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In this study I investigate the Iranian Green Movement supporters' use of slogans as political discourse on the Persian-language opposition website [www.kaleme.com](http://www.kaleme.com). Data was collected from the website's Kaleme section in the form of 22 articles and 3,500 user comments. A coding scheme was constructed to measure the presence of categories and themes in the site's comments section. Findings support the propositions of narrative theorists that frequent use of slogans in the comments may reflect a unique cultural element of Persian-language political discourse and reinforce the Green Movement's narrative of opposition to the government.

SLOGANS AND OPPOSITION POLITICAL CULTURE: ONLINE DISCOURSE IN IRAN'S  
GREEN MOVEMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

My blood is no different from that of other martyrs  
*Mir-Hossein Mousavi*<sup>1</sup>

Sociology and communications research on the role of new media and computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the Iranian Green Movement that followed the 2009 presidential election has focused on issues including political dissent, censorship, and internet anonymity (Burns and Eltham, 2009). However, research in this area has consistently overlooked the role of cultural and narrative elements influencing Iranian political discourse in cyberspace.

Specifically, the role of language in facilitating culturally meaningful dialogue through semantic and lexical cues has rarely been explored by scholars. Consequently, the cultural and linguistic salience of the “coherent popular narrative” (Monshipouri & Assareh, 2009, p. 37) of dissent following the election of 2009 in Iran is not well understood in the current literature.

In this thesis, I explore the nature and types of Green Movement discourse in the comments section of the Persian-language opposition website [www.kaleme.com](http://www.kaleme.com). I examine various aspects of Persian-language political discourse and discuss readers’ use of slogans as a unique and significant element of Iranian opposition political culture. I also illustrate aspects of this discourse that pertain to collective action frames and highlight the ways in which actors narrate the symbolic battle between the government and the opposition in cyberspace.

A content analysis study of this nature is necessary in order to answer the question of how “culture exerts an independent influence on social, political and economic phenomena” (Ignatow 2009, p. 665). Therefore, a primary interest of this paper is to study the “interaction between the culture of a society, movement ideologies, and movement frames” (Poulson 2005, p. 9). In other

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<sup>1</sup> Leader of the Iranian Green Movement

words, the paper aims to determine the ways and the extent to which culture influences online Iranian political discourse. Moreover, the linguistic elements of political discourse may be seen as important sources of information about opposition supporters and their political views.

Additionally, the paper argues that a content analysis of user comments is beneficial to social movements research because it highlights language as a powerful tool for uncovering the cultural differences unique to national social movements. Textual content analysis is a study of language as embodied in social and cultural norms (Berg and Lune, 2012). This perspective provides a direct interpretation of the ways in which political actors produce and convey meaning through use of the Persian language in an online setting.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PRELIMINARY HYPOTHESES

Social movements research on Iran has primarily focused on Iranian political movements of the last century from a historical and cultural perspective (Poulson, 2005; Gheytauchi 2009, 2010). While these studies have examined the use of Shia<sup>2</sup> narratives and slogans during times of upheaval in Iranian history, there have been very few studies focusing specifically on the narrative elements of Iranian political culture in an online setting. Therefore, the question remains as to how online discourse has influenced Iranian political culture and whether there are any similarities between discourses of past movements and the current political dialogue taking place in cyberspace. The Green Movement has provided social movements researchers with an opportunity to explore the unique nature of online political discourse as it applies to the case of Iran; however, the social profile of Green Movement supporters and their online discursive behavior remain unknown. To that effect, this exploratory study posits the following research questions:

Q1: What are the nature and types of online political discourse in Iran's Green Movement?

Q2: What is the significance of slogans in Iranian political culture?

Q3: Are there any emergent patterns of political discourse in the online comments?

In order to empirically ground the study, I posit the following preliminary hypotheses:

H1: Most comments will be anonymous in nature.

H2: Comments with slogans are more likely to be in Persian than English.

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<sup>2</sup> Spelling varies according to text. This paper uses the common spelling of Shia whereas other scholars such as Poulson and Moaddel use Shi'i. Moaddel (1992) defines Shia Islam as "a religious sect in Islam, predominantly the Twelver Shi'i, which recognizes twelve religious leaders (Imam), after Prophet Mohammad." (p. 353). Islam's split into two sects, Sunni and Shia, are largely the result of disagreements about the issue of Muhammad's succession. Shias believe that Imam Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, is Muhammad's successor. Sunnis reject this view and hold that Abu Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law, is the rightful successor to the Prophet. Shia Islam is the official religion in Iran.

H3: Slogans are a unique element of Iranian opposition political culture online.

H4: Green Movement supporters will be more likely to use slogans than Green Movement opponents.

H5: Comments with slogans will be more likely to contain democracy, reform, and justice themes than those without slogans.

H6: Comments with slogans will be more likely to contain positive views about Islam than those without slogans.

## LITERATURE

### Definitions of Content Analysis

George (1959) defines quantitative content analysis as “a statistical technique for obtaining descriptive data on content variables” (p. 144). From this viewpoint, the significance of quantitative text analysis is its precision, objectivity and reliability achieved by systematically counting frequencies with which keywords or themes appear in the text. The researcher also points out reliability problems associated with coding text as a central issue in textual analysis. Budd, Thorp and Donohew (1967) view content analysis as a “systematic technique for analyzing message content” (p. 2). They also point out the unobtrusive nature of conducting content analysis research as one of the benefits of this technique. Carney (1972) defines content analysis in a similar fashion by pointing out the advantages of the technique in producing a mass of information from data sources systematically and quantitatively.

Carley (1993) notes that “content analysis focuses on the frequency with which words or concepts occur in texts” (p. 81). Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as a technique for producing “replicable and valid inferences” from text and identifies six components of carrying out content analysis research, namely unitizing, sampling, recording/coding, reducing, abductive inferring and narrating the answers (p. 83). Similarly, McMillan (2000) identifies four steps for conducting a content analysis of web content. These four steps consist of formulating research questions, selecting a sample, defining categories to be coded, and training coders to achieve inter-coder reliability. Berg and Lune (2012) define content analysis as a “careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings” (p. 349). The researchers point out that content analysis is a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research as it blends elements of both types of

methodology, namely counting frequencies and making inferential interpretations of textual data. The researchers distinguish between manifest and latent content analysis by noting the differences between “surface structure” meaning (manifest) and the “deeper structural” meaning (latent) (p. 355). They also caution against generalizing the descriptive results obtained from frequencies and proportions.

