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## Miscellaneous

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**Submitted**

September 27th, 2022

**Approved**

February 10th, 2023

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Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

doi: 10.15581/003.36.2.83-95

[www.communication-society.com](http://www.communication-society.com)

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2023 – Vol. 36(2)

pp. 83-95

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**How to cite this article:**

Rahbarqazi, M. & Nourbakhsh, S.

(2023). The Effect of Social Media

on Iranian Citizens' Electoral

Participation and Political Action.

*Communication & Society*, 36(2), 83-

95.

## The Effect of Social Media on Iranian Citizens' Electoral Participation and Political Action

### Abstract

The present age is called the age of communication. Undoubtedly, in all matters of the world, the most incredible information is on the shoulders of the mass media. Today, the media have influenced the identity of contemporary man by expanding geographical, cultural and political boundaries so that the identity of modern man can be called media identity. The increasing role of new means of mass communication in various parts of human life has led to multiple fields. One area that social media have influenced in the present age is political participation. The present paper sought to test the effect of social media on the Iranian citizens' willingness to electoral participation political actions using the World Values Survey (WVS) wave 7 data release (49 countries/territories). The results show that social media indirectly, through the mediator variable of political trust, reduces the willingness of individuals to participate in elections. Moreover, the results show that social media, both directly and indirectly, increases citizens' willingness to engage in political protests.

### Keywords

**Social media, electoral participation, political action, Iran.**

### 1. Introduction

Entering the digital age marks the beginning of a new era in information and communication. While before the advent of new media, mass and traditional media (radio, television, newspapers, etc.) sought to expand

one-way, elitist, top-down communication, the advent of online social media has led to widespread change in the field of communication and information acquisition. Social media is a network of social interactions using various social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc., which today constitute the most extensive information platform in the world on the Internet. As citizens spend more time socializing and interacting on the Internet, these media have become an essential part of their daily lives. Revolutionizing the way citizens interact with each other, social media has affected all aspects of their lives, including education, communication, employment, politics, healthcare, social relationships, and personal productivity (Sadiku *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, the Internet and social media are not comparable to any other communication tool in terms of popularity among users and also covering a wide range of geographical boundaries, ease of communication and sharing information between users. According to Lou *et al.* (2019), online media has changed the type of communication and information control by introducing a new method of information distribution, which is decentralized, horizontal and interactive so that users of these social

networks are exposed to news content without any explicit or intentional effort (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018).

In fact, by providing the free flow of information, the Internet has created a platform for citizens to access various sources of information to evaluate the performance of institutions. In this context, citizens compare the performance of their government with other governments and become aware of the weaknesses and shortcomings of the government and political institutions in their country (Bailard, 2014). One area that seems to have been influenced by social media in recent years is political participation (Qutieshat, 2017; Warren *et al.*, 2015). In democracies, user motivation and behavior findings indicate that they are present in cyberspace and social media with different goals and orientations. Individuals may avoid or actively seek political information (Baek, 2015). However, empirical findings have shown that continuous exposure to political information and topics on social media increases all citizens' political participation or not interested in political issues (Theocharis & Quintelier, 2016). However, social media seems to work differently in less democratic countries. While social media in these countries has a negative effect on conventional forms of political participation such as elections, these media outlets increase political protests (Weirman, 2020; Xia & Shen, 2018). Various reasons have been given for the cause of this. One of the reported reasons for this is political trust (Chen & Wang, 2019). It is assumed that in less democratic countries, traditional media are largely controlled by government institutions, and as a result, the audience of these media outlets mentally become supporters of the status quo. But political opposition forces, which have less access to traditional and official media, are trying to use new media, especially social media, to achieve their goal. This makes these media a tool to question the trust of individuals in existing political institutions and provide citizens with a mentality for protest actions (Lu *et al.*, 2019).

The present paper attempts to test the direct and indirect effects of social media on Iranian citizens' willingness to participate and political protests. Iran is located in a politically, culturally and economically very similar region to other Middle Eastern countries. Therefore, it is expected that the results of this study can be generalized to other countries in the region.

