Electronic Governance, Political Participation and Virtual Community: Korea and UK Compared in Political Context

Seung-Yong Uhm and Rod Hague

Paper presented at the

European Consortium for Political Research

Joint Sessions of Workshops

Workshop on:
“Electronic Democracy: Mobilisation, Organisation and Participation via new ICTs”

Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Grenoble,
France
6 - 11 April 2001
Abstract
This paper examines the unfolding impact of the Internet on politics and government in Korea and Britain. While part of an ongoing research project, and not attempting a fully systematic comparison at this time, the paper explores available evidence about the scale and impact of online public participation, particularly in regard to major government websites in the two countries. It also considers government strategy for CIT, especially concerning electronic governance, and argues that both Britain and Korea have developed broadly similar and essentially top-down strategies, with detailed differences of implementation and some significant differences of emphasis. The Korean strategy encourages unmoderated online participation by the public, whereas the British approach seeks to foster participation in policy consultation in a more structured way. The paper then explores aspects of socio-political choice regarding CIT, utilising the theoretical perspective of the political opportunity structure to throw light on government’s informal dealing with citizen online participation and the adoption of Internet websites by members of the national legislature in the two countries.

Introduction

The new technology of the Internet not only allows more people to articulate interests quickly and conveniently and mobilise support for them at low cost, but also enables government to facilitate better public services. Thus, in this sense, we can say that electronic democracy – or at least electronic governance - is just around the corner. The British government, for instance, has declared intent to create a new form of governance, befitting the information era. All ministries and governmental agencies have set up intranets and their own websites. In Korea, too, we see a sharp increase in networking within and between government ministries, in the volume and quality of public information, and in public usage. In this sense, then, Korea is also in fast transition toward electronic governance. The now rapid political adoption of the Internet, however, raises numerous questions. What implications does it have for existing representative democracy? Will the Internet modify current political processes, that is, what changes are now made likely by Internet use? Are there cross-national variations in terms of how the Internet is being used politically, just as other media have been used in different ways in different countries? To answer these and other questions requires macro and long-term perspectives. This paper attempts a more limited objective, by addressing the last two questions through comparing the political usages of the Internet in Korea and the UK.

Basically, this paper starts by acknowledging both technological impact and socio-political choice. However, it leaves aside consideration of changes in political community
caused by the technological factors inherent in the Internet. Instead, it puts emphasis on how different political contexts shape modes of political usage of the Internet. The two countries, Korea and the UK, arguably provide a good basis for comparison. First, the computer information infrastructure of both countries is at almost the same stage of development. For example, according to a report published by the Office of National Statistics in the Britain, 20.4 million adults in Britain are currently using the Internet, comprising 45% of its whole population (http://www.ons.gov.uk), whereas 19.04 million Koreans, which is 43% of the population, have accessed the Internet (Korea Network Information Centre, December 2000, http://www.nic.ne.kr, http://www.nua.ie/survey/). In other ways, however, the two countries contrast. While Korea is a late-developing country, both in terms of wealth creation and political democracy, the technological transformation of its society is now proceeding rapidly. The UK, still often regarded as a model of parliamentary democracy polished over many decades, evinces a more cautious attitude toward fully embracing new technologies, both socially and industrially. The governments of both countries are pursuing broadly similar national IT strategies, including electronic governance, with detailed differences in implementation (discussed below).

While much of our research programme remains to be done, this paper is an initial exploration of the complex relationship between political structure and the emergence and widespread adoption of a new technology. However, it deals with our central focus, on the interaction between government strategy for IT and the citizen’s online movement. In particular, our interest lies in how different political contexts in the two countries shape government responses as well as modes of citizen’s participation in online political activities. In our analysis, we adopt two theoretical frameworks to explain the changes in citizen’s political participation online and the changes in the political opportunity of their online political engagement. The former is closely associated with the three aspects of political participation identified by Parry (1972), while the latter is about specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of social movements in some contexts while constraining them in others (Kitschelt, 1986).

The hypothesis is that the Internet affects the mode, frequency, and quality of citizen’s participation, causing changes in political institutional structure, governmental procedures and responses, and the configuration of political power. However, different institutional structures and differing governmental policies and procedures result in different levels of expectations. In Part I, a framework will be set out based on two relevant theories relating to political participation and the political opportunity structure. Part II is intended to present and interpret
data for Korea and Britain in terms of the theoretical framework developed in Part I.

