

An Analysis of Cyber-Electioneering: Focusing on the 2002 Presidential Election in Korea

Yun Young Min

Abstract

This paper examines the 2002 presidential election, which is widely recognized as the first in which full-scale cyber-electioneering appeared and played a presumably decisive role in South Korea. For the analysis of the effects of the Internet on the election, five hypotheses of debunking, cooling, conversion, reinforcement, and conformity are suggested.

We come to know that the Internet may be an effective tool to hold supporters and win the votes of fence-sitters. However, it is doubtful that the Internet can be effective in changing the actual political orientation of voters. This indicates that cyber-electioneering may be effective to win an election if the goals of cyber-electioneering are carefully defined, but also that cyber-campaigning alone can hardly bring about political victory. The Internet is supposed to make elections more intellectual and informative. Consequently, the power of the existing press, political parties, and politicians will be seriously reduced, while active citizens and voters will be concomitantly empowered.

Keywords: cyber-electioneering, presidential election, political effects of the Internet, online discussion, debunking, cooling, conversion, reinforcement, conformity

* This work was partially supported by the Hanyang University Research Grant, 2002.

Introduction

The Internet has had a significant influence on Korean society, as high-speed networks were laid throughout the country allowing more than twenty-six million people to become Internet users. We can perceive this change easily in the areas of shopping, finance, education, administration, and even politics, which this paper will examine.

The Internet made the 16th presidential election in 2002 the watershed of the history of Korean politics, in the same way that Koreans realized the influence of television on politics in the presidential election in 1997. For political parties and candidates the cyber-campaign complemented or even substituted for the conventional ways of electioneering that has relied on newspapers and television, and for voters the Internet became the most popular and powerful channel through which to express their opinions.

How did the Internet change the process of electioneering? Several hypotheses that can help analyze the cyber-campaigns are tested against the experiences of the recent 16th presidential election. These analyses will hopefully reveal both the potentials and the limitations of cyber-electioneering.

Hypotheses of the Political Effects of the Internet

The Debunking Effect

Anyone can be not only a consumer but also a producer of information in cyberspace. These are contrasting aspects of the social effects of two-way communication of the Internet.

According to Jean Baudrillard, the meaning of sign would sink and the political message would disappear due to the explosion of information in cyberspace. He views the state or civic groups unable to be successful in using cyberspace for political purposes (Kim Sanghwan 1998).

I have a different view in this regard. The technique of filtering

messages will be continuously developed as the amount of information increases in cyberspace. In addition, consumers will have to be very actively involved in order to consume signs, leading to the development of a new mode of interpretation. Therefore, the explosion of information will not end up with the disappearance of meanings (Yun Young Min 2000).

The expressed personal and political opinions of netizens which would have been otherwise buried in the sound of shouting in taverns before the advent of the Internet can bring, by accumulating and reaching critical mass in cyberspace, a political result that anyone could hardly predict. Citizens' interest in certain persons, groups, or issues, as well as what they think, can be revealed in the process of simply seeking information and opinions through a search engine. This effect of the Internet may be called the "debunking effect" in the sense that it reveals public opinions that are not well delivered by the mass media.

Cyberspace is making it possible for citizens to choose a political position quite free from the influence of the mainstream press thanks to this debunking effect. Public opinion, which has been almost exclusively minted by a few mass media, can no longer be hidden beneath the control of the press. The debunking effect is expected to break the old equation, "the opinion of the press = public opinion = prevailing opinion."

The Cooling Effect

It is common to think that a reasonable discussion is hard to have on an anonymous bulletin board or chat room because flaming often breaks out there. Flaming is known to take place on anonymous boards, especially at those sites where one tends to perceive one's collective identity (Hwang 2000).

In contrast, only very logical arguments survive in some anonymous boards where one can scarcely perceive one's collective identity, or in discussion rooms, where topics are specified even if one can perceive one's collective identity. According to my own research, par-

ticipants tend to make calm and reasonable judgment in those parts of the cyberspace (Yun Young Min 2002). Furthermore, serious discussions are often found in such boards, as they are usually managed by a sysop. Most boards have a sysop these days.

The tendency that logical arguments, rather than emotional expressions, prevail in on-line discussions can be called the “cooling effect” of the Internet. It means that voters become shrewd and objective by participating in on-line discussions.

Collective identities come to the surface in elections more clearly than on any other occasion. To the present, South Korean voters’ collective identities were based on one’s home town, particularly in cases in which the candidate is from the southeast province or southwest province. It also revolved around one’s alma mater, which high school or university he graduated from, as well as the other kinds of social status that have a decisive influence on voting. The tendency of voting based on the collective identity has driven quite a few people into despair.

The Internet can relieve the effects of the collective identity on elections considerably. Political Web sites bring voters the chance to ponder candidates or policies. Voters read what others think and also express their own opinion freely, especially on boards where the sysop controls flaming (Dutton, Elberse, and Hale 1999). The old collectivism based on emotion rather than reason is weakened through on-line discussions.

This is contrary to the common perspective that views the cyberspace as a place where instigation and misinformation prevail. It is true that instigation, misinformation, personal attacks and impromptu and sensational expressions are common in cyberspace due to its disinhibitive nature. However, this is only one side of cyberspace. It is this very disinhibition that allows frank and logical opinions to flourish in cyberspace, where anonymity makes people free from the influence of others’ judgment or authority (Yun Young Min 2000).

