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*The Internet's Influence on Democratization:
Cyber Optimism and Cyber Pessimism*

THE INTERNET'S INFLUENCE ON DEMOCRATIZATION: CYBER OPTIMISM AND CYBER PESSIMISM

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Abstract:

This article reviews and analyses scholarly perceptions of the internet's effects on democratization. Two main approaches to the internet are broadly identified: cyber optimism and cyber pessimism. The former is characterized by a positive view of the internet's potential to bring about political changes: democracy can be promoted worldwide, empowering, and eventually liberating closed societies. The latter, in contrast, offers a sceptical perspective: authoritarian regimes have managed to adapt to a new information environment, exploiting digital technologies for propaganda, surveillance, and censorship. By critically reviewing the literature, it is possible to recognize and trace the evolution of scholarly thought, from highly optimistic to pessimistic, on the internet's influence on democratization. Empirical evidence from the literature also allows for identifying key tactics that states employ to control the internet. Increasing digital control by states demonstrates that optimistic assessments related to the internet's global rise have not been reasonably justified.

Keywords: cyber optimism, cyber pessimism, internet, social media, democratization, digital control

Introduction

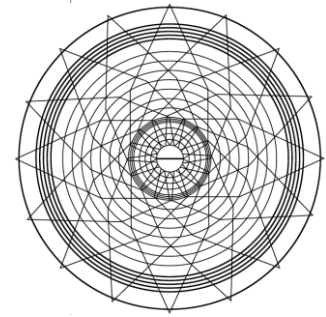
Currently, most of the global population (63 %) has access to the internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2021). In addition, there are now almost 2 billion websites. For comparison, in 2001, only 8 out of 100 individuals were connected to the internet while just 5 million websites were available (Nye, 2011, p. 114). Along with the global penetration of the internet, the popularity and significance of social media have been rising too. For instance, out of 4.9 billion internet users in the world, 2.9 billion are active Facebook¹ users

¹ The activity of the social media is recognized as extremist and prohibited on the territory of the Russian Federation, the data here and further are used for research purposes and are not aimed at approving extremist activities.

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and 2.5 billion are registered users of YouTube (Statista, 2022). Twitter is also in demand, generating more than 15 billion posts per month.

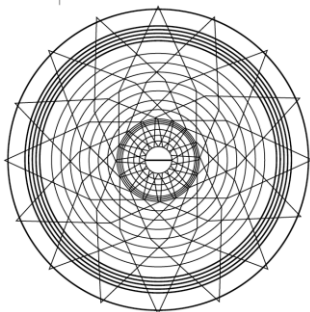
Given its global reach and increasing role in people's lives, it is not surprising that the internet attracts considerable attention from researchers. Scholarly perception of digital technologies can be characterized by two broad approaches: cyber optimism and cyber pessimism. Representatives of the former are distinguished by an optimistic view of the new communication technology's potential, arguing the internet empowers civil society and undermines the state's monopoly on information (Diamond, 2010; Howard & Hussain, 2013). According to cyber optimists, digital technologies would eventually lead to the liberation of closed societies. Representatives of cyber pessimism, on the other hand, are sceptical about the liberating power of the internet, providing numerous cases of digital control by authoritarian regimes (Kalathil & Boas, 2003; Morozov, 2011). Consequently, despite its many conveniences for human beings, the internet appears to be exploited by states to strengthen authoritarian rule.

Thus, to better comprehend the current role of the internet in contemporary digital society, this article aims to review and discuss the main arguments of the ongoing scholarly debate about the internet's influence on democratization. In this case, the review of scientific sources through analysis, comparison, synthesis, and integration of the authors' findings and conclusions allows a better understanding of the internet's effects on political processes. The article first reviews the cyber optimists' views and main points, given their initial dominance of the scholarly debate. Then the counterarguments of cyber pessimists are discussed as they are currently gaining prominence in the academic dispute on the internet's impact. As a result, the evolution of scholarly thought on the internet, from highly positive to negative, and numerous tactics of state intervention to tame new digital technology are identified. Despite great optimistic expectations associated with its global rise, the internet is increasingly controlled by states while the world, contrary to the cyber optimists' vision, has not become free and democratic.