Moreover, there have been several political protests in Iran in recent years. Some researchers believe that one of the reasons for the protests is the entry and expansion of social media. Given these cases, the structure of this article is as follows. In the first section, the theoretical approach to studying the effects of social media on protest behavior is investigated. Then, the data and the method used to perform the experimental analysis are described. In the next step, after presenting and interpreting the results of the tested models, the paper discusses the fundamental significance of our findings. The final section will summarize the results and ask some questions and offer some suggestions for future research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Social media and political trust**

Political trust, commonly defined as citizens' trust in political institutions (Turper & Aarts, 2017), is an important indicator of any political system and the nation-state relationship, a decrease in which can lead to instability, disorder, The growth of crime and social anomie. As Luhmann (1979) states, political trust, as the most valuable and important component of social capital, has a tremendous and inexhaustible force for the bond between citizens and government institutions. In this sense, trust in institutions leads to public support for democratic principles, the democratic system, legitimacy and stability, and implicitly leads to the rejection of undemocratic options (Mishler & Rose, 2005).

In general, political trust indicates the degree of the positive and supportive attitude of the citizens in the face of the political system and political activists. A review of the existing

theoretical literature on the effect of the media on political trust shows that two main spectrums of pessimism and optimism have been formed in this regard. In the late 1970s, Michael Robinson (1976) coined the term “video malaise.” The results of his research showed that reliance on traditional media news causes political pessimism and distrust, political instability and frustration with citizenship rights. According to Robinson, various factors played a role in shaping this trend: the unusual number of television news audiences, the credibility of news channels, the interpretability of television news, the focus on negative news, conflict and violence, and the anti-institutional content of television news programs (1976, pp. 426–430). In this regard, Shock (2017) believes that Media Malaise is one of the most popular and controversial concepts in many pieces of research in political communication. At the core of these theories is that citizens, in general, have become more pessimistic and distrustful of politicians and the political process, and political participation is declining.

These different approaches to the effect of the media on political trust can also be generalized to the relationship between social media and political trust. With the advent of online social media today, many citizens follow or accidentally expose political news through these platforms (Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, etc.) (Shearer & Matsa, 2018). In this regard, some studies believe that the Internet and social media positively affect citizens' trust in their government. As Lu *et al.* (2020) showed in a study, there is considerable evidence in China of the positive effect of Internet use on citizens' trust in government, respect for government authority, and efficiency. Other findings also show a significant relationship between the use of information and services of government websites and trust in the government. For example, Welch *et al.* (2005) have shown that the use of data and services on government websites leads to satisfaction, which leads to increased trust in government. Another study has argued that the formation of e-government and transparency has increased the level of trust in government and political institutions (Lu *et al.*, 2019).

However, another spectrum of theories is being formed as an intermediate approach. It believes that depending on the degree of media freedom of a country, the type of media used by citizens and the party affiliations of individuals, the influence of the media can be positive or negative. For example, Memoli (2020) shows that depending on the degree of media freedom, it can be stated that offline and online media (press and Internet) have a significant effect on public political trust. Some argue that while consuming news through social media reduces political trust, using it through web pages increases political trust (Ceron, 2015). Also, another group of research shows that depending on the party tendencies and ideological tendencies of users, social media reduces or increases political trust. In other words, citizens with pro-ruling tendencies mostly see news that has a positive assessment of the government's performance.

In contrast, citizens with a political willingness that oppose or criticize the ruling party are mostly news and information that strengthens has a negative attitude (Lelkes & Westwood, 2017; Klein & Robison, 2020). Some researchers take a more negative and skeptical approach to the effect of the Internet and social media on political trust. This approach generally argues that the decline in political trust is related to the advent of the Internet. The Internet reduces political trust by challenging traditional communications and the government's monopoly on information control (Lu *et al.*, 2019).

Generally, trust –as a factor in controlling and predicting the behavior of actors– plays a vital role in political action and political order. Distrust or low levels of political trust challenge the existing political order. It is generally argued that to the extent that individuals are dissatisfied with the results of government policy and its effectiveness in solving social problems, their level of trust in government and support for government action decreases (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2008; Yang & Holzer, 2006). Therefore, it should be said that the reduction of government control over the media, which is mainly due to the spread of the Internet (Woodly, 2008) has led to information manipulation and the more citizens use the

Internet, the more their level of trust in the government will decrease (Im *et al.*, 2014). In other words, the webspace can create a gap between the mental perception of government performance and the objective/actual performance of government to affect citizens' perception of government performance and lead to the spread of political dissatisfaction and distrust. In this regard, the research hypothesis is:

H1. Social media has a negative effect on political trust.