Conversion and Reinforcement Effect

Cyber-Electioneering may have a variety of goals and targets. For example, it should make the voters who are not aware of a given candidate recognize, reinforce the favor of the voters who already have a good impression of a candidate, or persuade critical voters into favoring or at least discourage them from opposing a given candidate in public.

People who manage electoral campaigns are perhaps concerned about how successfully they will be in persuading the voters who rely on cyber-electioneering. It may be somehow disappointing to the readers who have great expectations about the political effects of the Internet, but it is anticipated that the effects are not that big.

Each campaigning camp provides abundant information and data about its candidate and party through its Web site, and tries to bridge the gap to voters by e-mail. But getting voters’ attention is far from easy. There is only a small chance that voters whom the electoral camp really wants to persuade will voluntarily visit a candidate’s Web site. In addition, an e-mail sent by a candidate would be considered as spam mail and likely be removed even before being read.

Generally speaking, there are various channels providing information about the same case in the cyberspace, and there is lack of trust on the sources of information. So it is difficult to lead voters to change their preference by persuading them through Web site or e-mail. We call the effect “conversion,” which describes changing preference of voters to a political party or a candidate, but the so-called “conversion effect” seldom occurs.

It is anticipated that the effect of the Internet would at most reinforce a voter’s preference or draw support from the voters who already have a good impression of a candidate through contact with other media. This can be called the “reinforcement effect.” It is expected that reinforcement is more common than conversion in cyberspace.

In 1998 Jesse Ventura, who was the candidate of a third party in the gubernatorial election of Minnesota, USA, organized meetings

and raised funds through his Web site. According to research, he succeeded in mobilizing the young, who would traditionally seldom vote and the voters who do not belong to any political party, Democratic or Republican (Conhaim 2000). Namely, it can be interpreted that Ventura won the election thanks to the reinforcement effect of Internet.

From the perspective of an election campaigner, the reinforcement effect is less satisfactory than the conversion effect. However, one should not underestimate the importance of the reinforcement effect. In particular, it is a crucial consideration for a candidate or party who is disfavored by the influential mass media. They can strengthen solidarity of their supporters by using a variety of campaigning methods in cyberspace even in the middle of intensive bombardment by the hostile media.

Information is the major tool of selling products in cyberspace (Schwartz 1998). In a sense, candidates are products. Candidates may be information-poor products for the voters who are indifferent to politics or who are hostile to them. However, for the voters who are looking for information about candidates on the Internet, the candidates themselves can be a kind of information-rich product such as books, electronic products, and travel goods. This means that the voters who visit a Web site of a candidate expect rich information although the number of voters who are willing to search for information about candidates in cyberspace may be small (Kaid 2002). In this sense, the reinforcement effect is important enough to be made use of in election campaigns.

In the view of civic authority, the conversion effect has a negative rather than positive implication. This is because political parties and candidates not only persuade electorates through Web sites but also instigate the public and create their images. Actually, it is anticipated that the conversion effect is not as significant.

The Conformity Effect

Some psychologists argue that the so-called "conformity effect" in

psychology works in cyberspace as well (Hwang 2000). Conformity is the tendency of an individual to follow the dominant opinion, after comparing opinions of many people. In general, when the conformity effect occurs, people only express their public opinion to conform with the group's opinion, rather than actually changing their own minds.

When there is pressure to conform in the group decision-making process, people reach an agreement without discussing the subject sufficiently. Irving Janis called this situation "group thinking." Group thinking can cause "pluralistic ignorance." It means that each member of a group can have the false notion that his opinion will differ from that of the group, and hence be reluctant to present his own opinion, which when duplicated on the group level, results in everyone ending up with the wrong conclusion. It is similar to the story in which the townsfolk claim to see the king wearing fine clothes even as a child shouts "the king is wearing no clothes" (Hwang 2000, 202).

The conformity effect also causes group polarization. The sensational and extreme expression tends to dominate the mood, rather than a rational one in a situation of group thinking. In that case, emotional, rather than reasonable conflict occurs. Flaming may occur at the individual level, but as part of the process of generating an extreme reaction from a group, can be easily seen in cyberspace. For example, an article on a bulletin board that underestimates or denies the group identity leads directly to flaming because an individual is perceived in terms of group identity rather than a personal one in anonymous cyberspace.

The conformity effect is a hypothesis that stands contrary to the cooling effect described above. If there is a conformity effect in cyberspace, it would be found in a cyber-community whose cohesiveness is strong and whose leader is authoritative. So the conformity effect implies that the Internet may suppress the reflexive activities of citizens, and thereby weaken their power.

In the following analysis, we will test the five effects suggested above against data from the 2002 presidential election in South Korea.

