

## Iranians Revolution's Demands under the Shadow of Spiral of Silence: A Content Analysis of Twitter Messages in Iranian Mass Movement

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### Abstract

The 21st century has witnessed mass movements that can be dated back to 1990s which accelerated with the internet and still have continuing effects that have spread from local to the global stage. Since the Zapatista mass movements that started in Mexico as one of the first examples of these up to now, in several mass movements such as the Iranian Green Movement, Occupy Movements, Indignados (15M) and the Arab Spring, individuals who had not gathered before could come together due to different demands related to issues such as poor living conditions, the environment, economic problems, authoritarian regimes, human rights and democracy. While these demonstrations went on at physical spaces such as the Tahrir Square, Bourguiba Avenue, Plaza De Mayor, Zuccotti Park or Time Square on one hand, they were also held on social media including Facebook, Twitter and blogs, and simultaneously, virtual and real squares influenced each other. Although social media are considered indispensable in creating mass movements some think that it is not accurate to regard them as revolutions as reflected in expressions such as “Facebook Revolution” or “Twitter Revolution.” In 2009, the users collaborated through social media with regard to the claims that the Iranian presidential election was fraudulent. The mass movements that started with the first and the widespread use of the slogan “where is my vote?”, which was also carried over to the physical environment, were suppressed by the government, but, the distrust against the authority has exploded today at an increasing pace. Lastly, the mass demonstrations that started in 2017 gained momentum in early 2018 but were suppressed again by the government until the next event. This study focuses on classifying the messages sent over Twitter in early 2018 about the Iranian mass movements into primary and secondary categories using content analysis. The findings have been interpreted within the framework of the spiral of silence theory.

**Key Words:** Iranian Green Revolution, spiral of silence, social media, mass movements.

## **SusKunluk Sarmalının Gölgesinde İRanlıların Devrim Talepleri: İRan KitleseL Hareketinde Twitter Mesajlarının Bir İÇerik Analizi**

### **Özet**

21'nci yüzyılda kökleri 1990'lara dayanan ve internetin gelişimiyle birlikte hızlanarak, yerelden küresele yayılan ve etkileri halen devam eden kitle hareketleri görülmektedir. İlk örnekleri arasında Meksika'da başlayan Zapatista kitle hareketinden günümüze İRan Yeşiller Hareketi, İşga Hareketi, Öfkeliiler (Indignados (15M)) ve Arap Baharı gibi pek çok kitleseL eylemde daha önce bir araya gelmemiş bireyler, genel yaşam koşulları, çevre, ekonomik problemler, otoriter rejimler, insan hakları ve demokrasi gibi farklı talepler nedeniyle bir araya gelebilmişlerdir. Bu eylemler bir yandan Tahrir Meydanı, Bourguiba Caddesi, Plaza De Mayor, Zuccotti Parkı veya Time Square gibi fizikseL alanlarda sürdürülürken; diğEr taraftan Facebook, Twitter veya bloglar gibi sosyal medyada gerçekleştirilmiş, sanal ve gerÇek meydanlar birbirini etkilemiştir. Bu kitleseL eylemlerin oluşmasında sosyal medyanın olmazsa olmaz olduđu düşünülse de 'Facebook Devrimi' ya da 'Twitter Devrimi' gibi nitelendirmelerin doğru olmayacağı düşüncesi de belirtilmektedir. İRan'da 2009 başkanlık seçimlerindeki usulsüzlük iddiaları üzerine, kullanıcılar sosyal medya araçları üzerinden bir araya gelmiştir. Bireylerin fizikseL ortama taşıdığı, ilk ve yoğun olarak kullanılan "Benim Oyum Nerede" sloganıyla başlayan kitleseL eylemler hükümetin aldığı tedbirler ile bastırılmış fakat otoriteye duyulan güvensizlik hissi artarak günümüze kadar gelmiştir. Son olarak 2017 yılı sonlarında başlayan kitleseL eylemler 2018 yılının ilk günlerinde hız kazanmış, daha sonra hükümetin aldığı önlemler aracılığıyla bir dahaki kalkışmaya kadar bastırılmıştır. Bu çalışmada 2018 yılı başlarında İRan kitle hareketleri ile ilgili Twitter ortamında gönderilen mesajların içerik analizi metodu kullanılarak hangi ana konu ve alt konu başlıkları altında toplandığına odaklanılmış ve elde edilen bulgular suskunluk sarmalı kuramı çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İRan Yeşil Devrimi, suskunluk sarmalı, sosyal medya, kitleseL hareketler.

### **Introduction**

In the approximately 60-year-long time that has passed since the works "Man-Computer Symbiosis" by J. C. R. Licklider (1960: 4-11) and "Intergalactic Computer Network" by Hey and Pápay (2014: 192-210) up to our times, the internet and the social media environments have provided humanity with opportunities of communication and interaction at an unprecedented level. It may be argued that one of the most tangible examples of this prevalence and interaction is that 53% of the world population which is over seven and a half million people are internet users, 42% are social media users, and 68% are users of mobile devices (www.wearesocial.com, Date Accessed: 08.11.2018).

Today's world witnesses the presence of an environment where information cannot be hidden, is liberated by elimination of information monopolies, may be accessed with its plainest form without passing through the filters of gatekeepers, and ideas can be expressed without restriction. This situation paves the way for the general idea that social media is one of the main factors in the formation of mass movements.

The essence of this idea lies in the observation that the effects of several mass movements that took place in the first two decades of the 21st century whose effects are reflected today keep transforming the future in a spectrum from country borders to government regimes in a cause-effect relationship. Mass movements were described by Marshall (1999: 746) as, “a mutual step and positioning by people for a common goal that is determined beyond the existing ordinary relationships and interactions among people,” while Manuel Castells (2013: 189) defined it as, “... the driving force of a deep distrust in the political institutions that rule the society which arises as a result of the dialectic competition of the state and other political powers that wish to restructure the urban social life.” Moreover, Yaylacı who cited Jürgen Habermas (2011: 72) saw mass movements as, “...a resistance against the world’s system which emerged under the main influences of colonialism and becoming poor.” Melucci (2009: 87) explained it as, “a way of collective movement based on solidarity which experiences a conflict and pushes the limits of the system it resides in, as well as a network of social relationships where collective identity is constructed.”

Mass movements have also been interpreted by several academics in terms of the psychological states that are in. Hoffer (2011: 7) argued that all mass movements have participants that act with similar ideas and will resist every difficulty including death to reach the desired goal. According to Hoffer (2011), whatever the mass movement promises, it feeds the radicalism, effort, hope and hate in its followers, and it creates a highly powerful field of attraction and influence. The degree of the influence that is created is proportional to absolute belief, obedience and loyalty. Erlevent (2012: 45) explained this issue as, “masses are irresponsible and just as much emotional crowds that act with their feelings instead of reason, tend to get carried away by suggestion, easily believe what is stated, have underdeveloped thinking capacity, follow dreams and imagination, prioritize their emotional world over their intellectual world, strive to become heroes and do heroic things and obey all commands without objection.” Baudrillard (2003: 13-14), with a slight twist, defined a mass as a black hole in which what is social gets lost. Some of these views still need to be researched and validated in the line of internet era and increased state of individualism.