Internet as a liberation technology

Perception of the internet – given its decentralized structure that does not allow full control by any state – has initially been highly optimistic. Starting from the 1990s, when the internet has become available to mass consumers, many scholars, experts, and commentators have held great expectations over the fast-developing new communication technology, arguing it can transform society, politics, and even the whole world.

Cyber optimists did not hesitate to make utopian forecasts, foreseeing a digital future, in which physical space will lose its significance, the role of states will decline, and the world population will find itself in greater harmony (Negroponte, 1995). Gilder (2000) even



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likened the internet with the Bible, comparing digital communications that ignore distance and location with angels who also transcend space and time. Rheingold, meanwhile, argued that internet connectivity can revive the public domain, making possible direct democracy via computers: “[t]he utopian vision of the electronic agora, an “Athens without slaves”” (1993, p. 58).

Optimistic views were also expressed about the impact of the internet on closed, non-democratic societies. The main argument was that the internet would undermine authoritarian regimes, making the world freer, as it allows the fast distribution and exchange of alternative ideas and information. In other words, authoritarian states would no longer be able to control what information their citizens consume and thus could not hide any wrongdoings from the public. A more pluralistic and open public sphere would challenge state control of information, empowering civil society vis-a-vis government (Wright, 2000). Eventually, strong society with access to the internet and demands for more freedoms would lead to the collapse of non-democratic political system.

In this regard, cyber optimists have paid specific attention to China as an authoritarian state with the world’s largest number of internet users. Kristof (2005), for instance, claimed that the communist regime in China would soon collapse due to the spread of the internet as an increasing number of posts and blogs exposed the corruption of Chinese officials, thereby undermining the state’s monopoly on information. The bet was placed on the inevitable inability of the local government to censor cyberspace due to a growing number of Chinese netizens, who were assumed to incessantly investigate and publish state crimes on the internet. Under the avalanche of alternative and critical information, the exposed government would thus fall.

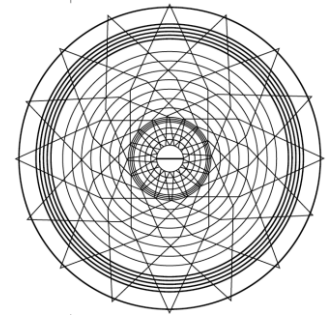
Many political leaders were similarly quite optimistic about the internet’s liberating potential and uncontrollable structure. For instance, in 2000, then President of the U.S. Bill Clinton famously claimed that taming the internet by authoritarian China was akin to attempting to “nail Jell-O to the wall” (The Economist, 2013), that is, it was pointless.

Cyber optimists have also discussed a closely related issue of collective action amid the global penetration of the internet. Enthusiastic rhetoric has dominated the discussion, especially during and after protests, demonstrations, and uprisings across the world. According to Howard (2010), civil society in different parts of the world, from Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan to Kuwait and Turkey, has already learned to effectively use communication technologies to oust incumbent presidents, consolidate demonstrations, evade censorship, or enhance democratic practices. Relatedly, Howard’s (2010) study of internet use in Muslim countries concluded that the dissemination of digital technologies facilitates democratization.

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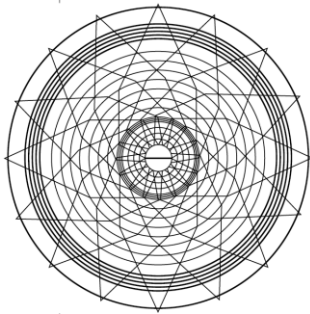


In this context, Larry Diamond, one of the leading voices among cyber optimists, called the internet a liberation technology, which allows people “to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom” (Diamond, 2010, p. 70). Similarly, Palmer (2003) argued that the new communication technology helps to fight non-democratic regimes by allowing citizens to distribute reports on state corruption and misconduct, call for protests, organize online elections (assuming it is harder to falsify them), and mock authoritarian leaders.