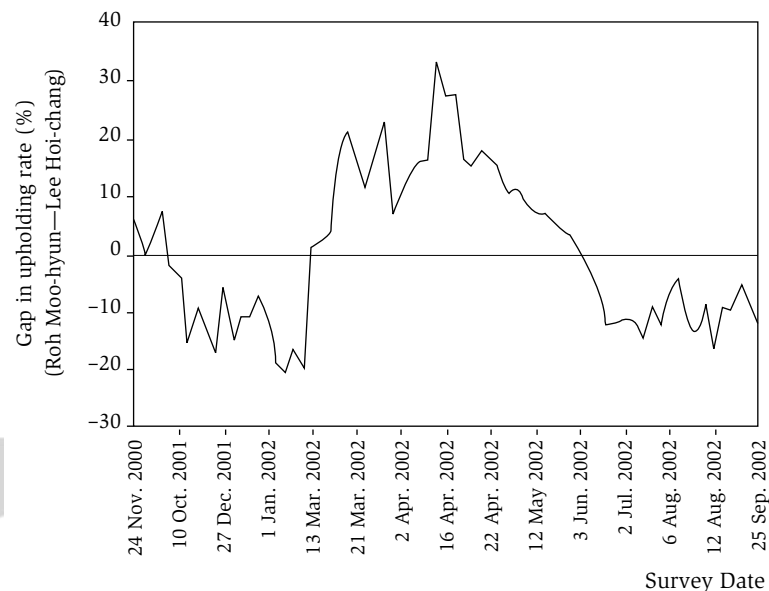
An Empirical Analysis of Cyber-Electioneering

Most remarkable phenomena during the 2002 presidential election in South Korea are, I would say, the increase in ordinary voters' influence and the decrease in the influence of major newspapers. It is believed that the Internet made them possible. Although the participation was instigated by the popular presidential primary election of the Millenium Democratic Party (MDP), and the decrease of newspapers' influence had already been detected in the 1997 presidential election, when TV debates among candidates were introduced, the Internet made those changes even more substantial.

The Decrease in Newspapers' Power: Evidence for Debunking Effect

The weakened influence of so-called major newspapers during the presidential election is solid evidence for the debunking effect. Those major newspapers almost everyday carried articles that both implicitly and explicitly criticized candidate Roh Moo-hyun during the presidential primary election of the MDP. However, their attacks proved futile and can even be said to have actually produced quite contrary results. Thanks to the attacks of those newspapers, Roh earned the strong image of David who fought against Goliath, and in the end he won the election. South Koreans observed that the more offensive reports were printed in newspapers, the more voters entered cyberspace to seek alternative information; thereby, the major newspapers lost, all the more, authority in politics.

Figure 1 graphs an imaginary showdown between Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Hoi-chang from the results of polls collected by various institutions during the election period from November 2000 to the election day, 19 December 2002. It indicates that the level of support for Roh Moo-hyun did not decrease, even as he was severely criticized by candidate Rhee In-je along with the major newspapers from mid March to late April. Rather it increased or was at least sustained by the margin of at least 10 percent that of Lee Hoi-chang, the Grand National Party's (GNP) candidate.



* This graph was constructed with upholding rates in public surveys during the 2002 presidential election period. The rates were estimated with responses to the question of "Who would you vote for between Roh and Lee, if only the two candidates were running in the presidential race?" In each survey, the numbers used in the graph were computed by subtracting the upholding rate for Lee from Roh's.

Figure 1. Fluctuations in Upholding Rate of Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Hoi-chang

While the major newspapers and candidate Roh fought against each other due to newspapers' open criticism of Roh's ideological position, "Roh's utterance of nationalization of newspapers," and so on, the number of visitors searching "Roh Moo-hyun" at major search engines or portal sites increased vertically and the number of visits to Roh's homepage increased dramatically.

A similar phenomenon took place during the period from 17 November, when MDP candidate Roh and National Alliance 21 candidate Chung Mong-joon agreed that one of them would be chosen as

the joint candidate for the two parties. Right after the announcement of the agreement, candidate Roh began to run ahead of candidate Lee in the imaginary race between the two. In addition, Roh received more support than Lee in most polls which were held from 25 November, when Roh became the joint candidate, to the election day.

Roh's support rate, which had increased due to the agreement with Chung Mong-joon did seldom decrease and was largely maintained to the election day, though Roh was attacked by the GNP's negative campaign and harsh critics working out of the major newspapers. Interestingly during this period, Roh did not directly respond to the attacks of the GNP or the newspapers against him. It was different from his response during the primary election of the MDP.

According to Table 1, the number of searches for candidate Roh Moo-hyun and Nosamo¹ at the Yahoo Korea site increased in March and April, when the MDP's nomination race was being held, over ten times as many as that in February. The number of searches for the MDP also increased five or six fold during the same period. This was similar to the period between the day when Roh was nominated as

Table 1. Frequencies of Search concerning the 2002 Presidential Election at Yahoo Korea

	Presidential Candidate		Supporting Groups		Political Party	
	Roh	Lee	Nosamo	Changsarang	MDP	GNP
Feb.	14,205	6,523	8,972	—	12,865	15,980
Mar.	160,536	13,167	77,112	—	70,521	29,872
Apr.	188,669	20,993	96,698	690	65,997	42,045
May	108,020	64,198	86,416	5,022	22,694	42,217
Jun.	35,452	7,931	32,857	835	18,384	32,486
Jul.	22,874	5,635	21,450	973	16,344	26,188
Aug.	33,812	13,798	28,310	1,312	27,515	40,686