Part I: Virtual Political Participation and the Political Opportunity Structure

Citizen and Government Meet together on the Net

Discussion of politics and the Internet began from the perspective of its potentially revolutionary impact of “cyberpolitics” on the structures of representative democracy (Tofler 1980; Negroponte 1995; Grossman 1995). Less visionary and more realistic accounts then emerged as to how the Internet is actually being applied within current political processes (Norris, 1999; Bimber, 1997). Widespread use of the Internet for political purposes is, nonetheless, held to correlate positively with civic engagement by way of a ‘virtuous circle’ (Norris 1999, 2000). While some authors thus argue that the Internet will encourage more people to be politically motivated in some way, other commentators remain sceptical (Margolis and Resnick 2000). Complex causal relationships are likely to be involved here, but the evidence gathered in the course of our research for this paper leans towards the ‘virtuous circle’ thesis, at least as applied to Korea. While only a small proportion of Korean users regularly surf the Internet for political information, many commercial portal sites not only provide political news but also conduct online polling, much of which is about political issues. Through such encounters, even the politically uninterested become exposed to political information and are presented with opportunities to become involved in political activities of some type. As some analysts suggest, those who obtain political information and participate in online political discussion become more knowledgeable about political issues, and are more likely to participate in politics, e.g. to vote, than those not going online (Davis 1999, Norris 2000). A survey (Kim and Yoon 2000) conducted in Korea shows that about 79% of those visiting political websites at least 5 times during the campaign season participated in voting in the Korean 2000 General Election. This figure is considerably higher than the national average voting rate, 57%, and higher still compared with a 50%. voting rate among those who have never gone online.

It is now clearly apparent that the Net provides politicians and citizens with a more effective channel to contact each other than older media like TV or newspaper. Once on the Net, individual voices that otherwise have not been heard can not only come to public notice relatively easily but also in some cases gain enough public support for policy-makers to take them into account. What aspects of the Internet are enabling these changes? How and where are these changing processes taking place? Is a new relationship between citizen and governments
becoming established on the Net, and how is this linked to the ‘real’, off-line world? To address these questions fully is beyond the scope of this paper, but we can initially identify a new conceptual aggregation of people, the ‘virtual community’, characterised by Bimber (1998) as “more chaotic” than the off-line world, and with an “unpredictable flow of information”. Foster (1997) has argued that “a new social process” is at work. While some authors distrust the notion of ‘virtual community’, this paper argues that they can and do develop on the Internet. Use of the Internet for political purposes can be adequately explained in terms of the uses and gratification model in political communication; people use the Internet for the gratification(s) sought and to pursue the expectations they have arising from their political purpose (McLeod and Becker, 1983). We would argue, furthermore, that people are drawn to use the Internet for political activities because, from a political economy perspective, they are induced by the high efficiency and low marginal cost of participation. In this, we follow Bonchek’s (1995) argument that the Internet reduces the costs of communication, coordination, and information. Hence, the Internet should contribute to group formation, as well as to the efficacy and efficiency of activity to recruit and retain membership.

Even if not determinative, communication structure is a key factor in shaping modes of political participation (Arterton 1987). More specifically, the range of media available for political communication affects not only the mode of political participation, but also its frequency and quality. In these respects, we should not understate the advent of the Internet, despite the case made by Margolis and Resnick (2000) that the Internet has become ‘politically normalised’. First, the Internet enables citizens in virtual communities to benefit from more interactive, more frequent, and arguably more effective ways of political participation. Second, political institutions are also affected by the adaptation of the Internet; for example, more decentralized organisation, more horizontal expansion, or more channels for direct democracy. Thirdly, governmental procedures to deal with citizen inputs, demand and support (Easton, 1971; 1989), become modified by the new communication environment. Fourthly, the parties and interest groups go online, representing and mediating citizen interests as well as seeking to build their political capacity, electorally and otherwise. The effects of the Internet, in short, on both the input and output sides of the political system, may be cumulatively greater than those of other media technologies.

**Political Participation Online**

Political participation is the involvement of the individual, in various ways and levels in the political process, ranging from complete non-involvement to the holding of political office
(Rush, 1992). A hierarchy of political participation based on traditional communication structures may be modified on the net: a quantified model of political participation will be furthered through a survey in Korea and the UK. As in the off-line political process, political participation on the net requires *motivation* and *capacity* as main factors determining the level of participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). Higher level involvement in the hierarchy of political participation requires stronger motivation and more capability. Online political activity requires expenditure on IT equipment (by an individual or organisation) and the acquisition of sufficient skill to be able to undertake the activities desired, whether simply to use email or construct an interactive website. There are also outlays of time, CIT running costs and the opportunity cost of foregoing other activities. Other things being equal, strongly motivated individuals will invest the initial time and effort to acquire the skills needed for online participation. But individuals are likely to acquire most of the necessary skills through other, generally more prevalent, forms of Internet and IT usage. So even relatively weakly motivated individuals may, in fact, possess the skills for online political participation. Once appropriate skills are acquired, those with stronger motives would be expected to select more time- and cost-effective options in the mode of participation, and to go online more frequently where this meets the purpose in mind. From a political economy perspective, the Internet reduces the transaction costs of political involvement for a given level of motivation. Once Internet access becomes socially widespread, it facilitates larger scale political participation than traditional channels of communication.