The internet, in other words, has become a political tool in the hands of society, helping to document various violations and challenge non-democratic governance. Following such reasoning, expanding internet connectivity, assumingly the greatest challenge for authoritarians’ political survival, would eventually democratize the world as “the virus of freedom, for which there is no antidote, is spread by electronic networks to the four corners of the earth” (Wriston, 1997, p. 172). In 2003, a conceptual framework on how to oust all remained dictators in the world by 2025 was developed, in which the internet shall play a crucial role as it “opens much of the rest of the world to people who otherwise repressed and isolated [...] [and] is a force multiplier for democrats and an expense multiplier for dictators” (Palmer, 2003, p. 78).

Consequently, one of the widely discussed cases that was about to prove (again) the effectiveness of digital technologies and platforms in toppling authoritarian regimes appeared to be theocratic Iran. There, in 2009, after the reportedly controversial presidential election, in which the incumbent won, people massively took to the streets disagreeing with the result. Coinciding with the global rise of social media and the spread of internet-connected mobile phones in the region, the events in Iran were characterized by digital flows of content about the ongoing protests, regime’s brutality, and appeals to the international community (Howard, 2010). As a result, scholars rushed to conclude that the digital revolution was taking place within the authoritarian context – what cyber visioners had long predicted – and closed societies would soon be freed. Yet, despite all the efforts of digital activists, the Iranian government managed to survive.

Nevertheless, the optimistic view of the liberating potential of the internet did not fade. On the contrary, it has been boosted after the 2010-2011 Arab Spring. Cyber optimists hold that digital technologies and social media significantly contributed to the successful uprisings in the Arab world, leading to the collapse of longstanding dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen (Harb, 2011). Howard and Hussain (2013) concluded that social media played a key role in forming political discussions and helped spread democratic ideas. The authors also found that some key offline events followed revolutionary online debates as the internet “allowed communities to realize that they shared grievances and



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because they nurtured transportable strategies for mobilizing against dictators” (Howard & Hussain, 2013, p. 3).

Tufekci and Wilson (2012) likewise found evidence that social networking platforms increased participation in the 2011 street protests in Egypt and served as alternative sources of information, which the local government struggled to censor. The authors concluded that internet-enabled political communication helped to organize and coordinate anti-government action that ended in the fall of the dictatorship, empowering individuals in authoritarian regimes to articulate aspirations for change.

Journalists and commentators also joined the discussion of the internet's effects on democratization, quickly dubbing anti-government protests and riots in the Arab world Twitter and Facebook revolutions (Reed, 2014, p. 126). It was even suggested to award Twitter the Noble Peace Prize after the 2009 street protests in Iran (Pfeifle, 2009).

However, countries from North Africa and the Middle East are not the only ones in which the internet and social media have been associated with coordinated digital resistance. Digital resistance also took place in Ukraine where the internet and social media platforms have likewise been credited with political change. In November 2013, as a consequence of then President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign an association treaty with the European Union, a Facebook post from a journalist called for a gathering on Independence Square that eventually led to mass-scale anti-government protests (Bohdanova, 2014). Like both the Arab Spring and the snow revolution, protests in Ukraine (called Euromaidan) are argued to be fuelled and organized with the help of digital technologies (Surzhko-Harned & Zahuranec, 2017). According to MacDuffee Metzger and Tucker (2017, p. 190), “the evidence is clear that social media was a key tool used for organizing” collective action in Ukraine that in the end toppled Yanukovich's government.