1. The largest voluntary group of Roh's supporters who acted in the real world as well as in cyberspace.

*Table 2. Results of Search for the Two Presidential Candidates at Daum**

Roh Moo-hyun			Lee Hoi-chang		
Web site	Members	Remark	Web site	Members	Remark
The President, Roh Moo-hyun	3,534	supporting	I love Lee Hoi-chang	277	negative
Those who love Roh Moo-hyun (Nosamo)	2,233	supporting	How about Lee as the next President?	226	supporting
A fool, Roh Moo-hyun	1,360	supporting	Solidarity for Anti-Lee Hoi-chang	173	negative
Anti-Roh Moo-hyun	1,000	supporting	Anti-America, Anti-Lee Hoi-chang	76	negative
Gwangjeon-Nosamo	474	supporting	Lee Hoi-chang	71	supporting
The ten thousand signature-seeking campaign of young workers supporting Roh Moo-hyun	60	supporting	—	—	—
Nosamo (Andong, Gyeongbuk)	56	supporting	—	—	—
Nosamo (Chungbuk)	50	supporting	—	—	—
Nosamo (Gyeongju)	39	supporting	—	—	—
Nosamo (Guri & Namyangju)	38	supporting	—	—	—
Vote for Roh Moo-hyun	30	supporting	—	—	—
Chungcheong-Roh's friends	23	supporting	—	—	—
Nosamo (England)	21	supporting	—	—	—
Nosamo i y	21	supporting	—	—	—

* Daum is one of the most popular Korean portal site.

As of 21 May 2002. Only cyber-communities of which the number of members was over 20 are listed.

the joint candidate of the two parties and the election day (first to third week of December). The number of searches for Roh Moo-hyun and the MDP increased rapidly, with the exception of Nosamo, a group judged to be illegal by the National Election Commission.

The voters who entered cyberspace by way of a search engine may have realized that the number of sites supporting Roh was overwhelmingly larger than that of sites for any other candidate (see Table 2).

After searching “Roh Moo-hyun,” voters would have visited Roh’s or Nosamo’s homepage. The number of netizens who visited Roh’s homepage increased continuously, and more than 70,000 visited by Roh’s homepage a day during the last week of May and the second week of December, which was the period right before voting began (see Figure 2).

The influence of the major newspapers over voters must have weakened in the process of conducting Internet searches for “Roh Moo-hyun,” visiting the sites supporting him, and occasionally participating in on-line discussions. Thanks to its debunking effect, the Internet could function as the breakwater in favor of Roh.

Though Roh became known to people to a certain extent for his biting interrogation in the public hearing on political corruption during the Fifth Republic in the late 1980s, he was generally unknown to the majority of voters. He must have realized that the Internet was the best tool to publicize his potential as a presidential candidate. Furthermore, he could protect himself from the unfriendly and aggressive reports of the major newspapers through the Internet. This may be interpreted as the remarkable result of the debunking effect.

“Roh’s Wind”²: Conversion or Reinforcement?

Assuming that the Internet was effective in electioneering, then why

2. Roh’s Wind (*nopung*) is the word that indicates his swift gaining of popular support from the electorate.

did only Roh succeed in gaining the wide support from the electorate among other politicians? We may find an answer to the question at the fact that the main stage of election is still in the real world, and will be so for the foreseeable future.

The beginning of “Roh’s Wind” dated back to the general election in 2000. His electioneering for the 2002 presidential election really began when he decided to leave Seoul and run for the general election in Busan. His running in Busan was a decision that politicians could hardly imagine. It meant that he will be giving up his vested interests as an Assemblyman and taking a high risk. Few people expected him to win—and he did in fact lose. The formation of his fan club, Nosamo in June 2000, which was the first of its kind in South Korea, would not have been possible without his apparently absurd decision to run for election in Busan.

Roh opened his Internet Web site in August 1999. He ran it with the help of dozens of volunteers with the name “cyber aide.” At that time, the site had about 300 visitors and five to six articles were posted on the board daily. It was one of the most successful individual politicians’ Web sites of that time, but it was far from being considered at the level of “wind.”

Then, the so-called “Roh Moo-hyun syndrome” began to materialize right after the April 13 general election in 2000, when almost 300 articles were posted on the board at his site (see an article from *OhmyNews* as of 14 April 2000). Considering that only under 5 percent of visitors post an article, this implies that almost 6,000 people visited Roh’s homepage a day. At that time, one weekly magazine was already reporting about Roh Moo-hyun’s “hot wind” (*Sisa Press*, 12 May 2000). Also, Roh took the lead by a striking margin of votes against Assemblymen Rhee In-je and Lee Hoi-chang in a popular poll asking “Who is appropriate to become the next president?” which was carried out at the Web site of People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, an influential civic organization (see *Maeil Business Newspaper* of 26 April 2000).

According to an announcement of the team operating Roh’s Web site, on the average 2,000 to 4,000 people visited Roh’s Web site a

day in 2001. It was recorded that 5,000 to 6,000 people visited during the third week of March 2002 and almost 100,000 people during the first two weeks of April (see Roh Moo-hyun's homepage, www.knowhow.or.kr).

Why did so many people visit Roh's Web site? The vertical increase in the number of visitors to the site can hardly be explained without consideration of the close race with Rhee In-je in the MDP's primary, conflicts with the major press, and so on. The situation cannot be fully explained only in terms of the primary election. In fact, the visits increased not only at the MDP's but also at other candidates' or famous politicians' Web sites during the MDP's nomination race. Then, why did the netizens intensively flock towards Roh's Web site?

