

# Qualitative Study of Professionals' Perspectives about Internet Public Policy in Iran

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## Summary

The purpose of current study is to explore the views and experiences of state experts in the field of internet public policy about the current and favorable status of internet policymaking in Iran. The study employed a qualitative methodology using 21 purposive semi-structured interviews. Inductive thematic analysis was used by MAXQDA 10 software to identify the similarities and differences across the data. The total number of initial codes were 952. Based on the 7 research questions, 26 themes were identified. The main framework of this study to answer the research questions is developed by intersecting three dimensions of policymaking, i.e. entities, process, and issues. The results consisting of all states, roles, and relationships among these dimensions are reported based on the professionals' responses. Findings of this study can be considered as a roadmap for policymakers and scholars in the field of internet public policy analysis and study. Global internet policymakers can also use these results as a good case for investigating the internet policy position in developing countries.

## Key words:

*Internet; Cyberspace; Public policy; Internet policy; Qualitative study; Iran.*

## 1. Introduction

Internet technology is a medium through which it is possible to provide large volumes of information for users with the lowest cost and time. In addition to information provision for users, this medium has become an integral part of life, penetrated into their daily and personal lives; and influenced the various dimensions such as communication, education, entertainment, business and so on (Lamberton, 1996). Emergence of internet coincides with the debates about the global village and globalization; a concept seeking to create a new world order and direct all cultures and human activities under an umbrella. Internet, in its current format, is a mean to integrate the human life style throughout the world regardless of nations' cultural requirements and specific conditions. The

effects of internet use in today world are such that we are now encountered with two-faced globalization phenomenon; it means that the real world has been exposed to contrast with virtual one in a way that most of daily activities will be meaningless without the existence of new communication and information technologies. Internet empowers users to control communication by supplying technological facilities in a way that today audiences are not merely watchers of media programs; but they can rapidly show feedback to any content or even produce it. Undoubtedly, the performance of this medium in development of a nation is based on the quality of policymaking framework, decisions made, and processes that are used in formulation of any decision in macro and micro levels in this area. Thus, governments attempt to make policies in the field of internet, as a public good, to prevent the threats and take advantage of the new communication technology opportunities.

Policymaking plays an important role in a state's public media and frames the communication atmosphere in a society. Media content and structure and specially their understanding from their roles are influenced by the approach dominant in formulation of media laws in a country and therefore, the complicated and changing nature of this area has significant consequences for future of media. Practically, media management is not possible without considering the macro policies. These kinds of policies specify the goals and the route for media managers. Therefore, development of a media policymaking system is a necessity in the field of media studies for promotion of expectations and achievement of desired goals in the area of cyberspace.

Global increase in the use of internet has established many challenges in its management and regulation. Internet governance involves extensive issues from technical administration to more public debates such as control over

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internet. In spite of international nature of internet, the difficulty of compromise on these rules in global level has contributed to the formulation of more laws in national level. The sum of these efforts have resulted in establishment of Internet Governance Forum (IGF) by World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) on 16 November 2005 to discuss freely the opinions of all stakeholders in member states about the issues related to internet governance (Mueller, 2010). From a legal perspective, (Benkler, 2000) introduced a model with three layers of governance including physical infrastructure, logical and content layers. The first layer deals with travels of information; the second layer controls the infrastructure and the third one contains the information signaled through the network. (WGIG (The Working Group on Internet Governance), 2005) defines internet governance as the “shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the Internet”.