Hoffman (2005: 39-40) based the roots of how effective the internet could be in mass movements on the fact that, in 1994, the Zapatista Movement in Mexico distributed the messages of their leaders firstly to a website via electronic mail and then to sympathizing masses. Another milestone in accessing large masses with communication via the new media was the mass demonstrations in the Philippines. In these events, after the corruptions of the President of the Philippines, Estrada, were revealed on 17 January 2001, the short messages

that reached 7 million and mass demonstrations in a week led to his resignation (Shirk, 2011: 1).

### **Literature Review**

In the first decade of the 2000s, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter came into people's lives. Considering the 2009 Twitter Revolution (Iranian Green Movement) in Iran, the Outraged Movement (Los Indignados) in Spain in 2010-2011, the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, the Facebook Revolution in Egypt, the civil war and its aftermath in Libya, shortly the mass movements that were experienced in the Arabian Peninsula and occupy movements that spread like an epidemic to the whole world in this process, it is seen that social media users are closely related to these revolutions (Chen, 2013: 594).

The Iranian Green Movement which may be traced back to 2009 may be considered to be a pioneering example of today's mass movements supported by social media. The public opinion that there was fraud and cheating in the presidential elections dated 12 June 2009 led to the largest protests that were seen in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Connecting this movement to what the media called as a Twitter Revolution, considering that the number of Twitter users in the country was then 0.027% of the country's population by 19,235, was seen as an exaggeration (Evgeny, 2011: 15). However, it is seen that this issue has changed in late 2017 in terms of numbers of users and internet accessibility.

The Green Movement that was suppressed by the government by excessive force was rejuvenated in late 2017. The protests, which started against the problems in the country such as high cost of living, unemployment and corruption in December 2017 and turned into anti-regime demonstrations in a short time, spread to several cities such as Tehran, Kermanshah, Sanandij, Zanjan, Shiraz, Qom, Ahvaz, Zahedan, Arak and Khorramabad ([www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com), Date Accessed: 20.11.2018). These protests came to the fore after American President Trump tweeted the following on 30 December 2017: "Many reports of peaceful protests by Iranian citizens fed up with regime's corruption & its squandering of the nation's wealth to fund terrorism abroad. Iranian govt should respect their people's rights, including right to express themselves. The world is watching!" ([www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com), Date Accessed: 23.11.2018). After the start of these events in Iran, the Minister of Communication and Telecommunication sent a direct message to the CEO of Telegram, which was the most active social media platform in Iran with 40 million active users then as "A telegram channel encouraging hateful conduct, use of Molotov cocktails, armed uprisings, and social unrest," and Telegram was banned later ([www.techcrunch.com](http://www.techcrunch.com), Date Accessed: 20.11.2018). This situation is another example, in the formation, mobilization and crowding of mass movements today. Social media platforms are

used effectively, and in cases that cannot be controlled by authoritarian governments, they are blocked.

Friedman (2000: 66-68) stated that, by the democratization of information, it is now a matter of the past for governments to hide information from the people they serve and argued that, in a sense, this may serve the improvement of human rights and freedoms and become the voice of the voiceless against tyrannical governments. In a different perspective, it may also be claimed that these freedoms reinforce the power of underlying governmental forces by providing platforms that are virtual just like social media. Szajkowski, who commented on social media in terms of mass movements, defined social media as an element that provides a basis for mass movements, mobilizes reluctant masses in a spiral of silence and has become a hope for such masses (Szajkowski, 2017: 420-421). The concept of spiral of silence used by Szajkowski (2017) was coined for the first time in 1960s and turned into the Spiral of Silence Theory by Western German sociologist E. Noelle-Neumann in 1974. Noelle-Neumann expressed the main assumptions and hypotheses of her theory as the following: While behaviors and thoughts that are not approved by the society may be directed by the majority towards the minority as a punishment involving isolation, minorities may also sometimes create a spiral of silence over the majority by utilizing mass communication tools (Neumann, 1974: 45).

The essence of this theory includes the following principles (Roessing, 2014: 2-3):

- People are afraid of social isolation and segregation,
- In the society, people observe opinions and behaviors that they could comfortably and freely express and display,
- They refrain from expressing their opinions when there is decreasing support for these opinions in the society,
- As the number of those who support unsupported thoughts, opinions and acts decreases, the frequency of observing these in the society also decreases.

The theory focuses on the entrapment of people/masses in a spiral of silence with an approach of 'wait and see' by becoming silent in an environment where alternatives are oppressed or annihilated, ignored or prevented from appearing on screens. In this case, as especially the undecided masses that are known as the silent majority are not aware of their own power, they resort to accept the opinions that are presented in the media as the dominant opinion and form their beliefs and attitudes accordingly (Gölbaşı, 2010: 70-73). One of the outputs of this study will be the interpretation of the analysis of the Twitter posts that are subject to this work in the framework of the spiral of silence theory.

## Methodology

The main problem of the topic involves investigating how the Iranian mass movements that occurred in early January 2018 on the Twitter platform as a social medium by people in different geographies and cultural structures, which main topics and sub-topics the reactions to these mass movements gathered and interpretation of the results within the framework of the spiral of silence theory.

The population of the study included tweets in English with the purpose of investigating the similar and/or different aspects of the reactions of people from different geographies to the Iranian Mass Movement in a certain time interval. In this context, it was aimed to define data by content analysis and report similar data by gathering them under certain concepts and themes, and the design was planned as a case study. Firstly, as a result of the observations made on the tweets about the mass movements in Iran, tweets that were shared with the hashtag #IranProtests, which was highly popular, were derived from the website [www.twitonomy.com](http://www.twitonomy.com) and analyzed. Among the 9229 multilingual messages with the hashtag #IranProtests that were sent on the dates of 3, 4 and 7 January where account activity increased, only 4421 messages in English were included in the analysis. All analyzed data generated on Twitter obtained, via a third party application Twitonomy, which is an analytical software application provides simple yet powerful insights and features and allows monitoring online activity to produces descriptive statistics.

During the analysis of the contents of the messages, the study utilized the content analysis coding table created and used by one of the authors, Tayfun Yücesoy, in his doctoral dissertation (Yücesoy, 2017: Appendix 2). The formation of the code table and it's accuracy verified by two different and independent academics during the phase of dissertation.

Each of the 4421 aforementioned tweets were categorized under 9 main topics. 73 sub-topics were then defined under these topics, and each message was analyzed based on 82 different criteria.

While determining the topics and sub-topics of the messages based on the code expansion table, the content of the text, the profile of the user and the weight, effectiveness and priority of the message were considered.

The image and video links in the code expansion table that was prepared for each message were not included in the content analysis, but these images and videos were taken into account as an extension of the text for coding the message on the table accurately.

Although the study was carried out by taking qualitative analysis as a basis, frequency and percentage values are also included in the results for the purpose of following a

comprehensive approach.