According to the statistics generated by Rankey.com (www.rankey.com), during the second week of April (7-13 April), the number of visits to Roh's Web site increased by more than 20,000 a day on the average, relative to that of the former week. So the percentage of visitors to Roh's site, out of all politicians' domains—as counted by a Web site-evaluation site—was 69.5 percent. In contrast, Rhee In-je's visitor count decreased by 4,700 a day on average relative to the previous week during the same period, making his share of web visitors drop to as low as 3.5 percent.

South Koreans' interests in Roh increased remarkably, probably due to the fact that against all expectations, Roh continued to hold the lead in all election polls during the primary race of the MDP and also took first continuously keeping away the MDP's advisor, Rhee In-je and the President of GNP, Lee Hoi-chang. Furthermore, Roh's Wind did not stop blowing despite of the major newspapers' persistent attacks of his ideological position, "nationalization of newspapers" and so on. As a result, more and more voters must have wondered to themselves "Just Who Is This Roh Moo-hyun?" That may explain the sharp increase in the number of visits to Roh's Web site. Also, that must have been the reason why "Roh Moo-hyun" became one of the most popular search terms in the news section of portal sites.

Most visitors to Roh's Web site were presumably his own sup-

porters and voters who did not need to decide whom to support (or whose support for other candidates had weakened) with the exception of some supporters of other candidates. The voters who visited Roh's Web site must have reaffirmed their support for Roh or begun to support Roh. In other words, it was the reinforcement effect at work in this case.

Comparison of Figures 1 and 2 clearly confirm that the origin of "Roh's Wind" is not the cyberspace but the real world. According to Figure 1, which graphed an imaginary showdown between Roh and Lee, the support rate for Roh began to decrease after it reached its peak at the second week of April. However, according to Figure 2,

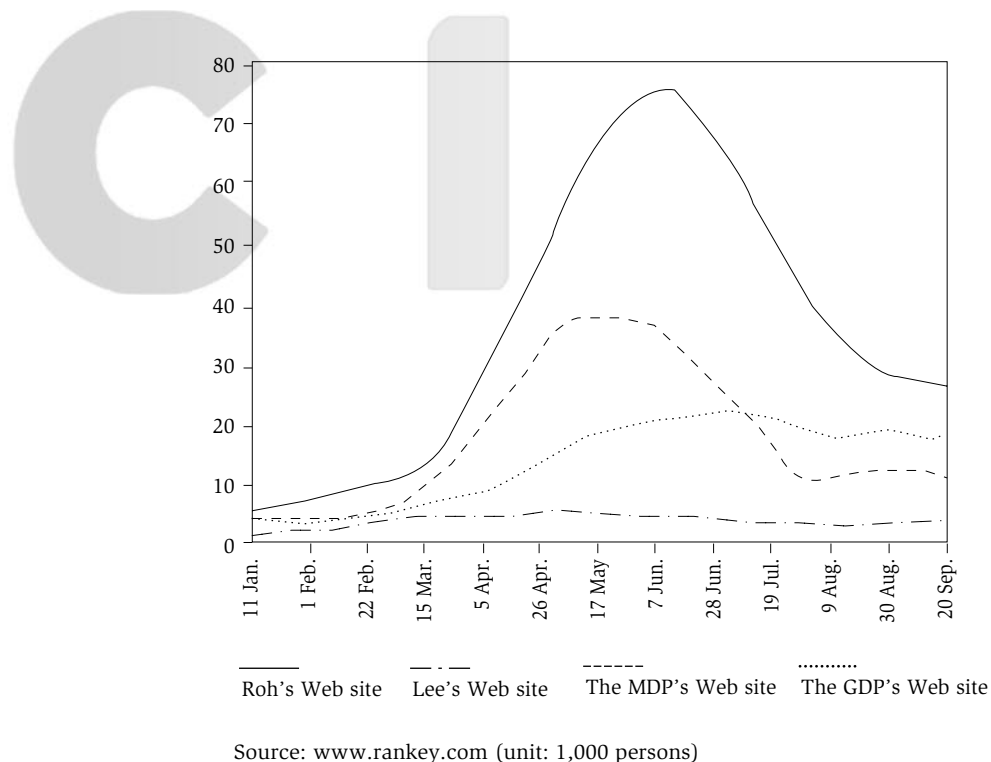


Figure 2. Fluctuations in Daily Visits to the Web sites Related to Roh Moo-hyun and Lee Hoi-chang (11 January–20 September 2002)

the number of visits to Roh's Web site continued to increase up to the second week of June.

The discrepancy between cyberspace and the real world in terms of the support rate and the degree of attention given to Roh suggests that Roh's support originated from the advancement of events in the real world. That is, the decrease in Roh's support in the polls can scarcely be explained by the decrease in Roh's popularity in cyberspace. The likely factors behind this decrease include the unfavorable situations due to the political corruption of the President Kim Dae-jung's sons, Roh's visit to the former President Kim Young-sam, as well as irregularities in the process of appointing the MDP's candidate to run in the mayoral election in Busan.

