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Alternative Information and Digital Citizenship: The Rise of Unconventional Political Participation in the Asian Context of Internet Use

Shin Haeng Lee

This study examines the impact of the Internet as an alternative information source on citizenship in East and Southeast Asia. Data came from the World Values Survey for the two periods of 2005–07 and 2010–13. The results show that informational Internet use is associated with unconventional political participation across the regions in both survey waves. Furthermore, the positive relationship is enhanced among those who do not belong to any voluntary organization or withdraw from daily newspapers. Overall I find that along with the widespread expansion of digital media, the Asian Internet has become an agent of civic associations that take place outside the institutional field of politics and empowers the marginalized in traditional systems of political communication.

Keywords: Unconventional Political Participation, Alternative Information, Digital Citizenship, Asian Internet, Comparative Study, Survey Data Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Being informed is necessary for citizens to participate in political action in such a way that the participation is influenced by the opportunity to understand and judge current problems as well as to learn civic skills (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). The diffusion of Internet use has been therefore linked with political participation in a variety of contexts. Mobilization, facilitated by the technology, is especially manifested in a non-institutional field of politics: the impact of Internet diffusion is particularly considered to empower those who lack the communication and network resources that are influential in political mobilization (Lee, 2017). The opportunity for alternative information may help people experience more benefits (as compared to the potential cost of participation for action) as it arouses uninterested or unmotivated citizens to get involved in lifestyle politics that address personal concerns (Bennett, 1998).

Moreover, rapid expansion of social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter has drawn attention to their capability for enhancing horizontal ways of connecting and re-directing the flow of new information. Indeed, these means for alternative information are associated with civil-society development as well as political participation (Howard and Hussain, 2013; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela, 2012). Therefore, the opportunity for Internet use may help civil-society groups make their voices heard and mobilize activism more expansively when they attempt to challenge political elites and demand effective and accountable governance.

The recent expansion of Internet connectivity in East and Southeast Asia necessitates a study on the context where the technology may democratize an opportunity structure for information-mediated political action. Also, a longitudinal comparison analysis of Internet effects is necessary because of any possible cascade effects of political movement on the Asian democratic landscape in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring. Indeed, along

with the proliferation of digital connectivity with Internet-accessible cell phones (dubbed "smartphones") over the past decade, social media has become hugely popular and goes beyond a digital divide based on socio-economic inequality among publics in East and Southeast Asia. The region now has five out of the top twenty countries with the largest Facebook populations in the world, and they were the fastest-growing markets for the service in the early 2010s (Abbott, 2015).

Of course, Asian news media seem to be irrelevant when it comes to harnessing any opportunities to encourage citizen participation in non-institutionalized and more direct activities. Rather, news consumption is in tune only with traditional, elite-driven politics. These findings raise several questions: Is this the case regardless of the different information sources people attend to? And is the Internet really a distinct and new means of expanding the opportunity for participation in political activism in comparison with other information sources?

In this study, Internet diffusion is hypothesized to have affordances that democratize the opportunity structures of political participation in East and Southeast Asia. These affordances include the possibility of horizontal information flows, manifested in unprecedented ways for civil-society actors to take advantage of a channel to promote political communication and association that occurs outside conventional systems. By democratization, I mean the mobilization of alternative communications activities for protest politics wherein citizen participation increases among those who had formerly lacked the traditional opportunity to become informed and engaged. The hypothesis is therefore tested for whether the impact of the Internet as an information source in turn has had an impact on unconventional political participation. To account for the mobilizing possibility for protest politics, I also examine whether Internet use empowers those who were lacking access to traditional channels of information.

In examining unconventional political participation, different channels of communication are also investigated. The channels are different systematically in terms of costs and affordances for people who want to be informed and mobilized for political action. Indeed, although news consumption was found to have divergent effects between conventional and unconventional political participation, it remains to be seen how different sources of information are related to each other as antecedents of action. Although research has vigorously investigated the political effects of information-seeking from diverse communication channels, few studies have identified the relationship between different sources of information as a mediator of participation in political action. An examination of these relationships contributes to a greater understanding of the impact of the Internet as an alternative pathway for political communication, which is assumed to be distinct from traditional communication opportunities to be informed and participate in politics.

The countries inside the Asian regions of interest include Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam in Southeast Asia, and South Korea and Taiwan in East Asia. These countries were carefully chosen based not only on their rapid adoption of social media through mobile phones but also on their comparable political cultures of having a shared history of post-colonial authoritarianism, having achieved state-driven growth and being involved in geopolitical tension between China and the U.S. The context that the Asian countries offer is notable and interesting because rapid technology diffusion and social media adoption have occurred despite widely varied socioeconomic and institutional conditions for democracy. For instance, even with its restrictive media environment, Vietnam had mobile-phone penetration close to 150 percent in 2012, and more than half of its users had access

to the Internet (Freedom House, 2013). Also, more than 80 percent of Internet users in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have an active profile on Facebook (Nielsen, 2011). These figures show that, since its rapid diffusion in early 2010s, social media have become an increasingly accessible means for people to connect with political, cultural, and cultural artifacts (Lee, 2015).

Particularly, while being enthusiastic about achieving modernization development, the governments in the region have been ambivalent about democratic transition or consolidation. Meanwhile, scholars frequently bemoan that the mass citizenry in the Asian countries lack a deep and resilient commitment to liberal values for democracy-in-practice beyond the instrumental endorsement of democracy-in-principle for economic prosperity and government performance. This criticism applies even to South Korea, Taiwan and The Philippines, countries that are considered to have achieved the consolidation of liberal democracy.