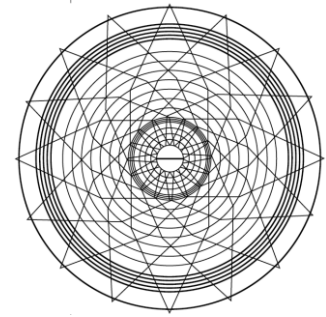
It can be seen that many scholars, experts, and commentators appeared to believe in the new communication technology's liberating potential and that the internet can (and will) democratize closed societies. The internet, in other words, is in a position to promote democracy across the world, empowering civil society and undermining the monopoly of authoritarian regimes on information, eventually causing their collapse.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the deterministic perception of technologies – that is, the belief that technologies can ultimately bring about political and social changes regardless of the context – is not unique to the internet. Before the advance of the internet, scientific and media communities along with regular witnesses also enthusiastically evaluated the prospect and potential of earlier communication technologies such as the printing press, telegraph, radio, and TV, predicting the forthcoming inevitable transformation of society, economics, and world politics (Spar, 2001; Standage, 1999). For

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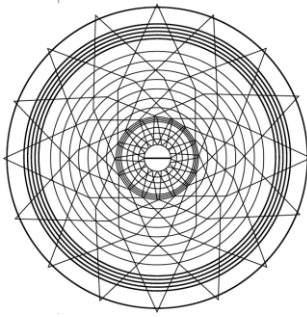
instance, in the wake of the 1788 French revolution, the printing press that accelerated the exchange of information was hailed for causing regime change in France and leading to the unavoidable dissemination of ideas of freedom to other nations (Standage, 2012, p. 196). The telegraph – the internet of the Victorian age – was in turn perceived as a tool to promote peace in the world since, by connecting states, it would eliminate misunderstandings between them (Standage, 1999).

The internet has simply become the latest human invention infused with high expectations. This is partly due to the libertarian culture that was closely intertwined with the development of computer networks (Kalathil & Boas, 2003). Libertarians, whose main value is unrestricted freedom, are against any state intervention in the development and regulation of the internet: both information and cyberspace must be free (Moore, 2018). Their firm position that parallels anarchic ideas was unambiguously expressed by John Barlow (1996) in “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace”:

Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.

In addition to libertarian values, a positive perception of the internet is also associated with low entry barriers that have significantly simplified interpersonal communication, allowed the fast distribution of ideas and information regardless of geographical location, and, most importantly, facilitated the coordination of collective action. That is, the internet, making possible instant many-to-many communication, eliminates intermediaries (Nye, 2011, p. 116) and thus allows users to generate and broadcast information.

Consequently, the internet – since it has increased access to information and has made it easier for citizens to communicate and, if needed, mobilize against a regime – has been posited to challenge authoritarian rule, exacerbating the “dictator’s dilemma”. The latter is a term used to specify the inherent trade-off that authoritarian leaders face (Wintrobe, 1998). On one hand, autocrats – due to the lack of legitimacy resulting from the non-democratic nature of their governance – need to use force, including violence, to suppress dissent and keep political power. Yet, excessive repression could lead to resentment and rebellion. On the other hand, they also need to provide public goods to the population to maintain political stability. Excessive provision of public goods and benefits to prevent protests and unrest could though undermine their power base and lead to the emergence of challengers to their rule. Thus, authoritarian leaders in order to stay in power always need to keep a balance between the use of repression and public goods. Meanwhile, the internet, which was believed to empower citizens to the extent they can



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overthrow the regime, was to make it more difficult, if possible, for authoritarian regimes to maintain power and keep stability.

In this context, anti-government protests, riots, and revolutions, in which digital technologies were credited with political change, have amplified the dictator's dilemma and have further contributed to the ongoing scholarly debate on the internet's implications for democratization. Nevertheless, not all witnesses of the internet's global development have embraced its liberating and democratizing power. There have appeared many sceptical scholarly voices that consider the political impact of digital technologies overrated.

State resilience and digital control

Pessimistic views, like optimistic ones, have accompanied – but did not dominate yet – the development of the global internet from the beginning. Wu and Weaver (1996), for example, discussed the emergence of online democracy in the 1990s, identifying numerous shortcomings of online surveys, including the problem to verify respondents and check the authenticity of both the sample and results. In other words, online surveys were vulnerable to manipulation. This could negatively affect democratic practices since public opinion – which is assumed to be important for democratic rule – might have been distorted, which in turn could lead to flawed state policies. The authors, thus, concluded that the internet did not ultimately strengthen democracy.

