instead of strengthening public opinion through rational communication, online media will cause online consumers to try to find information that is consistent with their political and ethical preferences, making existing views be more reinforced more than ever, and even move towards polarization in some cases (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). In addition, online space is often a leisurely occasion for state-controlled entertainment and consumerism, which tends to make voters tend to become unpolished, confused, and torn by violations of political and economic power (Galston, 2003).

Nevertheless, both sides agree that social media has spread more information in the community and have created a public sphere that has led to more active news and awareness and political participation among people (Macafee, 2018).) Although many studies have been done on the impact of social media usage and its political implications in the predominantly Western countries, social media in authoritarian societies appear to have helped to deepen political activity (Zuckerman, 2007). For example, Lynch (2011) claimed that new media in the Middle East have created a new environment in which citizens challenge government monopolies on information. He also argued that in the short term, the new media will encourage collective action by reducing the cost of engagement. He pointed out that new information technologies, in the form of dissemination of ideas, the creation of a common language and methods of protest among protesters, are an effective and useful tool for protesters. Studying protest behaviors in the Egyptian revolution of 2011, Joyce argued that the Internet and the new media were influenced by three ways in engaging in political protest: first, activating cyber activism as an impetus for street action; second, encouraging civic participation via contribution to mobilizing and organizing protests; and third, providing a new form of citizen journalism which provides a platform for ordinary citizens to express themselves and record their own interpretation of reality (Joyce, 2011: 4).

An important point in this regard is that social media primarily drives citizens' participation in politics toward protest activity in authoritarian countries (Theocharis et al., 2015; Tufekci and Wilson; Gainous, Wagner and Ziegler, 2018). In other words, some studies show that there is a positive relationship between the frequency of using social media and protest behaviors; the results seem to be consistent with research conducted on the

relationship between social media and political participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela, 2012). There are a lot of explanations about why there is a positive relationship between social networks and protest behaviors, including the fact that social media can facilitate access to political activists, thereby enabling new social movements to be more easily contacted by critical masses (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012). Social media can also strengthen the personal and collective identity building that is a major factor in collective political behavior (Dalton, Sickle, & Weldon, 2010). Moreover, these media allow users to connect online to their political groups and social movements of interest, and through information that can mobilize the critically acclaimed citizens, thus giving them opportunity Provide more resources for engaging in political activities (Yamamoto, 2006). This issue enhances the potential of social media to increase participation in political protest and other political behaviors. This is why many researchers emphasize the positive impact of social media usage for newsletters (Tucker et al., 2016) and the size of these networks (Lu and Zhao, 2018; Chan, 2016) to reinforce the political action of citizen protest. Thus, the following are posed as research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Social media use for news (H1a) and social media network size (H1b) have a positive effect on political protest.

Mediating role of online political discussions

Using social media has been widely investigated in recent years in terms of their information and political influences (Weeks and Holbert, 2013; Reuter and Szakonyi, 2013). But there is a major issue in research literature that the use of information of social media is a passive media behavior (Ji, 2017). Weeks and Holbert (2013) argued that social media usage involves two aspects of receiving and broadcasting news. Similar to the traditional news media, receiving new news media also emphasizes the passive nature of individuals. On the other hand, broadcasting social media news shows that consumers are controlling the content of news on social media, and they can actively participate in the process of using news through the selection of news stories. In other words, receiving and broadcasting news through social media is more than a kind of behavior; it is a process.

In this regard, on the one hand, research done on the relationship between social media usage and political discussion, in which news are broadcasted, shows that in both Western and authoritarian countries, these two variables have a positive relationship (Mou et al., 2013). Furthermore, other researchers theorize about the role of informal political discussion as an important mediator in political activities (Nisbet and Scheufele, 2004; Scheufele, 2004) and the value of informal political discussions in shaping public opinion for mobilizing political actions (Mutz, 2002).