To test for the hypotheses mentioned above, cross-national data from the World Values Surveys (WVS) were employed. WVS provides nuanced measures of communication, focusing on informational use. Moreover, the latest wave of the WVS covers several Asian countries where the survey was conducted in 2012–13. Using the data gathered during that period accounted for not only any upward trend in Internet penetration rates, but also for any after-effects of the widespread adoption of social media among the publics found in the Asian region. In sum, this study will test the robustness of the postulated relationship between technology use and citizen empowerment based on an integrative approach to the effects of the Internet on the opportunity structures of political participation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Unconventional Political Participation

As a key element of a well-functioning democracy, political participation has intrigued scholars from a wide range of disciplines. They have studied the concept by operationalizing the involvement of citizens in actual behaviors such as voting and attending protests. Such activities are indeed meaningful to democracy because, through these actions, citizens are able to affect the political decision-making processes (Dahl, 1998; Dalton, 2002). Of course, such political acts are manifold in their form of participation as well as in their patterns of institutionalization across countries (Verba, Nie, and Kim, 1978; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995).

The conceptualization of political participation in this study concentrates on concrete actions that allow for the direct expression of opinions in political processes that take place outside the institutional field of politics. This mode of political participation is distinct from traditional forms of participation found in election-related activities, such as voting, attending a campaign event or rally, and contacting public officials (Norris, 2002). Rather, the "unconventional" mode of political participation is often realized by protest activities such as signing a petition, attending a peaceful demonstration, or joining in boycotts (Barnes and Kaase, 1979). These activities that are considered "unconventional" enable citizens to publicly deliver their opinions toward the decision-making process, rather than relying on the mediation of the political elite, or leaving the entire process to be orchestrated by them (Delli Carpini, 2004). Certainly, such protest activities involve different risks, costs, and purposes

in a systematic way (Stokeman, 2014). Nevertheless, the "unconventional" forms of political activities have led to a formation of a network among agencies of mobilization. Distinct from traditional, hierarchical agencies of political mobilization, the networked agencies are characterized by their fluid identities and relatively horizontal organization structures (Bennett, 1998; Norris, 2002).

To be sure, protest action is no longer an unconventional phenomenon among Western post-industrial democracies. In these countries, the majority of the population engages increasingly in an emerging repertoire of low-cost, personalized forms of protest action at the expense of membership in traditional agencies of civic engagement and participation in conventional political action (Inglehart and Catterberg, 2002). Yet, in emerging or illiberal democracies, the unconventional forms of political action play a distinctive role in citizen participation. The disaffected or traditionally marginalized civil actors and groups might be not given sufficient opportunities to influence the political processes in the institutional field. The unconventional forms of political action might then be among the few feasible options for making citizen voices heard and participate in the decision-making process. Indeed, protest activities are the most common forms of targeting traditional political institutions, challenging elite-driven political relations and sometimes, even overthrowing dictators (Inglehart 1997). Even in China, where there is effective authoritarian controls, a "bounded" space exists where grassroots mobilization against the local elites regarding many societal problems including environmental issues is allowed as long as it does not provoke the state (Pan 2005).

In East and Southeast Asia, unconventional political participation still has a long way to be normalized (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002). However, with the diffusion of Internet use, it has been theorized that people have an easier access to protest activities, especially those who would have not otherwise been mobilized for an unconventional cause (Lee 2017). To be sure, Norris (2002) notes that the cause of protest politics is situational rather than systematic, in that it is more related to the structure of opportunities to be informed and mobilized by "particular issues, specific events, and the role of leaders" (p. 194). But this view suggests that citizens' participation in protest activities is triggered in reaction to increasing communication opportunities provided by the Internet. And this pattern of mobilization should be distinguished from the conventional mode of political participation that rests on the socio-demographic or attitudinal characteristics of the participants (Jennings and van Deth, 1989).

The emerging repertoires of political action also often cut across national boundaries. The worldwide expansion of NGOs and international organizations for human rights and environmental issues provides a structural opportunity for civil-society groups to protest against the established political systems within a country (Castells, 2008; Diamond, 1994). The patterns of participation in unconventional political activities are therefore relatively less subject to cross-country heterogeneity than are those of conventional action in the Asian political landscape. Based on the assumption that protest activities are part of the emerging repertoire of political participation in the region, the next section addresses individual-level factors of unconventional political activity.

2.2. Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity for Political Participation

Given the individual-level attributes of being or becoming participatory, the literature corroborates the importance of socio-economic status and political interest. Different micro-

level factors are indicative of the varying abilities and motivations that people possess, generating inequalities in political participation. Research has been therefore concerned with different structural conditions among citizens. First, Verba and Nie (1972) emphasized the function of socioeconomic status in shaping the ability and motives necessary to engage in political acts. A better education and higher family-income levels enable people to have more resources such as time, money, and the civic skills necessary for nurturing participatory citizenship (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, 1995; Verba et al., 1995). Gender-related and generational factors also serve as a source of variation in political participation, given their relationship to individuals' socio-economic status (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996).

In addition to socio-demographic variables, political interest has been considered a crucial antecedent to engagement in political behaviors (Delli Carpini, 2004; Verba et al., 1995). Indeed, the psychological approach has traditionally focused on personal attitudinal variables such as an individual's interest in, as well as self-efficacious beliefs about, politics being among the attitudinal determinants of participation in political acts (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei, 1991). In predicting political participation, the relevance of this psychological view as well as the sociological approach should therefore be taken into account.

However, individual ability and motivation are not the whole story. Rather, I assume that unconventional political participation is also affected by the opportunity for communication and association as much as it is determined by the ability and motivation to participate. The increased opportunities for becoming informed and mobilized are also likely to moderate the influence of such resources for participation. For the purpose of this study, therefore, the socio-demographic and psychological factors are to be controlled for rather than investigated.