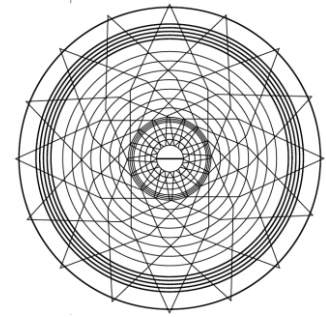
Kalathil and Boas (2003) were also not excited by the views and forecasts of cyber optimists. They demonstrated that optimistic hopes for the promotion of democracy across the world with the help of digital technologies were not fully justified as authoritarian regimes, in attempts to control cyberspace, have begun adapting to a changing information environment. Restrictive legislation, arrests of bloggers and internet users, and blocking and censorship of websites and digital content have become common methods to control information flows on the internet, helping authoritarian regimes to survive.

Meanwhile, Gladwell (2010) expressed scepticism about the internet's effects on political activism, arguing that it requires deeply motivated individuals whereas social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter offer weak ties: a user can “follow” or be a “friend” with someone whom he or she would never meet in real life. According to Gladwell (2010), cyber optimists see no difference between a virtual “friend” and a real one and do not realize that signing an online petition does not necessarily mean real action on the ground. Weak ties seldom lead to political activism associated with financial or personal risks. Siapera (2018, p. 60) calls such a lack of action, which is limited only to digital activism, “clicktivism”.

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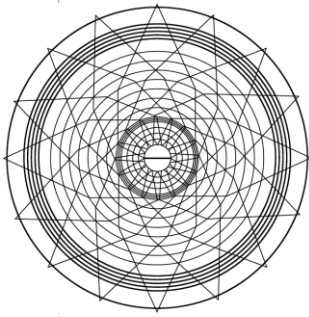
Pessimism about the liberating potential of the internet has not decreased even after the so-called Twitter and Facebook revolutions in the Arab world. Esfandiari (2010), for instance, maintained that the impact of Twitter on protests in Iran after the controversial presidential election in 2009 was highly overestimated. This is because social media was not the main communication instrument of protesters – messages about anti-governmental actions were spread orally. Also, according to Esfandiari (2010), posts on Twitter about the coordination of protests in Iran were written in English – not Farsi spoken by Iranians – and distributed among English-speaking users living outside of Iran.

Lynch (2011) likewise was not impressed by the claimed liberating and democratizing role of the internet during the Arab spring. According to Lynch (2011, p. 303), traditional media, people's irritation with rigged elections, and quickly worsening economic conditions played a more crucial role in the revolutionary events. Curran, Fenton, and Freedman (2016, pp. 67-68) also argue that rather than digital technologies deep social, political, religious, and economic problems prompted the masses to take to the streets in the Arab region.

In addition, cyber pessimists (Gladwell, 2010; Lynch, 2011) hold that political mobilization based on the internet and digital media is seriously flawed due to the lack of leaders needed to run the country after the authoritarian regime's fall. That is, social movements empowered by digital technologies are commonly horizontally organized and, thus, leaderless. Such a network structure might be advantageous for the organization and coordination of collective action but is less effective in subsequent state-building.

Meanwhile, Onuch (2015) states that although the internet helped to mobilize and coordinate the protest movement in Ukraine during Euromaidan, it was also exploited for the spread of misinformation, rumours, and radical content, causing divisions in society. Besides, individuals tended to demonstrate their adherence to the revolutionary cause solely on social media without joining protests on the ground ("clicktivism"). That is, social networking platforms used for the coordination of anti-government efforts were at the same time hindering the involvement of potential participants in street protests (Onuch, 2015, p. 178).

Furthermore, there is also criticism of tech giants that own social networks (such as Twitter and Facebook) deemed to contribute to regime change. Morozov (2011) doubts the role of tech corporations in the democratization of the world, focusing instead on the enormous and barely accountable political power they have wielded and the business orientation that drives their interests. Notably, there is a burgeoning literature criticizing big tech for their monopolistic behaviour, unelected leadership, biased algorithms, extensive surveillance, working conditions, and role in spreading disinformation and propaganda, among other things (Foer, 2017; Foroohar, 2020; Zuboff, 2019). Linaa Jensen



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(2020) even compares tech corporations with medieval feudal lords in terms of their economic and political power and control of customers in the digital age with control of peasants in the Middle Age.