### A Theoretical Framework for Text Analysis

Franzosi (1989) points out the difficulties of existing coding schemes of text analysis and instead advocates a more precise practice based on “semantically defined functional categories” (p. 265). He identifies the central problems of traditional coding schemes as highly abstract, theoretically defined and limited, unreliable due to data contamination, and loosely connected categories. Franzosi emphasizes the positive role that linguistic analysis could play in extracting richer and more reliable data from the text. The concept of specific text grammars is a significant contribution of Franzosi to text analysis methodology. In this light, “semantic text grammars” (p. 272) could be viewed as functionally defined categories aiding the researcher in conducting quantitative analysis of qualitative text data. Franzosi expands on the concept of semantic text grammars by noting that:

...a grammar can be used to code textual material from a variety of sources (not just newspapers) and on a variety of topics (not just collective actions). In fact, a grammar can be applied fruitfully whenever the text source follows the simple linguistic canonical structure, noun phrase/verb phrase. (p. 275)

Elsewhere, Franzosi (1994) explains the canonical structure further by introducing time and space “modifiers” which render the text analysis useful for a variety of types of social science research (p. 106). One of the most significant aspects of Franzosi’s paper is its introduction of the mathematical concept of set theory and its incorporation into text analysis. This theoretical framework allows the text analyst to transfer the data from words to numbers,

hence allowing for statistical procedures to be computed. Another important aspect of Franzosi's model is its treatment of semantic structures as relational models rather than hierarchical or network data models. This concept is explained further when Franzosi notes:

...the mathematical foundation of the relational model (relational calculus and algebra, or set theory) is easy to grasp. Second, the data organization of relational models is also easier to understand than that of hierarchical or network models: A table is a more familiar concept than a pointer. Third, the hierarchical model works very well for truly hierarchical structures only - that is, structures characterized by one-to-many relationships between entity-sets (e.g., many triplets related to one event). (p. 119)

Therefore, for Franzosi, set theory is viewed as a powerful tool for collecting, coding and analyzing text data, and providing statistical output for qualitative data. Franzosi (1998) also points out the significance of narrative analysis in uncovering hidden sociological information contained in textual data. For Franzosi, the advantages of moving past the qualitative-quantitative debate and focusing on the narrative of text allows the social scientist to find relationships "between text and social reality" (p. 547). Moreover, the author advocates the use of narrative analysis as a tool for understanding the deeper social origins and meanings influencing linguistic practices in order to facilitate greater understanding of discourse as embedded in linguistic culture. To that effect, Franzosi (2010) views the main advantage of narrative analysis as a way of exploiting "some fundamental linguistic properties of a specific type of text (narrative) to build a method that ultimately allows one to go 'from words to numbers,' to extract numbers out of words" (p. 1).

Vicari (2010) elaborates on the semantic grammar method by introducing additional framing categories such as "self-referential" and "adversarial" (p. 510). The introduction of these frames allows for a more specific coding scheme of collective action text analysis. The next step in Vicari's methodology focuses on "actions and states" similar to Franzosi's canonical structure. For Vicari, the particular significance of the frame semantic grammar is two-fold. First, it

prevents the contamination of data because the text is semantically coded and preserves meaning before and after coding. Second, the semantic grammar allows for quantitative analysis of text data while still allowing for qualitative interpretations. Vicari expands on this point and highlights the similarities of her model and Franzosi's by stating that:

Finally, this technique does provide an integrated system allocating all primary elements of collective action frames within a scheme of interpretation. It overcomes more abstract conceptual discussions that have failed to achieve empirical depth... frame semantic grammars allow the researcher to walk all the way from words to frames, from linguistic elements to cognitive images. (p. 521)

### Social Movements and Shia Narrative Frames in Iranian History

Gamson and Mayer (1996) define a social movement as “a sustained and self-conscious challenge to authorities or cultural codes by a field of actors” (p. 283). Diani (1992) notes that “to be considered a social movement, an interactive collectivity requires a set of beliefs and a sense of belongingness” (p. 8). Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford (1986) point out the shortcomings of psycho-functional (classical social movements theory) and resource mobilization perspectives of social movements as neglecting the role of grievance interpretation, having static views of participation, and over-generalizing “participation-related processes” (p. 465). Poulson (2005) emphasizes the framing processes discussed in social movements research and draws upon the importance of studying the narrative and symbolic elements in order to place social movements in their proper historical and cultural context. The author also points out the important role that “cultural narratives” played in the 1979 Iranian Revolution (p. 9). Poulson also refers to new social movement (NSM) theory as particularly sensitive to the issue of cultural identity while also focusing on ideologies and movement frames. The researcher distinguishes between culture and frames by stating that “a ‘frame’ is a movement specific narrative and culture is the broader ‘life-organizing’ principles such as shared religion and language” (p. 16).

Poulson employs this frame by stating that “Islam in Iran is a highly developed cultural system of symbols, practices, and narratives” (p. 31). Furthermore, the author mentions the importance of understanding the dichotomous nature of Iranian culture, namely the synthesis of pre- and post-Islamic Persian culture, as distinct from the rest of the Middle East in terms of its narrative and linguistic traditions.

### Imam Hussein and the Battle of Karbala

One distinguishing element of Iranian culture is the significance of Shia religious narratives pertaining to the battle of Karbala. Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson, was murdered by the Umayyad caliph Yazid in the infamous battle of Karbala in 680 after protesting the unjust rule of Yazid’s father Muawiyah, and the illegal transfer of power with which he appointed his son as his successor. Hussein and his army marched to the desert of Karbala and were besieged by Yazid’s men in what turned out to be an epic ten-day battle. Outnumbered by Yazid’s army and running out of food and water, Hussein and his men, accompanied by their wives and children, were defeated and brutally slaughtered in Karbala (Dabashi, 1989; Afary, 2003; Rizwan, 2011). For Shia Muslims, the religious consciousness brought on by the events of Karbala is of utmost importance, as noted in Fazel’s (1988) personal account of growing up as a Shia:

Growing up Shia you recognized yourself as a member of the opposition party; being a perpetual underdog, which has existed since the first years of Islam, continues to influence Shia behavior vis-a-vis the Sunnis and the rest of the world. It is the self-perception of an underdog in a hostile environment, coupled with a will to survive and a belief that eventually enemies will be vanquished...that leads the Shia to identify themselves as the “chosen people.” (p. 42)

Poulson (2005) likens the importance of the events surrounding Imam Hussein’s death to those of the crucifixion of Christ and notes that “in effect, the example of Hossein’s martyrdom and his actions throughout the siege of Karbala is an exemplar of righteous conduct that the

faithful should emulate” (p. 44). For Shias, Hussein remains the symbol of “undying opposition to the corruption of Muslim political life” (Armstrong 2000, p. 46). He is also the symbol of justice and martyrdom<sup>3</sup>—highly esteemed values within the Shia community. Poulson expresses the magnitude of the importance of Imam Hussein’s martyrdom as follows:

Hossein’s martyrdom at Karbala is a defining frame of reference—a general life lesson—for all pious Shi’i Muslims. Hossein, Ali’s second son, died while trying to reclaim the Caliphate. This event, which occurred on the first month of the Muslim calendar, Moharram, is re-created by Shi’is during the Moharram processions each year. Ashura, the tenth day of Moharram, is the day that Hossein was martyred by followers of Mu’awiya’s son, Yazid. During the Iranian Revolution, supporters of Imam Khomeini often used the slogan, “Every day is Ashura and every land is Karbala.” The slogan, in both its original and modern context, states that the righteousness of the Shi’i cause, exemplified by Hossein’s bravery at Karbala, is a daily, life-guiding philosophy. (p. 44)

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the narrative tradition involving Imam Hussein’s martyrdom is that it symbolizes “identifying and counteracting injustice” in Iranian political culture (p. 46). According to Poulson, the Karbala narrative is a recurring theme in nearly all social movements of the past century in Iran.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, this narrative frame was used by the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ruhollah Khomeini, to expose the shah’s injustice.<sup>5</sup> Fischer and Abedi (1990) also demonstrate this dynamic when they note that “throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Yazid stood for the shah, and Khomeini or other willing religious figures stood for Husain” (p. 168). Therefore, references to Imam Hussein’s martyrdom, in any context, are viewed as a juxtaposition of the battle between good and bad, and oppressed and oppressor.

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<sup>3</sup> Imam Hussein is commonly referred to in Shia Muslim literature as Seyyed ul-Shohada meaning “The Master of Martyrs”.

<sup>4</sup> This is perhaps the most important point linking social movements and narrative frames in Iran’s case. The added importance of this point is that Poulson (2005) was published approximately four years before the Green Movement got underway, and therefore proves true in the case of the Green Movement.

<sup>5</sup> Refers to a 1963 speech by Khomeini in which he likened the rule of the shah to that of Yazid. The recurring nature of this narrative highlights the theme of historical continuity in Iranian social movements following the 1979 revolution. From this perspective, the Green Movement is portrayed as a political movement originating from the broken promises of the 1979 revolution pertaining to greater social and political freedoms. This conceptual model is especially plausible when one notes that some senior members of the Green Movement like Mousavi held key positions during and after the Iranian Revolution.

Fischer (1980) refers to the role of Imam Hussein's martyrdom in Iranian political culture as the "Karbala paradigm" to reflect the historical narrative frame with which the events of Karbala are portrayed in Iranian society (p. 13).

Similarly, Moaddel (1992) highlights the role that Shia narratives played in the Iranian Revolution by noting the "imageries and symbolism of Shi'i Islam in initiating the sustaining the revolutionary movement" (p. 353). More specifically, Moaddel mentions the mobilization efforts undertaken by the religious elites during the month of Muharram, such as labeling Moharram "the month of victory of blood over sword," as a way of defying the shah during the initial stages of the revolution (p. 367). Sadri (2001) also highlights the relationship between Shia narratives and Iranian political culture by confirming the "traditionally pluralistic, and historically rebellious tendencies" of Shia Islam (p. 258).

#### Collective Action Frames

McLean (1998) points out the importance of framing as a tool for understanding social movements because "it spans instrumentalist and interpretivist connotations of culture, implying both negotiated meaning and the strategic erection of resemblances" (p. 55). Similarly, Snow and Benford (1988) note that social movements "frame, or assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents" (p. 198). Moreover, the researchers break up the framing process into diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational components, and note that "framing tasks are directed toward achieving consensus mobilization" and motivation for participation (p. 199). Elsewhere the researchers define collective action frames as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614). These beliefs and meanings are often socially constructed and are therefore

influenced by culture. Zald (1996) analyzes the interplay of culture and movement frames by providing specific definitions of culture, ideology, and frames, such as the following:

...culture is the shared beliefs and understandings, mediated by and constituted by symbols and language, of a group or society; ideology is the set of beliefs that are used to justify or challenge a given social-political order and are used to interpret the political world; frames are the specific metaphors, symbolic representations, and cognitive cues used to render or cast behavior and events in the evaluative mode and to suggest alternative modes of action. (p. 262)

The relevance of collective action frames to social movements research is not only that they provide a window into the cultural and ideological aspects of movements, but also that, “when successful, frames foster a sense of injustice, identity, and collective efficacy—cognitions that a situation is wrong, that it is not immutable and that ‘we’ can battle ‘them’ in order to change it” (Polletta 1998, p. 421). Gamson (1992) specifically singles out collective action frames as critical elements of social movements and discusses three components of collective action frames, namely injustice, agency, and identity. The injustice component emphasizes the perceived injustice suffered: indignation on the part of social actors or the oppressed. Agency refers to the conscious will of the oppressed to bring about social change. The identity component enables social actors to align themselves with those who share their sense of suffered injustice and agency, therefore creating an “us versus them” dynamic in which the battle lines are drawn between the social actors and the target of collective action.

## DATA AND METHODS

Primary data analysis was conducted on the official Persian-language Green Movement website [www.kaleme.com](http://www.kaleme.com). The website is also the official site of the reformist newspaper Kaleme and is considered the print media outlet of Mir-Hossein Mousavi. The website is a source of official news from the leaders of the Green Movement Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi,<sup>6</sup> as well as a reliable source of Green Movement related news with daily updates. It also offers editorials and opinion pieces written by leading bloggers, academics and clergymen with strong ties to the Green Movement. Each article has a separate comments section that allows the readers to post their comments in response to the articles. The comments are routinely moderated by site administrators before they are published.

According to [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)'s free web analytics tool, [kaleme.com](http://kaleme.com) has a global traffic rank of 27,641 and Iranian traffic rank of 10,023 reflecting visits to the website globally and from within Iran over the last three months. The site is most popular in the United Arab Emirates, which has a sizable Iranian expatriate population and ranks at 20,226 in most popular websites in the US in the last 3 months.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, approximately 18% of the website's visitors are located in the US. The audience demographics tool on [alexa.com](http://alexa.com) yields some important information about the social profile and approximate percentages of visitors by country of habitation. Table 1 provides an overview of the global ranking of [kaleme.com](http://kaleme.com) and percentages of visitors by nation.

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<sup>6</sup> Reformist cleric and leader of the Etemad-e Melli Party (National Trust Party). Karroubi was a presidential candidate in the 2009 election. Karroubi and Mousavi refused to join forces and ran separate campaigns against Mahmoud Ahmedinejad. In the aftermath of the election, the two candidates forged ties together and became co-leaders of the Green Movement. However, it is important to note that while both are considered leaders of the reformist camp among Green Movement sympathizers, Mousavi is widely regarded as the ideological leader of the Green Movement with Karroubi playing a more peripheral role.

<sup>7</sup> [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com) offers an unverified analytics tool. Figures presented are approximate.