Internet governance in Iran has been mainly based on internet public policy actors’ personal desires since there were many decision making entities and authorities. Chronologically, the first step toward policymaking in cyberspace took in October 09, 1998 through the formulation of “Overall Policies of the Regime in Computer-mediated Information Networks Sector” by Expediency Discernment Council and its impart by the Supreme Leader. It involved the organizing and reinforcement of the national system of computer-mediated information sharing, quantitative and qualitative development of national information networks, providing access to the global information networks only through the verified entities, active and effective presence in the global networks, development and reinforcement of an appropriate legal and judicial system, development of information technology and future study of the effects of change in information technology and taking a precise action to achieve international conventions and regulations and building information alliances (Hosseini Khamenei, 1998). But, according to the Parliament Islamic Research Center’ Report, the Supreme Leader imparted these policies to the Mohammad Khatami, incumbent president of Iran in June, 2001. Then, Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution passed the rules related to the internet filtering and supervision over Internet Service Providers (ISPs) under the “Rules and Regulations for Information and Computer Networks”. The second step toward internet public policy was “The Overall Policies of the Regime in the Sector of Cybersecurity” enacted and notified by the Supreme Leader in February 18, 2011. The main purpose of these policies was the development of a national appropriate and comprehensive system for securing the critical information infrastructures and consistent

promotion of electronic networks security and national information and communication systems for the purpose of continuity of public services, national infrastructures stability, protection of the state secrets, the preservation of culture and Islamic-Iranian identity and ethical values, and protection of privacy and legitimate freedoms and material and intellectual capital. This purpose could be followed up by the promotion of knowledge levels and national research, scientific, educational, and industrial capacities in order to produce knowledge and technologies (Hosseini Khamenei, 2011). The third and last policy toward internet governance was “The Order of Establishment of Supreme Council of Cyberspace” by the Iranian Supreme Leader in March 07, 2012. In this order, he believes that the impressive effects of World Wide Internet on the dimensions of personal and social life, necessity of planning and coordination to protect its harmful effects and the best use of opportunities in order to provide extensive and beneficial services to the general public are the main reasons of the establishment of this council and emphasized that it is the responsibility of this council to launch the national center for cyberspace to realize a full dominance over internet in national and global levels through active and reasonable decision making in terms of hardware, software and content (Hosseini Khamenei, 2012).

There are few studies that have explored the different dimensions of internet public policy in Iran. (Alvani, Khanifar, & Haji Molla Mirzaei, 2015) developed a mixed model for policymaking in cyberspace in Iran by applying the qualitative grounded theory method. In their research, they identified the various dimensions of cyberspace, the solution for dominance of government on major players, and the best method of governance for integrated management of cyberspace. (Alvani, Khanifar, Molla Mirzaei, & Miri, 2014) presented a model specifying the scope of authority and operation for the government entities in the field of cyberspace and determining the framework of activity and behavior for private institutions and the society as the whole. (Jahromi & Khaniki, 2015) investigated the current policies of Iran against the social media by understanding the policymakers’ mental paradigms and presenting a model for conflict resolution among the users’ consumption and the restricting methods of policymaking, such as filtering against social media. Their findings indicated that policymakers’ perspectives toward the social media do not necessarily conflict with their consumptions by users. But, inefficiency of current structures, ignoring legal and managerial tools and dispersion of decision making methods have resulted in many challenges for social media policymaking and have intensified the lack of convergence among the decision making entities. The purpose of the current study is to

explore the views and experiences of state experts in the field of internet public policy about the current and favorable status of internet policymaking in Iran. For this reason, this paper tried to answer the following questions:

**Q1:** How is the current and favorable status of internet policymaking entities?

**Q2:** How is the relationship between policymaking entities in terms of public policy issues and process?

**Q3:** What are the roles of policymaking entities in internet public policy process at the current status?

**Q4:** What are the roles of policymaking entities in internet public policy process at the favorable status?

**Q5:** What are the gaps between current and favorable status of policymaking entities in the field of internet?

**Q6:** What are the challenges of the internet public policy at the current status?

**Q7:** What are the solutions of dealing with these challenges?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Design

As the purpose was to explore, in depth, the professionals' perspectives about internet public policy in Iran, the study employed a qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews. Data collection with simultaneous data analysis, constant comparison, field notes, and memo writing were also applied in this research.

