Hypermedia Space and Global Communication Studies

Lessons from the Middle East

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The field of global communication studies has yet to come to terms with changes in the global media environment that began with the advent of the Internet and accelerated with the rise of mobile devices, social networking media, and user-generated content. These developments pose a radical challenge to the theoretical frameworks that have traditionally dominated international communication scholarship, if only because serious attempts to capture contemporary media dynamics require us to leave behind the meta-theoretical frameworks of modernization, dependency and globalization, and focus sharply on case-studies that yield insight about context-bound communication processes and their social and political implications. Indeed, we argue in this essay, whereas television was the default and often unstated fulcrum of much of global communication theory, the emergent global media environment is best understood as a transnational "hypermedia space" (see Kraidy, 2006) in which so-called "old" media like television and the newspaper join emergent media like mobile

devices, social media, video on the Internet, and others to create a communication space the social and political implications of which we are only beginning to discern.

In this brief essay we purport to tease out some of the theoretical implications of the emergence of digital culture for global communication studies. To that end, we use the Middle East not as a "container" where we can capture distinct hypermedia dynamics, but rather as an optic on the changing nature of global communication in the digital age. It is our hope that the case studies we discuss hold insights applicable beyond the contemporary Middle East. Therefore it is our objective to point the discussion into a comparative direction with broad relevance to global communication studies. With that in mind, we first explicate the notion of hypermedia space, then we move forward to look at the role of *hypermedia space* in political upheaval in Lebanon in 2005 and Iran in 2009, and finally we conclude with a discussion of the broader implications of these two cases for global communication studies. Before we describe and analyze the case-studies, let us clarify what we mean by hypermedia space.

1. Defining Hypermedia Space

Though the term hypermedia has been in use for a long time, we credit our use of the term to the Canadian international relations theorist Ronald Deibert (1997) who argues that the term "hypermedia":

… not only captures the convergence of discrete technologies, it also suggests the massive penetration and ubiquity of electronic media characteristic of the new communications environment … the prefix "hyper" (meaning "over" or "above") emphasizes two central characteristics of that environment: the speed by which

communications currently take place, and the intertextuality or interoperatibility of once-discrete media … linked *together* into a single seamless web of digital-electronic-telecommunications"(pp. 114-115).

Though Deibert formulated his ideas on hypermedia before the advent of YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, it is clear that these new developments reinforce the ease and fluidity with which digitized information moves between various media. Mobile telephony, tweets, email, social networks, text messaging, digital cameras, online videos, electronic newspapers, and satellite television thus constitute a fluid communicative environment: *hypermedia space*.

Clearly, the new media environment described in the preceding paragraph has implications for social and political communication. The advent of hypermedia space constitutes a qualitative leap in the ways that people seek, access, produce, and react to information. Most importantly, hypermedia space broadens access to the means of communication, since it is obviously easier for average people to "produce" messages today in the era of mobile devices and blogs than it was in the days of state-owned broadcasting, telephone landlines, and the daily newspaper delivered to the door or purchased at the store. The new media environment is therefore more participatory. As a result, since communication processes flow in several directions, and since the roles of producer and receiver of information have been scrambled, and since more people are now theoretically able to shape a message, then we can expect a multiplicity of discourses to arise in public culture.

Since some of these discourses will have rival objectives, reflect competing agendas and carry conflicting ideologies, the new media environment fosters contention in the public

sphere. Clearly, a variety of media "speaking" to each other do not and cannot alone trigger contentious political communication. However, when a context is rife with social and political tensions, and when social agents are willing and able to use hypermedia space with the objective of inducing change in the social or political status quo, then the availability of hypermedia space can play a crucial role in the performance of contention communication in public discourse. The cases of Lebanon in 2005 and Iran in 2009 have the three elements mentioned above: (1) a socio-political context riddled with tensions, both internal to the Lebanese and Iranian polities, but also induced by foreign intervention and global geopolitics; (2) groups of people, mostly but not only students and young activists, agitating for systemic change, willing to take risks to reach that objective, and savvy with the use of hypermedia, and (3) the availability, even abundance, of mobile devices, digital cameras, access to the Internet, and therefore to social networking (i.e. Facebook) and video (i.e. YouTube) sites and. Finally, as the case of Lebanon illustrates, popular culture—in this case reality television—can be recruited via hypermedia space for political ends. These developments, as our concluding section makes clear, have potentially profound implications for global communication studies.