An important issue in this regard is that traditional political discussions in non-democratic countries are mainly conducted in private areas and among family members or trusted friends (Polletta, 1999). But in the Internet age, online political discussion has been theoretically modeled (Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013). Online media has

provided a new public sphere in which citizens can express their opposition in a relatively free manner in non-democratic countries (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012).

Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1968) believed that people who are discussing political and general issues are more likely than political activists. Accordingly, social media acts as information hubs that make them in touch with others and share their interests with others. Thus, people who belong to social movements or political groups can communicate with one another and disseminate information about political mobilization, which, as a rule, cannot be shared between each other, thus it expands opportunities to participate in political activities (Kobayashi, Ikeda & Miyata, 2006).

Gil de Zúñiga and Valenzuela (2011) argued that online social media participation increases the number of civic behaviors by increasing the debate about public affairs among people. In other words, social media usage, on the one hand, increases their information on public affairs, and on the other hand, it facilitates participation in protest behaviors by stimulating political discussion (Lotan et al., 2011; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). From this perspective, social media emerges as sources that can enhance collective action experiences through the spread of dialogue between individuals, and thus provide the conditions for protest movements (Valenzuela, Arriagada, and Scherman, 2012). Hence, political discussion in social media enables individuals to take part in protest movements more than others (Valenzuela, 2013).

But the important point in this regard is that not only the use of social networks for receiving news and size of these networks can, by reinforcing online political discussions, make people involved in political activities (Mahmood, Firduas and Adnan, 2016; Ji, 2017), but social media usage for interactions can also increase the willingness of individuals to participate in political protest through online political debate (Ekström and Östman, 2015). Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux and Zheng (2014) argued in this context that even using social media for interactions can put consumers in a position to pave the way for political discussion, which, in turn, it can lead to political action. Therefore, the research hypotheses in this field are:

Hypothesis 2: Online political discussion positively mediates the relationship among social media use for news (H2a), social media network size (H2b), and social media use for interaction (H2c) with political protest.

Method

Population and sample

In early 2018, riots broke out in the cities of Iran, where the riots first began in Mashhad and then spread out to other Iranian cities. A survey of government officials showed that social media and the flow of news and information from them were the main reason for the spread of riots in other cities of Iran. Though different age groups participated in these riots, it seems that young people, and especially students, were more active

than other groups. As a result, we decided to examine the youth of Iran in a survey method. For this purpose, we selected 5 cities of Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Shiraz as the sample sites using the multistage cluster sampling method. Then, we identified three regions as the second cluster from each city, and in each region, we randomly selected three alleys and distributed questionnaires among the citizens face-to-face. The population of Iran was as 79926270 individuals based on the latest "statistical center of Iran" survey, among which 18.26 were between 15 and 25 years old, but given that the age of elections in Iran was 18 years, so we selected our respondents aged at 18 to 25 years. Given the unique political atmosphere in Iran, it was very difficult to find people who participated in political protests. For this reason, we questioned only the individuals' willingness to participate in political protests. The data collection stage was conducted between March and July 2018. About 2628 returned copies of the questionnaire were considered appropriate for data analysis.

Measures

Endogenous and exogenous variables

Social media use for news: According to Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012), four items were used to measure the use of social media indicators for news: what extent social network sites helped individuals to stay informed and get news "about current events and public affairs," "about their local community," "about current events from mainstream media," and "about current events through friends and family", where 0 means never and 5 means all the time (4 items averaged scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$, $M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.94$).

Social media use for social interaction: Consistent with Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) research, three items were used to examine this indicator. We specifically asked, "Thinking about the social networking site you use most often, how you would classify the following statements, where 0 means never and 5 means all the time?" The statements were "I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto it for a day," "I rely on it to stay in touch with friends and family," and "I do not rely on it to meet people who share my interests (recoded)". (3 items averaged scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$, $M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.10$).

