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# **The Role of New Media Technologies in the Globalisation Process**

## Seeking Traces in the Iranian Post-Election Revolts

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By

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## Abstract

This paper deals with the question of how new media technologies affect the globalisation process. It aims at bringing Internet technology and here especially Social Media in the discussion about international news reporting and the creation of a global public sphere. To do so, the first part of the paper examines several globalisation concepts in regard to a global news production and with a focus on the role that technology plays in the global news ecology. Taking the post-election revolts in Iran in summer 2009 as an example, the fourth chapter seeks for empirical hints of an influence of Social Media on the global public sphere analysing several Twitter messages and newspaper articles that were published during the revolts. Concluding, the fifth chapter of the paper clarifies how Social Media services could be included into the discussed globalisation concepts pointing to theoretical and methodological problems and raising questions that are worthwhile to examine in future research.

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## 1. Introduction

The importance of the media's role in the globalization process is undoubted. The media informs and connects people across borders and has the power to create a global public space, where collective awareness is raised and transnational discourse takes place. This power results most obviously from media reporting and the coverage of global events and issues. And here it is especially the journalists who are considered to be the most influential gatekeepers, discovering world relevant issues, investigating news story's, publishing them and setting so the news agenda of their own or – in case of foreign correspondents – another country.

However, the advent of new technologies could give this gatekeeping structure a spin towards a more divers and unprofessional developing of global news and a global public. Internet services provide citizens with the possibility to not only consume information from all over the world, but also to contribute to the news production publishing their thoughts and opinions and even sometimes their own local news stories. The global connectivity of Internet users through services such as *YouTube* or *Twitter* makes it possible that some of these news stories could find their way through the world raising a global discussion without the help of any media institution or media professional.

This possibility and its implications, as well as methodological and theoretical problems arising in this context, are addressed within this paper. But before turning to the role of internet media in global news production, the term globalisation and global public sphere shall be examined putting into context the main drivers: politics, economics, culture and technology. In the third chapter, the transnational communication and news production shall be analysed by comparing two differing communication models. These implications shall then be extended to Social Media as a global communication tool taking into account the use of Twitter during the Iranian revolts after the presidential elections in June 2009 as an example. To do so, several Twitter messages and newspaper articles were analysed in order to detect how Twitter messages were used during the revolts and how they were mirrored in professional newspapers.

Finally, this research leads to major implications answering the following question: How can new technologies such as Social Media be brought into the discussion of global news production and media globalisation and which theoretical and methodological problems arise by doing so?

## 2. Map of media globalisation

When referring to the globalisation of media, it is necessary to contextualize the term 'globalisation' in order to clarify which concept is used. There are several types of dimensions with which globalisation can be described, which leads to a variety of concepts that can hardly be combined. However, if one looks at globalisation as a process – using the dimension of time in the observation – there is almost a consensus that globalisation can be described as a time period or phase developed in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of modernity or a more specific term to describe a certain era of modernity (e.g. Appadurai, 2006; Castells, 2005; Giddens, 2005).

This of course does not imply, which features it bears and how globalisation took place. In fact, the usage of the term in order to name a time period and the adaption by politicians and other elite figures has blurred the scientific meaning and particularly caused a renunciation from the term using other terms to describe interconnectivity and transnational interdependence (for example Beck, 2005). 'Globalisation' should therefore be considered as an overarching term referring to many different concepts.

A promising way to draw a map of globalisation concepts is to typologise them distinguishing the dimensions politics, economics, culture and technology. Even though almost all concepts integrate all of these dimensions, the emphasis varies. Unchallenged is the role of media and communications as a main driver in all these concepts, whereas also here the implication varies depending on the angle from which the media is viewed – so as a political, economical, cultural or technological property.

A great amount of scholars defines media globalisation as an output of political and economical dependency stressing a hegemonic and (cultural-) imperialistic character of the media that leads to post-colonialism (McMillan, 2007), Westernisation or cultural primacy (Chalaby, 2006). The latter for instance becomes evident in the great amount of US-American media productions broadcasted in Europe (cf. Chalaby, 2006, 47). These perspectives question the concept of globalisation rather than contributing to it.