Besides big tech, Morozov (2011) also criticizes cyber optimists for their naive belief that digital technologies and online communications would undermine the foundation under authoritarian regimes, failing to foresee how non-democratic states could themselves effectively exploit the internet and social media for the distribution of propaganda, conduction of surveillance, and censorship. In other words, cyber optimists ignore the other side of the internet in the context of a new information environment: communication technologies can be used not for democratization but, instead, to strengthen authoritarian rule.

Eventually, many authoritarian regimes have learned how to neutralize the liberating potential of the internet, exploiting digital technologies to secure their political survival. That is why, countries, in which the freedom of speech and freedom of association are routinely suppressed, are characterized by:

1. systematic censorship and blocking of websites and online content;
2. arrests, intimidation, and harassment of journalists, bloggers, and digital activists;
3. introduction of the restrictive legal framework that strictly regulates cyberspace;
4. internet shutdowns, especially during acute political crises;
5. digital surveillance, including over political oppositionists, dissidents, and journalists;
6. cyberattacks aimed at independent media, politicians, and journalists;
7. organization of farms of trolls and bots that manipulate public opinion on social media;
8. control of internet infrastructure, including telecommunication companies, internet providers, and internet exchange points (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, & Zittrain, 2010; Roberts, 2018; Shahbaz & Funk, 2021; Singer & Brooking, 2018).

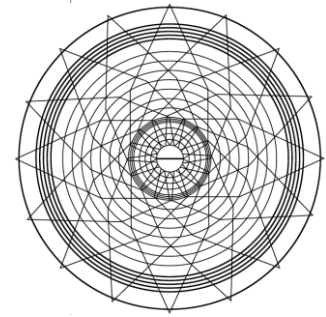
Early breakthrough communication technologies (such as the printing press, telegraph, radio, and TV) were also accompanied by unprecedented optimism and hype. Great hopes were imposed on these technologies as they were expected to transform society, government, and world politics. Therefore, it is not surprising that after the global advance of the internet in the 1990s, many scholars, experts, and commentators – like their colleagues centuries before – were confident that the internet would change the world, making it free and democratic. Their main miscalculation, however, was to underestimate the resilience of authoritarian regimes that have managed to adapt to a changing information environment.

On the other hand, should cyber optimists have followed the history of the world development of communication technologies, their frustration with increasing cases of

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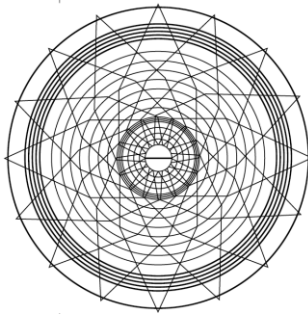


state control over the internet and social media would have been softened. For example, radio too was originally considered a subversive technology as it broadcast information, permeating state borders and thus significantly impeding the government's ability to control the flow of information within the country (Spar, 2001). Radio – like the internet now – “had low entry costs, no discernible property rights (initially at least), and an audience that stretched for thousands of miles and encompassed millions of people” (Spar, 2001, p. 127). Consequently, under the national security pretext, the radio industry was taken under state regulation and control without wasting much time.

That is, in the beginning, early communication technologies – like the internet – were perceived to challenge institutions of power as were deemed to be in a position to change the status quo and decrease the role and influence of governments (Spar, 2001; Standage, 2012). These communication technologies were initially thought to be uncontrollable. However, after some time, all of them were tamed by states, appearing under control of, borrowing Barlow's (1996) words, “weary giants of flesh and steel”. As current reality proves, the internet too has not become an exception.