2. Lebanon's Independence Intifada

After a car bomb killed the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in Beirut, on February 14, 2005, television emerged as a crucial political forum. Hariri-owned Future TV, hitherto known for is largely apolitical programming grid, became a full-time political machine, celebrating Hariri's legacy, accusing the Syrian regime of having ordered the assassination, and keeping a focus on the UN investigation into Hariri's murder. Future TV talk-shows featured

many anti-Syrian speakers while specially commissioned music videos asking for "The Truth" were repeatedly aired between programmes. LBC, politically sympathetic to Hariri's political line, focused on the assassination only for a few days before returning to its regular programming mix of entertainment and news, avoiding the negative financial consequences of wall-to-wall coverage of the assassination. Whereas Future TV and LBC were critical of the Syrian regime and favorable to US and European intervention, two other leading Lebanese channels New TV known for its criticism of Hariri's policies, and Hizbullah's Al-Manar reflected a different view, one opposed to Western interference and suspicious of U.S. and Israeli agendas. Without explicitly supporting Syrian involvement in Lebanon, both channels refrained from criticizing the Syrian regime and both were critical of the UN investigation. New Television and al-Manar challenged Future TV LBC, with New Television propounding the secular version while Al-Manar put forth a religiously inflected version of events (Kraidy, 2009).

As analyzed in-depth elsewhere (most of the discussion of the Lebanon case is drawn from Kraidy, 2009), the genre of programming known as "reality television," which features non-scripted amateur events and competitions whose outcome is determines by viewer voting via text-messages or through the Internet, was thoroughly politicized in the Middle East. With a production and dramatic logic that makes television shows dependent on other media, reality television programs can, under the right social circumstances, activate hypermedia space. Indeed, the assassination of Hariri triggered demonstrations in downtown Beirut, known as the "Independence Intifada," that indicate that participatory activities called for by reality television programs like LBC's *Star Academy*—voting by mobile phone, using text-messaging to build

alliances and promote contestants, and in subsequent years, constructing Facebook fan pages, etc—can have real political applications.

Indeed, in 2005 Beirut demonstrators used mobile phones, television and vocabulary from reality television programs in ways that suggests that the combination of hypermedia space and popular culture can have a powerful impact on public life. For example, demonstrators brandished signs using the language of reality television, as was clear in the large March 14, 2005, "opposition" demonstration clamoring for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the resignation of Lebanon's pro-Syrian political and security leadership. Consider a hand-made, English-language sign carried by a demonstrator: the words "Lahoud Nominee" (referring to Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, whose term was illegitimately extended by Syrian fiat) sit atop the exhortation "call 1559" (in reference to the United Nations resolution calling for the withdrawal from Lebanon of Syrian troops and intelligence operatives). The sign replicates weekly reality television rituals with which a vast number of Arab viewers are familiar. It is therefore able to articulate a media-savvy political agenda in an age of attention scarcity, constituting attractive footage for the repetitive news cycle of Arab and Western news channels alike.

Reality television was instrumentalized for politics not only on the street but also in television studios. On LBC, a *Star Academy* rehearsal was interrupted live to announce Hariri's death. Then LBC went into a week of mourning, following it with a prime time Friday evening episode in which contestants hailing from throughout the Arab world sang patriotic Lebanese songs against the backdrop of a huge Lebanese flag, ultimately booting out the … Syrian

contestant in an eerily politicized atmosphere. This event in the studio echoed the resignation of Omar Karamé, then Lebanon's pro-Syrian prime minister, under pressure from demonstrators on the street. Clearly, US, French and Saudi support protected the Beirut demonstrations from direct repression, and media coverage played a crucial role in sustaining the rallies.

Nonetheless, the demonstrators did not take external support for granted, but courted it aggressively, staging visually attractive spectacles and using English-language signs. The demonstrators' message of national unity was visually underscored by the omnipresence of the Lebanese national flag. Media and public relations professionals organized a human Lebanese flag made of 10,000 people holding cardboard squares painted in white, green or red. The Beirut demonstrators took pictures with their mobile phones' digital cameras and transmitted to bloggers who uploaded them on friendly websites and to mainstream news media. The Hizbollah-organized rival demonstration was also festooned with Lebanese flags. The role of strategic communication experts notwithstanding, the demonstrations expressed genuine feelings of grief and popular anger at the system, and journalistic coverage was not entirely passive or acquiescent.