Table 1

*Regional Traffic Ranks and % Visitors to [www.kaleme.com](http://www.kaleme.com) by Country (Last 3 Months)*

Country	% Visitors	Regional Traffic Ranks
US	18.3%	20,226
UAE	9.2%	644
UK	8.1%	9,499
Germany	8.1%	13,632
Canada	7.5%	6,602
Netherlands	6.6%	4,997
France	6.5%	13,878
Sweden	5.7%	3,799
Turkey	4.2%	5,557
Malaysia	4.0%	3,891
Switzerland	3.5%	3,909
Iran	2.7%	10,023
Norway	2.4%	5,607
Russia	1.8%	64,968
India	1.8%	115,320

Source: [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)

### Coding

Articles for analysis were selected from the Kaleme section of the website and saved as a word document. Only those articles with five or more comments were selected for coding and analysis in order to focus on the detailed dialogue taking place in the comments section. Due to time and resource constraints, 22 articles with 3,645 comments were chosen for analysis, of which 3,500 comments were selected for the final analysis. The articles were selected in chronological order based on date of publication. The publication dates spanned a period of over 6 months, from November 4, 2009 to June 10, 2010. Each article was coded as an official communiqué, news article, or commentary piece using a binary coding scheme of 0=ABSENCE and 1=PRESENCE to indicate the presence or absence of a thematic category. Table 2 presents and overview of the article data.

Table 2

*Translated Article Title, Publication Date, Type and Number of Comments  
(N = 3,500)*

Title	Date	Comments
1. <i>The Events of 4<sup>th</sup> of November</i>	11-4-09	67
2. <i>People Beware, Something's About To...</i>	12-12-09	257
3. <i>I Wish They'd Recognize the Opposition...</i>	2-19-10	51
4. <i>Mousavi: Ending Racial and Ethnic Bias...</i>	2-22-10	38
5. <i>All This Military Police for 5,000 People?</i>	2-25-10	37
6. <i>The Movement's Strategy: Awareness</i>	2-27-10	635
7. <i>Mousavi's New Year Video Message</i>	3-18-10	580
8. <i>We Will Fight Until Our Constitution...</i>	4-8-10	191
9. <i>Promote the People's Constitution</i>	4-20-10	27
10. <i>Mousavi's Labor Day Message</i>	4-29-10	225
11. <i>Different Languages and Cultures Are...</i>	5-3-10	102
12. <i>Spread Awareness so People Know...</i>	5-8-10	31
13. <i>Mousavi's Response to Recent Executions</i>	5-10-10	436
14. <i>Didn't Think This Would Be Our Destiny</i>	5-12-10	45
15. <i>The Single-Voiced Is On His Way Out</i>	5-13-10	104
16. <i>Are There Any Similarities Between...</i>	5-15-10	154
17. <i>There Are No Judicial Figures Who Are...</i>	5-22-10	56
18. <i>Mousavi and Karroubi's Meeting...</i>	5-23-10	189
19. <i>We the Women Will Fight For Our Equal...</i>	5-25-10	31
20. <i>The Country Should Be Run According to..</i>	5-29-10	143
21. <i>Free the Prisoners</i>	5-31-10	51
22. <i>A Letter to Seyyed Hassan Khomeini...</i>	6-10-10	50

### Categories

Data mining in the Persian language was carried out using an Excel spreadsheet. A binary coding scheme was used to indicate the presence of categories. The categories were screened continuously throughout the coding process and varied in relation to the content of the articles. For example, a previously absent theme of egalitarianism was created and coded for the comments in response to an article which discussed women's rights and gender equality. Demographic data such as gender, location and typing language were coded accordingly to account for unknown cases. The content analysis of the comments focused on creating nominal

categories for themes present in each comment. A final analysis of the coding scheme identified 84 categories. Frequency distribution tables were created in order to identify patterns that would emerge in the coding process. Two dummy variables, “Slogan” and “NoSlogan,” were created to distinguish between comments which included a slogan and those which did not. Next, a frequency distribution table was created using SPSS to examine the types of comments which contained at least one slogan. Additionally, Pearson’s chi-square tests were conducted to test the statistical significance of observed associations between slogans and comment categories.

## FINDINGS

Demographic findings from this study support the prediction in H1 and suggest that, while significantly more men (45%) than women (6%) posted in the comments section, approximately 50% of the posters did not specify their gender, thereby supporting CMC theories on anonymity and censorship in authoritarian regimes (Walther, 2011; Howard and Hussain, 2011). Moreover, 96% of all posters did not provide any information about their geographical location while only about 4% commented from within Iran. However, I found a relationship between slogans and geographical location, as 5% of comments with slogans were posted by Iranian locals compared with 3% of comments with no slogans ( $x^2 = 8.89, p < .05$ ). Additionally, over 94% of all comments were typed in Persian, with very few comments in Penglish (Persian typed with English characters) or English, thereby supporting my prediction in H2.

### Recurring Themes

Approximately a quarter of all comments contained at least one slogan thus confirming my prediction in H3 that use of slogans reflects a unique element of Iranian opposition political culture online. Interestingly, 25% of all posters directed their comments at Mir-Hossein Mousavi, often engaging in one-way dialogue with the leader of the Green Movement about such issues as calling for strikes and demonstrations and condemning government-sponsored crackdowns and executions. A majority of all comments (62%) were “general” comments in which Green Movement supporters shared stories and opinions about Green Movement-related affairs. 14% of posters referred to oppression themes in their comments. Oppression was most frequently expressed as military crackdowns of Green Movement demonstrations, political oppression in the form of imprisonment, torture and executions, and state-run media censorship of Green Movement news. Interestingly, 17% of all comments referred to collective action

frames of “us” and “them” to express the deep political divide between the Iranian leadership and the Green Movement.

### Slogans vs. No Slogans

Table 3 illustrates the frequency distribution comparison of selected comment categories between comments with and without slogans, as well as the Pearson’s chi-square values associates with slogans and comment categories. H4 was confirmed with approximately 50% of posters of comments with slogans identifying themselves as Green Movement supporters, compared with only 2% who identified themselves as Green Movement opponents. This finding also indicated a relationship between slogans and identifying as a Green Movement supporter ( $\chi^2 = 32.18, p < .001$ ). Similarly, 55% of comments with slogans were supportive of the Green Movement and its leaders compared with 46% of the no-slogans category, therefore indicating an association between slogans and positive views towards the Green Movement ( $\chi^2 = 22.71, p < .005$ ).