The frequency of visits to Roh's Web site dropped during the period from mid-June to late August, as fast as its prior increase. About 30,000 people still visited the site a day in mid-September, but the netizens' interests in Roh seemed to have declined a great deal. In addition, the number of visits to the MDP's Web site have been much smaller than that of the GNP's since early July.

We also see the discrepancy between cyberspace and the real world in the period of October and November. The support rate measured by the number of visits to Roh's Web site began to swell sharply in late October, even far before the agreement of choosing a single candidate for the two parties; however, in the real world the support rate at the polls rose after the event in mid-November. We may interpret this to mean that the transfer of the momentum of support in cyberspace into support in the real world required the agreement of the two potential rivals.

One thing that we must pay attention to in Figure 2 is that the visitation rate of the MDP's Web site never reached beyond that of Roh's, while the visitation rate of Lee Hoi-chang's Web site reached beyond that of the GNP's except for the last part of the election period. Interestingly the visitation rates of Roh's and the MDP's Web sites showed a quite similar cycle, but that of the GNP's and Lee's Web sites fluctuated widely. In particular, during the period from early April to late July, the number of visits to the GNP's Web site

increased continuously, but that of Lee's remained at the same level for some time, and then decreased for some reason.

Similar trends appeared in the support rates at pre-election survey polls. Since March 2002 the support rates of the MDP and Roh similarly fluctuated and, moreover, the support rate of the MDP was never higher than that of Roh. In contrast, Lee's rate of support fluctuated by large margins, but that of the GNP changed little. In addition, the support rate of Lee was seldom higher than that of the GNP.

This may be interpreted that the MDP worked as a big burden to Roh in gaining voter support, while the GNP worked as a great help to Lee. It also indicates that the victory in the presidential election was the function of two independent variables, the candidate's own ability to draw support and that of the party of the candidate. In terms of results it was, we may say, the candidate's ability, rather than party affiliation, that decided the final outcome of the election.

From this discussion we may draw the temporary conclusion that the Internet has a reinforcement, rather than a conversion effect. We could say that in the 2002 presidential election, the conversion mostly took place off-line, while the Internet worked to reinforce voter's political preference, or at most gain support from floating voters.

The Cooling Effect Seldom Confirmed

Political influence in cyberspace comes from logic, and only logic can survive in a cyber-debate (Yun Young Min 2000). This is one of the substantial changes that the Internet has brought about in the realm of politics in South Korea. There is no doubt that emotional statements are common in free electronic bulletin boards. However, it should not mislead our evaluation of the political potential of the Internet. Someone may construe that in South Korean politics the major source of power moved from "the muzzle of a gun (army)" to "that of the emotion (TV)" and then to "that of logic (Internet)" in a short time.

On the bulletin board of the Readers' Court, maintained by The *Chosun Ilbo*, articles that supported or criticized Roh's action were

Table 3. Distribution of Articles Posted at Chosun Ilbo's Bulletin Board*

Date	Pro Roh	Against Roh	Neutral	Others	Total
30 April	128	144	91	416	779
1 May	141	150	88	509	888
2 May	96	167	68	441	772
3 May	121	139	90	401	751
4 May	105	122	85	426	738
5 May	99	131	69	370	669
6 May	122	141	88	412	763

* Statistics during the week right after 30 April when Roh visited the former President Kim Young-sam, which gave rise to public debate on the righteousness of his action.

posted at a similar amount after he visited the former President Kim Young-sam. Articles on all kinds of subjects were allowed to be posted on the board. I classified the articles into four categories, as shown in Table 3. The category of Others includes the articles which are not related to Roh at all. Some of the statements were resentful, but many were quite logical. It is expected that the resentful articles have little cooling effects but logical ones do.

Table 4 displays classification of the articles more than Table 3 although those were posted at the *Hankyoreh's* (a daily newspaper) discussion room on a subject having little to do with the presidential election. It is a representative discussion board, and in the *Hankyoreh*, flaming is seldom found. The board is run by a sysop although it is anonymous. Excessively abusive statements, whether they are for or against privatization, were seldom found. There is no way to verify how many articles were deleted by the sysop, but the posted articles were very logical.

Figure 3 offers interesting statistics with which to consider the cooling effect of the Internet, although they were not related to the election. They were the results of audience surveys concerning Korean Broadcasting System's (KBS) TV program titled *Married Couple's Clinic: Love and War*. For the program, an audience survey was implemented at the end of each broadcasted episode. The audience

Table 4. Distribution of Articles over the Bulletin Board under the Subject, "Privatization of Public Enterprises"* in the Internet *Hankyoreh*

Period	Against privatization	Extreme opposition**	Pro privatization	Extreme support**	Neutral	Others***
11-20 June (2001)	115	7	152	6	15	51
21-30 June (2001)	24	0	37	2	1	26
1-10 July (2001)	4	1	4	3	0	0
21-28 Feb. (2002)	120	0	61	0	5	27
1-10 March	61	0	19	0	2	10
11-20 March	62	0	25	0	2	14
21-31 March	85	2	52	0	5	29
1-10 April	83	1	53	0	5	28

* After 21 May, the subject title was changed from "Privatization of Public Enterprises" to "Solidarity Strike of Korean Federation of Trade Unions."