## **2.2. The effect of social media on political participation**

The results of some recent studies have shown that constant exposure to critical and radical messages on social media can lead to the formation of opposing identities (McGarty *et al.*, 2014) and negative feelings of users towards the existing political order. Motivates (Xia & Shen, 2018). Social media enables citizens to express their information and ideas very effectively by allowing the production of personal content (Zhu *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, online social media can be considered as an insurgent public sphere in which protesters in collective action express their demands and put pressure on political authorities to fulfil them (Lee *et al.*, 2015).

According to a survey of participants in the Egyptian 2011 Tahrir Square protests, social media in general and Facebook have played an important role in raising awareness of protesters and their decision to participate in the protests. (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Ultimately, new media outlets, by linking repressed and marginalized groups, remove the psychological barrier to their "fear" of repressive governments and give them "hope" to change the status quo (Safranek, 2012).

The fact is that modern technology has fundamentally changed the way individuals and groups organize and share information for mobilization. In particular, social networking sites empower individuals, facilitate the unity of like-minded parties, and act as communication and coordination mechanisms during protests and demonstrations. Thus, it should be said that social media in recent years has played an important role in mobilizing citizens for a multitude of political protests and social movements (Weirman, 2020). In these media, political information such as news and information about protests is faster and easier to access than traditional media due to the low cost of information transfer and the inability of governments to impose severe censorship on it (Chen *et al.*, 2019). Components such as ease and speed of access to various information, the efficiency of these networks in organizing and mobilizing protesters, and the possibility of multimedia dissemination of news and information related to protests, have made these media an essential and effective tool for activists and political protesters.

New communication media allow for a constant flow of updated information and different opinions and easier access, higher speeds, and a more comprehensive range of information searches than traditional websites (Ekström & Manstman, 2015). For example, research shows that social media such as Twitter and Facebook were widely used during the post-2009 protests in Iran. This phenomenon, which some have called the "Twitter Revolution," allowed protesters to communicate with each other and share information about protests without being identified (Tusa, 2013). The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement is another example of a protest movement in which the web has played an important role. According to Castells (2012), the Occupy Wall Street movement was born digital. Protests and calls for the occupation of blogs began and spread through Facebook and Twitter. Protesters played an essential role in mobilizing protesters and expanding the movement by sharing information, images, videos and comments on these online social networks. Howard and Hussain (2011) argue that social media provides movements with the tools they need to organize themselves, independent of government control. Regarding the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, they argue that public frustration in the two countries turned into political action when cell phones and the Internet became available to protesters. These facilities helped protesters unite their different demands and grievances into a common

agenda, turning local and scattered grievances into an organized movement with a collective awareness of common rights. Therefore, the second and third research hypotheses are as follows:

H2. Social media has a negative effect on electoral participation.

H3. Social media has a negative effect on political action.

In democracies, online behaviors have been argued to build social capital and trust (Shah *et al.*, 2001). Also, as Norris (2002) argues, the Internet and social media generally lead to some degree of political distrust in both democratic and non-democratic systems, except that in a democracy, citizens may have less trust in political institutions or politicians. But they maintain solemn trust in the political system or its fundamental principles, while in undemocratic systems, following the expansion of the use of the Internet and online social media, there is a steady decline in political trust, leading to a loss of popular support for the political system (Chen & Wang, 2019). More precisely, in democracies, by paying attention to freedom of expression, a pluralistic society, and the independence of the media, governments can observe the various voices and demands of society through the web and improve public policy and thus increase political trust. On the other hand, in non-democratic systems, due to government censorship in the online space and restrictions on expressing various opinions and demands, the regime deprives itself of this tool to monitor public demands and intensify the government-society gap and reduce political trust. This causes the citizens in such a society to move away from conventional political and electoral participation and mainly to protest activities. Therefore:

H4. Social media has an indirect negative effect on electoral participation by reducing political trust.