The literature has shown the importance of having greater opportunities to participate in political action. In line with a neo-Tocquevillian view of civil society, Putnam (2000) put an emphasis on the dense social networks formed by joining a variety of voluntary organizations that enrich democratic citizenship. Moreover, social interaction in such organizations facilitates coordination and communication that are conducive to formation of social capital. Rational choice theorists have been often struggled with a collective action problem in that more resources do not necessarily result in more participation because free riding takes place and it is a way to reduce costs and enjoy benefits of political changes in society at the same time (Olsen, 1972). However, membership in civil-society organizations gives an alternative explanation of how collective action overcomes the free rider problem (Putnam, 2000). Unions, environmental associations, and consumer associations engage their members frequently in petition drives, demonstrations, and boycotts (Stokemer, 2014).

Group membership functions also as an indirect stimulant to participation, because interaction with other members broadens citizens' range of interests and experiences that make social, as well as political, problems more relevant to them(Olsen, 1972; Verba and Nie, 1972). Doing so expands opportunities to not only be recruited and mobilized for political activity directly but also to be informed about and deliberate about issues that elicit psychological orientations toward public life (Calhoun, 1988; Moy and Gastil, 2006). Apart from its relationship with socio-economic status (Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998), therefore, involvement in voluntary associations explains why their members are in a better social-structural position to be politically active (Rogers, Bultena, and Barb, 1975). In the same vein, Pollock (1982) posited that group activity can function as an agent of mobilization and through these activities, people were informed, oriented, and trained to participate in the political domain.

Therefore, it is natural that people with greater involvement in civil-society organizations

have more politically meaningful social networks that support engagement in a wider range of political activities (Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998). The relationship between group membership and political participation has been further found to be robust even in the context of non-political, informal associations (Kwak, Shah, and Holbert, 2004). Is membership in voluntary organizations the only way of increasing the opportunity to be involved in unconventional political action, then? The following section introduces different channels of interpersonal or mediated communication as the opportunity structures of participation in politics.

Active membership in civil-society organizations is not the only opportunity for involvement in unconventional political participation. A rich body of research has put forth the view that interpersonal and mediated communication activities also serve as an important source of opportunity for engagement in action. First, traditional news media offer the opportunity for information-seeking activities that has a positive influence on participation in action (McLeod, Scheufele, and Moy, 1999). Journalism institutions are also influential in orienting their consumers toward public affairs and political issues (Graber, 1988; McLeod et al., 1996). From this viewpoint, the news media is therefore an agent that shapes the opportunity structures of mobilization, especially for those who were not able to become involved in politics through their social relations (Norris, 2000).

However, in opposition to the powerful-effects model, it has been argued that the news media do not transcend limited opportunity structures. This school of thought puts forth a "two-step flow of communication" model instead, with emphasis on a process of social mediation (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). In this process, exchanges of information and opinions play a crucial role in forming cognition patterns, attitudes, and behaviors. Adopting this view, some research has shown that interpersonal communication mediates between news-media use and political participation (Hardy and Scheufele, 2005). The findings suggest that conversations give the opportunity for information use and processing, and enhance attention to traditional news media for the acquisition of the knowledge necessary to be involved in political discussion (Scheufele, 2002). From this perspective, interpersonal and mass-mediated sources of information-seeking activities are in a reciprocal relationship with each other. And the relationship between traditional communication activities is important in understanding the opportunity structures of citizen participation in political action.

Furthermore, the political effects of mass and interpersonal communication have been investigated for their mediating role in forming the causal link that moves from social networks and civil associations to actual political participation (McLeod et al., 1999). The mediating functions of mass and interpersonal communication differ according to the level of information-acquisition and processing which enables citizens to translate their social-structural opportunities into political participation. This integrative approach further highlights the different effects of communication channels on the processes by which social advantages apply to political life. Simply put, citizen participation is related to differential gains not only from mass-mediated and interpersonal communication but also from mass-media channels.

For instance, Putnam (2000) related declining civic engagement to the primacy of television viewership over newspaper readership because television viewing activity itself tends to isolate individual citizens from social interaction. Conversely, newspaper use has been considered distinct from television news use in that the former encourages political learning and elaboration (McLeod et al., 1996; Moy and Gastil, 2006). The different effects of newspaper news and television news are attributed to the greater amount of attention required for reading than for viewing (Guo and Moy, 1998), which suggests their differential media

effects on political engagement, respectively. In response to Putnam's thesis, however, Moy, Scheufele, and Holbert (1999) found that both television and newspapers were conducive to involvement in public life when the measure of the communication variables was focused on attention to hard-news use instead of time spent simply using the media. From this perspective, communication behaviors matter in political participation when people seek informational gratification from their media use (Chaffee and Kanihan, 1997).

Given the increasing use of the Internet, then, a question arises as to how the Internet, as an unprecedented channel of information, influences the opportunity structures of communication. The next section addresses divergent views on the impact of the technology.

2.3. A Link Between Internet Use and Political Participation

There are two major perspectives that find a linkage between the Internet with political participation. In line with mobilization theories, the increasing use of the Internet is viewed as an opportunity to empower civil-society members who are marginalized by traditional systems of political communication (Howard, 2010). Indeed, digital connectivity helps reduce the costs of expressive activity and grassroots organizing (Garrett, 2006). Social media and customized technologies facilitate the emergence and development of segmented but issue-based publics in relation to the increasing primacy of personalization and consumerism over collectivism and ideological commitments in the field of politics (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). This organizing capacity of the technology means that ordinary citizens have a low-cost channel to influence decision-makers by expressing opinions via a variety of Web-based tools such as email, bulletin boards, and e-petitions (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010). Also, purpose-driven tech-savvy activists are given the chance to recruit and mobilize ordinary citizens without commitment to traditional politics through social media that enable them to target the disaffected and the like-minded (Howard and Hussain, 2013; Shirky, 2011). From this perspective, the diffusion of social media has the potential to decentralize the opportunity structures for civil-society organizations, allowing them to organize collective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