** Extreme opinion: the cases expressed against or for by using swearwords without any logic

*** Others: the cases with no relations to the subject

was asked "whether you agree or disagree with the couple's divorce." We see a big discrepancy between the results of surveys submitted by automatic response system (ARS) and those through KBS's Web site. The pro-divorce response rates of the two categories were very different, with the exception of a few cases as is shown in Figure 3.

Although these data need to be supplemented and analyzed more systematically, they presumably reflect the cooling effect of the Internet to a certain extent. In the case of ARS, the viewers' feeling would be directly reflected in their responses because they tend to lift the receiver without a filtering or cooling mechanism. In contrast, the viewers who visit KBS's Web site are confronted with others' opin-

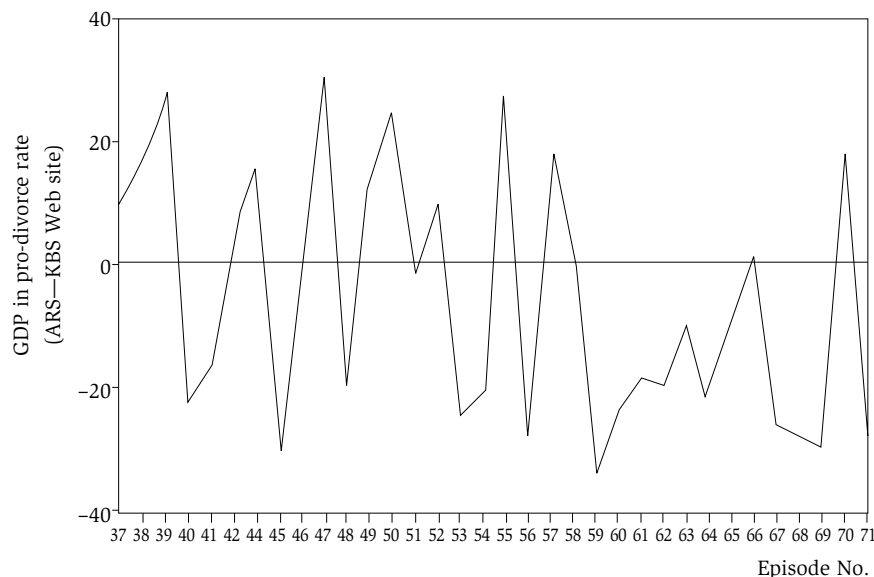


Figure 3. Results of Audience Surveys for KBS's TV Program *Married Couple's Clinic: Love and War* by ARS vs. Web site

ions, and consequently their initial feelings may change, although it is not easy to predict the direction of change. I presume that the cooling effects, if any, work in this process.

The Conformity Effect in Cyberspace?

I do not agree with some psychologists' assertion that conformity would happen in cyberspace just as it does in the real world. A cyber-community is formed on the basis of a principle of selectivity (or spontaneity). So it is not the soil where the conformity happens. Nonetheless, the conformity effect is examined here because how it works is little known so far.

I found very little evidence for the existence of the conformity effect in politically-oriented electronic bulletin boards. It was not

found in the electronic bulletin boards for readers of the Web sites of the major daily newspapers (*Chosun Ilbo*, *JoongAng Ilbo*, *Dong-a Ilbo*, *Hankyoreh*, *Kyunghyang Daily News*). Even if the conformity effect takes place in cyberspace as the psychologists assert, it is hard to prove it at Korean political Web sites. Articles are posted not only spontaneously but also purposefully by electioneers. For example, even though critical articles are posted at the board of Roh's Web site, there is no way for a researcher to find out whether those are sincere critiques of supporters or tricks of other candidate's supporters disguised as critiques from the inside.

An almost exceptional situation occurred which could be interpreted as the conformity effect in the discussion room of the TV program entitled *MBC's 100 Minutes-Debate*, which all the three runners (Roh Moo-hyun, Rhee In-je, and Chung Dong-young) of the MDP's primary election joined on 4 April 2002 (see Figure 4). The posted

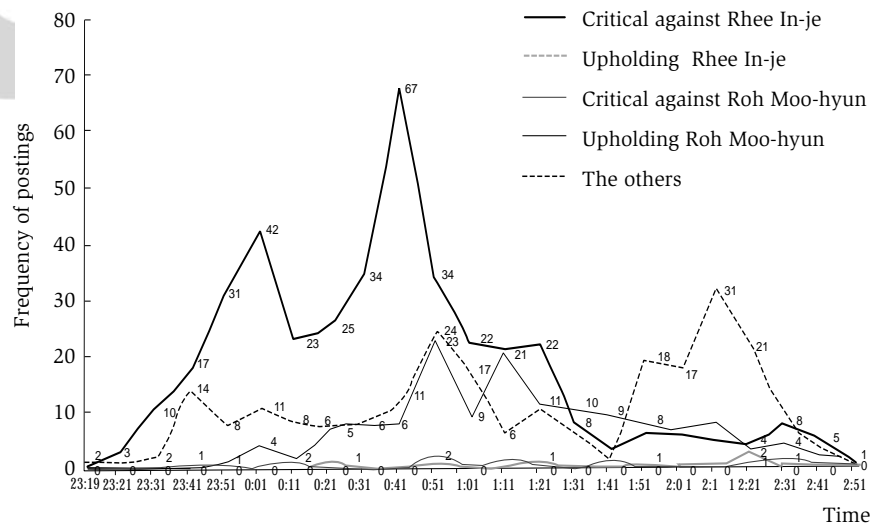


Figure 4. Statistics of the Audience Bulletin Board for the *MBC's 100 Minutes-Debate* Which Featured Runners of the MDP's Primary Election

articles were overwhelmingly critical to Rhee In-je and supportive to Roh Moo-hyun.