H5. Social media has an indirect positive effect on political protest action by reducing political trust.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Data**

In this research, the secondary analysis method was used based on the World Values Survey (WVS) wave 7 data release (49 countries/territories). These data were collected globally and over different periods. Among the 49 countries/territories countries, Iran was selected as a sample. These data were collected longitudinally, only WVS wave 7 data (2017-2020) was used. Wave 7, which took place in Iran in 2020, has a sample size of 1499 participants, all of whom were investigated in this study.

#### **3.2. Measurement variables and descriptive statistics**

*Social media*: Citizens are informed about what is happening in our country and the world through various sources. This independent variable shows how much citizens have access to information and news sources from social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. use? (min = 1; max = 5; mean = 3.84; Std. Deviation = 1.63)

*Political trust*: In a broad sense, political trust refers to citizens' evaluation as the leading institutions of government. The positive assessment of citizens of these institutions is the main indicator of political trust (van Deth *et al.*, 2007, p. 41). In this regard, due to the centralized nature of political power in Iran, in this study, we selected the three central institutions, Government, Parliament, Justice System/Courts as the leading institutions of power and measured citizens' trust in them (min = 1; max = 4; mean = 2.69; Std. Deviation = 0.81; Cronbach's alpha = 0.71)

*Electoral participation*: According to Verba and Nie (1979), political participation refers to activities that citizens perform directly or indirectly and in different sizes to influence the selection of government members and their plans or activities. Political participation has different levels, one of the most important of which is electoral participation. In particular,

given that political parties and organizations have less freedom in most Middle Eastern countries, elections are the main legal tool for influencing the country's policies. In this regard, in this study, to measure electoral participation, two items of participation in national and local elections have been used (min = 1; max = 3; mean = 2.37; Std. Deviation = 2.50; Cronbach's alpha = 0.86)

*Political action:* in this study, the definition of political action is according to Barnes *et al.* (1979). Political action is any voluntary action taken by members of society to influence the political system and currents outside the legal and formal frameworks established by the official institutions and organizations of the country. In this study, four items have been used to measure political action: signing a petition, joining in boycotts, attending lawful/peaceful demonstrations, and joining unofficial strikes. (min = 1; max = 3; mean = 1.55; Std. Deviation = 0.43; Cronbach's alpha = 0.70)

*Control variables:* Two variables of receiving news via email and the Internet are control variables in this study. An item was used in which the amount of access to news and information by email was measured (min = 1; max = 5; mean = 1.77; Std. Deviation = 1.23) to measure the receipt of news via email. The Internet reception of news was also assessed with a statement questioning citizen's access to news via the Internet (min = 1; max = 5; mean = 3.75; Std. Deviation = 1.61).

*Demographic variables:* In this study, age, gender, education, and income are four variables used as demographic variables. Age is an interval variable (M = 39.48; SD = 14.94). In this study, we gave the male scores of 1 and 2 for female (male = 51.1; female = 48.9). Education is also an ordinal variable with a score ranging between 1 for low education and 8 for higher education (M= 3.99; SD = 1.90). Finally, income level is an ordinal variable ranging from 1 to 3, with 1 indicating a low income and 3 a high income (M = 1.64; SD = 0.59).

**Table 1:** Correlations between the variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	1									
2. Sex	-.107**	1								
3. Educational	-.266**	-.029	1							
4. Income	-.113**	.088**	.262**	1						
5. Email	-.165**	-.022	.444**	.169**	1					
6. Internet	-.386**	-.028	.506**	.181**	.317**	1				
7. Social media	-.321**	-.009	.469**	.151**	.329**	.766**	1			
8. Political trust	.095**	.043	-.301**	-.086**	-.212**	-.292**	-.291**	1		
9. Electoral	.033	-.025	-.090**	-.025	-.085**	-.094**	-.059*	.314**	1	
10. Political action	-.079**	-.086**	.205**	.086**	.132**	.204**	.202**	-.280**	-.044	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).\*\*

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).\*

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 1 shows the relationship between research variables. The results show that social media has a significant relationship with all mediating and dependent variables. While social media has a negative relationship with political trust and electoral participation, social media positively relates to political action. Demographic variables also have a significant relationship with mediating and dependent variables. Therefore, the effect of demographic variables was controlled using SPSS software in this study. In this regard, after controlling the demographic variables, new variables RES: political trust, RES: election and RES: political action was created, which were free from the linear relationship of control variables (age, gender, income and education).