A communicative chain of mobile phones, email and television was used effectively to create fluid and interactive communication processes that eluded control. Clearly, the actual use of hypermedia space depends on political context, availability of technology infrastructure, and most importantly, people willing to use various connected media for specific social or political purposes. When the Lebanese army established checkpoints around central Beirut to

prevent demonstrators from reaching public spaces, soldiers at some checkpoints were clearly

unwilling to use force to send demonstrators back on their tracks, a nugget of information that

was immediately "blasted" via text messages, allowing demonstrators to converge on

checkpoints where soldiers or commanding officers appeared sympathetic to their cause. At

other checkpoints, young women put flowers in soldiers' hands, thus "disarming" them and

helping flows of men and women alerted via text-messaging "blasts" to reach designated

protest areas (Kraidy personal communications with demonstrators, June-August 2005).

3. Iran's Green Movement

On June 20, 2009, a young Iranian woman was shot in the chest on a street in the

Iranian capital Tehran during one of the post-election protests pitting students, activists and a

newly visible political opposition to the forces of the Iranian regime. A witness captured the

woman's last moments on a mobile phone camera and uploaded the footage on YouTube. The

40-second video shows the young woman collapse on the pavement, a pool of blood spreading

beneath her body, and blood coming out of her nose and mouth, her eyes open and staring at

the camera. Two men kneel next to her, pressing on her chest. One of them is screaming out

her name, Neda. The now viral video was picked up by social media such as Facebook as well as

mainstream media organizations. The BBC and CNN were among the many stations that

broadcast the video. The dying woman was identified as 26 year-old Neda Agha Soltan. Her

killing occurred during one of the many demonstrations against the election to presidency of

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, accusing the president and the government of fraud and contesting

election results. The Iranian government militia, Basij, was publicly accused of the murder of

Neda and others who died during the protests (Fletcher, August 20, 2009; Press TV, June 29, 2009; Weaver, July 1, 2009).

In November 2009, 5 months after the contested Iranian presidential elections, the British Broadcasting Corporation released a documentary film titled "Neda: An Iranian Martyr." In one camera shot, we see the mother of Neda kneeling beside her daughter's grave. In the same frame we can also see her through the mobile phone screens of two young women standing at the grave site and filming the scene (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4-iLG6FwRc). The viewer can see BBC footage copied from a CNN camera capturing an image of mobile phone screens showing the image of Neda's mourning mother. That all this can be seen in a YouTube video adds yet another layer to this inter-media configuration; it constitutes an additional node in the hypermedia chain that developed around Iran's "Green Movement" in 2009.

Whereas Lebanon's 2005 "Independence Intifada" saw the rise of text-messaging as a political tool, Iran's 2009 "Green Movement," propelled Twitter onto the global consciousness through myriad news reports that depicted Twitter as a qualitatively different and radically effective tool in the contentious politics unfolding on the streets of Tehran. Neda was killed on a Saturday evening. By Sunday morning, she was the fifth most commented topic on Twitter (Putz, June 22, 2009). By Monday, there were 6, 860 entries for her on the Persian language Google website (Fathi, June 23, 2009). At the time of writing, a Google search of 'Neda Agha Soltan' yielded 1,680,000 results. A YouTube video showing her dying moments had 702,793 views. In post-elections Iran, mobile phones, emails, and social networking sites constitute the

nodes of a hypermedia chain that turned stories, such as Neda's death, into international events. Newspaper columnists and online journalists talked about a "Twitter Revolution," of Twitter being the "medium of the movement" (Grossman, June 17, 2009) and a "player in Iran's drama" (Musgrove, June 17, 2009), of Iranians "taking their protest online" (Nasr, June 14, 2009).