*"In such ways, these theorists of global news dominance are sceptical about the validity of the 'global' and globalizing news formations and news flows which more accurately reflect the relentless capitalist expansion and worldwide 'westernization' (...) of culture and commerce." (Cottle, 2009, 30)*

These concerns activated organizations such as UNESCO or the European Broadcast Union (EBU) to strengthen the regional or local media production in order to create a

counterweight to the hegemonic media imports. Even though – according to Chalaby (2006, 17) – the latter has not had a great impact on the imbalance so far, this could be a promising approach for the future.

Besides these more political and economical approaches, another great amount of scholars defines globalisation as a cultural development creating a global public sphere where collective identification takes place. This concept builds on McLuhan's 'Global Village' and Habermas' concept of a 'public sphere' (cf. Cottle, 2009, 30). The media and especially the news reporting play an important role here creating the space for intellectual exchange and identification with a global or European (Firmstone, 2008) public. Whereas Firmstone (2008) points out that the creation of a public sphere is not only due to transnational media:

*“Rather than focusing on the media, it seems necessary to give further consideration to the question of who constitutes the public in the triangular relationship between the citizens, the transnational media and collective actors that Neidhardt et al. (2000) map out as necessary for a functioning European public sphere.” (Firmstone, 2008, 438)*

Especially the influence of the citizens is focused within this paper. How do they communicate transnationally, which technologies do they use, and how does their behaviour change in reaction to the advent of new technology?

Even though his concept has been developed further into cultural approaches, McLuhan apprehends globalisation from a mainly technological standpoint. He considers the modern world to be a 'Global Village' connected through “new electronic interdependencies” (Levinson, 1999, 66). McLuhan elaborated this concept in the 1960s, and pointed with these 'new interdependencies' to electricity at a whole and the uprising television (Castells, 1996, 333f). According to McLuhan, the television connects the viewers worldwide and builds a cognitive net embracing the planet (Baltes, 2005, 74). This concept is of great importance nowadays considering the net of data that spans around the world. As mentioned before, it is therefore grounding for recent globalisation theories.

Castells (1996) for instance builds on the 'Global Village', when explaining 'The rise of the network society'. As McLuhan, he has a thorough technological focus on globalisation. Although Castells points out that the world of 'data nets' is a new communication era that cannot be compared to McLuhan's concept (Castells, 1996,

337), both authors emphasise the determination of social developments by technological development.

*“Unlike any other revolution, the core of the transformation we are experiencing in the current revolution refers to technologies of information processing and communication.”* (Castells, 1996, 31)

Castells puts the advent of the Internet and communication technologies at the beginning of the 1990s in relation to global cultural, economical, and institutional interconnections. According to Castells, new media technology “can contribute to the building of networks among new social movements that might serve to reinforce relations of dominance or alternatively call them into question” (Stevenson, 1999, 174). These mediatised social movements require a new diversified media production. Unfortunately, the connection between technological development and changing routines in global media production has been less addressed in the literature. Cottle (2009, 33ff) points out that there is – so far – a lack of theory in this field. How global media production changes and renews itself due to new technology plays so far rather a role in reflections of media professionals and journalists than in academic literature (cf. Cottle, 2009, 30ff). This discourse then has a rather normative character examining especially new challenges in the Internet and “the industry’s fetish for ‘live’ 24/7 news” (Cottle, 2009, 34). But also technologies allowing people to become part of the media production themselves, such as mobile technology or camcorders, are addressed within these reflections. Hafez (2007, 100) indeed questions the globalising factor of the Internet mentioning that the democratising possibility of the Internet has not been taken yet (ibid.). His arguments shall be discussed in Chapter three.

It is important to consider the angle from which globalisation as a process is viewed. The concurring concepts have their own emphasises and enlighten mostly one aspect of global interrelations. In order to analyse the role of new media technologies it is useful to take a closer look on theories and models that describe how news and news reporting emerge and which factors should be taken into consideration.

### **3. Global news reporting**

The attendance of a global public sphere as a public space where international topics are discussed and global identity is created needs as a prerequisite transnational (or ‘cross-

border' as Hafez (2007) puts it) orientated actions. Or in other words: How do we know about global issues, how can we decide what is of global importance?

As mentioned, the main answer to this question in the literature is the media and global news reporting as the most powerful tool. Analysing global crisis as the "dark side of a globalised planet" (Cottle, 2009, 1), Cottle (2009) points out that media reporting is actually the main factor whether a crisis is considered as global or not. This presumption is the background of many studies focusing on the question, which factors are crucial for media coverage of international issues (for example Golan, 2006; Chalaby, 2006; Leung & Yu Huang, 2007). However, an empirical examination of the question, what other factors besides the professional media – especially in the context of Internet media and communication technologies – could contribute to the news production has been missing.