During topical/thematic coding, whether or not the data under the topics that emerged constituted a meaningful entity was examined, and attention was paid to have the emerged topics/themes explain the data that were collected in the study in a meaningful way. In summary, it was aimed to make sure that the topics constituted a meaningful whole while being different from each other. At the stage of interpreting the findings, the classification and the data gathered under themes were interpreted by connection to each other and other topics.

Besides what is stated above, the limitations that were encountered in the beginning of and during the research process are included below:

- While analyzing the tweets that were sent in dozens of different languages, the study included only the tweets that were sent in English, which is considered an international language.

- The main difficulty in the analysis of the texts of the tweets that were sent was that a single sentence could be related to multiple categories of analysis. It was considered that including one tweet in more than one category could prevent an objective approach. At this point, inclusion of the tweet in only one category by considering the previous tweets of the user profile was accepted as a limitation.

- While determining the daily cross-sections of the messages, the dates of 3, 4 and 7 January were selected by assessing two different criteria as the intensity of mass movement and the intensity of posting, but another limitation was that the technical infrastructure of the website [www.twitonomy.com](http://www.twitonomy.com) does not allow choosing a desired time interval. Due to the limitation of third party application Twitonomy, time period of two hours selected randomly in determined day.

- The days that were determined by considering the intensity of Tweet flows and the high numbers of messages sent in this intensity were limited to a time period of 2 hours.

- Another limitation was that it was not possible to collect demographic information (age, gender, educational level, ethnicity) while analyzing the contents of the messages sent by individuals in the virtual environment.

### **Analysis**

Considering the main tweet topic distribution table presented below, it may be seen that, among the 4421 messages, the most frequently included contents were regarding sharing of personal agenda, comments and explanations by 39.33%, while the least frequently included

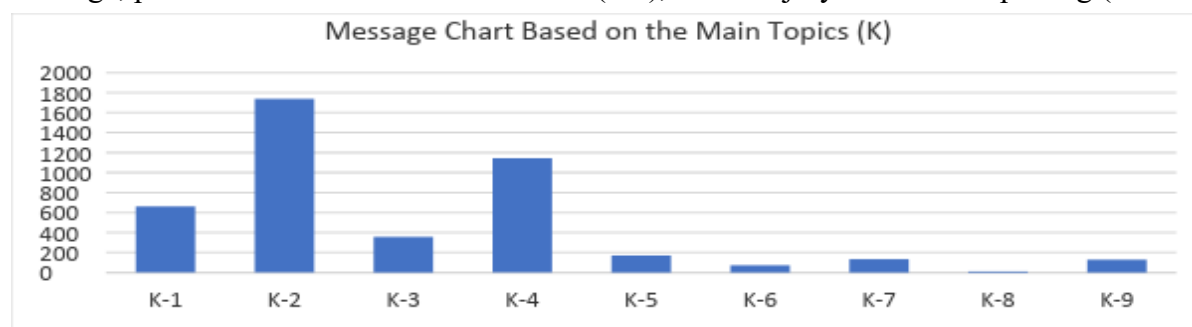
topic was economics by 0.27%. The tweets about personal agenda, comments and explanations were related to messages on reform, mass movement and revolution by 25.9% messages on assembly, marching and demonstration by 14.95%.

Message Table Based on the Main Topics	CODE	3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	%
Assembly, marching, demonstration	K-1	252	260	149	661	14,95
Personal agenda, comments, explanations	K-2	729	529	481	1739	39,33
Help	K-3	46	145	166	357	8,08
Reform, mass movement, revolution	K-4	326	439	380	1145	25,90
Leader	K-5	4	47	120	171	3,87
Security	K-6	14	49	10	73	1,65
Human Rights	K-7	12	40	82	134	3,03
Economics	K-8	1	11		12	0,27
Censorship	K-9	24	53	52	129	2,92
<b>TOTAL</b>		1408	1573	1440	4421	100,00

**Table 1:** Message Distribution Table Based on the Main Topics (K)

The topics of messages denoted as K-2, K-4 and K-1 constituted the majority of all messages by 80.18% and included a total of 3545 messages. These were followed by messages related to help by 8.08%. Among all the messages, those related to dissatisfaction with the leader had an approximate ratio of 3.87%.

One of the most important issues in personal perceptions in mass movements, K-6 that represents security was found to have very a low prevalence among the statements in the tweets as 1.65%. Similarly, K-7 human rights and K-9 censorship issues had a very small place in the message traffic by 3.03% and 2.92% respectively. As this issue may be expressed as that power-based pressure is not noticed in continuing mass movements, it may also be understood as that the sources of the messages that were sent did not notice these issues due to the place they were physically located in (abroad, outside the place of the event). However, when these issues are examined alongside the sub-topics of the topic K-1 corresponding to assembly, marching and demonstration, namely K-1-3 conflict reporting, usage of tear gas (0.48%), K-1-4 road blockage, prevention/restriction of movement (0%), K-1-5 injury and death reporting (0.52%),





K-1-6 assault, physical violence, torture and arrest (0.36%), it may be stated that the results were in favor of the inference that power-based pressure is not noticed in continuing mass movements.

**Chart 1:** Message Chart Based on the Main Topics (K)

Considering especially the Occupy Movements and the mass movements in the Arab Spring all around the world in the last decade, while the problem that is experienced is stated to be economics-based, it was a result worth noting that the topic of economics was the least frequently included topic in the contents of the messages. Although the share of economics in the ecosystem where mass movements take place was discussed, it was seen that this was not supported by the data collected from the messages.

### Analysis of the Messages Within Their Own Sub-Categories

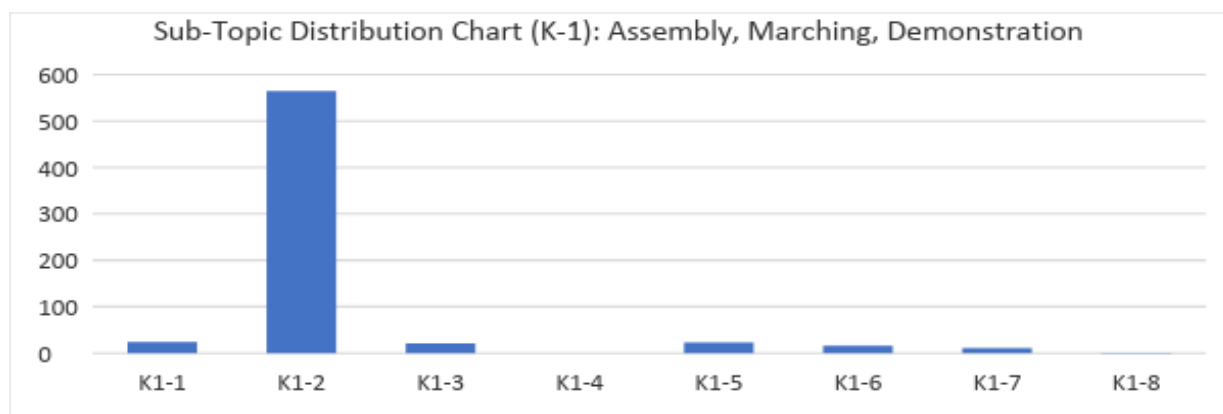
**Assembly, Marching, Demonstration (K-1):** The messages on reporting these activities constituted 14.95% of all messages with 661 tweets, while the vast majority of the K-1 main topic included K-1-1 reporting on assemble, marching and square activities and K-1-2 news about square, field, park and assembly place by 89.11% in total.