Social media Network size: Individuals' political discussion network size can have a significant effect on the process of citizens' political participation (Mutz, 2002). Accordingly, this research tries to achieve more accurate results by controlling this variable. Accordingly, participants were asked two questions about the number of people they talk online on political and public issues. For people with a network size of 1 to 5 people, we considered score 1, 6 to 10, score 2, 11 to 15, score 3, 16 to 20, score 4, and bigger than 20, score 5. Moreover, participants who did not exchange in political discussions to anyone about political were scored 0 (2 items averaged scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.73$; $M = 0.74$, $SD = 0.98$).

Political discussion in social media: This variable consists of four items in which it has been tried to identify how much people through social media "write their own opinions on political issues and send it to friends and Or other people", "share photos or political clips, "discuss political issues," and "forward political commentary

and news to friends or other people." where 0 means never and 5 means all the time (4 items averaged scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$; $M = 1.58$, $SD = 1.30$).

Political protest: In this research, by a political protest we mean its objective and offline form. For this variable, 5 items were designed to ask people how much they would do to such activities as "signing protest petitions", "participating in demonstrations", "participating in labor and trade strikes", "using anti-government symbols" and "dissemination of anti-government declarations" (4 items averaged scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.72$; $M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.43$).

Residualized variables

News media use: Respondents separately rated how frequently they use a variety of outlets to get news. Specifically, they were asked about their frequency of exposure to news through national TV, satirical news programs, national newspapers, radio, (4 items averaged scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$; $M = 2.14$ $SD = 1.09$).

Strength of party identification: related literature suggests that strengthening party identification plays an important role in rising levels of participation (Lee and et al, 2013). Accordingly, we tried to investigate the party identification using a 11-point scale ranging. In this variable, the number 1 represents the highly conservative individuals, so that as we approach towards number 11, the reformist degree of a person increases ($M = 6.78$, $SD = 2.21$).

Internal political efficacy: This study controls the variable of political efficacy. Findings indicate that there is a positive correlation between the increasing political efficacy and political protest. In the study, two questions were used to measure internal political effectiveness: "People, like me, can influence government policies", "I have a good understanding of my country's political issues." where 0 means never and 5 means all the time (2 items averaged scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$, $M = 1.57$, $SD = 1.38$).

News media use: Respondents separately rated how frequently they use a variety of outlets to get news. Specifically, they were asked about their frequency of exposure to news through national TV, satirical news programs, national newspapers, radio (4 items averaged scale, Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$; $M = 2.14$ $SD = 1.09$).

Demographics: A variety of additional variables were included in the multivariate analysis to control for potential confounds, as these are variables that the literature has found to be related to political protest. The respondent's gender (60.1% males), age ($M = 21.32$, $SD = 3.68$) were straightforward in their measurement. Education was operationalized as highest level of formal education completed ($M = 3.49$, $Mdn = 3$ -year college degree). For income, each respondent chose one of 15 categories of total annual household income ($M = 6.50$).

Statistical analyses

To test the research hypotheses, hierarchical regressions were used. Considering that in this research the use of intermediary variables also appeared, so in order to examine the confirmation or rejection of the theoretical model of research, as well as the investigation of the indirect effects of variables, SEM using AMOS 20 were also used. Variance inflation factor was a multicollinearity between the use of social media for interactions and news items as 1.16, indicating that there is no multicollinearity among these variables.