Hafez (2007) distinguishes two "fields of communication" in order to draw a model of the connectivity of different media systems. The first field is the direct access citizens of one media system have to get information from another. They can browse the Internet for foreign websites or watch international broadcasts in order to inform themselves about topics and contexts in other countries. The second field is the international news reporting and here namely the journalists who either work as foreign correspondents or as domestic gatekeepers selecting international news for their (national) audiences (Hafez, 2007, 9). Even though this list should not be understood as a prioritisation, Hafez points out that the direct access to information (mainly through internet media) has been rising in importance in the focus of scholars during the 1990s (ibid.). This – according to Hafez (2007, 10) – does indeed not mean that the importance of international reporting has diminished.

Even though Hafez (2007) sees the Internet as a great source of global information, he does not mention it as a tool of contribution to news reporting. Instead he clarifies that the production of media still is in the hand of media professionals – writing articles, composing TV programmes, and creating websites.

Concerning that point, Cottle (2009, 18ff) provides a more progressive model. Besides the main field of media professionals creating news and setting the agenda, he identifies a counterweight that he loosely names "new media networks", not in contradiction to "old networks", but "Western corporate media".

*"Traditional mainstream press and broadcasting are also now surrounded and interpenetrated by the increasingly ubiquitous presence of the internet"*

*with its enhanced connectivity, interactivity and invigoration of new forms of citizen and online journalism.” (Cottle, 2009, 17)*

These new networks contain for instance the *Blogosphere*, citizen journalism, *YouTube* as well as “insurgent postings”. The main news flow in his model still leads from the corporate media to the new media networks indicating that the new media producers mostly act as mirror reflecting the “mainstream press”. However, Cottle points also at reverse news flows. Referring to Castells, he calls them ‘counterflow’ or ‘contraflow’, which implies that this is a rather political than economical factor that is connected to power relations.

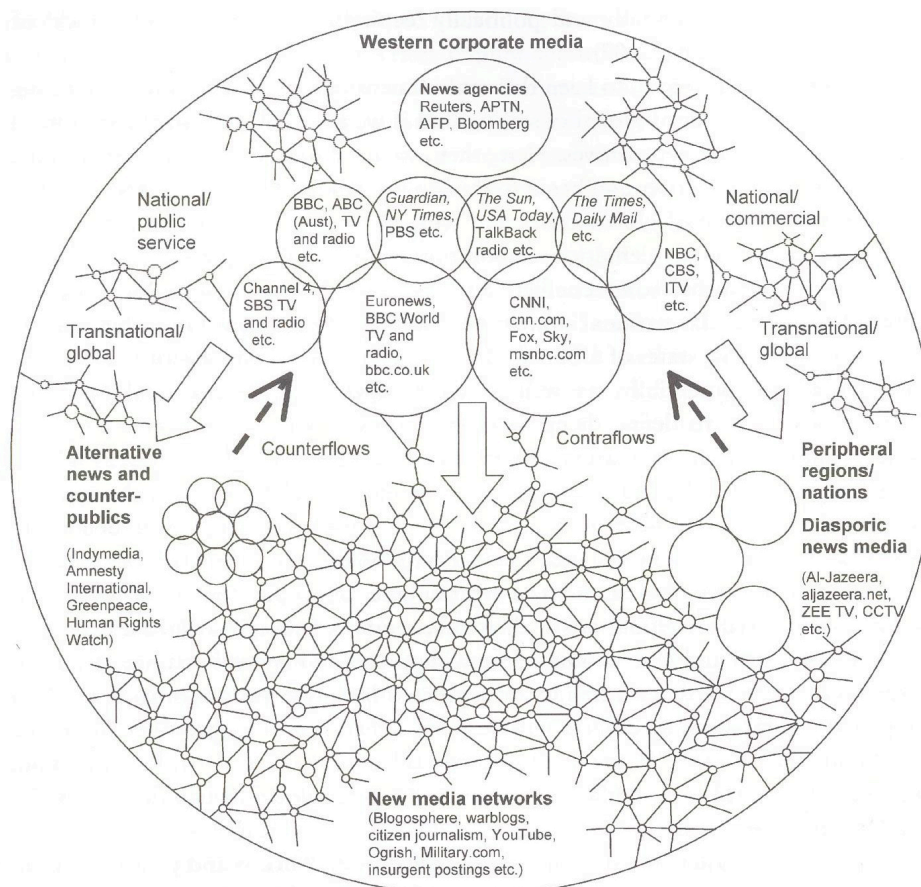


Figure 1: “Global news ecology” (Cottle, 2009, 18)