Assembly, Marching, Demonstration (K-1)	CODE	3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL MESSAGE	K-1 %	TOTAL %
Reporting on assembly, marching, square activities, sharing first response information	K-1-1	7	11	6	24	3,63	0,54
News about square, field, park and assembly place	K-1-2	208	230	127	565	85,48	12,78
Reporting on conflict, assault, usage of tear gas	K-1-3	15	5	1	21	3,18	0,48
Road blockage, obstruction, restriction of movement	K-1-4					0,00	0,00
Reporting on injuries and deaths	K-1-5	3	12	8	23	3,48	0,52
Assault, physical violence, torture, arrest	K-1-6	15	1		16	2,42	0,36
Participation announcements	K-1-7	4		7	11	1,66	0,25
Protesting marching, assembly and demonstration	K-1-8		1		1	0,15	0,02
TOTAL		252	260	149	661	100	14,95

**Table 2:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-1): Assembly, Marching, Demonstration

Moreover, among these 661 messages, there were smaller ratios of those about K-1-3 Conflict reporting, usage of tear gas (3.18%), K-1-4 Road blockage, obstruction/restriction of movement (0%), K-1-5 Reporting on injuries and deaths (3.48%), K-1-6 Assault, physical violence, torture and arrest (2.42%), and participation announcements (1.66%). Considering all the messages, it is seen that the issues that were observed here were in parallel with the low

ratio that was determined regarding security.



**Chart 2:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-1): Assembly, Marching, Demonstration

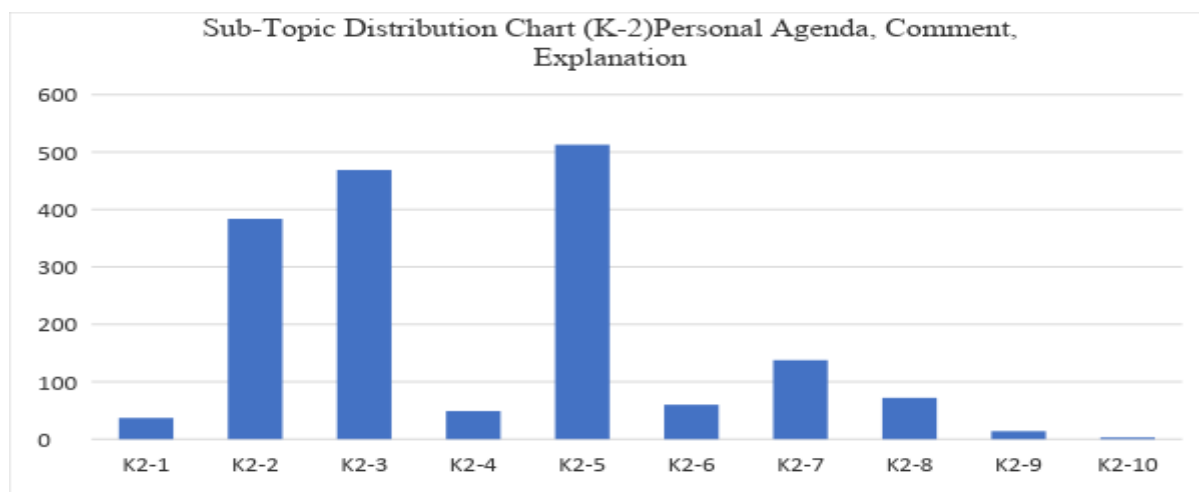
**Personal Agenda, Comments, Explanations (K-2):** this category covered the highest number of posts among all messages by 39.33%. Among the 1739 messages in the K-2 category, the prominent titles were K-2-5 Sharing information by 29.5%, K-2-3 Interpreting, analyzing current affairs by 26.97% and K-2-2 Sharing news about current affairs by 22.08%.

Personal Agenda, Comment, Explanation (K-2)	CODE	3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	K-2 %	TOTAL %
Wishes, expectations and demands	K-2-1	24	6	7	37	2,13	0,84
Sharing news on current affairs	K-2-2	166	128	90	384	22,08	8,69
Interpreting, analyzing current affairs	K-2-3	164	185	120	469	26,97	10,61
Thanks, celebrations	K-2-4	32	6	11	49	2,82	1,11
Sharing information	K-2-5	283	96	134	513	29,50	11,60
Revelation of own (ethnic, religious, sexual) identity	K-2-6	30	25	5	60	3,45	1,36
Addressing a certain person	K-2-7	19	68	51	138	7,94	3,12
Protesting the Government and State Forces	K-2-8	7	6	59	72	4,14	1,63
Protesting a political leader	K-2-9	4	6	4	14	0,81	0,32
Criticizing, protesting the global economic system	K-2-10		3		3	0,17	0,07
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>729</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>1739</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>39,33</b>

**Table 3:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-2): Personal Agenda, Comments, Explanations

These three categories mentioned above constituted 30.89% of the 4421 messages. These were followed from the most prevalent to the least by K-2-7 Addressing a certain person by 7.94%, K-2-8 Protesting the government and state forces by 4.14%, K-2-6 Revelation of

own identity by 3.45%, K-2-4 Thanks, celebrations by 2.82%, K-2-1 Wishes, expectations and demands by 2.13%, K-2-9 Protesting a political leader by 0.81% and K-2-10 Criticizing the global economic system by 0.17%.



**Chart 3:** Sub-Topic Distribution Chart (K-2) Personal Agenda, Comment, Explanation

The sub-topic of K-2-10 Criticizing the global economic system was in parallel with the topic of K-8 Economics, while it had a ratio of 0.07% in the overall distribution and 0.17% in its own main topic. These ratios are an example of how little economics is discussed in individual reactions regarding mass movements. Similarly, protesting a political leader had a ratio of 0.32% among all messages and 0.82% among its own main topic with 14 messages. This low ratio suggests that, although social media is far from a centralized structure, as opposed to its freedom of access provided to users, the messages were not towards criticizing the political authority.

**Help (K-3):** This category had the fourth highest number of messages among all by 8.08%. Among the 357 messages in the K-3 category, the sub-topics from the most prevalent to the least were K-3-7 Help request from social media by 47.9%, K-3-5 General help request by 17.65% and K-3-6 Help request from the USA by 16.53%.