Results

Table 1 shows the result of the hierarchical regression analysis of predictors of political protest. The first hypothesis predicted that a higher frequency of social media use increases the likelihood of a person participating in a political protest. First, looking at the demographic block of variables, all demographic variables, except income, emerge as significant predictors of political protest. In other words, Age ($\beta = 0.066$) was positively associated with political protest, with older respondents being more involved in the political protest. Gender ($\beta = .101$) was a significant predictor, showing female respondents to be more politically efficacious. Education emerges as a significant predictor of political protest ($\beta = .020$), with those in the higher Education group being more likely to attend the political protest. The second model adds the Political efficacy and Strength Partisanship variables and shows that both of them are significant. In other word, with a very high significance Political efficacy ($\beta=.132$) and the Strength Partisanship in Iran ($\beta=.088$) have a slightly positive impact on the political protest. Traditional News Media Use included in Model 3 is significant ($\beta = .188$). The positive beta coefficient shows that, after controlling for all other factors, those who make use of media news are more likely to attend the political protest. In fourth model, Adding the political discussion in social media significantly improved the prediction of political protest ($\beta = .228$).

The final model includes the social media variables. The result shows that all social media, except social media use for Social Interaction, are statistically significant. Social media use for news ($\beta = .051$) and Network size ($\beta = .334$) were positively associated with political protest, showing that those respondents who paid more attention to news in social media and have a wider network size, tend more to participate on political protest.

Table 1: Hierarchical Logistic Regression Analysis of Political Protest

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 6
<i>Age</i>	.066**	.066**	.055*	.043	.026
<i>Female</i>	.101***	.097***	.099***	.071***	.043*
<i>Education</i>	-.057*	-.069**	-.090***	-.111***	-.115***
<i>Income</i>	.020	.010	-.006	-.006	-.018
<i>Political efficacy</i>		.132***	.094***	.062**	.045*

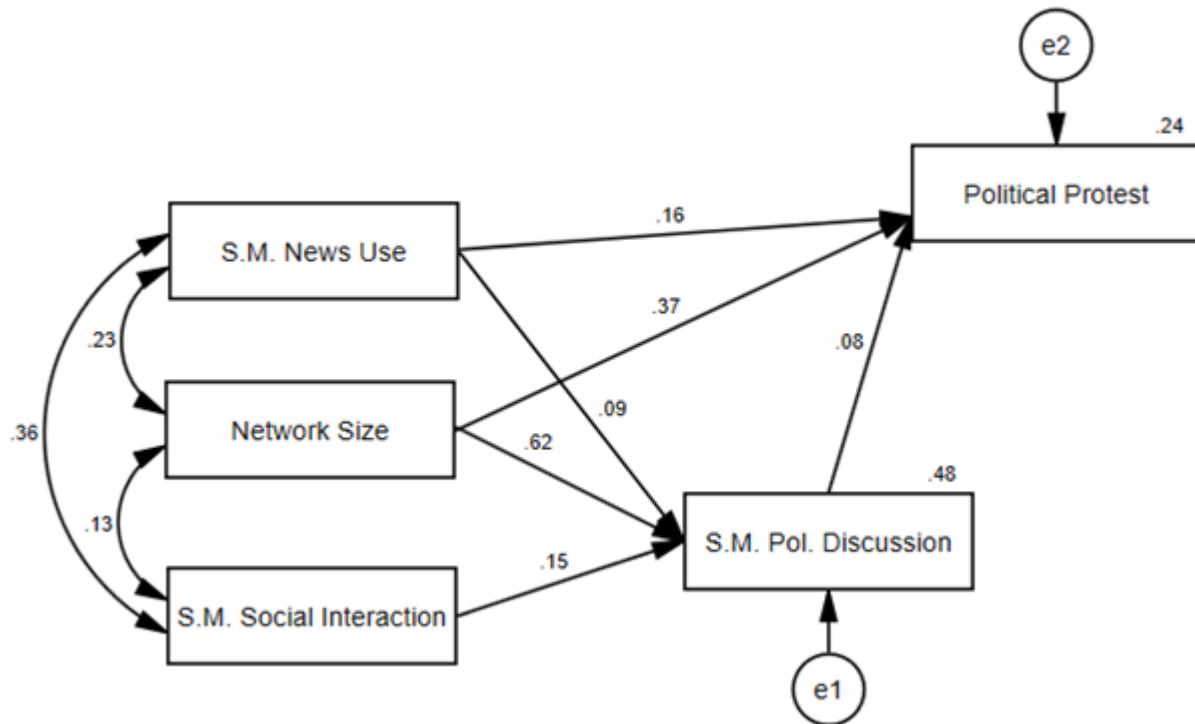
Strength Partisanship	.088***	.093***	.100***	.070***
News Media Use		.188***	.087***	.014
S.M. Pol. Discussion			.340***	.088***
S.M. Social Interaction				.001
S.M. News Use				.143***
S.M. Network Size				.365***
R2	.014	.039	.071	.171
F	9.51***	17.80***	28.81***	67.35***