Findings also suggest a relationship between slogans and use of emoticons ( $\chi^2 = 38.44, p < .001$ ), as comments with slogans were more likely to contain emoticons (mostly the letter V to signify peace and freedom) than were comments without slogans (6 compared with 2%). Interestingly, there was a relationship between slogans and posters’ responses to each other’s comments ( $\chi^2 = 17.58, p < .001$ ). Only 3% of comments with slogans responded to another poster’s comment, compared with 7% of comments with no slogans. This suggests that posters who didn’t use slogans are more likely to engage in cyber dialogue with others than those using slogans. Similarly, very few comments with slogans contained sarcastic or humorous themes compared to comments without slogans (0.4% compared with 2.3%), indicating a relationship

between sarcasm and nonuse of slogans ( $x^2 = 13.33, p < .001$ ).<sup>8</sup> My findings also suggest a relationship between neutral comments and nonuse of slogans ( $x^2 = 27.70, p < .001$ ). Neutral comments were those in which the posters did not identify themselves as either Green Movement supporters or opponents. There were no neutral comments with slogans in the entire sample of 3500 comments. This finding suggests that slogans are more likely to be used by posters with concrete political orientations as opposed to those without any party affiliation. Similarly, another statistically significant finding from this study was the relationship between mistrustfulness and nonuse of slogans ( $x^2 = 17.34, p < .001$ ), which suggests that those posters who did not use slogans tend to be individuals who do not trust any political group.

I also found a significant relationship ( $x^2 = 10.28, p < .001$ ) between references to Shia narratives of the battle of Karbala and slogan use, as comments with slogans were twice as likely to mention Hussein/Yazid themes than those without slogans (4% compared with 2%). This suggests a significant carryover effect of Shia narrative frames and use of slogans in Iranian political culture to the cyberspace environment. Moreover, comments without slogans (9%) were more likely to include political content ( $x^2 = 3.90, p < .05$ ) than comments with slogans (7%). Similarly, comments without slogans contained more political and philosophical questions (addressed at Mousavi and other posters) than those with slogans (4% to 0.5%,  $x^2 = 24.30, p < .001$ ). Likewise, comments without slogans were found to be more likely to include references to military, political and media oppression, and references to “they” than those with slogans (17% to 12%). A higher percentage of comments with slogans (66% compared to 61%) contained general comments, including the posters’ personal opinions about Green Movement-related news and events ( $x^2 = 7.63, p < .01$ ). Nearly 14% of comments with slogans included pro-

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<sup>8</sup> Most themes containing sarcasm and humor consisted of sly remarks directed at Mousavi, Karroubi, and Green Movement supporters, and thus could be interpreted as a unique aspect of anti-Green Movement rhetoric.

democracy themes compared with only 11% from the no-slogans category ( $\chi^2 = 6.60, p < .01$ ), as predicted in H5. This finding further supports my proposition that slogans are cultural tools for expressing political opposition in online Persian discourse. No significant relationship was found between slogan use and pro-Islamic themes, so H6 was rejected.

Table 3

*Frequency Distribution Comparison of Selected Comment Categories (Slogans vs. No Slogans)*

Category	Slogans		No Slogans	
	Count	%	Count	%
<b>Gender</b>				
<i>Female</i>	51	6.2%	162	6.1%
<i>Male</i>	374	45.1%	1171	43.8%
<i>Unknown</i>	404	48.7%	1338	50.1%
<b>Location</b>				
<i>Iran*</i> ( $x^2 = 8.89$ )	41	4.9%	80	3.0%
<b>Typing Language</b>				
<i>Persian</i>	781	94.2%	2514	94.2%
<b>Directed at:</b>				
<i>Mousavi</i>	203	24.5%	652	24.4%
<i>Karroubi*</i> ( $x^2 = 5.81$ )	6	0.7%	52	1.9%
Political Comment* ( $x^2 = 3.90$ )	55	6.6%	235	8.8%
Asked Question*** ( $x^2 = 24.30$ )	4	0.5%	103	3.9%
Requested Direction* ( $x^2 = 6.44$ )	17	2.1%	104	3.9%
General Comment** ( $x^2 = 7.63$ )	547	66.0%	1620	60.7%
Neutral*** ( $x^2 = 27.70$ )	0	0.0%	87	3.3%
Oppression	103	12.4%	398	14.9%
Them/The Other	123	14.8%	460	17.2%
Anti-Government* ( $x^2 = 4.11$ )	32	3.9%	151	5.7%
Pro-GM*** ( $x^2 = 32.18$ )	413	49.8%	1034	38.7%
Anti-GM*** ( $x^2 = 23.64$ )	13	1.6%	151	5.7%
Democracy** ( $x^2 = 6.60$ )	114	13.8%	281	10.5%
Reform* ( $x^2 = 4.56$ )	6	0.7%	47	1.8%
Equality* ( $x^2 = 5.43$ )	2	0.2%	30	1.1%
Nationalism	65	7.8%	166	6.2%
Sarcasm*** ( $x^2 = 13.33$ )	3	0.4%	62	2.3%
Emoticons*** ( $x^2 = 38.44$ )	46	5.5%	44	1.6%
Mistrustful*** ( $x^2 = 17.34$ )	0	0.0%	55	2.1%
Hussein/Yazid*** ( $x^2 = 10.28$ )	31	3.7%	49	1.8%
Poetry** ( $x^2 = 7.31$ )	35	4.2%	182	6.8%
Supportive*** ( $x^2 = 22.71$ )	459	55.4%	1226	45.9%
Thankful/Likes* ( $x^2 = 6.80$ )	42	5.1%	202	7.6%
Responds*** ( $x^2 = 17.58$ )	22	2.7%	173	6.5%

\* $p < .05$ \*\* $p < .01$ \*\*\* $p < .001$

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the nature and types of Persian-language political discourse taking place on the web and to explore the influence of culture on linguistic expression of political discourse. Although the relationship between culture and language has been explored previously by researchers like Ignatow (2009), this paper aimed to explore “the relationship between a given communication exchange and its social context” through culturally specific forms of writing and meaning creation in the Persian language (Berg & Lune, p. 364).

Dabashi (1985) highlights the politically discursive nature of the Persian language by noting that “Persian literature has been always politically conscious” (153). To that effect, my findings suggest a relationship between Iranian political culture and language as expressed in slogans. Moaddel (1992) refers to the widespread practice of shouting “*Allah Akbar!*” slogans from rooftops during the initial stages of the Iranian Revolution—this tradition was carried out by Green Movement supporters in 2009 as well—as a distinct element of Iranian political culture (p. 367). Similarly, Gheytonchi (2010) refers to the use of slogans in the Green Movement demonstrations as an Iranian tradition dating back to the tobacco protests of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and as a recurring theme in the country’s tumultuous political history of the past century.<sup>9</sup> The relationship between political culture and slogans is especially evident when Gheytonchi notes:

In 1891, protestors in Tehran demanded cancellation of the tobacco monopoly sold by Nasser al-Din Shah to a British businessman. During 1905-1911, protestors objected to the Anglo-Persian Agreement, and the protests led to the Constitutional Revolution. During 1951 to 1953, the mass protests supported Mossadegh and his action to nationalize the oil industry. In 1963, demonstrators protested in the streets against the Shah’s White Revolution, which aimed to abolish the feudal landlord-peasant system and gave women the right to vote. As with any ritual, street demonstrations in Iran follow a

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<sup>9</sup> While a comprehensive history of Iranian social movements is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note the relationship between the Green Movement and past movements including the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The theme of historical continuity in Iranian social movements encompasses not only the structural elements of social upheaval and change, or Shia narratives of Hussein’s martyrdom, but also the chanting of slogans.

pattern; slogans are chanted, the public marches [in an] orderly [manner], and signs and symbols are held by the demonstrators to communicate their demands. (p. 252).