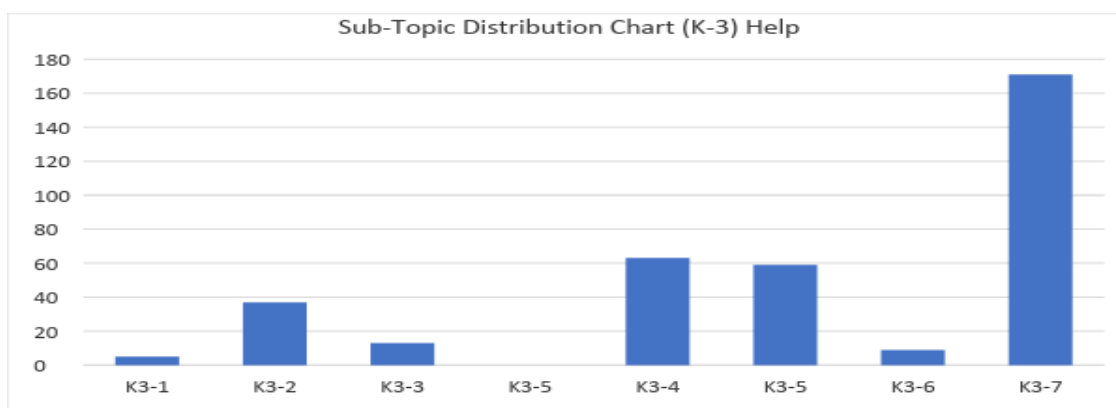
Help (K-3)	CODE	3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	K-3 %	TOTAL %
Help for assemble, demonstration, marching activities	K-3-1	4		1	5	1,40	0,11
Help request from the UN	K-3-2			37	37	10,36	0,84
Help request from other countries	K-3-3	5	7	1	13	3,64	0,29
Protesting help	K-3-5						
General help request	K-3-4	17	17	29	63	17,65	1,43

Help request from the USA	K-3-5	12	24	23	59	16,53	1,33
Help request from international media	K-3-6	1	7	1	9	2,52	0,20
Help request from social media	K-3-7	7	90	74	171	47,90	3,87
TOTAL		46	145	166	357	100,00	8,08

**Table 4:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-3): Help

The three categories mentioned above constituted 82.08% of the 357 messages. These were followed from the most prevalent to the least by K-3-2 Help request from the UN by 10.36%, K-3-3 Help request from other countries by 3.64%, K-3-6 Help request from international media by 2.52% and K-3-1 Help for assembly, demonstration, marching activities by 1.4%, while there was no message regarding K-3-4 Protesting help.

The most striking result in this category was that requesting help from international media (K-3-6) had a ratio of only 2.52%, while usage of social media for achieving the visibility and support of mass movements and for help purposes (K-3-7) had the highest ratio of messages by 47.9%. This may be explained as an indicator of the need of the mass movement that formed on social media to transform into real masses with the help of virtual press.



**Chart 4:** Sub-Topic Distribution Chart (K-3) Help

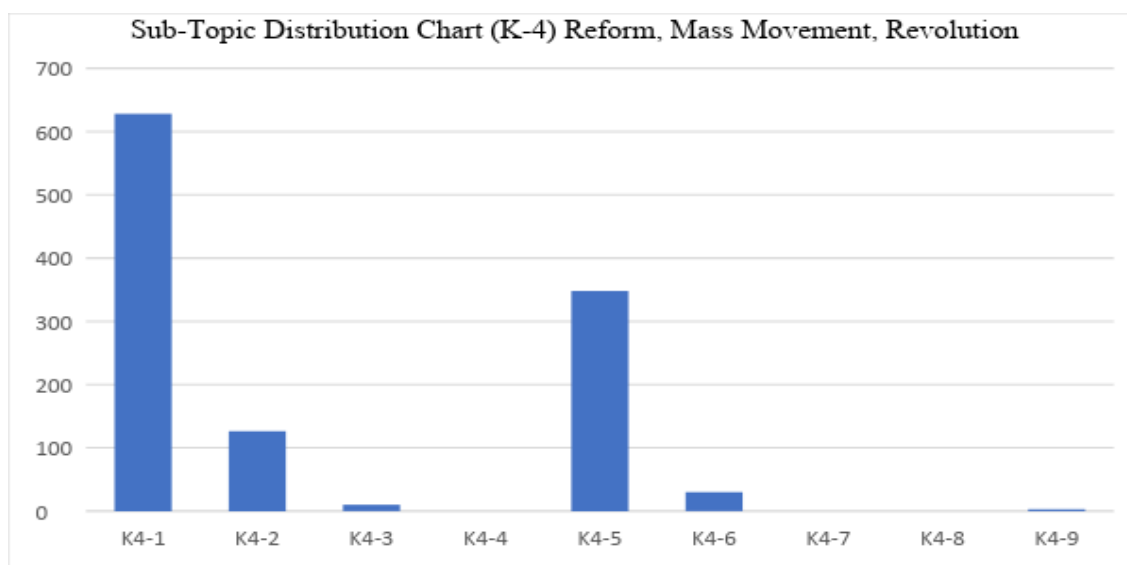
It may also be argued that, topically, the messages sent by the US President Donald Trump corresponded to the opposition views that resonated with the mass movements in the help category. Moreover, the total ratio of help requested from international organizations, media and states was found as 31.05%. This may be interpreted as an indication of expectations for other states and organizations for overcoming the lack of self-esteem and hesitation felt against the hegemonic elements controlled by the state against the mass movement.

**Reform, Mass Movement, Revolution (K-4):** This category held the second most prominent place in all messages with 1145 messages in it and 25.9%.

Reform, Mass Movement, Revolution (K-4)	CODE	3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	K-4 %	TOTAL
Sharing news on current affairs	K-4-1	190	284	154	628	54,85	14,20
Rebellion, revolt	K-4-2		8	118	126	11,00	2,85
Reform demands	K-4-3	2	4	4	10	0,87	0,23
Formation and success of regime change, government change, revolution	K-4-4						
Support for mass movement	K-4-5	123	124	101	348	30,39	7,87
Opposing, criticizing, protesting mass movement	K-4-6	11	16	3	30	2,62	0,68
Formation of flow of refugees	K-4-7						
Protesting elections	K-4-8						
Banning, criticizing corrupted politicians, negative statements	K-4-9		3		3	0,26	0,07
TOTAL		326	439	380	1145	100,00	25,90

**Table 5:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-4): Reform, Mass Movement, Revolution

The prominent sub-topics in the K-4 category in the 1145 messages were K-4-1 Sharing news on current affairs by 54.85%, K-4-5 Support for mass movement by 30.39% and K-4-2 Rebellion, revolt by 11%. These three sub-topics constituted 24.92% of all 4421 messages. These were followed from the most prevalent to the least by K-4-6 Opposing, criticizing, protesting mass movement by 2.62%, K-4-3 Reform demands by 0.87% and K-4-9 Banning, criticizing corrupted politicians, negative statements by 0.26%. There were no messages that corresponded to the sub-topics K-4-4 Formation of success of regime change, government change, revolution, K-4-7 Formation of flow of refugees or K-4-8 Protesting elections.