In fact, as social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter saw a flood of news and images about the events unfolding in Iran, Twitter, a two-year old free social networking and micro-blogging service, became the primary source of information for many outside Iran, especially after the media blackout that followed the expulsion of foreign correspondents and the state detention of photographers, journalists and documentary filmmakers after the June elections[1] (Committee to Protect Journalists, July 30, 2009; CNN, June 16, 2009). The Iranian government also restricted foreign media's coverage by banning reporters from the streets and limiting them to work from their offices (Plunkett, June 16, 2009). Twitter thus emerged as a medium providing eyewitness accounts from street demonstrations when such accounts were hard to provide by journalists. Twitter enables its users to send and receive messages known as tweets that cannot exceed 140 characters. In their "About Us" section of their website, Twitter creators assert that "mobile has been in our DNA right from the start: The 140 character limit originated so tweets could be sent as mobile text messages which have a limit of 160 characters. Minus 20 characters for author attribution, this gives users just enough room"

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[1] According to the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), 42 journalists were held in Iranian jails by July 30, 2009, most of them accused of "sending pictures to enemy media." For a more detailed account of the detentions, visit http://cpj.org/2009/07/journalists-face-trial-in-iran-as-arrests-continue.php

(http://www.twitter.com). Twitter and mobile phones are then linked from the onset. The creators continue, "Twitter is the evolution of mobile messaging, not replacing SMS, IM, or email but introducing a new public dimension to messaging" (twitter.com, 2010).

One of the main features of Twitter is the hashtag. As indicated in the name, this consists of placing the hash (#) sign in front of keywords. Hashtags were developed to create groupings on Twitter and make it easier to follow certain topics. They are "community-driven convention for adding context and metadata to your tweets" (Twitter Fan Wiki, http://twitter.pbworks.com/Hashtags). According to the same website, hashtags were made famous during the San Diego forest fires in 2007 when blogger Nate Ritter used the hashtag "#sandiegofire" to identify his disaster-related updates. Twitter's track feature and the development of the website hashtag.org made it possible to index and track the most discussed topics or "trends" and their frequency. Even non-Twitter users can subscribe to the RSS feed of their chosen hashtag, receive updates from twitter to their news reader of choice (Google Reader for example), and follow the conversation. The most popular hashtags created around the Iranian elections and the Green Movement are #Iran, #IranElection[2], #gr88 (a contraction of Green Revolution 1388, the Iranian calendar year in which the elections were held) and #Neda. This brings us back to the video of the slain young woman which, once captured on mobile phone, was made available on YouTube and quickly picked up by twitterers who posted comments as well as links to the video and related pictures. But twitterers were not simple receivers as they made sure to create their own campaigns; one of which is the #CNNfail in

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[2] After a long absence, #IranElection bounced back into Twitter's trending topics at number 4 when rallies were taking place in Iran to commemorate the 31st anniversary of the Islamic revolution (*The Independent*, February 11, 2010).

response to the American news organization's poor coverage of the Tehran protests. Twitter users were acting as media watchdogs; not only were they providing information, but they were also demanding more from the mainstream media.

Global, especially American, news organizations looked at images coming out of Iran as proofs of the power of "new" media technologies to "democratize" authoritarian environments, and many observers have claimed that these media now play a crucial role in social movements and revolutions (Libresco, June 16, 2009; Shirky). Such coverage reflects an ignorance of previous episodes of political contention when then "small" non-mainstream media played an important role. Indeed, "new" media are not newcomers to the Iranian political scene and social movement circles. The years leading up to the 1979 revolution bear witness to the fundamental role played by such media in galvanizing the revolutionary process. Newly-introduced electronic devices, particularly the transistorized audiotape machine, were of paramount importance in the communication of religious and political messages; messages that often found their source beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. Ayatollah Khomeini, spiritual leader of the revolution, had been exiled in 1963. His sermons and pronouncements came in the form of audiotapes which were later transcribed and mimeographed or Xeroxed on a massive scale (Tehranian, 1980 p. 21). Messages entered the country in a "new media" form and diffused internally in more traditional and paper-form media. "Small media," as wrote Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994), who offer the most probing and systematic analysis of those events, contributed to a "big revolution."

Much like the migratory nature of Khomeini's messages from his exile in Neauphle-le-

Château into Iran, the Neda video travelled from Tehran to the world wide web. If Khomeini's

messages were auditory by nature, the messages beaming out of Iran in 2009 were primarily

audio-visual (videos and images) and textual (tweets). Where audiotapes were the carrying

medium of sermons, small mobile devices stood out as the perfect medium for the transmission

of live footage from the demonstrations in the absence of mainstream media coverage. This

footage was subsequently re-transmitted via tweets on Twitter which often provided links to

YouTube videos and Flickr images. Similar to the manner in which Khomeini's messages were

adapted from audiotapes into more traditional communication channels, Neda's image

migrated from mobile devices, into the web, and was eventually transformed into a poster held

at worldwide street demonstrations.