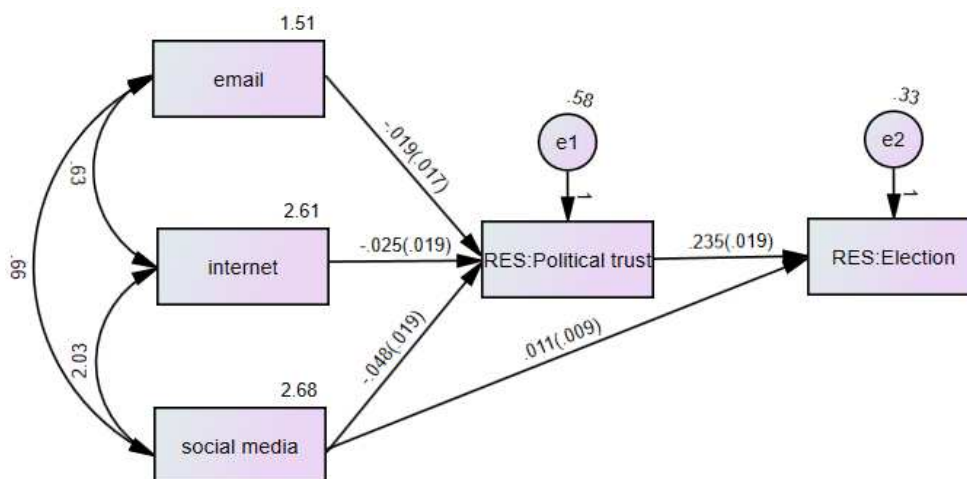
### 3.3. Analytic procedures

Each hypothesis was tested using SEM analysis and Amos software. So, two independent models were used in the study. In the first model, H1, i.e., the direct and indirect effects of social media on electoral participation, was tested. In the second model, H2, i.e., the direct and indirect effects of social media on political action, was tested. One of the important assumptions for using Structural equation modelling is the multivariate normality of the data hypothesis. In this regard, to investigate the normality of multivariate, Mardia coefficient and its critical ratio were used. In this regard, critical ratio values greater than 2.28 are considered a violation of the assumption that multivariate is normal. In this study, the value of the Mardia coefficient in the first model is 0.975, and its critical ratio is 2.256. Also, in the second model, the value of the Mardia coefficient was 1.102 in the first model, and its critical ratio was 2.550. It can be concluded that the assumption of multivariate of with a suitable approximation was observed.

### 4. Results

Testing the hypotheses consisted of two models: in the first model, the direct and indirect effects of social media on electoral participation, and in the second model, the direct and indirect effects of social media on political action were tested.

**Figure 1:** Specified SEM shows unstandardized path coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.



1,000 iterations and a 95% trust interval.

Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1 illustrates the empirical model of the research in the form of structural equation modelling. Regarding the goodness of fit and coefficients of the model, it should be said that the research model has a relatively good fit and the data collected support the theoretical framework of the research: (Model GOF: CMIN = 4.882, DF = 2, P = .087, CMIN / DF = 2.441, RMSEA = .031; PCLOSE = .769, CFI = .998, GFI = .999). Also, in this figure, the non-standard path coefficients and standard error represent the strength of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables in the model.