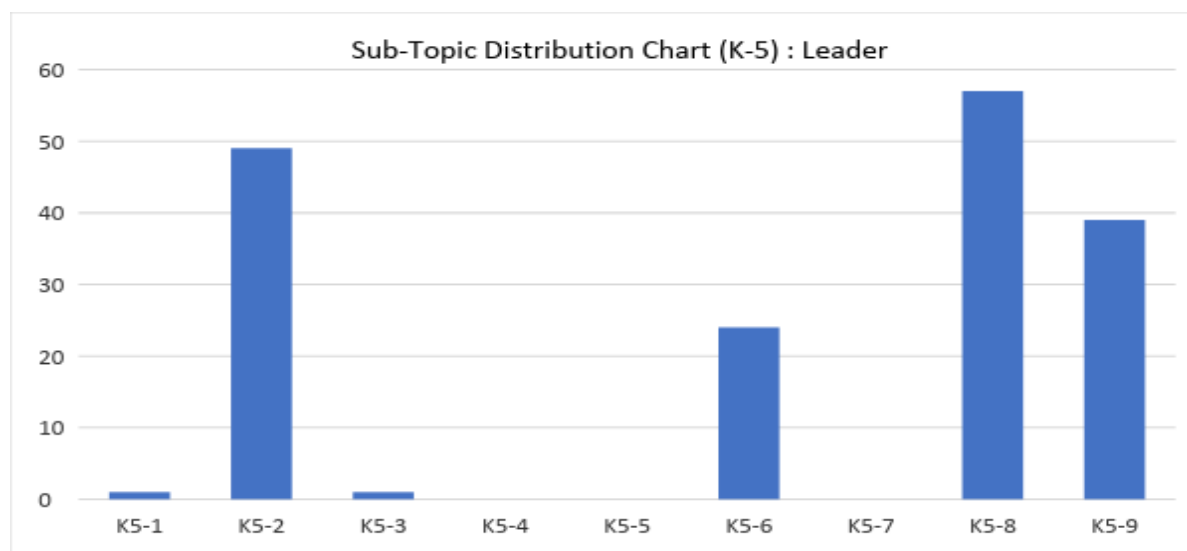
**Chart 5:** Sub-Topic Distribution Chart (K-4) Reform, Mass Movement, Revolution

**Leader (K-5):** This category covered 3.87% of all messages.

Leader (K-5)	CODE	3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	K-5 %	TOTAL %
Positive comments on political leader	K-5-1	1			1	0,58	0,02
Negative comments on political leader	K-5-2	1	36	12	49	28,65	1,11
Positive comments on military leader	K-5-3	1			1	0,58	0,02
Comments on the families of political/military leader	K-5-4						
Demand for overthrowing political leader	K-5-5						
Addressing political leader	K-5-6			24	24	14,04	0,54
Freezing the bank accounts of leader	K-5-7						
Comments on leader – neutral	K-5-8		1	56	57	33,33	1,29
Leader's own statements	K-5-9	1	10	28	39	22,81	0,88
TOTAL		4	47	120	171	100,00	3,87

**Table 6:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-5): Leader

The prominent sub-topics in the K-5 category which included 171 messages were K-5-8 Comments on leader – neutral by 33.33%, K-5-2 Negative comments on political leader by 28.65% and K-5-9 Leader's own statements by 22.81%. While these three sub-topics constituted 84.79% of the 171 messages, they represented 3.28% of all 4421 messages.



**Chart 6:** Sub-Topic Distribution Chart (K-5): Leader

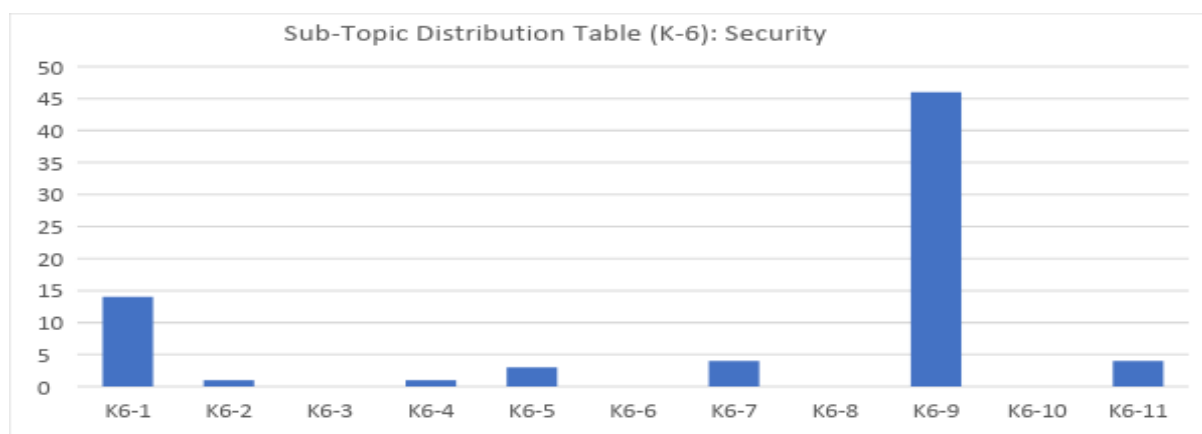
These were followed by K-5-6 Addressing political leader by 14.04% and K-5-1 Positive comments on political leader by 0.58%. There were no messages in the sub-topics of K-5-4 Comments on the families of political/military leader or K-5-5 Demand for overthrowing political leader.

**Security (K-6):** This category had the second smallest share in all messages with 73 messages and a ratio of 1.65%.

Security (K-6)	CODE	3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	K-6 %	TOTAL %
Sharing activities of security (police/gendarmery) forces	K-6-1	4	5	5	14	19,18	0,32
Sharing military intervention	K-6-2		1		1	1,37	0,02
Requesting UN intervention	K-6-3						
Requesting intervention of other countries	K-6-4	1			1	1,37	0,02
Report on conflict / assault	K-6-5	3			3	4,11	0,07
Reports on road blockage, obstruction, restriction of movement, withholding prior permission	K-6-6						
Protesting security forces	K-6-7		4		4	5,48	0,09
US intervention	K-6-8						
Criticizing, refusing interventions	K-6-9	2	39	5	46	63,01	1,04
Personal security measures	K-6-10						
Explosion, fire	K-6-11	4			4	5,48	0,09
TOTAL		14	49	10	73	100,00	1,65

**Table 7:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-6): Security

Among the 73 messages in the K-6 category, the prominent sub-topics were K-6-9 Criticizing, refusing interventions by 63,01%, K-6-1 Sharing activities of security forces by 19.18% and K-6-11 Explosion, fire by 5.48%.