Besides the states' adaptation and subsequent interference with communication technologies, the development of the internet is treated with restrained optimism also due to social and political polarization of society that it reportedly provokes. Sunstein holds, drawing from social science experiments, that the internet and social media platforms “make it easier for people to surround themselves (virtually) with the opinions of like-minded others and insulate themselves from competing views” (2017, p. 69), which can be detrimental to democracy. More importantly, people can, and actually do, delve deeper into online communities with radical views, ending up with more extreme views and positions than they used to have. Such echo chambers are further reinforced by social media algorithms that personalize users' content based on their preferences (Pariser, 2011), aggravating the problem of polarization and segregation.

In addition, another actual problem that does not add optimism to many scholars is the proliferation of propaganda and disinformation via social media platforms. The ability to rapidly spread and amplify messages (often with the help of bots and trolls) that the internet offers has made propaganda more effective and extensive in the digital age. Currently, an increasing number of political institutions and governments resorts to “computational propaganda” in order to manipulate public opinion (Bradshaw, Bailey & Howard, 2020) while tactics of digital propaganda become more sophisticated (Woolley, 2022). Consequently, there is now a shift in scholarly focus as social media platforms “are more likely to be discussed as incubators of “fake news” and propaganda than as tools for empowerment and social change” (Guess & Lyons, 2020, p. 10).



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Against such a backdrop, cyberspace has seemingly become a futile ground for conspiracy theorists to spread their views: in the digital age, conspiracies along with misinformation have been amplified and circulated with great speed and effect. Importantly, online conspiracies such as misinformation about the origins and consequences of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19 conspiracy) and a secret world government behind all evils on the planet (QAnon conspiracy), among many others, pose risks to public safety and health and lead to a lack of confidence in institutions (Allington, Duffy, Wessely, Dhavan, & Rubin, 2021; Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020). Yet not declining in popularity, conspiracies reinforce one another (Bodner, Welch, Brodie, Muldoon, Leech, & Marshall, 2020; Morelock & Narita, 2022), accelerating the spread of misinformation online.

In other words, the internet helps not only to disseminate critical and politically sensitive information that assumingly exposes repressive regimes but also extreme, misleading, and false content. Meanwhile, the proliferation of information bubbles, propaganda, and conspiracies, which have been amplified by social media, has negative implications for individuals and society, including increased polarization and manipulated public opinion. Thus, as hinted above, some developments facilitated by the internet are not conducive to democratization; in contrast, they can undermine trust in the democratic process.

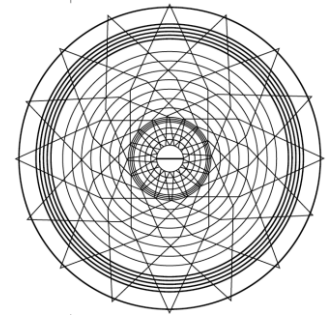
Conclusion

As a result of the review of the ongoing scholarly debate, the evolution of perception of the internet's impact on democratization can be identified. From the beginning, optimistic perceptions, expectations, and forecasts about the liberating potential of new digital technology have dominated the academic discussion. After protests, uprisings, and revolutions that, according to scholars (Diamond, 2010; Howard & Hussain, 2013), were enabled by the internet and social media, optimistic belief in tech has only been strengthened. The extent and reach of cyber optimism were hard to restrain. After the 2009 anti-government protests in Iran, which were extensively discussed and speculated on social media, it was suggested that the Noble Peace Prize goes to Twitter while the protests themselves were called the Twitter revolution. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that after the Arab Spring digital technologies have been hailed and crowned as the liberator of closed societies. Meanwhile, the 2011 regime change in Egypt was dubbed the Facebook revolution. The belief that all is needed to liberalize non-democratic societies and fight authoritarian regimes is to provide people with access to the internet has been firm ever since.

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Nevertheless, along with cyber optimism, cyber pessimism has also been developing. Not all witnesses of the internet's global rise were intoxicated by marvels of digital technologies. Many scholars cautiously perceived the liberating potential of the internet and social media, avoiding highly promising judgements. One of the reasons for doubt, according to cyber pessimists, is the apparent exaggeration of the political role and impact of communication technologies on street protests in longstanding dictatorships (Curran, Fenton, & Freedman, 2016; Morozov, 2011). There were other causes (corruption, rigged elections, economic conditions) and means (oral communication, traditional media) that sparked anti-government sentiments and collective action while cyber optimists rushed to equal the internet with freedom and democracy.