Even though his model of the “global news ecology” gives a great view on organisations and actors of global news production, it provides no hint on how and to which amount the different news producers affect the audience. While it becomes clear that – according to Cottle (2009) – Internet services have an impact on professional news production, an impact on the audience considering the creation of a global public sphere is not stated. Hafez (2007) in fact argues that impact. A big amount of Internet usage

stays within national borders and the main global Internet “highways” proceed in transatlantic routes far away from a balanced global public sphere (Hafez, 2007, 100ff). To prove this thesis, Hafez presents a study by the firm *PriMetrica* showing the amount of Internet traffic in MBps through several regions. This indeed is a rather economical factor (presenting the location of the biggest Internet hosting companies) than to prove the location of Internet content production and exchange. However, he makes a good point considering the language used in the Internet as a main preventer of a real global use of the Internet (Hafez, 2007, 103). Since the majority of the world’s population only speaks one language, the use of international websites is naturally restricted. This problem and insufficient access to information technology leads to a so-called ‘Digital Divide’ cutting the less developed and less educated countries off from the global Internet knowledge.

Coming back to the actors of global news production, the role of the Internet as an unprofessional pool of news producers is far not so clear than it seems at first sight. In fact, the diversity of Internet actors is enormous and often the differentiation of professional and unprofessional media production is blurring. Most corporate media organisations have their own website as an additional (professional) media product (cf. Cottle, 2009, 17) whereas some professional journalists run an own (private) weblog. It is therefore important to distinguish between uninstitutional and unprofessional Internet products. The latter refers to the term ‘citizen journalism’ that actually is sometimes institutionalized too (for example in special interest forums or unpersonalized weblogs). Another distinction should be made concerning the function of the news production. Cottle (2009, 162ff) mentions that in order to reduce the risk of media scandals, many organisations (for instance NGOs) evade in the Internet in order to provide their target groups with information. The function of this information is not journalistic coverage, but support of their own interests such as raising funds or establishing political influence.

As we can see, the emphasis in analysing factors that lead to the existence of a global public sphere lies on news reporting of media professionals. Even though some authors point to the rising importance of the Internet as an information source, only Cottle (2009) includes the unprofessional Internet-use as a contribution to global news production into his news model. However, an empirical examination of that factor is even in his approach missing. One can argue that the technological prerequisites are too new to be regarded in academic contexts, but it could also be that methodological

problems and insufficient theoretical foundation lead to this lack of examination. The revolts after the Iranian elections in June 2009 and the massive reflection in Social Media services could be a good example to deal with these questions and to figure out what problems this rather new phenomenon raises while scientifically undermined.

#### **4. The Iranian revolts and Twitter coverage**

The point of origin for the Iranian revolts in June this year was the Iranian presidential elections held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2009. The election was eagerly regarded from the international public, because of president Mahmud Ahmadinejad's collision course in questions of foreign politics, as well as from the Iranian people, which proves the high voter participation of almost 80% (Ladurner, 2009). Ahmadinejad's challenger Mir Hossein Mussawi has had a strong backing among the Iranians, which caused already in the election campaigning tension between the two different political lines. The claiming of the election results on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June then led to commotion. According to the interior ministry, Ahmadinejad reached almost 65 % of the votes whereas Mussawi gained 32% (ibid.). This rather unexpected result suddenly caused – encouraged by Mussawi – thousands of people to go on the streets of Teheran and other major cities in Iran protesting against the results and blaming the government to have done election ridding. Also several Western governments as well as the European Union stated concerns about alleged irregularities during the elections (Freeman & Blair, 2009).

The protests continued in the following days causing angry street fights between dissidents and the Iranian police as well as the Ahmadinejad supporting Basij paramilitary group (Tran & Borger, 2009). On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June more than one million people demonstrated in the streets of Teheran, where – after first peaceful protests – several people were killed (ibid.). The revolts and the rigorous reaction of the Iranian officials was massively covered by Western media leading to a highpoint on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, when a video appeared showing a young woman killed in the protest masses. The amateur video spread immediately in the Internet and was shown on major TV news programmes. The woman called 'Neda' became a symbol of the revolts raising sympathies all over the world (cf. Tran & Borger, 2009; McElroy, 2009).