**Chart 7:** Sub-Topic Distribution Chart (K-6) Security

These three sub-topics constituted 87.7% of the 73 messages and 1.45% of all 4421 messages. These were followed by K-6-5 Report on conflict / assault by 4.1% and K-6-2 Sharing military intervention and K-6-4 Requesting intervention of other countries by 1.4%

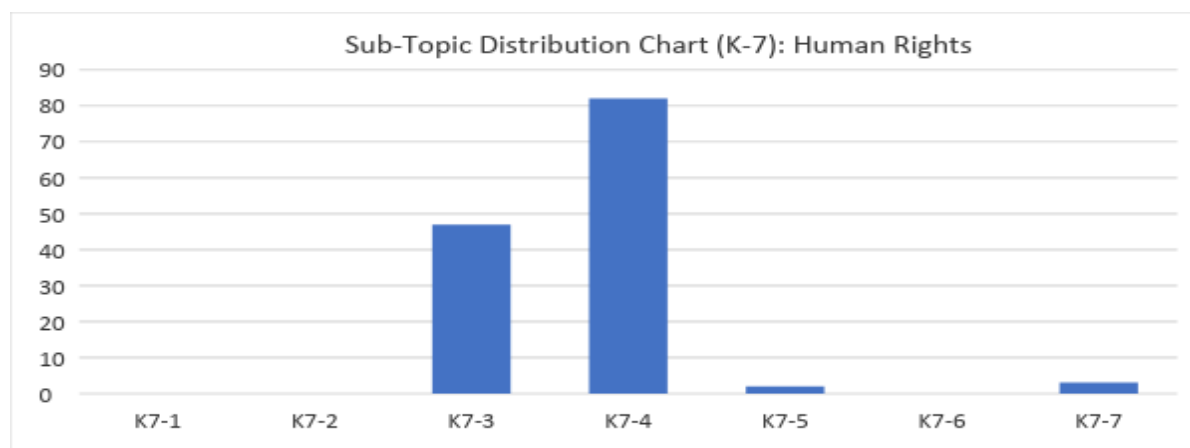
each. There were no messages that corresponded to the sub-topics of K-6-6 Road blockage, obstruction and restriction of movement, K-6-8 Requesting US intervention.

**Human Rights (K-7):** It is seen that this category covered 134 posts and 3.03% among all messages.

Human Rights (K-7)	CODE	3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	K-7 %	TOTAL %
Report on looting activities	K-7-1						
Report on injury	K-7-2						
Report on death	K-7-3	1	37	9	47	35,07	1,06
Arrest	K-7-4	6	3	73	82	61,19	1,85
Assault/Physical Violence/Torture	K-7-5	2			2	1,49	0,05
Massacre or attack	K-7-6						
Evacuation of citizens of certain countries	K-7-7	3			3	2,24	0,07
TOTAL		12	40	82	134	100,00	3,03

**Table 8:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-7): Human Rights

The prominent sub-topics in the K-7 category which included 134 messages were K-7-4 Arrest by 61.19% with 82 messages, K-7-3 Report on death by 35.07% and 47 messages and K-7-7 Evacuation of citizens of certain countries by 2.24% and 3 messages.



**Chart 8:** Sub-Topic Distribution Chart (K-7): Human Rights

These three categories constituted 132 messages and 2.98% in the 4421 messages in total. These were followed by K-7-5 Assault, Physical Violence and Torture by 1.49%. There were no messages under the sub-categories of K-7-1 Report on looting activities, K-7-2 Report on injury or K-7-6 Massacre or attack.

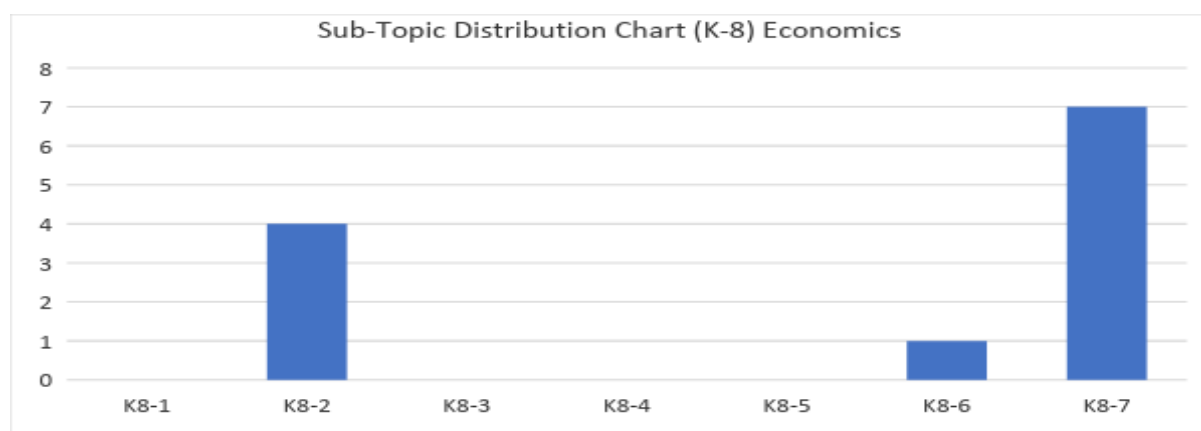


**Economics (K-8):** There were 12 messages in this category which constituted only 0.27% of all messages.

Economics (K-8)		3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	K-8 %	TOTAL %
Statements of poverty	K-8-1				0	0,00	
Financial crisis	K-8-2		4		4	33,33	0,09
Anger towards WS bankers	K-8-3						
Natural resources – acquiring petrol	K-8-4						
Petrol prices	K-8-5						
Unjust taxing	K-8-6	1			1	8,33	0,02
Unjust tax distribution	K-8-7		7		7	58,33	0,16
TOTAL		1	11	0	12	100,00	0,27

**Table 9:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-8): Economics

Among the 12 messages in the K-8 category, the prominent sub-topics were K-8-7 Unjust tax distribution by 58.33% and 7 messages, K-8-2 Financial crisis by 33.33% and 4 messages and K-8-6 Unjust taxing by 8.33% and 1 message.



**Chart 9:** Sub-Topic Distribution Chart (K-8) Economics

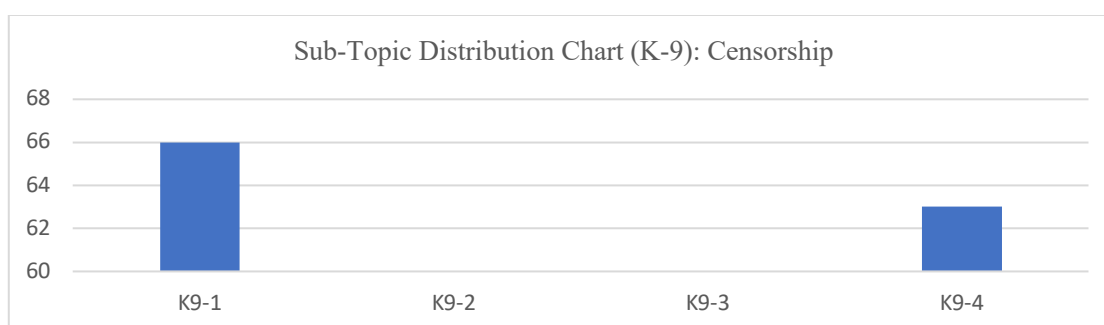
Considering the table and plot on the messages that were shared about economics, although there is the idea that the economic reasons are in the basis of all mass movements, the number of messages on this issue within the message traffic had the lowest share among all messages.

**Censorship (K-9):** Among all the messages, this category covered 129 messages by 2.92%.

Censorship (K-9)		3 JAN	4 JAN	7 JAN	TOTAL	K-9 %	TOTAL %
Internet restrictions, throttling	K-9-1	16	25	25	66	51,16	1,49
Social media blockage, ban	K-9-2						
Television censorship	K-9-3						
Press censorship, media censorship	K-9-4	8	28	27	63	48,84	1,43
TOTAL		24	53	52	129	100,00	2,92

**Table 10:** Sub-Topic Distribution Table (K-9): Censorship

The prominent sub-topics in the K-9 category which included 129 messages were K-9-1 Internet restrictions, throttling by 51.16% with 66 messages and K9-4 Press and media censorship by 48.84% and 63 messages.