### 2.2 Setting and sample

The study was undertaken in one geographical region at the capital of Iran, Tehran, since all internet policymaking entities and especially internet public policy professionals reside in this city. Purposive sampling method applied since the sample size in qualitative researches is the function of researcher's aim. According to (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) sample size in qualitative studies is determined by data saturation. It is the number of sample size at which the researcher achieves a complete and comprehensive understanding of the reality and the new samples do not add new information to the obtained knowledge. The participants of this study were selected according to their professions and experiences in the field of internet public policy. A sample of 21 Professionals (P) was considered sufficient to address the aim of the research since the theoretical data saturation satisfied at this point.

### 2.3 Data collection

All the professionals were interviewed individually and their perspectives were digitally audio-recorded. They were offered the choice of interview methods (face-to-face and telephone) at any time or location they preferred. At the commencement, the interviewer explained the aim and application of the research to the participants and asked them to introduce themselves completely by emphasizing on their relevant work experiences and knowledge about the internet public policy. Open questions which were semi-structured guided the interviews. These questions were all derived from the literature available in the fields of cyberspace and public policy analysis. Capturing thoughts about the data and facilitating the analysis, memos were written during the interview. In order to identify gaps, researcher also tried to conduct data collection and its analysis simultaneously.

### 2.4 Ethical considerations

Promptness in the application of ethics in research requires the researcher to learn, discuss, and apply the ethical principles and protect the participants' rights in the study. For this purpose, the interviewer explained the purpose of the research for all participants, obtained their consciously consent, ensured them about the confidentiality of their identities and responses and the possibility to leave the interview, expressed the purpose of applying tape recorder and the way it is used for data analysis, and suggested them that they can request for the results of the research.

### 2.5 Data analysis

The data for each interview were transcribed verbatim into a single word processing file. Inductive thematic analysis was used by MAXQDA 10 software to identify the similarities and differences across the data. In the first step, participants' words and statements were open coded. Then, by comparing data constantly with each other and finding their linkage, all the codes involving similar concepts were classified under one category resulted in different categories. By moving toward being more selective, similar categories became integrated and reduced into a theme.

## 3. Results

In total, 21 interviews conducted in the study between October and December 2016. The time duration of interviews lasted between 30 to 70 minutes resulted in about 190 pages and around 70000 words in Persian

language. The total number of initial codes were 952. Based on the 7 research questions, 26 themes were identified.

### 3.1 Internet policymaking entities

Two themes, number of the entities and quality of the members' combination in the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, were identified by the research for the status of internet policymaking entities in Iran.

#### 3.1.1 Number of the members in the council

This theme is associated with three categories of Number of members, Actual members, and Legal members.

More than half of the interviewees focused on this issue that the number of public entities in the internet public policy council is sufficient but it is required to involve others for internet policymaking. A faculty member of university stated:

*"The major gaps here is the absence of public and private beneficiaries. We emphasizes on governmental beneficiaries more than required; so we can not hear the voice of the people contributing to involving in the halo effect. The presence of people and private sector releases them from this dilemma, levels the ground for a roll-back, enables them to change the paradigms available in the relevant field, and at last shift the country discourse to an appropriate side." (P13)*

Most of the professionals underlined the importance of the actual members' role in internet public policies; a manager in the ministry of culture expressed:

*"What a drawback of this council can be named is the absence of private sector. The private sector consists of unions, syndicates or any form of companies involving in content production for cyberspace. By adding this, the efficiency of the council will be increased." (P12)*

Regarding the role of the legal members in Supreme Council of Cyberspace, interviewees believed that all relevant entities are involved in this field. A faculty member of university explained:

*"Supreme Council of Cyberspace does not have any problem in respect to legal entities. For example, The Revolutionary Guards, Ministry of Communication, Ministry of Information, and Ministry of Culture, which are the main policymakers, are present." (P15)*

#### 3.1.2 The quality of the members' combination

Although participants admitted that all members of the council have been selected carefully, but about half of them believed that, in respect to the conglomerate, there are some gaps such as lack of Cohesion and Consistency among the members. A manager in a public cultural organization stated:

*"...The members have been selected carefully but their duties are not specialized. In fact, the council has not found its missions yet; it does not know the qualifications required for members; and can not recognize the main problem. If we want to make policy we must understand the issues in this area." (P11)*

