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Policymaking Preferable Content for Iran Cyberspace: Futures Studies Using Backcasting

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction:

In Iran, cyberspace content is one of the most challenging policy areas, not only in the media field but also in the public field. In the past decade, talking about different aspects of cyberspace policy has been one of the constant priorities of people and media. This priority is formulated and debated around different concepts such as national internet, national information network, filtering, etc. in each period.

Different and sometimes contradictory approaches about cyberspace content have been proposed regarding the way to deal with this phenomenon. In a situation where the speed of cyberspace developments is so high that there is no consensus on a single issue yet, new issues arrive one after the other, futures studies for the internet content policy through

knowing the paths ahead and making proactive decisions to prepare for the future is a policy necessity.

Methods:

This article uses Delphi, future wheels and backcasting methods for futures studies. First, the desired future of the content in Iranian cyberspace was identified with the participation of 32 experts through the Delphi method. The future wheel method was then used to determine the main axes to reach the desired future to provide the basis for backcasting. Backcasting is preparing the mind for future images as a basis for decisions. In this approach, unlike forecasting, instead of looking from the present to the future, we look from the future to the present time, and with the image of the desired situation, which is fundamentally different from the current situation, the base for transformation is provided.

Results:

After determining the desired future, the most important axes that need special attention for the occurrence of the desired future were identified :the position of governance among content production and distribution players, the balance of power among content production and distribution players, the circulation of content in cyber space without restrictions and capabilities of Content monetization. The target time horizon of this research is 2025, and in the framework of backcasting, steps are proposed to occurrence the desired future.

The optimal condition of the four axes is as follows:

1- The position of governance among content production and distribution players: The current situation of the role of Iran governance in the field of content production has been criticized by many experts who responded in this research. Many of them considered any change in the existing conditions to require a transformation in this role. The ideal situation of this axis for Iran in 2025 is that the government in the field of content acts only as a policymaker and regulator.

2- The balance of power among content production and distribution players: The ideal situation of this axis in 2025 is that in the field of content of cyberspace in Iran, the power is dispersed among all stakeholders and none of them have the ability to eliminate each other. According to one expert, one of the prerequisites for moving in such a direction is the possibility of free activity of alternative media.

3- The circulation of content in cyberspace without restrictions: The desired situation of this axis for Iran in 2025 is that the communication right, as one of the fundamental rights and principles of Iranians, is recognized and included in the upstream laws through revision. One of the interviewed experts considered the communication right as one of the main foundations for the occurrence of a desirable future.

4- Capabilities of content monetization: The ideal situation of this axis in 2025 for Iran is to become a regional power in the field of content production and the export of content to other countries in the world, especially countries with cultural and geographical commonalities, will turn content into a significant source of income.

For each of the four axes, time is broken into four steps. These desirable situations have a staggered relationship that the occurrence of any distant future first requires the occurrence of the nearer future.

Conclusions:

In general, it can be said that reaching the desired future in the field of cyberspace content in Iran can be achieved to a large extent by using the futures studies approach in policy making. It should be noted that even if all these steps are fulfilled, the ideal future depicted will not necessarily happen. The specified axes for the occurrence of the desired future in 2025 have been defined in the internal environment of Iran, which has the possibility of maximum control and planning. However, paying attention to the characteristics of the desired future of Iran in 2025 shows that some of its aspects are defined in the national environment and others in the international environment.

Although in the national environment, it is possible to plan for the occurrence of the desired future, but these conditions do not exist in the international environment and the existence of multiple actors creates different conditions. According to Ulf Pillkahn (2008), we have different possibilities of interaction with the levels of the surrounding environment, and in the inner environment there is the possibility of control, in the near environment there is the possibility of impact, and in the distant environment there is the possibility of reaction.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop sufficient programs to impact the near environment and react in the distant environment. As an example, one of the main uncertainties that make up the desired future is the balance of power in the cyberspace at the global level. The ideal state is distributed and scattered power among all actors, so that neither companies nor governments have undisputed and uncontrollable power in this area. In this field, Iran does not have the possibility of full control and policy making, but it can be effective through international activities. As an example, Iran can form a strong alliance

with countries with common interests that are against western dominance over the laws and infrastructures of cyberspace and through international organizations and channels to reduce the power of western countries and multinational companies. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the issues of the content of cyberspace both at the national and international level.

Limitations:

Conducting this research has been associated with limitations. In normative futures studies, it is appropriate to determine the desirability with the maximum participation of stakeholders. In this article, an attempt was made to identify experts related to the subject in four groups and refer to them. The diversity of experts was met by a sampling strategy based on maximum diversity, although the quantity of experts could have been more appropriate. As an independent and small-scale research, it was very difficult to access more experts. Therefore, it is suggested that such research should be conducted with a longer time horizon and sufficient funding with the wide participation of stakeholders, including policy-making and executive governing bodies, public and private institutions and companies, and non-governmental organizations, and its results should be implemented at the national level.

Data Availability Statement

Data available on request from the authors.

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Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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