The widespread expansion of digital connectivity has not just drawn academic attention to its political capacity for grassroots mobilization. It has also sparked interest in its potential for a horizontal flow of alternative information for protest politics. The Internet enables political communication and civic association to take place in a distinct way from those based on traditional organizations and social relations: it is a structural opportunity for dissident voices to be heard without having to resort to traditional organizations and agencies shaping public discourse (Shirky, 2011). This horizontal flow of alternative information is amplified in social-media services such as Twitter, which has allowed individual bloggers and activists with large networks, not necessarily traditional news outlets, to be producers and disseminators of contentious information during events such as the Arab Spring (Howard, 2010; Lotan et al., 2011). In this view, Lee (2017) found that the Asian Internet space has had differential effects on politics: Internet use is positively associated with unconventional forms of political action, but not with conventional action such as election-related activities.

The mobilizing potential of Internet use for protest politics also echoes the communication-mediation model: engagement in interpersonal reflection and discussion promotes political participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Hardy and Scheufele, 2005; Scheufele, 2002). Moreover, Valenzuela (2013) found out that the positive association between social media use and protest behavior is mediated by finding information that

motivates mobilization and expressing political opinions through social media. The rapidly growing use of social media, therefore, expands the opportunities for civic messaging and political discourse to engage more publics than before. This citizen-driven, communication-mediation process is expected to enhance active citizenship and participatory behaviors.

Of course, the reduced costs of information do not necessarily empower civil-society voices. The existing disparity between the information-rich and the information-poor may endure on despite the increased opportunities to become involved in political action. Since individual users are given greater control over what they do with the Internet, their civic skills and motivation to use the opportunity for a political purpose should matter. Even if equal Internet access occurs, a gap in political participation is thus posited between the politically interested and the less interested (Bimber, 2003; Xenos and Moy, 2007), as well as between the socio-economically advantaged and their counterparts (Hargittai and Walejko, 2008).

In light of reinforcement theories, unconventional political participation may not transcend existing opportunity structures, even in the new information environment. To be sure, it is certain that technology diffusion has decentralized flows of information and reduced the costs of participation. But the material realization of a political change is not independent of traditional systems of political communication. Although protest activities are assumed to be predicted more by the opportunity for mobilization than by socio-economic and attitudinal characteristics, technology diffusion may reinforce the agency of civil-society organizations and news media. That is to say, if reinforcement occurs, Internet users' participation in unconventional forms of political action will be ascribed to traditional, rather than new channels of information and association opportunities.

3. HYPOTHESES

Drawing on the above theories, two hypotheses help explain the relationship between the Internet and political participation in the context of East and Southeast Asia. First, in line with mobilization theories, I hypothesize that unconventional political participation is encouraged by Internet use. Technology diffusion expands the opportunity to be involved in unconventional forms of political action in an unprecedented way, going beyond the restrictions posed by the disparity in socioeconomic, psychological, and communicative conditions among people living in the Asian countries. In other words, for those who actively seek information from the Internet, technology helps reduce communication and networking costs and could consequentially support citizen empowerment. Furthermore, technological potential will be strongly manifested by the prevalent use of social networking services via Internet-accessible mobile phones across the region. Accordingly, I postulate:

> H1: If people living in Asian countries use online information sources more frequently, then they will be more likely to engage in unconventional political participation.

But reinforcement theorists may argue that increased opportunities of information use and processing do not necessarily empower political action that takes place outside traditional politics. Instead, from their perspective, patterns of digitally enabled political participation merely mirror pre-existing inequalities in political involvement, despite the growth of, and increasing access to, technology. On the Internet, the reduced cost of information reduces,

in turn, somewhat ironically, the cost incurred by avoiding opportunities to be involved in political matters. Technology diffusion may thus widen, rather than bridge, the gap in the participation levels of between that of those who benefit from the existing opportunity structures of political communication and that of those who do not.

However, the mobilization hypothesis maintains that the increased opportunities to take part in unconventional forms of political action are provided disproportionately to those who lack the opportunities to be engaged through voluntary organizations, social networks, or news media. In other words, the extent of the mobilizing impact of technology would be manifested at a lower level among those who are equipped with such traditional opportunities of communication and association. In light of this reasoning, the second hypothesis is proposed:

> H2: The positive relationship between Internet use and unconventional political participation will decrease among those who are provided with traditional opportunities of communication and association.

4. METHOD

4.1. Data

To test for the hypotheses, this study makes use of the World Values Survey (WVS), which has published cross-national survey data on the public's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in seven Asian countries of interest. The countries are Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam. For these countries, to account for the temporal effects of technology diffusion, two waves of WVS data were used: 2005–07 (wave 5) and 2010–13 (wave 6). The countries covered in both survey waves are South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand. The data on Indonesia and Vietnam were available only in wave 5, and the Philippines only in wave 6. As a result, I used pooled data across the seven Asian countries in each of the WVS waves while controlling for country fixed effects.

The WVS data sets were gathered by a regional network of research teams, which carried out face-to-face interviews with nationally representative samples of voting-age adults (17–19 years old and above). The sample size for each country ranged from 1,200 to 2,015 respondents.[1] Based on the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) standards, the calculated response rates ranged from 28.4% to 89.9% (AAPOR, 2006).