5. Conclusion: Reconsidering hypermedia

The two case-studies described in the preceding text raise several issues about the

connection between hypermedia space and political agency, and beyond that, about the future

of global communication studies. The judicious, activist use of hypermedia space contributed to

a transformation of the field of contention in both Lebanon in 2005 and Iran in 2009.

Hypermedia space's importance resides in the ways in which it combines mobility, interactivity

and visibility. We can now glimpse the contours of a theory of hypermedia in which mobile

activists interactively activate inter-media configurations that connect media old and new,

gaining visibility for their cause through a hypermedia space that is less controllable than social

space and therefore potentially subversive of the prevalent mode of governance—something

that was manifest in both Beirut and Tehran.

A theory of hypermedia space at once foregrounds the importance of emerging media—

YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc—while at the same time emphasizing that "old" media like

television, the world wide web and newspapers are essential links in hypermedia space. "New"

and "old" media are therefore locked in an inter-dependent, mutually re-enforcing,

complementary relationship. In Beirut, text-messaging and digital cameras served to channel

crucial information that increased the visibility of the cause on television. Similarly, Neda's story

proves that whereas YouTube and Twitter are potentially subversive tools to be utilized by

political activists, they do so only when integrated with "old" or traditional media. The

movement of images among mobile phones, computer screens, and television screens had to

link up to television to be widely diffused. Television as an institution therefore became as

much of a target of both the "Independence Intifada" and the "Green Movement" as the

scorned governments. In the case of Iran, the #CNNfail campaign is but an example of activists

seeing television as an essential ally in their campaign. That the video of Neda had become a

global sensation cannot be attributed to YouTube alone. Al-Jazeera, CNN, and BBC, to name a

few, broadcast the video. Theirs is an essential role in the development of the story, especially

in contexts where new media technologies are still lagging behind and television sets remain

the most widely diffused medium. In Iran, out of a population of 66,429,284, there were

32,200,000 internet users as of September 2009, which means an internet penetration of 48.5%

(Internet World Stats, http://www.internetworldstats.com). Sysomos, a Toronto-based web

analytics company researching social media says there are only about 8,600 Twitter users

whose profiles indicate they are from Iran (Schectman, June 17, 2009). Furthermore, while much commentary portrayed Iranian youth and the internet as harbingers of democracy, a survey poll conducted by *The Washington Post* showed that "only a third of Iranians even have access to the Internet, while 18-to-24-year-olds comprised the strongest voting bloc for Ahmadinejad of all age groups" (Ballen and Doherty, June 17, 2009). Blogger Maximillian Forte wittingly summarized the situation when he wrote: "So in this Twitter revolution, Twitter is not representative of Internet users, Internet use is not representative of a wider population, the youth are not representative of the youth, and the Iranians may not even be Iranian. Fantastic indeed, this power of 'social media'" (June 17, 2009).

The future of global communication studies depends on research that systematically explores, explicate and theorize the ways in which a variety of "old" and "new" media connect to each other, rather than celebrating the rise of new media or lamenting the decline of old. However, we should be cautious not to fetishize the technology, but to remain focused on the politically motivated people using it and the social and political contexts—national and global— of their action. It is here that the important issue of social agency comes to the fore. Hypermedia space is one of the sites of social agency, because as Bolter and Grusin argue, "[M]edia do have agency, but that agency … is constrained and hybrid … the agency of cultural change is located on the interaction of formal, material, and economic logics that slip into and out of the grasp of individuals and social groups." (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 78). To follow this general line of thinking while eschewing media determinism, we propose to think of hypermedia as a space in which agency can be grasped when individuals and communities activate information configurations through willful, activist action. In this sense, we propose

moving away at once from theories like media dependency and imperialism that locate agency

exclusively in the political economic structure of media technologies, and from cultural theories

of active users that posits agency in interpretive decoding of media messages. What global

communication studies requires to remain a dynamic field, we argue, are theoretically

informed, empirically based studies that explore the social and political implications of

hypermedia space in concrete contexts.

