Digitalism and the Future of State Surveillance; Studying How Digitalism Affects Government Surveillance in the Islamic Republic of Iran; the Elites' Viewpoin

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Abstract

Purpose: The main objective of this article is to determine the positive/negative effects of digital transformation on the Islamic Republic of Iran's government. So, the study mainly examines the aspect of government's surveillance because of the broad scope of the topic.

Method: The research is qualitative and based on the grounded theory method. The data collection method used in the theoretical sections is documentary- library .A semi-structured interview method was also used with a sample population made up of professors, experts, as well as some staff in related fields in order to assess the collected data and their compliance with the Iranian government. Additionally, the information gathered from the interviews has been analyzed using three phases of qualitative coding.

Findings: The study's findings demonstrated that, although Iran remains significantly behind its regional and global rivals in this field, digitalism has had profoundly positive and negative effects on the government's surveillance in that country.

Conclusion: As a conclusion, it seems digital technologies will aid in ensuring the security of the society in a nation like Iran in terms of surveillance. Another point is that creating legal frameworks for data access and facilitating people activities in cyber spaces are both necessary for enhancing the government's capacity for digital surveillance. At last, taking into account the current state of Iran society, establishing trust between individuals through the legal frameworks is a crucial and fundamental tenet in the government's surveillance and use of data gathered

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Digitalism, Surveillance, Government, Technology Firms

Introduction

Throughout history, inventions have generally faced opposition due to two concerns. First, the concern of some currents about its impact on people and society, secondly, the concern of governments. But despite these obstacles, today the rapid development of digital technology has covered almost all areas of human society (Kissinger, Schmidt and Nuttenlocher, 1401: 57). . In addition to showing efficiency, digital technology managed to show itself in ways that are even different from previous technologies. The most important of these distinctions is the gradual reduction of the contribution of human intelligence in solving the human life problems (Kissinger, Schmitt and Notenlocher, 1401: 58-54); And also, the transformation in the role and place of this technology in collective life. Traditionally, technologies may have affected parts of the government organization, but now all aspects and functions of governments are affected by the digitalization process (Delfanti and Arvidsson, 2019: 8-12)); And without it, the realization of the functions of the government will face a serious challenge (Safari, Khoshsima, Mohammadian, Moslehi, Haki, Afrazmand, Tamizi, 2013, 54). The emergence of electronic government as part of the public sector reform program in the world, including in Iran, is a proof of this claim. Some call these developments the Digital Revolution or the Platform Revolution (Van Dijck, Poell, De Waal, 2018:4); which means deep transformations in the structure of collective life. One of the important fields in which governments use digital technology is Surveillance. With the same considerations, the present article has focused on one of the most important functional aspects of the government in Iran, namely the Surveillance or Digital Monitoring of people and society and a deeper understanding of the developments in this field.

Several theories support this study; Manuel Castells (2009) in his network power's theory believes that digital technologies lead to the creation of networks consisting of communication nodes between the main parts of society that exchange data, which generate power. Therefore, the formation of a Networked Society and a Networked State is likely. In such a platform, the Networked State has capacities that enable it to manage the society by using the data and their control. According to Castells, such a way of exercising power will always cause resistance (Castells, 2009: 47-53). In this network, power is increasingly concentrated in transnational technological-media complexes (Schroeder, 2018:2). Increasing the government's supervisory power for networked and extensive surveillance is the most important indicator derived from this point of view.

On the other hand, based on the theory of technological determinism of Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innes, technology may sometimes assume the main role in social changes and cause important changes in society. However, in the critique of the agency of technology, it has been said that technology is not the only determining factor, but its formation is also affected by the social conditions of the society (Van Loon, 2008:22-25&42-43). In the discussion of state recognition, generally four faces are given ;1- ideological aspect 2- coercive aspect 3- public aspect (providing services and special public works) 4- private or economic aspect

(Bashirieh, 2016: 37-37). Digital technology creates new opportunities and challenges in each of these fields (Kharazi, 2019, 109). Considering the significant contribution of digital technologies in the future, there is a concern that the economy, the army, Society and education are under the influence of these companies. Because they become the most important partner of the state in governing and exercising power. (Meredith, 2021, 1-2) By reducing the state's role in providing services and delegating it to private companies and technology owners, the state's vulnerability to cyber-attacks increases; Because these companies often do not pay attention to security protocols (Tidy, 2021, 1-2). In the Islamic Republic of Iran, one of the areas where digital technologies are used the most is the surveillance of citizens. Monitoring in this field has not been without challenges. Therefore, in this study, the first and second faces of the state under the concept of surveillance have been considered.

Methodology

The research is qualitative and based on the grounded theory method. The choice of this method is due to the fact that no codified theorizing has been on the subject of the article; Also, due to the new and dynamic nature of the subject, gathering up-to-date data requires interviewing rich informant people. Therefore, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the sample community consisting of three categories: 1- Academicians (professors, students and graduates in software engineering, hardware, artificial intelligence and information technology, political science, sociology, future research) who have studied deeply about the subject. 2- Experts: people who, despite having academic backgrounds and also are active in those 3- Employees who are works in the data collection from cyber space, mainly monitoring or state management. To identify people in the primary interviews, we used purposeful sampling and then, network sampling in order to identify people with rich and valuable data. This continued until reaching theoretical saturation (15 people).

Conclusions Results

In response to the research questions, the interviewees proposed 29 categories, which in the final abstraction process, were categorized into four general concepts.
1- Situation description: The responses indicate the rational impact of technology on the performance of State supervision and the acceptable developments of that. At the same time, the current situation is under the influence of two factors, External sanctions and the internal narrowing of the State's surveillance.
2- Challenges: Answers includes four major challenges: first; Technical weakness due to dependence on digital technology. Second; Political challenges including the contradictions of the States' Viewpoints with each other and with the society, third; The cultural challenge includes people's distrust of new technologies; and fourth the scientific challenge is the weakness of indigenous knowledge.

3- Requirements: According to the interviewees, the most important requirement in solving the mentioned challenges is the removal of sanctions and enacting the foreign relations. supporting domestic individuals and companies, as well as technological socialization, including educating people and solving their security and religious concerns.

4- Vision: The most important future prospect in this sector is the quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of the State's digital surveillance of citizens. They have warned about citizens' data and the possibility of domestic technology companies becoming competitors for the States.

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