Another expert in this field emphasized on the lack of shared understanding among policymakers:

*"There is no compromise among the members. Although a plurality of views is good but they have not common understanding of cyberspace." (P7)*

### 3.2 The relationship between the policymaking entities in terms of public policy issues and process

Internet policymaking entities in Iran are supposed to deal with other two dimensions of public policy; policy issues and policy process. Public policy issues are those controversial themes related to government actions, in respect of a specific field, such as legislation, administrative acts and judicial decisions intended to deal with a given social condition. Public policy process also involves six stages overlapping each other; problem identification, agenda setting, policymaking, budgeting, implementation, and evaluation. All these six stages can be summarized into three phase of policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. Three themes were recognized in this study according to the research respondents.

#### 3.2.1 The relationship between the public policy issues and the policy formulation stage

Since formulation stage is the first step in policymaking, most of the interviewees believed that the Rule making is the most important part of policymaking; based on their opinions, when a proposal is approved in Supreme Council of Cyberspace, all future steps will be followed. Thus, the main function of policymaking entities in this respect is rule making. Accordingly, one of the managers in Ministry of Culture stated:

*"... the policy of the President Rouhani is that some entities like parliament must be only rule*

*makers and should not intervene in implementation of internet policies” (P14).*

### 3.2.2 The relationship between the public policy issues and the policy implementation stage

Most of the professionals believed that most of the members in the council are in charge of executive affairs or executives of public services. A secretary in National Center for Cyberspace Research expressed that:

*“Entities that are more dependent on government have more executive roles” (P19).*

### 3.2.3 The relationship between the public policy issues and the policy evaluation stage

According to the interviewees, entities that are in charge of supervision, prevention and coping with crimes are more responsible for the evaluation of internet public policies in Iran. A researcher in the field of cyberspace stated that:

*“The role of Police and Judiciary is highlighted in the policy evaluation stage. Secondary policies, filtering and coping with cyber-crimes are categorized in the subset of the Judiciary” (P5).*

## 3.3 Roles of policymaking entities in internet public policy process at the current status

Three themes were identified about the roles of current internet policymaking entities which are related to the stages of public policy process.

### 3.3.1 Effective policymaking entities in the formulation stage

More than half of the professionals believed that the role of Parliament is more highlighted in the policy formulation stage. Near half of them stated that National Center of Cyberspace is influential and a few number of individuals pointed out to the role of Research Institute of Information Technology. It can be inferred from the participants statements as follows:

*“National Center of Cyberspace is important in policymaking; while Parliament is more important in formulation of internet public policies” (P15).*  
*“National Center of Cyberspace, Supreme Council of Cyberspace, and Secretariat of the Cyberspace are almost formulating the internet public policies” (P18).*

### 3.3.2 Effective policymaking entities in the implementation stage

According to the majority of professionals' viewpoints (67%), most of the current entities are playing role in the implementation stage of internet public policymaking. A manager working in a cultural organization stated that:

*Broadcasting, Ministry of Communication and Information technology, and Islamic Propagation Organization are important in the implementation while Education and Training, The Revolutionary Guards, Police and Ministry of Defense are significant in the both implementation and evaluation stages (P10).*

### 3.3.3 Effective policymaking entities in the evaluation stage

Some of the interviewees believed that entities that formulate policies are also involved in the evaluation stage while others disagreed and pointed out to their separate roles; in this regard, more than half of the respondents emphasized the roles of Parliament, National Center of Cyberspace, Judiciary, Police and The Revolutionary Guard. Two media experts specialized in internet services stated:

*“... policies are formulated in National Center of Cyberspace and supervision is one the functions of this center” (P6).*  
*“Parliament, Judiciary, and National Center of Cyberspace have influential roles in the evaluation” (P7).*

## 3.4 Roles of policymaking entities in internet public policy process at the favorable status

Like the previous section, the favorable status consisted of three themes related to the stages of internet public policy process.