4.2. Dependent Variable

As a dependent variable, unconventional political participation was operationalized by creating a binary variable that takes a value of '1' if the respondent has done any protest activity or more in the last five years (wave 5) or in the last year (wave 6), and '0' otherwise. Out of a battery of survey questions available from the WVS dataset, four items were

[1] In WVS wave 5, the sample sizes were 2,015 for Indonesia, 1,201 for Malaysia, 1,534 for Thailand, 1,227 for Taiwan, 1,200 for South Korea, and 1,495 for Vietnam. In WVS wave 6, the sample sizes were 1,300 for Malaysia, 1,200 for The Philippines, 1,200 for Thailand, 1,238 for Taiwan, and 1,200 for South Korea.

used to distinguish those who signed a petition, joined in a boycott, attended a peaceful demonstration, and joined in any other act of protest. The wave-5 data identified 19.10% of the respondents (N = 1,642) who reported having done any form of protest activities (coded as '1') and 80.90% of them were coded as '0' (N = 6,953). In the wave-6 data, 14.10% of the respondents were coded as '1' (N = 865) because they reported having done at least one of the activities, while 86.31% of them were coded as '0' (N = 5,269).

4.3. Independent Variables

The independent variables included a series of communication variables from the WVS data. The WVS provided a battery of items to measure the frequency of different information-seeking activities from which people learned what was going on in their country and the world. Among them, four measures were included to tap the use of information "last week" (wave 5) or "weekly" (wave 6) from interpersonal conversations, news broadcasts, daily newspapers, and the Internet (including email). Using these items, a series of information-seeking variables was created to dichotomize the respondents into those who obtained information from each of the sources at least once a week and those who did so less frequently or not at all. The news-broadcast variable came from respondent reports of using news broadcasts on radio or television at least once week. The newspaper variable and interpersonal-conversation variable derived from items in daily newspapers and conversations with friends or colleagues, respectively. The Internet-use variable was based on the measure of information-seeking via the Internet or e-mail.

In addition to information-seeking behaviors, individuals' social associations were also included to account for the mobilizing opportunity for communication and association. Using a battery of relevant items, I created the organizational-membership variable, which dichotomized respondents who reported active membership in any of voluntary organizations and those who did not. The organizations included: (a) church or religious organizations, (b) sports or recreational organizations, (c) art, music, or educational organizations, (d) labor unions, (e) political parties, (f) environmental organizations, (g) professional organizations, (h) humanitarian or charitable organizations, and (i) any others. Cronbach's alphas of the index were .69 and .74 for the items derived from Wave 5 and Wave 6 data, respectively.

Political interest was also taken into account to control for its presumable influence not only on information-seeking but also on political participation. The variable made use of a survey item that asked respondents how interested they would say they were in politics, ranging from "not at all interested" to "very interested" (4-point scale).[2] Finally, socio-economic status was controlled for, including gender, age, and level of education (9-point scale) as well as household-income levels (10-point scale). Table 1 offers the descriptive summaries of the independent variables.

[2] As noted by Niemi et al. (1991), political self-efficacy is also an important motivation for participation in politics because it rewards and reinforces these kinds of behaviors. However, my research design rested on secondary data analysis using WVS waves 5 and 6 that did not provide relevant items to measure the variable. The regression results should be therefore interpreted with caution.

Table 1. Descriptive Summaries of Pooled Data on Independent Variables

Variable	Definition	2005–07		2010–13	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age	Respondent's age	39.78	15.35	43.26	15.02
Education	1 = No formal education, 9 = University–level education	5.72	2.42	5.91	2.45
Income	1 = Lowest step, 10 = Highest step	5.26	1.88	4.93	2.16
Political interest	4 = Very interested, 1 = Not at all interested	2.48	0.90	2.45	0.91
Variable	Definition	Proportion		Proportion	
Gender	1 = Male, 2 = Female	1 = 50.62% 2 = 49.38%		1 = 50.18% 2 = 49.82%	
Organizational membership	Active membership in any voluntary organization	No = 61.28% Yes = 38.72%		No = 56.14% Yes = 43.86%	
Interpersonal conversation	Obtain information at least weekly from conversations with friends or colleagues	No = 26.32% Yes = 73.68%		No = 26.25% Yes = 73.75%	
Newspaper	Obtain information at least weekly from daily newspaper	No = 41.53% Yes = 58.47%		No = 39.58% Yes = 60.42%	
News broadcasts	Obtain information at least weekly from TV or radio news	No = 7.98% Yes = 92.02%		No = 3.58% Yes = 96.42%	
Internet use	Obtain information at least weekly from the Internet or e-mail	No = 71.91% Yes = 28.09%		No = 55.60% Yes = 44.40%	

Data source: WVS, waves 5 and 6.

4.4. Analytic Methods

To examine the hypotheses, multiple logistic regression models were run on each of the fifth and sixth waves of the WVS data set for the Asian countries. Given cross-country heterogeneity of variance in political participation, each wave model included country fixed effects. Thus, each country in the model had its own intercept. Also, although the binary predictors were dummy-coded, the other predictors were centered and scaled by subtracting the country-specific means and dividing by the country-specific standard deviations. Doing so put the independent variables on a comparable scale within each country. Using the cross-national survey data, both between- and within-country weights were taken into consideration. In using politically relevant items, response rates were assumed to differ between political institutions and cultures assurvey weighting could not be ignored as theircontext differed(?).