### “Ya Hussein! Mir-Hossein!”<sup>10</sup> and Other Slogans

Table 4 provides a translation of slogans and their frequencies. The most common slogan used by website visitors was “Ya Hussein! Mir-Hossein!” [O Hussein! Mir-Hossein!]. This slogan has multiple meanings. First, “Ya Hussein!” is a Persian exclamation used in the same context as “O Lord!” Therefore, “Ya Hussein!” is a call for strength and piety upon Imam Hussein. The latter part of the slogan refers to the leader of the Green Movement, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, by his first name. The slogan highlights the symbolic way in which Green Movement supporters view Mousavi and his role as opposition leader. From a narrative perspective, Mir-Hossein Mousavi is portrayed as the symbol of fighting oppression and the Islamic Republic leadership is viewed as the illegitimate and tyrannical Yazid. Therefore, one of the most common ways with which Green Movement supporters narrate their differences with the government is through the use of layered meaning in their slogans. In other words, a simple slogan made up of two names signifies a historical narrative of perceived oppression, injustice and martyrdom as exemplified in the following comments:<sup>11</sup>

2009.12.12 22:56, magnet said:

وای اگر موسوی حکم جهادم دهد. ما آماده ایم. اگر دست به کار اشتباهی بزنند با واکنش شدید مردم از جمله اعتصابات سراسری بی شک روبرو می شوند. یا حسین میرحسین

Only if Mousavi were to call me forth to jihad. We are ready. If they attempt to do anything, they will face a strong response by the people, including general strikes.  
*Ya Hussein! Mir-Hossein!*

2010.02.28 01:54 مهدی said:

همه باید در آگاه کردن مردم بکوشیم..اول از دوست و فامیل و بعد در محله و شهر خویش...

<sup>10</sup> Hussein is an Arabic-origin name and its spelling varies according to text. The Persian spelling of the same name is Hossein. The difference in spelling is used in this text to distinguish between the two figures.

<sup>11</sup> In the translations, slogans are italicized in order to highlight the symbolic nature of the comments.

یکی از بهترین کارها نیز در عید نوروز که همه به دید و بازدید و مسافرت میروند پخش  
فیلمهای سبزها از جمله جنایات حکومت در سرکوب مردم و ...  
میباشد... یا حسین ... میرحسین

All of us need to spread information and awareness...start from friends and family  
and then neighborhoods and cities...one of the best things to do during the new  
year travel season is to show Green Movement related videos, especially those  
which contain scenes of government oppression and murders... *Ya Hussein Mir-  
Hossein!*

The next most commonly occurring slogans belonged to a group of one-off slogans that  
were collectively coded as “other slogans” because they did not contain any explicit references to  
the Green Movement. These slogans frequently co-occurred with other slogans and were often  
made up by the users. The example below illustrates the use of such a slogan along with “Ma  
Bishomarim!” [We are countless!] and “Ya Hussein! Mir-Hossein!” In this example, “Ma  
Peyrove Khatte Emamim, Ma Hami-ye Mir-Hosseinim!” [We are the followers of Imam  
Khomeini’s path! We are Mir-Hossein’s supporters!] is used as a slogan with a rhyming couplet.

2010.05.26 00:03, امید سبز said:  
ما پیرو خط امامیم ما حامی میر حسینیم  
به امید ایرانی سبز و جاودان دور از دیکتاتوری  
همه با هم ۲۲ خرداد را سبز کنیم  
ما بی شماریم یا حسین میر حسین

*We are the followers of Imam Khomeini’s path! We are Mir-Hossein’s  
supporters!* In hopes of a Green<sup>12</sup> Iran without dictatorship. Together we will turn  
the June 12 demonstrations<sup>13</sup> Green. *We are countless! Ya Hussein Mir-Hossein!*

2010.05.09 05:57, امیرارسلان said:  
روحانی واقعی منتظری صانعی..  
آدم با دیدن بزرگانی مثل حضرت آیت الله صانعی ادام الله الشریف یاد مظلومیت معصومین می افتد  
اما گر قرار بود ظلم ماندنی و مظلوم نابود می شد امویه باید می ماند و از امام حسین  
نامی نمی ماند. ما جنبش سبزیم و علمدار حسینیم همه با میر حسینیم

<sup>12</sup> It is commonplace for Green Movement supporters to refer to each other affectionately as “Greens”. Green is the symbolic color of Islam and the Islamic flag. It also represents the arrival of spring in Iranian culture. Green imagery including wearing green wristbands and scarves are popular elements of the movement. In this example, the word is used to signify a free democratic Iran.

<sup>13</sup> June 12 is the anniversary of the 2009 election which is widely believed to have been rigged by the conservative camp.

Ayatollah Sane'i<sup>14</sup> is a real clergyman. One feels compassion for the oppressed Shia Imams when he sees the likes of Ayatollah Sane'i. If oppression was everlasting and the oppressed were to die off forever, the likes of Yazid and his tribe would still be alive while Imam Hussein's legacy would be wiped off forever. *We are the Green Movement! We are the standard-bearers of Imam Hussein! We're all with [Mir]Hossein!*

### Collective Action Frames and "The Other"

Gamson (1992) provides a conceptual framework for understanding the extent to which collective action frames play a role in social movements. This framework involves three components, namely injustice, agency, and identity. However, the most significant component for the purposes of this paper was the identity component present in approximately 17% of the comments, approximately half of which co-occurred with at least one slogan (see Table 3). From this perspective, references to "we" and "they" emerge as another unique aspect of online Persian political discourse. Many Green Movement supporters engaged in a collective action frame through which they made their grievances known. The category Them/Other includes comments with references to an "adversarial them" (Vicari 2010, p. 506). Another significant element of Gamson's approach is his concept of "cultural resonances" and its influence on collective frames (1992 p. 135). Keeping in mind the emotionally charged imagery associated with Hussein's beheading in Karbala, Gamson's explanation of cultural resonances takes on a unique cultural character:

Not all symbols are equally potent. Some metaphors soar, others fall flat; some visual images linger in mind, others are quickly forgotten. Some frames have a natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with a broader political culture. Resonances increase the appeal of a frame by making it appear natural and familiar. Those who respond to the larger cultural theme will find it easier to respond to a frame with the same sonorities. (p. 135)

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<sup>14</sup> Outspoken senior reformist cleric famous for his endorsement of democracy, equal rights for women, and close ties to Green Movement leadership. Sane'i is also a fierce critic of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and opposes radical Islamism and Iran's nuclear program.