**Table 2:** Direct and indirect standardized effects on Electoral participation.

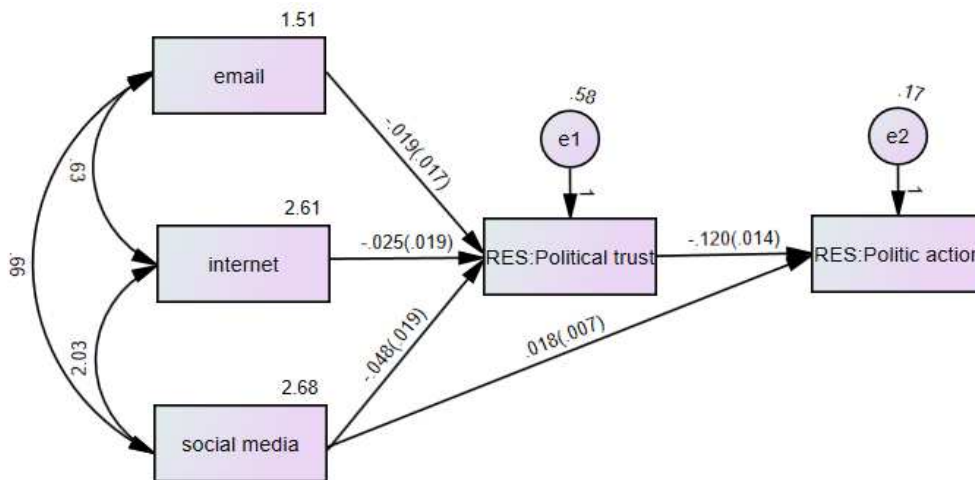
	Political trust	Electoral participation	
	Direct	Direct	Indirect
Email	-0.030		-0.009
Internet	-0.053		-0.016
Social media	-0.103**	0.029	-0.031***
Political trust		0.303***	
R2	0.026	0.09	

Notes: \*p < 0.05 \*\*p < 0.01 \*\*\*p < 0.001

Source: Own elaboration.

The results of Tables 1 and 2 show that only three paths in the above model were significant. Firstly, when social media goes up by 1, political trust goes down by 0.025. The regression weight estimate, -0.025, has a standard error of about .019. Dividing the regression weight estimate by the estimate of its standard error gives  $z = -0.025/0.019 = -1.316$ . In other words, the regression weight estimate is 1.316 standard errors below zero. The probability of getting a critical ratio as large as 1.316 in absolute value is 0.186. In other words, the regression weight for social media in the prediction of political trust is not significantly different from zero at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). Secondly, when political trust goes up by 1, electoral participation goes up by 0.303. The regression weight estimate, 0.303, has a standard error of about .019. Dividing the regression weight estimate by the estimate of its standard error gives  $z = 0.303/0.019 = 15.947$ . In other words, the regression weight estimate is 15.947 standard errors above zero. The probability of getting a critical ratio as large as 15.947 in absolute value is less than 0.001. In other words, the regression weight for political trust in the prediction of electoral participation is significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed). Finally, the results show that although social media does not directly affect electoral participation, it can indirectly affect electoral participation. The standardized indirect (mediated) effect of social media on political trust is -.031. Due to the indirect (mediated) effect of social media on political trust, when social media goes up by 1 standard deviation, political trust goes down by 0.031 standard deviations. This is in addition to any direct (unmediated) effect that social media may have on political trust.

**Figure 2:** Specified SEM shows unstandardized path coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.



Note: This theoretical model was also bootstrapped based on the standard errors with 1,000 iterations and a 95% trust interval.

Source: Own elaboration.



Figure 2 presents the empirical model of the research in the form of structural equation modelling. Regarding the goodness of fit and coefficients of the model, it should be said that the research model has a relatively good fit and the data collected support the theoretical framework of the research: (Model GOF: CMIN = 0.294, DF = 2, P = 0.863, CMIN / DF = 0.147, RMSEA = 0.010; PCLOSE = 0.906, CFI = 0.999, GFI = 1.00). Also, in this figure, the non-standard path coefficients and standard error represent the strength of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables in the model.

**Table 3:** Direct and indirect standardized effects on Political action.

	Political trust		Political action	
	Direct		Direct	Indirect
Email	-.030			.006
Internet	-.053			.012
Social media	-.103**		.068**	.022***
Political trust			-.219***	
R2	.026		.057	

Notes: \*p < 0.05 \*\*p < 0.01 \*\*\*p < 0.001

Source: Own elaboration.