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models Predicting Unconventional Political Participation

Variables	2005–07	2010–13
Sociological		
Gender (Female)	–0.24*** (.79)	–0.12# (.88)
Age	–0.11** (.90)	0.00 (1.00)
Education	0.12** (1.12)	0.26*** (1.29)
Income	–0.08** (.92)	–0.04 (.96)
Psychological		
Political interest	0.40*** (1.49)	0.38*** (1.47)
McFadden pseudo (%)	10.01	6.67
Mobilizing		
Organizational Membership	0.68*** (1.98)	0.38*** (1.46)
News Broadcasts	–0.10 (.91)	–0.40* (.67)
Newspaper	0.19** (1.21)	0.13 (1.13)
Interpersonal Conversation	0.16# (1.17)	0.30** (1.35)
Internet Use	0.37*** (1.45)	0.54*** (1.72)
Incremental (%)	6.86	5.03
Country fixed effects		
Vietnam	Ref. category	N.A.
Malaysia	0.52** (1.68)	Ref. category
Thailand	0.63*** (1.88)	1.75*** (5.73)
Taiwan	0.79*** (2.20)	0.97*** (2.63)
Indonesia	1.20*** (3.33)	N.A.
The Philippines	N.A.	1.32*** (3.75)
South Korea	2.11*** (8.25)	1.99*** (7.30)
Incremental (%)	4.14	3.58
Final McFadden pseudo (%)	21.01	15.28
N	8,132	5,882

Note: Entries are final standardized logit regression coefficients, with odds-ratios in parentheses.
# p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.
Source: Author's calculations based on WVS, waves 5 and 6.

5. RESULTS

Table 2 shows the results of the logistic regression model to predict the likelihood of unconventional political participation in each wave. The model explains 21.01% and 15.28% of the variance in the outcome variable of wave 5 (2005–07) and wave 6 (2010–13), respectively. Among the independent variables, the country-fixed effects have larger coefficients than those of individual-level predictors. When Vietnam in wave 5 and

Malaysia in wave 6 are set as reference groups, people in other countries have much larger probabilities of being involved in unconventional political actions beyond their individual-level characteristics. For example, respondents in South Korea show that there is an increased likelihood of participation by 825% in wave 5 and 730% in wave 6 compared with those in the reference countries. In the regional context, a cross-country difference is a crucial factor of citizen participation in protest action.

Notwithstanding the heterogeneity, individual-level characteristics have significant effects on unconventional political participation across the countries. First, socio-demographic and political-interest variables have significant effects on the participation. The ability and motivation model explains 10.01% and 6.67% of the variance in the outcome variable of wave 5 (2005–07) and wave 6 (2010–13), respectively. Yet, beyond the socio-demographics and political interest, the opportunity for communication and association accounts for 6.86% and 5.03% of the variance in unconventional political participation in each wave model. This opportunity block explains the variance to a greater extent than the block of country-fixed effects does in both survey periods. In East and Southeast Asia, individuals' unconventional political participation is significantly influenced by their opportunity structures of information and mobilization. This causal mechanism goes beyond the cross-country differences in macro-level factors such as democratic institutions, political cultures, and civil-society development.

To be sure, there are changes in significant predictors of the participation between survey waves. In wave 5, being involved in unconventional action is predicted by being male, of younger age, having a lower level of household income, and information-seeking via daily newspapers. In wave 6, the variables turn out to be insignificant. At the same time, interpersonal conversation emerges as a positive predictor, whereas the use of news broadcasts is a negative predictor. However, in both wave models, a higher level of education, greater political interest, membership in a voluntary organization, and informational Internet use are significantly associated with unconventional political participation.

The first hypothesis (H1) was that, if people living in the Asian countries used the Internet as an information source, then they would be involved in unconventional political participation to a greater extent than low Internet users would. As shown in Table 2, Internet use is positively associated with participation in both wave models. During the period of 2005–07, the informational use of the Internet or email generates a 45% increase in the likelihood of taking any form of unconventional political action, given that all other variables are held constant. During the period of 2010–13, the increase rate becomes 72%. In the model, the Internet use variable has the largest coefficient among the individual-level variables to predict unconventional political participation. Thus, the data support H1.

The second hypothesis (H2) was that, if Asian Internet users were involved in unconventional political action to a greater extent than low users were, then participation would accelerate among those who were detached from traditional communication channels. For this hypothesis, the logistic regression model in each wave was employed including interaction terms. Each wave model was used to examine whether the relationship between informational Internet use and unconventional political participation was contingent on the social association, news-broadcast, newspaper, and interpersonal-conversation variables. The results are shown in Table 3.

The interaction models in both waves bring about an improvement in accounting for the variance in the outcome variable. Compared with the baseline model, the inclusion of the four interaction terms leads to 0.14% and 0.29% increases in the explanatory power of the

Table 3. Interaction Models Predicting Unconventional Political Participation

Variable	2005–07		2010–13	
McFadden pseudo of prior blocks *(%)*	21.02		15.28	
Main Effects of Mobilizing Variables				
Organizational Membership	0.56***	(1.75)	0.66***	(1.94)
Newspaper	0.26**	(1.29)	0.29**	(1.34)
News Broadcasts	0.06	(.94)	0.46*	(.63)
Interpersonal Conversation	0.15	(1.17)	0.23*	(1.26)
Internet Use	0.43	(1.53)	0.80*	(2.23)
Interaction Terms				
Internet Use × Organizational Membership	0.38**	(1.46)	0.54***	(.58)
Internet Use × News Broadcasts	0.11	(.90)	0.13	(1.14)
Internet Use × Newspaper	0.30#	(.74)	0.34*	(.71)
Internet Use × Interpersonal Conversation	0.05	(1.05)	0.16	(1.17)
Final McFadden pseudo (%)	21.16		15.57	