Another interrelated reason for cyber pessimists' doubt about the possibility of democratization with the internet's help is the resilience and adaptability of authoritarian regimes to a novel information environment, in which geographic location and distance are ignored, information is circulated almost instantly, and communication is conducted basically at no cost. Many governments, finding themselves in a new situation, have eventually managed to extend their grip on the digital sphere. For that reason, various tactics of state control over the internet and social media, including censorship, digital surveillance, restrictive legislation, communications blackouts, and propaganda, have been implemented (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, & Zittrain, 2010; Roberts, 2018).

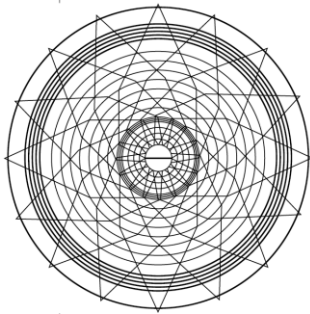
The fact that many states have appeared to tame the internet is also confirmed by the annual ranking of digital freedom conducted by Freedom House (Shahbaz & Funk, 2021) that reports on numerous cases of internet control across the world. In other words, despite the (perceived) liberating potential of the internet, many countries have learned to control the new communication technology, minimizing the negative consequences of internet connectivity and use, including the coordination of anti-government protests. It is just worth mentioning that the internet, which is also blamed for causing polarization in society and amplifying the spread of misleading and false content, has not become the first technology that found itself under close state inspection, following the path of early communication inventions.

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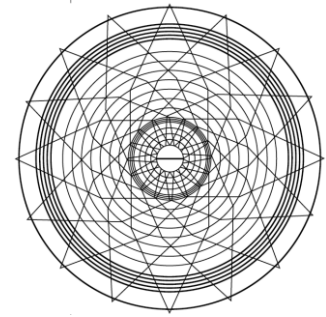
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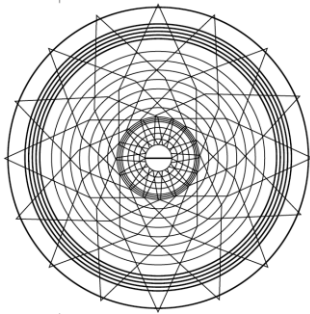
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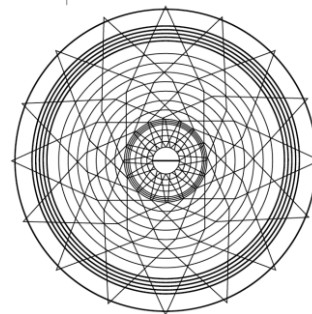
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ВЛИЯНИЕ ИНТЕРНЕТА НА ДЕМОКРАТИЗАЦИЮ: КИБЕРОПТИМИЗМ И КИБЕРПЕССИМИЗМ

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Аннотация:

В данной статье рассматриваются и анализируются научные представления о влиянии Интернета на демократизацию. Выделяются два основных подхода к Интернету: кибероптимизм и киберпессимизм. Первый подход характеризуется позитивным взглядом на потенциал Интернета для осуществления политических изменений: расширяя возможности общества и в итоге освобождая закрытые общества, Интернет способствует продвижению демократии во всем мире. Второй подход, напротив, характеризуется скептическим взглядом: авторитарные режимы сумели адаптироваться к новой информационной среде, используя цифровые технологии для пропаганды, слежки и цензуры. Посредством анализа научной литературы также прослеживается эволюция мысли о влиянии Интернета на демократизацию от крайне оптимистичной к пессимистичной. Эмпирические данные из научной литературы также позволяют определить основные методы, которые государства используют для контроля над Интернетом. Усиление цифрового контроля со стороны государств демонстрирует, что оптимистичные оценки, связанные с глобальным ростом Интернета, не были оправданы.

Ключевые слова: кибероптимизм, киберпессимизм, Интернет, социальные медиа, демократизация, цифровой контроль