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# Human Rights in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Constraints (abstract)

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**Research Panel:** Media and the Digital Age

**Presenter:** Mahmood Monshipouri, PhD, Professor of International Relations, San Francisco State University; Visiting Professor, University of California, Berkeley

**Title:** Human Rights in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Constraints

**Abstract:** By making information more accessible than ever before, digital technologies have come to shape societies and cultures in many respects. These technologies also offer tools for resistance and change that can be effectively deployed to influence existing power relations. People around the world have increasingly used digital media to present political reactions against authoritarian rule or to speak out against failed policies. In contrast to the all-too familiar centralized, vertically integrated social movements, theories Social Movements argue for a new way of doing politics—namely, "network politics." More importance is attached to social and cultural concerns in these movements, and the focus of politics shifts away from recruiting members toward establishing informal, loosely organized social networks of supporters.

This paper argues that social movements, such as feminism, the environment, and human rights, are increasingly organized around flexible, dispersed, and horizontal networks. By promoting horizontal links and providing a method for communication across space in real time, new technologies have bolstered decentralized network constellations, facilitating informal or underground transnational coordination and communication. This network politics involves the creation of inclusive spaces where diverse movements converge around common goals, while still maintaining their autonomy. The digital age also mirrors tumultuous times ahead in regard to protecting and promoting human rights at a time when authoritarian governments can manipulate information gained through modern modes of communications to efficiently suppress the individual's freedoms.