Notes: Standardized regression coefficients reported. N = 2628. *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001

When considering the overall explanatory power of the models, the modest R2 of .26 for the final model can be observed. F-change statistics show that for each of the six models each block of variables is significant as a whole, with the online media block explaining an additional 7.1% of the variation in political protest (see Table 1).

In addition, AMOS software was employed to study the structural relationships between the main research variables. The goodness of fit of the research model shows that it is well-fitted (Figure 1). The determination coefficients indicate that 24% of the variance of online political discussions is influenced by social media, and, social media, either directly or indirectly, through the mediating variable of political discussion, can explain the variance of the variable of political protest.

Figure 1: Results of SEM model of social media uses, social media political discussion, and political protest.



Note: Sample size = 2628. Path entries are standardized SEM coefficients (betas) at $p < .05$ or better. Model goodness of fit: $\chi^2 = .00$; $df = 1$; $p = .99$; RMSEA = 0.000, CFI = 1.000, GFI = 1.000, RMR = 0.00. Explained variance of criterion variables: Political discussion $R^2 = 48\%$; political protest $R^2 = 24$. This theoretical model was also bootstrapped based on the standard errors with 1,000 iterations and with a 95% confidence interval.

The results obtained from the SEM indicate that three components of social media have had a positive and significant effect on strengthening political discussion within the online space. Discussions on social media have also had a positive and significant effect on the increase in protest behaviors in political affairs. The research results regarding the direct correlations of variables are consistent with the results obtained in the hierarchical regression previously mentioned.

Table 2: Direct and Indirect Effects of Social Media Use on Political Participation.

				β
S.M. Pol. Discussion	<---	S.M. News Use		0.090***
S.M. Pol. Discussion	<---	S.M Network size		0.620***
S.M. Pol. Discussion	<---	S.M. Social Interaction		0.151***
political protest	<---	S.M. News Use		0.159***
political protest	<---	S.M Network size		0.368***
political protest	<---	S.M. Pol. Discussion		0.082***
political protest	<---	S.M. Pol. Discussion	<---	0.007***

political protest	<---	S.M. Pol. Discussion	<---	S.M Network size	0.051***
political protest	<---	S.M. Pol. Discussion	<---	S.M. Social Interaction	0.012***

Notes: Standardized regression coefficients reported. N = 2628 *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001

The table refers to the direct and indirect results of social media on political protest. Standard coefficients show that the use of social media for news ($\beta = 0.007$, $p < 0.001$), the use of social media for social interactions ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$) and social media network size ($\beta = 0.051$, $p < 0.001$) indirectly and through political discussions within social media has had a positive effect on political protest. The Sobel test was used to determine the significance of the indirect effects of social media. As a result, the t-value obtained for the indirect effects of using social media was 3.07 for news, and for the use of social media for interactions was 3.38 and for social media network size was 3.58. Thus, it can be argued that considering the high t-value as 1.96, both social media dimensions have had a significant and positive effect on political protest. The important point in this regard is that although the regression tests in Table 1 show that the use of social media to interact directly did not have a significant effect on political protest, this variable could be indirect and affects the expansion of protest activities through online political discussions.