### 3.4.1 Effective policymaking entities in the formulation stage

According to the professionals' attitudes, although the current policymaking entities are effective but they are not sufficient and it is necessary to make use of other relevant institutions. They mostly believed that the favorable entities in this regard are Parliament, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Communication, National Center of Cyberspace, Islamic Propagation Organization, Ministry of Sciences and Researches, and 'Information Technology

Research Institute. One of the interviewees having a managerial position in the Ministry of Culture expressed:

*“Supreme Council of Cyberspace has been worked properly. If we accept the formulation of cultural engineering map, it will be ideal for us to highlight the role of cultural entities. Our revolution has been a cultural one. Ministry of culture, Islamic propagation Office, and seminaries must participate in the internet public policy formulation” (P12).*

A researcher in the field of cyberspace stated:

*“Problem recognition is the main action in the policy formulation; that is you are able to form the necessity of different problems. It is required to determine what our exact problem is. Here, it is predicted to be done in the Supreme Council of Cyberspace. Whether this entity has the sufficient time and budget for problem recognition? The answer is No; this contributes to poor decisions in the council. It is required to conduct numerous researches and build a research institute for the purpose of internet public policy” (P5)*

### 3.4.2 Effective policymaking entities in the implementation stage

Results showed that most of the entities involving in the implementation of the internet policies in the current status, i.e Broadcasting, Ministry of Communication, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Education and Training, have to be deployed in this stage at the favorable one. As it was stated:

*“... Roles of each entity must be separated in the implementation stage; for example, role of government, broadcasting and etc. must be detailed” (P5)*

### 3.4.3 Effective policymaking entities in the evaluation stage

Ministry of Communication, National Center of Cyberspace, and Ministry of Sciences and Researches were identified to be influential in the evaluation stage at the favorable status. Professionals believed that National Center of Cyberspace have to take more responsibilities in this stage. In this regard, the managing director of Assembly of the Islamic Revolution Cyberspace activists represented:

*“Evaluation must be conducted by the policymaking authority precisely; for example, evaluation must to be done in the National Center*

*of Cyberspace and cyberspace network, as the arm of Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, have to immediately prepare a prompt report and track it” (P16)*

## 3.5 Gaps between current and favorable status of policymaking entities in the field of internet

According to the research findings, nine themes were identified including the emphasis, main strategy, and attitudes of the policymakers toward internet public policy in the current and favorable status, administrative structure of the entities, approach of the policymakers to the issues such as liberalization of information flow, freedom of expression, and democracy, policymakers' overall approach to the internet, and performance quality of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace.

### 3.5.1 Emphasis of the internet policymakers in the current and favorable status

35% of interviewees believed that the emphasis of the policymakers at the current status is on the internet content, 32% stated that it is on the policy process and 16% expressed that policymakers are acting passively. 17% of them had also no sufficient information in this respect. At the favorable status, 30% of them credited that policymakers must emphasize on the content. 20% stated that they have to be focused on the policy process and half of them pointed to the equal emphasis on both.

*“There are many theoretical gaps in the current status. We can not produce a mature content while there is a high need for efficient theories to be used as a foundation for the policy and strategy. We do not have a lifesaving theory and we do not have a plan to bridge the gap. In the favorable status, it is needed to emphasize on the content and produce a fundamental theory in this respect” (P10)*

*“... They are often emphasizing on the content in the current status but it is necessary to focus on both of them. The main problem is on the implementation of the internet policies” (P20)*

*“The Supreme Council of Cyberspace is so involved in the internal and external processes as far as internet content has been neglected” (P18)*

### 3.5.2 Main strategy of internet policymakers at the current and favorable status

About 60% of the respondents stated that the main strategy of internet policymakers at the current status is conservative while 20% said it is developmental. 20% of them expressed also that we are encountering a mixed one

consisting of the both mentioned strategies. 45% of professionals believed that development is the favorable strategy for internet public policy in Iran while 55% of them claimed that policymakers should formulate a mixed strategy due to the potential opportunities and threats of the internet in Iran.