Following Cottle's criteria (2009, 15) as stated in his 'Global Crisis Reporting', the post-election revolts are not constituted as a 'Global Crisis'. However, the hope for a political

and social change in Iran made the elections of international importance. The foreign media recognized the reaction of the Iranian people as a social movement, even though journalists were prevented from their research and media reporting was restricted as the German division of "Reporters sans frontières" claimed (Reporter ohne Grenzen, 2009). Remarkable was in addition that not only the professional media covered the revolts internationally, but news spread also in Social Media services and here especially in *Twitter*.

Twitter is a microblogging service that is often explained as a mixture of weblogs (one-to-many communication) and Messenger services such as *msn*, *skype* or *ICQ* (one-to-one communication). On the Twitter website, the service is explained the following: "Twitter has grown into a real-time short messaging service that works over multiple networks and devices." (anon., 2009) And further: "Twitter's core technology is a device agnostic message routing system with rudimentary social networking features. By accepting messages from sms, web, mobile web, instant message, or from third party API projects, Twitter makes it easy for folks to stay connected" (ibid.). As stated, the main features of Twitter are real-time access and connectivity. In combination, these features enable people to provide others with most recent information. This creates a never-ending digital stream of news – with differing relevance and size of the target group. Twitter messages – so called "Tweets" – have a length of only 140 characters and can be provided with a "hashtag" that typically describes the topic of a Tweet and builds a reference through which the Tweet can be found.

During the Iranian revolts, Tweets with a hashtag related to the Iran elections raised massively. According to a publication of the *Web Ecology Project* – an interdisciplinary US-American research group examining the building of digital communities – from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of June, 2 024 166 Tweets related to the topic have sent (Web Ecology Project, 2009). The group estimates that almost 500 000 Twitter users contributed to the digital discourse during that time period. According to the Social Media tracking service Trendrr, the most used hashtag #iranelection achieved it's peak on Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> of June - just one day after the death of Neda. On that day, 444 100 Tweets with the hashtag #iranelection made their way through the Internet. According to Twitter tracking service Trendistic, this made more than 2,5 % of all Tweets send on that date (see Figure 2).

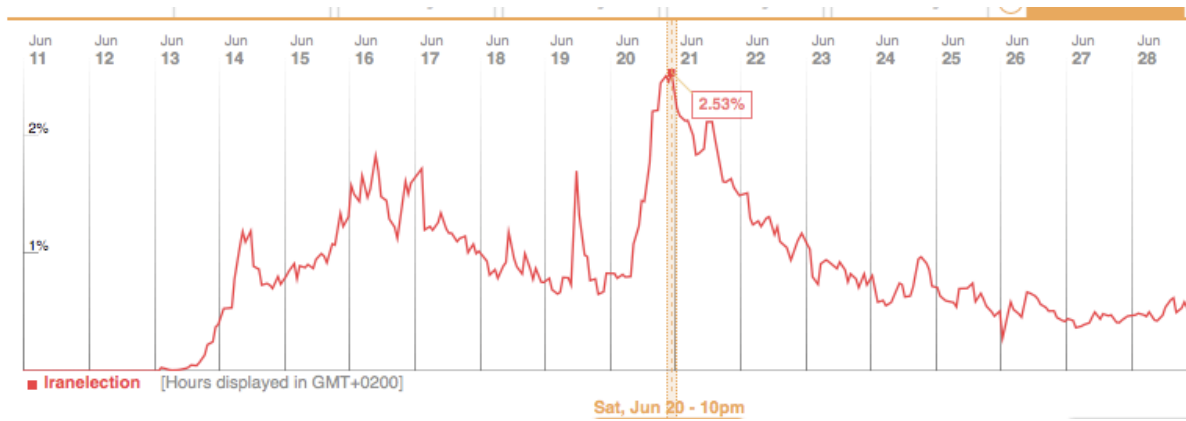


Figure 2: The use of the term “iranelection” from 11<sup>th</sup> till 28<sup>th</sup> of June. Source: Trendistic.com

This dynamic could not only be observed in the amount of Tweets published, but also considering the location from which the Tweets were sent. The Social Media monitoring service *Sysomos Inc.* published two graphics on their weblog that visualize the great international dynamic of the topic. Whereas more than half of the Tweets related to the Iranian election were sent out of the Iran before the election day, some days after the elections, most Tweets were sent from other countries than Iran.