Discussion

The more social media penetrate societies and affect political, economic, and cultural processes, the more research is concentrated on it. In this regard, much research has been done on the relationship between social media usage and citizen participation in political affairs, many of which have emphasized the significant impact of social media. Moreover, one of the phenomena influenced by media is individuals' participation in political protest, which has confirmed many of its empirical research (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; Gainous, Wagner and Ziegler, 2018). These studies have attempted to open up a new way of studying citizens' protest behaviors and, firstly, to identify different patterns of social media use, and secondly, given the complexity of social and political realities, more desirable models are needed for better understanding the relationship between social media and citizens' participation in protest behaviors.

In the same vein, the present study attempted to use theoretical areas to directly influence the use of social media in order to get the news and size of such networks to participate in political protest. In addition, in this research, we tried to address the influential alternatives of political debate with others in the social media environment, which, in contrast to other aspects of social media, was an active activity.

The first hypothesis examined in this study with regard to related literature was that those who use social media for news and the size of a broader network are more likely to participate in political protest. The results of testing the hypothesis H1 showed that those who receive their news through social media, and are in contact with a larger network of people within those social media, are more likely to protest than others. This finding allows us to discuss with greater emphasis on the important role of social media in political activities.

Based on the first hypothesis, it was expected that, even with the control of other explanatory variables, social media can positively and positively explain the variance of political protest. R-square changes indicate that

social media usage for news has a strong explanation for variance of participation in political protest. These results are consistent with many other research proposals on the direct effect of social media on participation in political protest (Zúñiga, Copeland and Bimber, 2014). The research findings in this area have shown that social media have different dimensions only part of which can facilitate participation in protest activities. In other words, social media usage for social interactions cannot have a direct effect on political protest. But social media usage for receiving news can have a positive and significant effect on political protest. The main reasons for this appear to be the nature of social media news (Tucker et al., 2016). In addition, authoritarian structures of the Middle East countries suggest that the lack of adequate democracy in these countries makes the opposition forces perform their protest activities within social media (Gainous, Wagner and Ziegler, 2018). Of course, although the censorship and filtering environment sometimes restrict the use of the public from the free media environment, in many cases people use anti-filter applications to counter the filtering space and thus can access the news and information they need. (Jamali & Shahbazar, 2017). The research results obtained from testing the first hypothesis also depicted that the size of the social media network has had a higher effect on participation in political protest by increasing online social links (Kwon and Nam, 2009). In other words, when people communicate with more people via social media and reinforce their social ties online, there is a more favorable atmosphere for participating in political protest. These findings are consistent with many previous researches (Lu and Zhao, 2018; Chan, 2016).

We also tested in the second hypothesis the relationship between the dimensions of social media usage with the desire to participate in political protest through the mediating variable of online political discussion. The results, consistent with related literature, showed that all three dimensions of the social media have had, however insignificant, effect on increasing the willingness to participate in political protest.

One of the most interesting findings in this regard was that although social media usage for social interactions did not directly affect the tendency to participate in political protest, the results showed that this variable was indirectly and by increasing political discussion can have a positive and significant effect on the tendency to political protest. One of the reasons seems to be that, in authoritarian countries, traditional media are largely controlled by governments, and individuals cannot freely express their thoughts. But social media has created a relatively uncontrollable atmosphere for the citizens of these countries, so they can easily talk about information obtained through social media. In other words, in the light of social media, horizontal communications are formed and, according to Kastels, the links between the various sectors of society are created horizontally. The power of currents movements surpasses power movements, and citizens can use social media to eliminate media monopolies (Kastels, 2000).

Breaking the media monopoly of governments makes people face new and critical information and engage in political discussions with others in order to deepen their knowledge of social media. This, as Giddens (1984) suggests, makes people rethink their thoughts and doubt their traditional beliefs that they knew in the past. But since governments in these countries are still ruled by traditional rationality, there are conflicts between modern civilizations and traditional structures that create contradictions for people's tendency and willingness to participate in political protest.

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