**Chart 10:** Sub-Topic Distribution Chart (K-9): Censorship

There were no messages under the sub-topics of K-9-2 Social media blockage, ban or K-9-3 Television censorship.

### Discussion and Conclusion

As mentioned before, there is a general acceptance that the mass movements that are experienced in this century could not occur without the internet, and the visibility of such activities is a reflection of the communications infrastructure. Castells (2013) stated that, although real life is filled with fear regarding the establishment of the confidence for the formation of mass movements, change may be achieved via overcoming this fear by gathering in the internet environment. If the mass movements in Iran that occurred in late 2017 and early 2018 are considered in this context, while it is seen that social media acted as a catalyst in the realization of these events, it is difficult to argue that people overcome their real-life fears completely on the internet. When this situation was analyzed based on the messages that were categorized, the following findings were obtained.

In the topic of news on assembly, marching, demonstration (K-1), most of the messages were related to sharing news stories, while personal comments were not included. Additionally,

the low rate of messages related to reporting arrests, violence or conflicts at squares was similar to the low rate in the category of security (K-6).

Considering the number and ratio of the messages that fell under the topic of personal agenda, comments and explanations (K-2) (1739 messages / 39.33%), interpreting the current affairs (K-2-3) had a share of only 27% under this topic and 10.6% in all messages. It may be argued that this ratio is one that is low enough to provoke thoughts for masses that really want reform. Additionally, the total ratio of post under this topic in general about protesting against the government, state forces and political readers was lower than 2%. This does not reflect the slogans and comments in the international mainstream media.

Considering the messages on the topic of help (K-3), the tweets of the US President Trump that supported the Iranian public were unrequited. The finding that only 1.33% of all messages requested help from the USA may be interpreted as an indication that the USA is perceived as the biggest enemy for both the political power and the society.

Considering the topic of reform, mass movement and revolution (K-4) which would be expected to include the highest numbers of messages, individuals whose messages were included in this category expressed their demands for reform by 0.87%, while there were no messages about regime change. Instead, it is seen that sharing news about the current affairs was preferred. It may be considered that this could pose less legal risks for individuals.

Regarding leaders (K-5), the rate of directly criticizing leaders with their names was very low. It may be thought that users avoided negative expressions about leaders.

In terms of security (K-6), the finding that the messages about requesting support from another state or organization and intervention on the events were few agreed with the ratios in the topic of help (K-3). This may be interpreted in two different ways in general. First of these is the need and desire of the Iranian public to solve issues with their own efforts, which seems highly unlikely considering the presence of an oppressive regime. The other may be the belief that requesting help from another country or organization could constitute a serious crime and harm the individual.

While the ratio of 3.03% covered by messages related to human rights (K-7) may lead one to think everyone could freely express anything they want, the number of these messages does not reflect the number of arrested, injured or dead protesters.

The number of messages related to economics (K-8) was surprisingly low in contrast to studies that emphasized high food prices, difficulty in living conditions, high levels of living expenses, etc. among the reasons for the Arab Spring such as Ciezadlo (2011)'s "Let Them Eat Bread: How Food Subsidies Prevent (and Provoke) Revolutions in the Middle East," Johnstone

and Mazo (2011)'s "Global Warming and the Arab Spring, Survival Global Politics and Strategy," Dodge (2012)'s "Conclusion: the Middle East After the Arab Spring" and Adeel Malik and Bassem Awadallah (2011)'s "the Economics of the Arab Spring," as well as insights of several academics and their reflections in the mainstream media.

The most striking finding about the messages related to censorship (K-9) was that even the prohibition of Telegram, which had the highest share in the country with 40 million users, was not reflected in the messages.

Contrary to the findings of this study, the views of the Iranian public on these events and the start of these events in Western media were explained by unemployment, increased prices, corruption and compulsory hijab for women according to Bengali and Mostaghim (2018) ([www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com), Date Accessed: 23.11.2018), inadequate inspection of economic institutions and lack of state guarantee according to Cunningham and Mufson (2018) ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), Date Accessed: 21.11.2018) and dissatisfaction with inadequate government by leaders according to Dehghan (2017) (protesters taking down large banners depicting the Ayatollah's image) ([www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), Date Accessed: 24.11.2018). These issues were expressed in squares where the protests took place as "Death to the dictator," "Death to (Hassan) Rouhani," "Don't be afraid, we are all together," "Forget about Syria, think about us," "Not Gaza, nor Lebanon, my life for Iran." ([www.thehill.com](http://www.thehill.com), Date Accessed: 06.11.2018).

However, when the slogans related to these topics were compared to the Twitter message analyses here, it was seen that the messages about dissatisfaction with, hate against and criticism of **leaders (K-5)** had a ratio of 1.65%, those related to **security (K-6)** had a ratio of 1.65%, those related to **economics (K-8)** had a ratio of only 0.27%, and the messages related to **censorship (K-9)** had a ratio of 2.92%. The number of messages related to these topics constituted only 225 of the 4421 messages, namely 5.08% of all messages. This may clearly be explained as that the slogans and statements in real spaces and those in the virtual environment do not overlap, and a spiral of silence has formed.

It is undeniable that the main issue which pushes individuals into a spiral of silence is that checking the IP numbers of senders and receivers in heterogenous systems such as the internet and social network platforms is possible with various simple methods for not only states but also companies. Past mass movements showed us that, when states demanded the Internet Protocol (IP) numbers of those who supported mass movements from social media companies and were rejected, they tried to take precautions like blocking access to such platforms or throttling internet speeds in order to prevent spreading these movements further and reduce the interest in the international public, and ultimately, they cut off the internet all together.

Considering issues from this perspective, the internet and social media constitute a means that is provided to the individual directly by the state and controlled partly by the state. Not only reaching the individual directly via IP addresses, but also control, restriction, observation and recording on their content directly or indirectly through the topics discussed on the internet may lead the individual to feel weak and helpless against the mechanism of the state. This results in the emergence of a spiral of silence.

Likewise, Marcuse (2007: 5-11) also stated that, while technological developments allowed government regimes to become totalitarian regimes, they also provided a stricter inspection mechanism in favor of social groups. Moreover, the New Yorker columnist, Malcolm Gladwell (2010) argued that, despite the incredible opportunities the internet provides for the individual, it rarely formed strong interindividual connections for acts that carried high risks, while Harlow and Guo (2014: 475) asserted that the opportunities provided by the internet were inadequate for social change due to its limitations. As the internet emerged out of military needs, it may be easier to explain spirals of silence considering that security forces use social media just as much as dissident citizens do. It is observed based on these basic approaches that, the expression of the social dissatisfaction in Iran that has lasted since the past until today has been more clearly pronounced in real squares rather than the internet. In summary, in the case of Iran, it is seen that social media is not able to provide a safe environment for individuals to freely express their opinions. It is observed that, rather than being platforms where spirals of silence may be lifted, online environments create new spirals of silence for minorities and majorities in different forms.

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