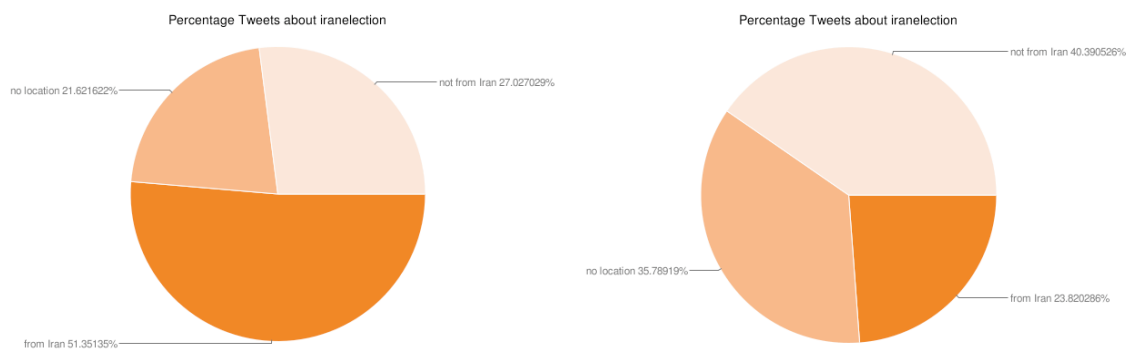


Figure 3: Where do the Tweets come from? Comparing the day before the elections (11<sup>th</sup> June) with the 19<sup>th</sup> of June. Source: *Sysomos Inc.* (2009)

Though these statistics give an overview of the Twitter activities related to the Iranian revolts in a quantitative manner, it is much harder to analyse Tweets qualitatively. The use of Twitter is divers and it is hard to extinguish typical features that can be used as a reference of comparison. Examining some of the Tweets sent in the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, it becomes obvious that in fact the function of the use of Twitter during the revolts varied.

### *Organisation*

The use of Twitter during the revolts had to some extent a solely organisational function. People twittered to communicate with each other for example to spread information about strategies or meetings places.

*"Please come to Baharestan Sq. in Tehran tomorrow at 4pm #IranElection"*<sup>1</sup>  
mousavi1388

This was even more important, since other communication channels were restricted or controlled by the government such as radio and mobile communication. Also oppositional websites were censored and the access to social platforms such as *Facebook* or *YouTube* was according to *Reporter ohne Grenzen* limited (*Reporter ohne Grenzen*, 2009). The communication via Twitter was moreover suitable, since Twitter users can hide their identity.

### *Opinion*

Many Tweets of that day express general feelings and opinions about the ongoing action. The death of Neda raised a flood of Tweets showing regret and condolence. This obviously has a more commenting function, but could indeed contribute to a collective emotional relation between Twitter users.

*"Neda died with her eyes open. Shame on me if I keep mine shut!  
#Iraelection"* Moussavi Supporter (*Democrazy2009*)

### *Information*

Another function that can be found in the Tweets from the 21<sup>st</sup> June is to provide information about the action itself.

*"Many ppl was killed in Iran Saturday - hospital sources say 'tens of ppl  
killed' - #Iraelection"*<sup>1</sup> persiankiwi

These Tweets were also addressed to people outside the country, which implies requests to retweet – to forward – these messages. The reporting of events and their

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<sup>1</sup> The *Web Ecology Project* listed in their report the most influential Twitter users related to the Iranian revolts measured on the amount of forwarded messages (Retweets) they gained. The Twitter accounts *persiankiwi* as well as *mousavi1388* were among these (*Web Ecology Project*, 2009).

discussion via Twitter played an important role in the supply with information. However, the quality of the information and the source could hardly be examined.

On Saturday after the election for instance, the rumour spread that presidential candidate Moussavi got arrested during a demonstration. His wife denied this later towards the TV broadcaster *Voice of America*. Until the denial however, the rumour got massively forwarded publishing the wrong information all over the world. This is especially a problem for media producers using Twitter as a source of information.