In this regard, the connection between communicative practices and situations on the

ground needs further exploration and theorizing. One way to begin doing that is to distinguish

between information and mobilization. Iran's "Twitter Revolution" facilitated the exchange of

information across borders; but the extent to which it was effective in organizing

demonstrations and mobilizing people to rally remains in doubt. Was Twitter as effective an

internal communication within the movement as it was in externally promoting the

movement's aims? It could be argued that the "public" nature of such media and their high

visibility make them perfect for the mass diffusion of information while at the same time

rendering them ineffective in organizing clandestine operations in volatile contexts. After all, it

makes no sense for Iranian activists trying to escape government persecution to answer

Twitter's fundamental question "what are you doing?" by posting their next stop. Though the

posting of information seems counter-intuitive in revolutions, there were many campaigns

publicizing lists of so-called "proxy servers" that could help bypass some of the restrictions

imposed by the government of certain IP addresses. Due to over extensive publicity, the value

of such proxy servers was destroyed as the government obtained access to them and was

therefore able to ban them.

Hypermedia space provides an alternative to the rigidly controlled and monitored social space (Kraidy, 2006). True, Facebook profile pages show what one cannot see in Tehran's public murals for instance; they recognize Neda as a national martyr which she was for many Iranians. Technology enabled such a process to take place, during which otherwise neglected actors have entered the opinion-making game. It is by entering hypermedia space that Neda's video has become a sensational media product enabling the expression of a counter-state rhetoric. But this street/Facebook dichotomy is a dangerous one as it reveals the existence of a double-reality: a physical and a virtual one. There is a risk that as long as the "ideal" state can be experienced in the virtual space (which is a reality in its own right), material reality will not undergo meaningful change. Though media alone do not produce revolutions, any revolution today cannot happen without the media, old and new. Paradoxically, however, the very nature of new media has eroded the notion of revolution. Producing or watching a video could is not a political act in itself. And as long as people in front of their screens are under the illusion that they are making a contribution, a shared video is as far as a revolution would go. In some cases, the shift of social life– through texts, images, icons, and symbols—into hypermedia space can reflect political stagnation. In hindsight, both Lebanon's 2005 "Independence Intifada" and Iran's 2009 "Green Movement" have not led to enduring systemic political change.

Another issue related to understanding how communication practices relate to concrete material situation concerns issues of trust and authenticity. New social media makes it arduous, even impossible, to determine the identity of activists. Though this was not a major issue in Beirut's Independence Intifada, it was manifest in the case of Iran, when many Twitter users who are not in Iran decided to change their time zone and set their location to Tehran in order

to protect those who are tweeting locally from government prosecution and censorship. As a result, the number of local Iranian Twitter users and the sources of Iran-related tweets cannot be determined. As *Foreign Policy* magazine blogger Evgeny Morozov put it, "There is a huge Iranian Diaspora that […] is using social media even more actively than their peers back in Iran. So, if the person's name sounds Iranian, they have some content in Farsi on their blog, and are posting a lot about events in Tehran - how do we know if they are in Tehran or, say, Los Angeles?" (Morozov, June 17, 2009). Finally, issues of "noise" and "manipulation" must be considered. In chaotic environments like Beirut in 2005 and Tehran in 2009 where foreign governments and intelligence agencies were involved, it is possible for external actors to reframe the movement and add their own interpretations and opinions to the events. What, then, constitutes "authentic" Lebanese or Iranian voices?

Finally, global communication scholars need to focus on the extent to which widespread political contention—no matter how genuine, deeply felt, and heavily mediated—leads to sustained social and political change. In both cases, movements formed with telegenic demonstrators airing real grievances to gain sympathy and support from local and global actors. Both events under study in this essay have so far not led to permanent, institutional changes in the Lebanese and Iranian polities. The 1979 revolution in Iran holds an important lesson: the revolutionaries relied on audiotapes, but these were integrated into a network of 90,000 mosques, organized around 60,000 to 200,000 mullahs and linked to a university-based radical intelligentsia, with its underground and exile publications (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994; Tehranian, 1980, p.18). For hypermedia chains to be effective, they must necessarily be integrated in pre-existing social networks and institutions to endow hypermedia

space with trust, authenticity and ultimately popular acceptance. This confirms the importance

of contextually sensitive, empirically based, theoretically guided studies if we are to understand

the role of digital culture in global communication studies beyond utopian platitudes fetishizing

new media as reliable agents of radical change on the one hand and dismissive knee-jerk

reactions oblivious to qualitative changes to the global media environment on the other hand.

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