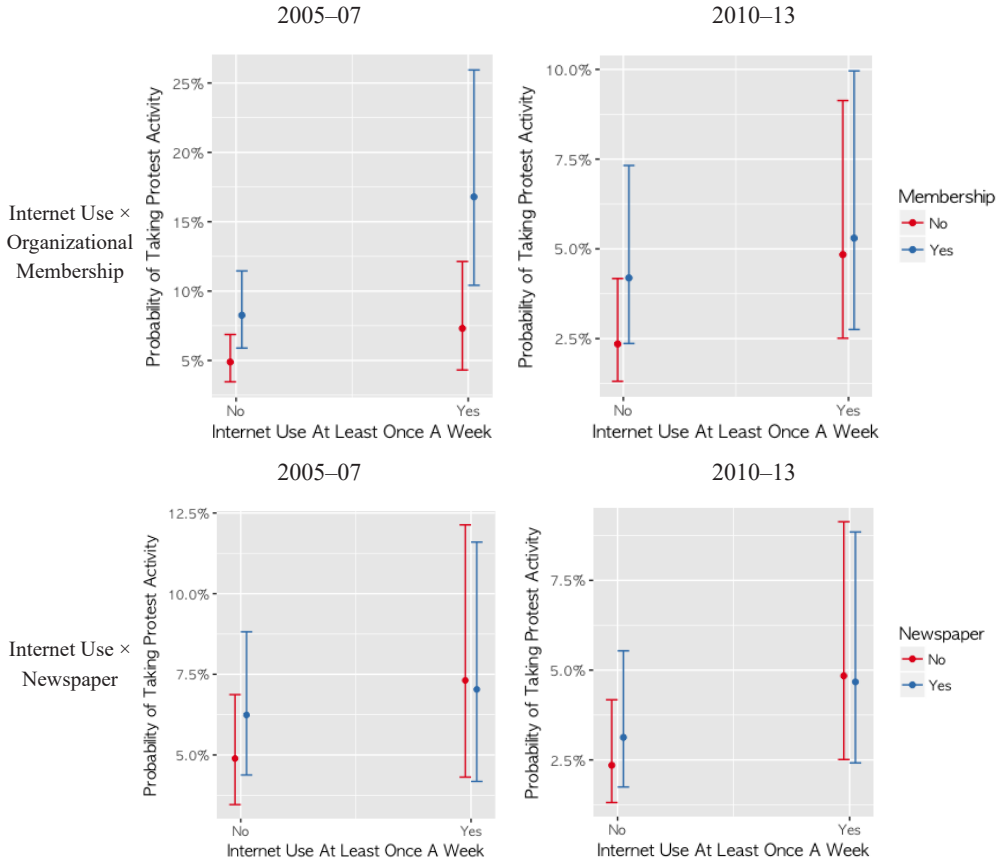
Note: Entries are standardized logit regression coefficients, with odds-ratios in parentheses, after controlling for variables in interaction terms.
# p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
Source: Author's calculations based on WVS, waves 5 and 6

wave 5 and wave 6 models, respectively. The models also explicate the relationships between Internet use and unconventional political participation, which are contingent not only on social association but also on newspaper use. For the period 2005–07, informational use of online sources lacks a significant main effect on participation when its interaction with social association is included. The positive coefficient of the interaction term is significant at a 99% confidence level, suggesting that the political impact of Internet use is only manifested among those who belong to a voluntary organization. To put it in another way, technology accelerates the influence of social association on participation in action by 46%.[3] Meanwhile, without such an organization, informational Internet use is an irrelevant activity for unconventional political participation (see the top-left plot in Figure 1).

The contingent relationship between Internet use and social association changes in the wave 6 data. During the period 2010–13, informational use of the Internet or email is positively associated with unconventional political participation above and beyond the effects of the interaction terms. More importantly, as seen in the top-right plot of Figure 1, the

[3] In this study, the coefficients in a logistic regression model were interpreted using their odds ratios. In doing so, the log odds for an interaction term of Internet use by organizational membership in wave 5 was calculated by two odds ratios: for those who do not use the Internet even once a week, the odds ratio is exp(0.56) = 1.75 for belonging to any organization and the odds ratio for those who sue the Internet at least once a week is exp(0.56 + 0.38) = 2.56 for belonging to any organization. The ratio of these two odds ratios (Internet use over nonuse) yields the exponentiated coefficient for the interaction term of Internet use by organizational membership: 2.56/1.75 = exp(0.38) = 1.46.

Figure 1. Relationship Between Internet use and Unconventional Political Participation by Organizational Membership and Newspaper Use



Source: Author's illustrations using WVS waves 5 and 6

relationship becomes stronger among those who do not belong to any volunteer organization. The negative co-efficient of the interaction term means that the effects of Internet use as an information source on participation decrease by 42% when people are active members of any voluntary organization.[4] Without membership in civil-society organizations, Internet use becomes more important for participating in protest activities. In other words, the recent mobilization of protest action relies more on technological affordances for organizing and coordinating in the absence of the agency of traditional organizations. The finding suggests that the expansion of social-networking services empowers citizens who are otherwise marginalized from civil-society organizations. Citizen empowerment takes place in the non-traditional opportunity structures and in the non-institutional field of politics.

In addition, the results of the interaction model in Table 3 show that the impact of Internet use is moderated by using daily newspapers. Note that the newspaper variable has a

[4] As described above, the odds ratio for the interaction term of Internet use by organizational membership in wave 6 turns out to be 0.58.

positive relationship with the participation variable at a 99% confidence level in both wave models. Among those who use the Internet or email for information-seeking, however, the effects decrease by 26% in wave 5 at a 90% confidence level and 29% in wave 6 at a 99% confidence level. The results indicate that the positive relationship between Internet use and political participation diminishes as daily newspapers serve as an information source (see the bottom plots in Figure 1). In other words, the agency of the information technology as a channel of political mobilization increases among those who are detached from newspapers as a traditional information source. The data substantiate the view of the Internet as a new channel of political communication and association that empowers the marginalized in the existing opportunity structures. The findings lend support to H2.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings provided some implications for understanding the impact of technology diffusion on the landscape of political participation in East and Southeast Asia. First, the results show that, when people obtain information from the Internet or email, their likelihood of participation in unconventional forms of political action increases. The relationship is consistent between both WVS survey waves: the mid-2000s and the early 2010s. Also, in the latter period, informational Internet use has a robust impact on political participation, more than any other individual-level predictor of action. Along with the widespread adoption of social media, the Internet is now an essential tool of political mobilization in the Asian region.