A possible way to rate the reliability of a Twitter source could be to take a look on the followers<sup>2</sup> of the Twitter user. But still, neither the amount of follower nor the amount of Retweets of a Tweet is adequate to prove trustworthiness. The latter seems to be more likely a benchmark of the media value containing factors as newness, negativism or conflict (controversy). This again opens possibilities for spammers seeking awareness and deliberately spreading wrong information. It could be observed that there were in fact spammers utilizing the popularity of the hashtag #iranelection to raise awareness for themselves or commercial issues.

However, Tweets out of Iran were used in Western newspapers contributing to the media coverage of the events. But also here, it is worthwhile to have a look on the function Tweets have when reflected in professional media. The biggest German weekly newspaper *Der Spiegel* published at the beginning of July a diary of the days after the elections, where a Tweet of *persiankiwi* is cited:

*“persiankiwi twitters in this night<sup>3</sup>: ‘Es ist zwei Uhr früh, und die Menschen auf den Dächern rufen ‘Tod für Chamenei’. Vor einer Woche wäre das undenkbar gewesen, die Leute haben die Nase voll, wollen Freiheit.’”* Der Spiegel, 29/2009

Remarkable is first of all that the translated text is much longer than 140 characters. That is because the editors completed sentences and wrote out abbreviations. The original Tweet reads like this:

*“2am and people still on roof shouting death to khamenaie. a week ago that was unthinkable. people very fed up. want freedom. #Iranelection”*  
persiankiwi

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<sup>2</sup> Which are other Twitter users that subscribed to Twitter messages sent by this user.

<sup>3</sup> Own translation.

Among many other Tweets that *persiankiwi* twittered in that night, the editors picked a commenting one that does not provide any “hard” information. The fact that people shout on the roofs might have been considered as having a minor information value that has not necessarily to be proved. The Tweet creates rather an atmosphere than background information. This fits well in the very close-to-people style of the whole reportage. It is, as if someone in Teheran had been interviewed telling his impression of the event. In this context, the Tweet must self-explainably be considered to be a ‘people’s voice’. That is especially the case, since the editors do not provide any information about *persiankiwi*, if the user is a human or organisation, male or female, Iranian or foreigner. Whereas Twitter is used as a tool to collect the “people’s opinion” here, the London-based Telegraph used Tweets in another manner. In an article about new sprouting violent hostilities on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, Tweets are used as a source to prove information about brutal fights on the streets in Teheran:

*“Reports on the social networking site, Twitter, said there was deliberate brutality as police dispersed the crowd. ‘Just in from Baharestan Sq – situation today is terrible – they beat the ppls like animals,’ said one entry. Another added: ‘In Baharestan we saw militia with axe chopping ppl like meat – blood everywhere – like butcher.’”* The Telegraph, 2009-06-24

Here, the Twitter users are not named, instead the fact that there are several “reports” stating the same information can be considered as a sign of trustworthiness. The information however is precarious and of great importance. The published ‘voices from the street’ do not only maintain the authenticity of the article, but also provide information that can give the story a spin in an editorial sense.

As observed in the analysis of the Tweets, the functions *Information* and *Opinion* can also be found in Tweets covered by professional media. Unsurprisingly, the voice of eyewitnesses is important enough to find reflection in major professional media. New is that the access to such information has become easy due to new technologies. The distance between journalists and people diminishes, since journalists can easily “monitor” what people in a conflict area think. On the other hand, the distance grows, since there is no direct contact.

It is not the aim of this paper to discuss journalistic quality and values in handling citizen journalism. Instead, the next chapter shall bridge the concept of a Global Public Sphere with the results found in this analysis discussing the role new media technology can play in the creation of a global public sphere.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The massive coverage of the Iranian revolts in Twitter as well as in international media points to an international public awareness of that issue. The analysis however gives no hint on the question, which is more responsible for that – the professional or the social media. But the fact that Tweets were reflected in major media products makes evident that social media at least contributed to creating this public awareness. Considering the restrictions for journalists working in Iran in June and the censorship of information by the Iranian government, it seems plausible to follow Cottle (2009, 18) describing the effect of Twitter as a “counterflow” or “contraflow”. The counterpart here is the single-edged information spread by the Iranian officials. Twitter might have given this power relation a spin: Twitter covered a side of the story that could not be covered by professional media due to restrictions and repression. Of course, the contribution of Twitter to the professional news production should not be overestimated, since these are only two examples in a wave of articles and reports about this topic. However, it became obvious that Twitter *can* play a role for journalists as a source of information, indicator for collective opinion or tool to provide authenticity in newspaper articles. How new media technologies affect the routines of media production is therefore a topic that is worth to examine – also in academic contexts.