*"... in the current status we are passive against the different issues of cyberspace; namely, we wait an event occurred and then decide what to do. We are inactive in this respect and we do not act wisely. In the favorable status, we can not apply a single strategy..." (P19)*

An expert in philosophy and technology stated:

*"...our strategy is mostly conservative or controlling and we have not adopted a developmental strategy yet" (P21)*

### 3.5.3 Attitudes of the internet policymakers toward internet public policy in the current and favorable status

About 57% of interviewees stated that the attitudes of the policymakers toward internet at the current status is repairing. 5% of them believed that it is preventive. 19% said that policymakers' attitudes is passive and the remaining expressed it is a combination of both repairing and preventive attitudes. 90% of professionals also claimed that the attitudes toward internet public policy should be preventive.

*"... in the current status we can not even say it is repairing but the current approach is passive. The favorable approach should be preventive" (P8)*

*"... it is not preventive nor repairing. I see it coping. We have to be responsive at the favorable status" (P10)*

### 3.5.4 Administrative structure of the entities

Near 55% of respondents stated that the administrative structure of the internet policymaking entities is limitative. Only 5% believed it is promotive. 25% of them also expressed that some entities have limitative and some other have promotive structures in the process of internet policymaking. The remaining professionals had no ideas in this regard. An emeritus of Telecommunication Infrastructure Company said:

*"Our structures are all cumbersome and when we deconstruct we can take a step forward" (P9)*

Also A manager in a public cultural organization stated:

*"It depends on the entities. Some of them are active positively but some others are not. I think it is relative" (P11)*

### 3.5.5 Approach of the policymakers to the liberalization of information flow

25% of professionals indicated that the approach of the internet policymakers to the liberalization of information flow in Iran is negative while 40% of them said it is positive. The remaining 35% believed that some of the policymakers have positive and some others have negative approaches. A law expert in Communication Regulatory Authority stated:

*"They do not have a good deal with. We do not have an atmosphere that the expression of everything is brought to the attention of the public and that everyone knows everything. It should be changed at the favorable status. It should be revised; perhaps it is required to remove something" (P3)*

An expert in philosophy and technology said:

*"The overall approach can be divided into the two categories: first, those policymakers that are accompanied by the liberalization of information flow and second, those who are against it. These two are in the same political context" (P21)*

### 3.5.6 Approach of the policymakers to the freedom of expression

Approximately, 45% of professionals declared that the approach of the internet policymakers to the freedom of expression is positive. 35% of them believed it is negative and the remaining pointed to the mixture of approaches among policymakers.

*"Freedom of expression in our country has a bad situation. It requires access to the different networks and resources, possession of radio broadcasting transmitters or mass media and information justice" (P9)*

*"if we consider the freedom of expression in a framework, at least it can be said that they have a good approach to it. As far as I know, their approach is positive unless the overall red lines of the regime which are rooted in Sharia such as insulting a person. It will be perfect if we develop some indices for freedom of expression and then try to make culture. Freedom of media contributes to the growth of the society" (P12)*

*“Policymakers are not a single body and it is not possible to obtain a similar perspective. Their views are different” (P19)*

### 3.5.7 Approach of the policymakers to the democracy

35% of interviewees retorted that the approach of the internet policymakers to the democracy and participation of different beneficiaries in decision makings is positive. 55% of them represented it is negative and the remaining believed this approach is not absolute and it differs among internet policymakers.

*“If you ask the current internet policymakers about their belief to the democracy, liberalization of information flow, freedom of expression and ..., they will not retort that they are not believed in. This is what we call just the declaration but we see something else in action. There is a difference between the declaration and action ...” (P19)*

*“Policymakers upload some of their information online to collect feedback. They like the dominance of a discourse atmosphere in the cyberspace” (P20)*

### 3.5.8 Policymakers’ overall approach to the internet

About 60% of the professionals mentioned that the policymakers’ overall approach to the internet is conservative and the other 40% believed it is hybrid.