Gamson's concepts of the identity component and cultural resonance are clearly visible in the following two examples, with and without slogans respectively, which make references to "we" as a distinct and opposed entity to the adversarial other or "they". The latter example is of particular significance as it epitomizes the extent to which slogans and collective action frames are employed by Green Movement supporters.

2010.05.01 16:56, سبز جوان said:  
من با هزار جور زحمت و فیلتر و ... امدم  
خیلی دوست دارم تا پیام ویدیویی رو ببینم  
اما باید فقط به نوشتاریش قانع باشم  
چون سر عتم پایینه  
با سرعت پایینم فقط خواستم بگم ما تا آخرین قطره ی خونم ایستادم  
و به دوستان سبزم میگم که اگه ما کم بودیم اینها مجوز میدادن  
به نظر شما از چه میترسند که از راهپیمایی ۵ هزار اغتشاشگر (به قول کیهان) میترسند؟؟؟؟  
بگذارند به همه ثابت شود ما بیش از ۵ هزار نفر نیستیم!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  
اقای رئیس جمهور انتظار ما از شما فقط و فقط استقامت تا پیروزی است  
ما ایستادیم تا نهالمان بارور شود  
یا حسین میر حسین

I came to this site after getting through a filter.<sup>15</sup> I'd love to see a video of this news piece however I will have to make do with just text because of the low speed of my internet connection. I just wanted to say that I will make a stand until the last drop of my blood. And to my Green friends I should say that if we [we] were indeed outnumbered, they [they] would give us permits to demonstrate.<sup>16</sup> Are they [they] afraid of 5,000 people demonstrating?<sup>17</sup> Let everybody see that we are more than 5,000 people! Mr. President,<sup>18</sup> we expect you to make a stand until we reach victory. We [we] will stand until our sapling bears fruit. *Ya Hussein Mir Hossein!*

2010.05.15 21:16 داوودی...! خیلی خوب بود اگه میشد تو این کلمه مناظره گذاشت..  
زننده باد میر حسین موسوی...  
راستش شاید این مقایسه من اصلا درست نباشه و نمیخوام مهندس عزیز رو با امام حسین مقایسه کنم نه اصلا... بر خلاف برخی که بعضی از آدم ها رو عینا در حد امام علی مید  
اما شاید بشه این افراد و وضعیت موجود را با زمان قیام امام حسین مقایسه کرد...  
این شرایط و این به نوعی قیام جنبش سبز این ایستادگی میر حسین و مردم

<sup>15</sup> The opposition's website is officially banned by the government inside Iran. Iranians have to use anti-filter software to gain access to it.

<sup>16</sup> The government refused to allow people to gather for protests after the election thereby curbing the people's constitutional right to engage in peaceful street demonstrations.

<sup>17</sup> Referring to a conservative newspaper claiming that the Green Movement only had 5,000 supporters left inside Iran.

<sup>18</sup> Many Green Movement supporters addressed Mir-Hossein Mousavi as "Mr. President" in a symbolic gesture to signify their narrative of government-sponsored vote-rigging in the 2009 presidential election.

و این دولتمردان متقلب که از نامردی انصافا از شمر و یزید چیزی کم ندارند...  
 همش تو این فکرم که زمان امام حسین هم به جورایی همین وضعیت بوده...  
 دولتمردان برای قدرت و دنیا به اسم اسلام چه ها که نکردند...  
 جالبه اون زمان هم به نام اسلام و مبارزه برای اسلام میزدند میکشند تجاوز میکردند آتش میزدند و...  
 چه قدر دنیا کوچیکه! راستش وقتی این روز ها رو میبینم...  
 و وقتی ابعاد قیام امام حسین که خیلی بزرگ تر و وسیعتر از این قیام امروز بوده رو میسبم...  
 تازه میفهمم که چرا باید برای امام حسین عزا داری کنم... چرا باید برایش اشک بریزم...  
 چرا باید بهتر بشناسمش و راهش رو ادامه بدم... میدونی بهتر امام حسین رو درک میکنم...  
 یه چیز دیگه هم بگم... اونم اینکه... اینکه نمیدونم چرا بعضی از دوستان که  
 مخالف جنبش سبز هستند اینقدر اصرار میکنند که سبز ها کم شدند...  
 البته تنها راهش برگزاری یک راهپیمایی آزاد هست...  
 اما برفرض که از سبز ها میر حسین مانده باشد و کربوی و ۷۰ نفر دیگه که جمعا میشه ۷۲ نفر!  
 سوال... یزیدیان چند نفر بودند؟ امام حسین و یارانش چند نفر بودند؟ سرانجام همه  
 یا مرگ شد یا شهادت... چه کسانی به ظاهر پیروز شدند؟  
 حالا بعد از این همه سال مردم برای چه کسی اشک میریزند؟ چرا امروز کسی نمیگوید که کدام بیشتر  
 بودند؟ امروز صحبت از حق است... حقی که به نامردی با شمشیر پاسخ داده شد

*Long Live Mir-Hossein Mousavi!* [other slogan] Actually, my comparison may not be all that correct so I don't want to compare Mousavi with Imam Hussein at all...unlike some people<sup>19</sup> [they] who compare others [them] to Imam Ali<sup>20</sup>...but maybe one could compare the current situation to the time of Imam Hussein's murder...the current circumstances of this Green Movement and Mousavi and people's stand [against the regime], and these cheating rulers<sup>21</sup> [they] who are reminiscent of Yazid. I keep thinking that things were similar to now during Imam Hussein's time as well. The things that rulers back then didn't do in the name of power and Islam...what's funny is that back then [as today] they also killed, raped, and burned in the name of Islam...how small is the world we live in! When I see what's happening today and compare it to Imam Hussein's uprising [against the unjust rule of Yazid], and realize the magnitude of his actions, I understand why it is that I mourn his death and cry for him...why I need to know him better and follow his path. I understand him better. I should add that I don't understand why some people [they] who are against the Green Movement seem to think that our numbers have dwindled. The only way to prove this would be to have [the government allow] for a public demonstration. In any case, let's assume that there are only 72 Green Movement supporters left including Mousavi!<sup>22</sup> Question...how many men did Yazid have [in the battle of Karbala]? How many men did Hussein have?<sup>23</sup> In the end all of Hussein's men were martyred...who

<sup>19</sup> Possible reference to the conservative camp's assertions that Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran and close ally of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, is of the essence of Imam Ali.