The results of Table 3 show that four paths were significant in the above model. First, similar to the previous model, social media has a significant effect on political trust in institutions. Secondly, when social media goes up by 1, Political action goes up by 0.018. The regression weight estimate, .018, has a standard error of about .007. Dividing the regression weight estimate by the estimate of its standard error gives  $z = .018/.007 = 2.679$ . In other words, the regression weight estimate is 2.679 standard errors above zero. The probability of getting a critical ratio as large as 2.679 in absolute value is 0.007. In other words, the regression weight for social media in the prediction of Political action is significantly different from zero at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). Thirdly, when political trust goes up by 1, Political action goes down by 0.12. The regression weight estimate, -.120, has a standard error of about 0.014. Dividing the regression weight estimate by the estimate of its standard error gives  $z = -0.120/0.014 = -8.612$ . In other words, the regression weight estimate is 8.612 standard errors below zero. The probability of getting a critical ratio as large as 8.612 in absolute value is less than 0.001. In other words, the regression weight for political trust in the prediction of Political action is significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed). Finally, the results show that social media can indirectly affect political action. The standardized indirect (mediated) effect of social media on political action is 0.022. Due to the indirect (mediated) effect of social media on political action, when social media goes up by one standard deviation, political action goes up by 0.022 standard deviations. This is in addition to any direct (unmediated) effect that social media may have on political action. As the results of Sobel's test ( $z=2.423$ ) show, social media indirectly and significantly increases political action. The rest of the paths in the above model were not significant.

## 5. Conclusions

In this article, first, the reasons for the effects of social media on citizens' willingness for political participation were presented. In this regard, research theories have shown that social media can, directly and indirectly, increase electoral participation and protest actions in communities. Secondly, the research hypotheses theories were tested. Dividing political participation into two dimensions of electoral participation and protest political action, the SEM results showed first. However, social media did not significantly affect electoral participation, consistent with Zhang and Chia's theories (2006) and Lu *et al.* (2019), Norris

(2000), the media can indirectly reduce citizens' willingness of electoral participation by mediating political trust.

Iran is a country where elections have a religious and political meaning so that the participation of individuals in elections is not done solely to select parties and candidates. Participation in elections is synonymous with supporting and creating legitimacy for the system of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For this reason, political and governmental officials in Iran are always trying to get a high turnout in the elections through the official media. But in Iran, as in many Middle Eastern governments, the opposition does not have much access to traditional media. For this reason, they try to use the Internet, especially social media, which is less controlled by the government. Naturally, the opposition forces use challenging news on social media to reduce the legitimacy of the system. So, these media reduce citizens' trust in political institutions and officials. As a result, the decrease in political trust in institutions reduces citizens' willingness of electoral participation.

Other research results are consistent with Xia and Shen (2018), Weirman (2020), McGarty *et al.* (2014), Howard and Hussain (2011). They show that social media, directly and indirectly, affects political protest actions, both directly and indirectly, and increases citizens' willingness for such behaviors. New media have made news and information circulate faster around the world, and no government has the power to control and monopolize information. In other words, social media creates a "network society" that can, as a virtual public sphere, increase the struggle to express different views, build solidarity, and increase the empowerment of protesters. If political protesters only talk to close friends or family members, they are unlikely to draw large crowds to the streets. But by investing in weak social links through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and the like, political activists cannot only publish their calls for political mobilization but also start a conversation. That can promote the attitude of political activism among communities. Thus, networking social movements through social media, on the one hand, attracts more fans and, on the other hand, leads to the formation of an alliance between them and other social actors. These matters can provide the basis for the spread of protest behaviors by providing significant political opportunities. In the absence of these networks, there is a high probability that protest movements will not continue. In other words, according to Touraine (1985), a critical and protest culture cannot be formed without discussion in the public sphere. For this reason, in recent years, protest movements using new communication technologies, especially social media, have created a kind of virtual public sphere and shape, inform, or direct public opinion against a particular issue.

Thus, in the present age, the Internet and social media have brought about drastic fundamental changes in traditional societies and have led to differences in human civilization and new worldviews. New information and communication technologies are the main engine of globalization and affect political, social and economic life. With their emergence and expansion, information is expanding exponentially and adapting to increasing information has become somewhat difficult. Along with social media, the Internet has played an essential role in shaping and orienting politics. While taking countries out of difficulty, state monopolies in the field of information and limited sovereignty and revision of government behavior and performance have led to state monopolies. Therefore, the reduction of the rulers' control over the news in the new media has facilitated the mobilization of the protesting citizens and can attract like-minded citizens with better communication facilities.

Finally, this research was conducted on Iranian citizens. Iran has a particular political system, which has both democratic and republican features and traditional and religious elements. For this reason, the ideology in this country is very different from other countries in the Middle East. Therefore, the research results can be generalized to other Middle Eastern countries, especially those who recently experienced the Arab Spring and political protests.

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