But did Twitter really raise a global public sphere, a space where the topic of the Iranian revolts was discussed globally? Even though the numbers that the *Web Ecology Project* presented sound impressive at first sight, 500 000 Twitter users are not a global collective. It is therefore more likely that the global affecting power of Twitter is so far still restricted. But if one counts all social media together, there could be something like a global movement. At least there are signs for that: the massive retweeting of information from Iran, the storm of sympathies after the death of Neda in Twitter in many Western countries, the building of groups in *Facebook* and other social networks... In many Western countries, Twitter users coloured their profile picture green to solidarise with the ‘green revolution’ or they changed their location to Teheran in order to make it harder for the Iranian officials to identify Iranian Twitter users. All these examples seem to back Castells’ observation that new media technologies are able to build a network around social movements – a network where global public is created. Of course, the “global” is limited and one can say that this is even more an Online elite gathering together than a public. But exactly that question could be interesting for

further research: Who are these people that lead this international discourse? Who is for example *persiankiwi* and what is his or her intention?

That a small elite drives the main discourse in Twitter, does indeed not mean that not more people profit from it. The number of people that actually informs themselves about international topics using Twitter might be much higher. Here, a new possibility arises that can be included in Hafez' (2007) model of cross-border mass communication. The direct, unfiltered access to information grows considering social media and user-generated content – that is thus not professionally produced. Alone the three Tweets analysed in the chapter before show the diversity of messages that can easily be distributed. Through new technologies, one gets access to information and opinions regarding the whole list of foreign issues that happen every day. The professional media might not become less important when researching information and preparing it media suitable. The public opinion however, can be accessed without any institutional or professional filter. From a system theorist's standpoint that could mean that new media technologies let the interrelations between media systems grow.

Thus to prove these hypothesis seems to be quite a difficult task. The *Web Ecology Project* (2009) comes up with some good methods to analyse Tweets quantitatively: Counting Tweets during a certain time period, counting the amount of followers and Retweets, finding influencing users. Also the location of Twitter users might play an important role when observing Twitter globally. But as mentioned before, the examination of Tweets qualitatively remains difficult. For instance, there is no information on the sender and his trustworthiness. Which information is relevant, is it useful to examine social media testimonials, what is representative? Even when the (technical) form of a media output is determined (as with the appearance of Twitter messages), there is often still no consensual utilisation. (It is hard to believe that the founders of Twitter had in mind to invent a tool for political participation.) The diversity of Social Media products concerning language, usage and appearance makes it hard to find suitable research issues that can be comprised in order to come to general conclusions. A suggestion could be here (as done in the analysis) to stress the dimension of function rather than the dimension of content. Because to assume that all Twitter users are citizen journalists is as naïve as to assume that information on Twitter is generally redundant and useless.

When getting away from the actors to a more organisational level, economic matters certainly play a role as well. The fact that there is even in Internet services a high

tendency to economic concentration should be taken into consideration. The most successful international Internet services are owned by American media conglomerates such as *Google* (e.g. *Google Search Engine, Google Services, Picasa, YouTube, DoubleClick*), *Yahoo* (e.g. *Yahoo Search Engine, Yahoo Services, Del.icio.us, Flickr*), *eBay* (e.g. *eBay, Craigslist (25%), PayPal, Skype* (just sold almost all shares), *StumbleUpon*) or *Microsoft* (e.g. *Facebook (1,6%), msn, Hotmail*). This might bring up a new discussion about cultural hegemony in the intrinsically diverse and multicultural Internet.

As one can see, this paper raises more questions as it is able to answer, which is useful since there is – as mentioned – a lack of empirical examination concerning the question what role new media technologies play in the globalisation process. It could be showed that it is worthwhile to deal with these questions in order to catch up academically with a changing media ecology. The example of the Iranian revolts and the role of Twitter within these could be suitable to prove evidence for the existence of an influence of Social Media on the Global Public Sphere. To do so, this topic should be of course investigated on a larger scale. Cottle's model of the "Global news ecology" seems to be a useful theoretic grounding for that. The short analysis in the third chapter however arouses the assumption that the seeking could be successful.

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