*“The policymakers’ approach is conservative in that they have a pathological view so they can not submit good suggestions. Since their minds do not lead to the solutions they are obliged to confront which in turn it means conservatism. But, at the favorable status it is required to have a liberal approach” (P18)*

*“... it is hybrid. When we are encountering a collection of policymakers, both approaches of liberalism and conservatism is available ...” (P20)*

### 3.5.9 Performance quality of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace

Most of the professionals affirmed that the performance quality of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace at the current status is not good and there is a huge gap between the current and favorable status.

*“The current status is not good. There is a huge gap between the society and government preferences and if it is not filled the society and consequently the Iranian regime will be faced with*

*many threats. I do not see any plan by the government for this purpose” (P10)*

### 3.6 Challenges of the internet public policy

The challenges of the internet policymaking in Iran can be categorized according the stages of the public policy process.

#### 3.6.1 Challenges of the internet public policy in the formulation stage

According to the professionals’ sayings, the most significant and frequent problems in the this stage are lack of a comprehensive approach in developing policies, failure to comply the Supreme Leader’s statements in the approvals of the Council, lack of harmony between regulations and the nature of internet, and low number of the Council approvals. A researcher in the cyberspace law stated:

*“Instead of showing their visions about the cyberspace, policymakers are mostly problem-oriented at the current status that is when you look at the approvals you can not extract a plan out of it. You can not even make any prediction from these approvals to complete the puzzles of the national internet policy. As you have seen, after five years from the time the council began to work the Supreme Leader has also complained several times. We have to wait to see whether the council, with its particular duties delegated by the Leader, can ultimately fulfill its mission. The resolutions that have already been adopted by the Council are not numerous and even do not count on the fingers of one hand” (P1)*

Another professional said:

*“There are many contradictory regulations in the National Center of Cyberspace and High Council of Cyberspace which were written for the physical space not the cyberspace and then we came up to adapt it” (P12)*

#### 3.6.2 Challenges of the internet public policy in the implementation stage

The main challenges identified in this stage consists of digital divide between the body of the regime and the executives, lack of convergence among the executives’ attitudes, gap between the official reading and social reading of culture, failure to distinguish the duties among the entities, and multiplicity of entities and lack of



coordination among them. As some of the professionals expressed:

*“One of the main problems is coordinating the entities since there are so many members and if we reduce their number then we will lose comprehensiveness of members in the implementation stage” (P18)*

*“Digital divide show only itself to the executives and body of the regime. This problem has two part which one is resolved by policymaking and executive arrangements and the other should be passed over time” (P1)*

### 3.6.3 Challenges of the internet public policy in the evaluation stage

According to the professionals, low pace of policymaking entities and lack of supervision on implementation of policies are the two main challenges recognized in the evaluation stage. As one of the interviewees said:

*“Our other challenges refer to the time and speed, laws, supervisors and even inhibitors such as Judiciary which are far behind the cyberspace” (P12)*

## 3.7 Solutions to cope with the challenges of the internet public policy

The themes extracted from this question can be also categorized as the previous sections according to the stages of the policymaking.

### 3.7.1 Solutions to cope with the challenges of the internet public policy in the formulation stage

Based on the interviews, development of a comprehensive and complete plan, national information network, increasing the knowledge of policymakers, good needs assessment, defining the policies in the upper documents, and localization of policies are the main themes identified in this stage. The relevant quotes are as follows:

*“The national information network should be developed since it is very important to be localized. You are moving in the field of the enemy. All the infrastructures should be built and the internet must be more inclusive. Then, the policies can be defined ...” (P18)*

*“The needs and necessities of the policies such as budgets, structures and ... have to be specified. Scientific research can unveil the dark side of our knowledge to this subject” (P14)*

*“The most important event in improvement of the policymaking is escalating the public policy knowledge theoretically which is possible through the promotion of the literature leading to the removal of traditional policymaking” (P19)*

### 3.7.2 Solutions to cope with the challenges of the internet public policy in the implementation stage

The most frequent themes identified in discussion with the professionals about the solutions for this stage are the communication, coordination, and cooperation of the policymaking entities with each other, participation of academic scholars, and maximum participation of policymakers in both public and private sectors. In this respect, some of the experts stated:

*“Structures must be restored with the cyberspace itself not a parallel structure since the costs will be increased in this way. What is now on the agenda of department of regulation in High Council of Cyberspace is that the regulation is settled for the internet content for all entities and a regulation system is developed for each of them which acts as a coordinator for them and opens a window for these interactions” (P8)*

*“... in the implementation of the policies, scholars, private sectors and public sectors all should participate. We must have our definitions but we have to do our best to train individuals with sufficient knowledge and attitudes in our field. If you do not start the way, you will not achieve the destination. Technology is one of the main discussions now. This discussion has been initiated today and it is getting scattered more. We have to establish new study courses in order to recognize right and false” (P13)*

### 3.7.3 Solutions to cope with the challenges of the internet public policy in the evaluation stage

The main category in this theme is the more accurate and comprehensive monitoring of the current state with an emphasis on the economic, cultural and political traumas. As one of the interviewees mentioned:

*“... another point which is important for internet policymaking is possession of a precise understanding and monitoring of the current state of actions, actors, trends and processes in this field” (P18)*

#### 4. Conclusion

By development of internet and increase of its users in Iran, it has become an inseparable part of the everyday life which is observable by the economic, social, cultural, and political imbalances it has caused in Iranian territory. Overcoming these imbalances, it is required to develop a framework for developing public policies in the field of internet and cyberspace. As mentioned earlier, although few researches has done for this purpose but studying the current and favorable states of internet policymaking and finding the possible gaps in this respect is intact yet. The present research explored the experiences, beliefs, and views of professionals and experts in internet public policy applying a qualitative method with 21 semi-structured interviews. The main framework of this study to answer the research questions is developed by intersecting three dimensions of policymaking, i.e. entities, process, and issues. The results consisting of all states, roles, and relationships among these dimensions were reported based on the professionals' responses. According to the findings, although the entities involved in the Supreme Council of Cyberspace are appointed by the Supreme Leader, professionals believed that there is a necessity to change the current combination of members by adding the beneficiaries in private sector. It is also required to link among the actual and legal members of the council in order to increase their cohesion, consistency, and mutual shared understanding. The functions of the policymaking entities were also investigated. It was shown that regarding three themes of policy process which consist of formulation, implementation, and evaluation, the policymaking entities are required to make internet rules, pass them to the executives for planning, organizing and directing, monitor the outcomes of these plans for any deviations from the goals of internet public policies, and then take the correct actions by supporting any development, maintaining the current states and coping with the damages. At the current status, in the policy formulation stage three entities of Parliament, National Center of Cyberspace, and Research Institute of Information Technology are more effective than other entities. In contrast, at the favorable status, professionals declared that Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Communication, Islamic Propagation Organization, and Ministry of Sciences and Researches should be added for efficient internet public policy outcomes in this stage. All member entities in the council are almost involving in the policy implementation stage. This is a weakness since absolutely some entities must have less or even no participation to make balance in this stage. Thus, Broadcasting, Ministry of Communication, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Education and Training must play more executive roles at the favorable status. In the evaluation stage, it is supposed that Parliament, National

Center of Cyberspace, Judiciary, Police, the Revolutionary Guard plus Ministry of Communication, and Ministry of Sciences and Researches have to be in charge of supervision on internet policies. Bridging gaps between current and favorable status of policymaking entities in the field of internet requires equal emphasis on policy process and content, developing a mixed strategy due to the potential opportunities and threats of internet in Iran, policymakers' preventive attitudes toward the internet public policy, positive approach to liberalizations of information flow, freedom of expression, democracy, and having a liberal or at least hybrid overall approach to the internet public policy. As it can be inferred from the challenges and solutions recognized in this study, the internet governance and its public policymaking system in Iran require a new technical and methodological insight and making many changes in macro levels of government. The findings of this study can be considered as a roadmap for policymakers and scholars in the field of internet public policy analysis. Future researches can also use continued analysis over a longer period of time to provide further insight into the internet policymaking position. Quantitative and inferential study of the results of this research will be fruitful for the generalization of the findings and identification of possible conceptual models.

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