We may imagine that people who had opinions counter to dominant ones might feel frustrated in the hot atmosphere of the board during or after the program. Many of the posted articles were critiques against Rhee. While 396 critiques against Rhee were posted, 9 articles for Rhee were posted. In contrast, 146 articles were pro-Roh, while only 7 were anti-Roh.

However, aside from this interpretation, one may argue that the posted articles reflected the viewers' feelings and thoughts, or may assert that those were the results of organized actions of Roh's supporters. It is important to note that only registered members of the site can post an article on the MBC's bulletin board, while anyone can post an article anonymously on the MDP's. Interestingly, more pro-Rhee In-je articles were posted on the latter than the former during the same period. The pro-Rhee articles on the MDP's board might have been posted by the supporters hired by Lee's camp or by the voters who were frustrated in posting articles on MBC's board. However, there is no way to decide which interpretation is true with the given data.

Conclusion

The 2002 presidential election revealed the political potential of the Internet to the extent that even ordinary voters felt it in South Korea. This paper is an attempt to explain it systematically.

From the analysis, we find that the Internet may be an effective tool to hold supporters and win floating votes. The combination of the debunking, reinforcing, and cooling effects of the Internet will make it possible. In addition, it is doubtful that the Internet can help change the political orientation of voters. That is, its conversion effect is not probable. This indicates that cyber-electioneering may be effective to win an election if the goals of cyber-electioneering are carefully defined. It also cautions that cyber-campaigning alone can

hardly bring about victory in an election.

The Internet will make an election more intellectual and informative. Consequently, the power of the existing press, political parties, and politicians will be, one may predict, seriously reduced, while active citizens and voters will be empowered. This was reflected, to some extent, in the South-Korean experience.

Apparently many researchers are interested in which medium is more powerful, the mass media or the Internet. In this analysis, however, we see that the interaction between the mass media and the Internet is no less important. One-way mass media, such as TV or newspapers acquired a powerful and fast feedback loop. A number of viewers exchanged their feelings and thoughts through Internet Web sites while watching TV programs related to the election. In this new process of forming public opinions, the influence of TV programs may be weakened (cooling effect) or reinforced (reinforcing effect). But we need more research to ascertain under what conditions cooling or reinforcing effects work.

No expert predicted that Roh Moo-hyun would be elected as the 16th President of South Korea thanks to the Internet. Also, there are few experts who hesitate to say that one of major factors of his victory was the Internet. Without thorough examination of the causality between Roh's victory and the Internet, it would be wise for so-called experts to remain cautions about making concrete conclusions about such events in the future.

REFERENCES

- Conhaim, Wallys W. 2000. "E-Democracy Gains Ground." *Link-Up* 17.5 (September-October): 5-13.
- Dutton, William, Anita Elberse, and Matthew Hale. 1999. "A Case Study of a Netizen's Guide to Elections." *Communications of the ACM* 42.12 (December): 48-54.
- Hwang, Leo Sang-Min (Hwang, Sang-min). 2000. *Saibeo gonggan-e ttodareun*

nae-ga itda (The Other Self in the Cyber World). Seoul: Gimm Young Publishers.

Kaid, Lynda Lee. 2002. "Political Advertising and Information Seeking," *Journal of Advertising* 31.1 (spring): 27-35.

Kim, Sang-hwan, et al. 1998. "Maeche-wa gonggan-ui hyeongisanghak" (Metaphysics of Media and Space). In *Maeche-ui cheolhak* (Philosophy of Media), 17-60. Seoul: Nanam Publishing House.

Schwartz, Evan I. 1998. *Webonomics: Nine Essential Principles for Growing Your Business on the World Wide Web*. New York: Broadway Books.

Yun, Young Min (Yun, Yeong-min). 2000. *Saibeo gonggan-ui jeongchi* (Politics in Cyberspace). Seoul: Hanyang University Press.

_____. 2002. *Saibeo gonggan-ui sahoe* (Society in Cyberspace). Seoul: Hanyang University Press.

WEB SITES

Chosun Ilbo. www.chosun.com

Daum. www.daum.net

Dong-a Ilbo. www.donga.com

Grand National Party. www.hanara.or.kr

Hankyoreh. www.hani.co.kr

JonngAng Daily. www.join.com

Korea Daily News. www.kdaily.com

Korea Economic Daily. www.hankyung.com

Korean Broadcasting System (KBS). www.kbs.co.kr

Kyunghyang Daily News. www.khan.co.kr

Maeil Business Newspaper. www.mk.co.kr

Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). www.imbc.com

Millenium Democratic Party. www.minjoo.or.kr

OhmyNews. www.ohmynews.com

Rankey.com. www.rankey.com

Roh Moo-hyun. www.knowhow.or.kr (This was the URL of Roh's personal Web site but is currently the official URL for Cheong Wa Dae, the Office of the President)

Sisa Press. www.e-sisa.co.kr

Yahoo Korea. www.kr.yahoo.com