<sup>20</sup> Imam Hussein's father. Imam Ali is the first Shia Imam and considered the true successor to the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims consider Ali to be the symbol of courage and forgiveness.

<sup>21</sup> A recurring theme in the opposition's comments was a reference to the adversarial other without specifying their identity. In this example, it is rather difficult to discern the identity of "the rulers" the poster is referring to. The complexity of the Iranian political system makes it particularly hard to decode whether the poster is referring to the Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Ahmedinejad, or both.

<sup>22</sup> See 23

<sup>23</sup> Hussein's army consisted of 72 men.

were the apparent winners of the battle on the surface? After all these years, whom do people mourn the death of and cry for?<sup>24</sup> Today, why doesn't anybody mention that they were outnumbered in battle? Today, there is only the call for justice...justice that was answered with hatred and a sword.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Refers to Ashura Day processions commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein in Karbala.

<sup>25</sup> Possible metaphorical references to Hussein's call for justice, his beheading by Yazid, and the Iranian government's military crackdown on protestors.

Table 4

*Translation and Frequency Distribution of Slogans*

Slogan	Translation	Count	%
<i>Allah Akbar!</i>	<i>God is great!</i>	15	1.7
<i>16 Azar!</i>	<i>December 7! (Student Day)</i>	3	0.3
<i>Az to be yek eshare! Az ma be sar davidan!</i>	<i>You order! We execute!</i>	11	1.2
<i>Ma bishomarim!</i>	<i>We are countless!</i>	90	10.0
<i>Ma piroozim!</i>	<i>We are victorious!</i>	32	3.6
<i>Marg bar dictator!</i>	<i>Death to the dictator!</i>	9	1.0
<i>Ray-e man koo?</i>	<i>Where is my vote?</i>	3	0.3
Other slogan		270	30.1
<i>Har Irani yek resane</i>	<i>Every Iranian is a medium!</i>	13	1.4
Slogans with “Green” references		114	12.7
<i>Ta akhar istade-im</i>	<i>We will stand until the end!</i>	37	4.1
<i>Ya Hussein! Mir-Hosseini!</i>	<i>O Hussein! Mir-Hosseini!</i>	300	33.4
Total		897	100.0

## CONCLUSION

This study argues that the use of slogans in an online setting reflects a unique element of Iranian political culture and that these slogans are often tied to Iranian history and culture through narrative framing processes. Further, it is argued that an essential aspect of the online political culture of the Green Movement is its use of collective action frames to signify opposition to the government. The findings generally supported these arguments and the preliminary hypotheses presented earlier. I found that posters who used slogans in their comments were more likely to type in Persian, be Green Movement supporters, and make references to freedom and democracy in their comments than those who did not use slogans. Moreover, posters who used slogans were more likely to mention the narrative of Yazid and Hussein than those who did not post slogans.

This study's findings support the propositions of narrative theorists (e.g. Franzosi 1998, Benford 1993, Poulson 2005, Gheytauchi 2009) and suggest that frequent use of slogans in political discourse may reflect a unique cultural element of Persian-language political discourse and reinforce the Green Movement's narrative of opposition to the government. Poulson (2005) emphasizes the narrative framing process of social movements in the following:

Movement actors use symbolic action to frame social movement activity. Often, movement tactics are anchored to existing cultural traditions. These practices can be conceived of as a cultural "tool kit" of protest strategies that are repeatedly used by movements. Past movement strategies, whose symbolic content is already known to a society, can help facilitate new movements when they anchor their goals to symbols from the past. (p. 51)

My findings also pertain to more uniquely cultural elements of narrative frames such as the Persian traditions of *shoar*<sup>26</sup>. From this perspective, the sociological function of the Persian *shoar*

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<sup>26</sup> Poetry in Persian

could be juxtaposed to include a broader historical understanding of slogans as embodied in cultural norms, as noted by Gheytañchi (2009) below:

The shoars kindled emotions: a yearning for unfulfilled promises of equality and freedom made during the early days of the revolution. Anyone familiar with the Middle East will be able to tell you about the spoken word-either shoar or sher (poetry)-the strong emotions it is used to convey, and the vital role it plays in the culture of this region. This is particularly true of modern Iran, where the lack of democratic institutions has led intellectuals to express themselves in the symbolic language of poetry and shoar. (p. 1)

### Limitations

This study has several limitations that are worth mentioning. First, from a methodological perspective, time constraints severely limited the data collection procedure to the extent that the sample size of comments to be analyzed had to be reduced to 3,500. The original research design was to include approximately one year's worth of comments in the analysis. Additionally, resource constraints pertaining to Persian-language text analysis, and a lack of reliable software for native coding in Persian, prolonged the coding procedure. Second, funding constraints rendered me unable to employ independent coders to address reliability and validity concerns.

Furthermore, no native Persian speakers could be employed as independent coders due in part lack of funding to cover the expenses of cumbersome coding procedures involving interpretation and translation of text from Persian to English. Another limitation of this study was that it was designed and carried out in a relatively short amount of time. This meant that some of the peripheral issues pertaining to the history of the Green Movement and Iranian social movements in general were largely ignored in order to focus on the cultural aspects of the movement. Given more time, the study would include a detailed chapter on previous social movements and the cultural links between each one. Finally, given more time and resources, the study would make use of more sophisticated statistical analysis, including multivariate modeling, in which slogans are the dependent variables.

## Implications

This study allows for a broader and more coherent understanding of the concept of historical continuity in the Iranian Green Movement. Some of the central characteristics of the Green Movement cited in this paper suggest viewing this social movement as the next phase of the country's historical progression towards democracy. This is a view that is shared by many contemporary researchers like Poulson (2005), who advocate for a synthesis between the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 and the Islamic Revolution of 1979 by stating that "the current Iranian debate, complicated by the introduction of Western political philosophies during past Iranian movements, is an extension of the past movement frames that were negotiated during a century of Iranian social movement activity" (p. 304). Moreover, a study of this kind has several implications for future research on this topic.

First, from a methodological perspective, future research could use a more rigorous approach, such as Franzosi's set theory or topic modeling (for example Latent Dirichlet allocation), to produce a more concrete and less contaminated set of textual data for quantitative analysis. The benefits of such an approach would include having a more accurate and representative set of data for interpretation, as well as grounding research in a solid theoretical framework. Second, from an analytical perspective, future research could look for ways of improving reliability by training and employing bilingual independent coders who are familiar with various text analysis grammars. These individuals would not only act as independent coders, but also play an active role in the study by refining the interpretative framework upon which to conduct coding procedures. Furthermore, future research could expand on the current social movements literature by highlighting the theme of historical continuity of Iran's Green Movement. Ideally, this kind of future research would be anchored in rigorous methodology,

theory and history, and rely on skilled coders who are capable of deciphering cultural phenomena embedded in online language and political discourse.

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