Second, the results of the interaction effects suggest that technology diffusion echoes mobilization theories in which the Internet empowers those who lack conventional opportunities for communication and association. It is interesting that in the mid-2000s the mobilizing capacity of Internet use was reinforced among those who were already active members of such civil-society groups. However, the Asian Internet in the early 2010s had become a channel of mobilizing protest action to a greater extent among those are detached from involvement in traditional social or civic organizations, as well as following hard-news media. The between-wave difference points out that the increasing adoption of social media has a significant impact on the opportunity structures of participation that takes place outside the institutional field of politics in Asia.

In many Asian countries, traditional news outlets have been subject to the influence of governments who seek to control dissident voices and civil-society groups. The hierarchical structure of mainstream media is the key to the control of the state over the production and distribution of politically relevant content. Therefore, it should not be surprising that traditional channels of communication are limited in the opportunity structures of political action. To be sure, newspaper use and interpersonal conversation allow for active information-seeking among those who are involved in civil-society groups and thus civically or politically motivated.

In contrast, the diffusion of the Internet provides an unprecedented opportunity for people to experience an alternative channel of communication and association. On the Web, the decentralized structure of information flows spurs individuals to experience a plurality of citizen voices that would otherwise be tamed or manipulated by the political elite. This technological capacity had once been subsumed under traditional systems of political communication. As a result, the already engaged benefited more from the technology than

the disengaged for active information-seeking and participation in political action. However, the results suggest that the Internet empowers the disadvantaged in traditional systems of communication when mobilizing collective action. The change is in relation to the widespread expansion of cheap mobile devices and digital social networks. Civil activists are now keen to reach and mobilize their like-minded supports online in an effective and efficient way, and are adept at it (Howard and Hussain, 2013). This trend facilitates the development of online civil society into an agent of civic and political action. Accordingly, when people seek information from the new communication channel, they are also involved in network-based opportunities for political participation.

As the technology-diffusion trend cuts across socio-structural divides within as well as between Asian countries, its mobilizing capacity for action has begun to transcend the existing disparity in mobilizing resources. Digital tools are particularly effective in infusing people with a sense of community (Garrett, 2006), affording the organized relationships that are necessary for political action (Harlow and Harp, 2012). In this sense, digitally enabled mobilization is distinct from traditional means of organization, on which people have previously relied to engage in political action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Indeed, when unconventional action occurs in the Asian context, it becomes more and more apparent that participants are neither committed to civil-society organizations nor are necessarily politically motivated. They are, rather, rooted in online communities, informed by bloggers and other online-based writers, and coordinated through social networking tools. Such loosely-organized but network-based protests are exemplified by recent cases such as the 2008 anti-beef import demonstrations in South Korea and the 2014 Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong.

One important limitation that needs to be addressed here is the unavailability of data measuring individuals' use of social networking services for social interaction, and testing its impact on political participation. This is relevant to the technological potential for mobilizing young people, who again tend to increasingly shun traditional news outlets as well as withdraw from traditional voluntary organizations. Indeed, Bakker and de Vreese (2011) found that, above and beyond informational-media use, the socializing activities of youth online were related to their unconventional forms of political participation in the Netherlands. In the same vein, along with their rapid adoption of social media, younger people living in Asia may have a narrowing gap in their opportunities to be informed and mobilized for action.

In addition, it is still debatable whether digital network connectivity complements a pre-existing information gap based on socio-economic inequality among publics in East and Southeast Asia. Particularly, Deibert et al. (2012) are skeptical about democratization of Internet access for activism because technology adoption can also be co-opted for manipulating public opinion, discrediting alternative voices, and marginalizing dissent. Certainly, Lee (2015) found that the technology-diffusion trend cuts across socio-structural divides within and between Asian countries so that the mobilizing capacity of social media use for activism has begun to empower those who would have not be engaged otherwise. Therefore, future studies should address the increasing role of social-media use in the information gap that may lead to a different picture of contemporary Asian politics.

Mobilization and reinforcement are not necessarily mutually exclusive phenomena, but rather, are both relevant to the understanding of political engagement in a new system of information-flows. Indeed, reinforcement theories help to elucidate structural inequality in the traditional forms of political action. This inequality mirrors social and attitudinal structures

in public involvement, which are also influential in shaping communication opportunities for participation. Nevertheless, mobilization theories are not wrong. Rather, their perspective explains why unconventional forms of political participation are increasingly emerging in Asian countries. The diffusion of the Internet and social media is bringing about a significant change in the opportunity structures of protest action. With the expansion of digital connectivity, civil-society members are now afforded new "networks of recruitment" in support of social mobilization (Howard, 2010; Verba et al., 1995).

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Shin Haeng Lee, Assistant Professor, Division of International Studies, Sejong University, 209 Neungdong-ro, Gwangjin-gu, Seoul, 05006, Korea, Tel: +82-2-6935-2634, E-mail: shinlee@sejong.ac.kr

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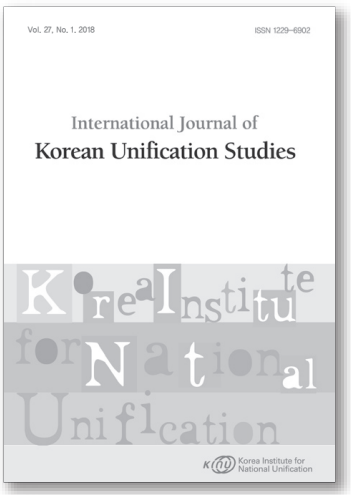

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