Considering political participation, the useful discussion by Parry (1972) categorises it under three main aspects: the *mode* of participation, its *intensity*, and its *quality*. The “mode” of participation refers to the form it takes, and whether it is formal or informal. He argues that the mode will vary according to the opportunity, level of interest, the resources available to the individual, and prevailing attitudes towards participation in the society concerned, notably whether it is encouraged or discouraged. “Intensity” seeks to measure how many individuals participate in particular political activities and how often they do so, which also is likely to vary according to opportunities and resources. “Quality” is concerned with the degree of effectiveness achieved by participation, seeking to measure its impact on those wielding power and on policy-making. The quality of political participation is also influenced by opportunities and resources, and varies from case to case.

First, what *modes* of political participation are available? Many typologies have been attempted (see, for example, Arterton, 1978; Davis, 1999), but in this paper we propose a relatively simple categorization in terms of *motivation* (an individual’s reason for undertaking political activity,
whether for use or gratification) and cost (the actual or expected outlays of money, time, and skill, to achieve the intended outcome).

- **Consumption** of political information and public services is the most moderate online involvement in political activities. It does not necessarily require higher level of motivation, that is, such activities can be carried out through individuals attending to their daily needs, or even in “more accidental than purposive” ways (Norris, 1999a). However, consumption activities are important because, in performing them, individuals cross the threshold of political socialization, even those who normally consider themselves socially or psychologically remote from political issues.

- **Interest articulation** involves types of activities requiring relatively high motivation and opportunity cost, like sending e-mail to politicians or government officials, or posting a political message on a bulletin board. Although requiring relatively high motivation these activities often relate to protecting personal interest, directly or indirectly, and thus motivation may well be strong. In contrast, the opportunity cost varies according to, for example, the degree of urgency involved or the specific political (rather than technological) difficulties facing the individual in the effort to protect personal interest or promote personal values. It seems plausible that in the US, for example, Internet-based communication is now on a par with the phone, fax or letter as a medium of direct interest articulation between citizens and government.

- In contrast, **Support** includes such activities as contributing online to a politician’s fund raising. The distinction between support and interest articulation blurs somewhat, but the former category is often closer to voluntary activities supporting public interest or common causes, or contributing to a political fund, instead of protecting individual interest. Support imposes, in most cases, a higher monetary or opportunity cost than interest articulation, but the level of motivation varies according to individual orientation for the reason and social network. The religious right in the US demonstrated the viability of fund-raising through direct-mail in the 1970s and 1980s, and this feasibility now extends to political fund-raising online. Once people have acquired the habit of online purchasing of goods and services, using credit or charge cards to register support for causes or candidates they believe in becomes a convenient mode of pursuing personal
political beliefs and externalising individual values.

- *Mobilisation* and *organisation* require the highest level of motivation and cost, for the obvious reason that the individual now deliberately seeks to orchestrate the expression of opinion and activity, and is thus contemplating a different scale of political involvement. Figure 1 schematically represents motivation versus costs in different modes of online participation.
Second, how does the Internet affect the *frequency* of political participation? We can glimpse the current pattern, and perhaps the trend, of online usage from data available for two major websites in Britain and Korea, respectively the website for No 10 Downing Street and the ‘Blue House’ website of the President of Korea. The Office of the Prime Minister in the UK reports that in its first nine months of operation in its current form, the website for No 10 Downing Street averaged 356,684 page hits per day, with an average number of 5,739 users per day. The Office of the President in Korea reports that about 20,000 users visit its website each day, and the total number of messages in the Open Forum (BBS) during December 2000 was 9,721, while the number of e-mails to the President was 6,106 during the same one-month period. Both websites report a steady increase in the number of hits as well as a longer average length of user sessions over the last year. The data indicate that more people are being drawn to these flagship governmental websites, with a considerable proportion of them being repeat or even frequent visitors. These websites are discussed further below.
Third, the *quality* of political participation can be assessed by *effectiveness*, as Parry suggests, and, in addition, by *equality*. Political participation may be regarded as most effective when the policy outcomes are much as participants intend. Success can be further distinguished between *procedural* and *substantive* outcomes (Kitschelt, 1986). Procedural success implies recognition that a legitimate claim has been made, which should be admitted to the public agenda for due consideration. Thus participants are given access to the decision-making procedure. Substantive success, by contrast, is concerned with results rather than procedures, with the focus on the actual outcome of the public decision-making procedure. Substantive success is far harder to achieve, of course, because the demands of one claimant are frequently negated or counter-balanced by those of rival claimants. Even the appearance of procedural success may be illusory. An automatic response application is often set up in web servers, in an effort to satisfy participants’ desire that someone in government will actually attend to their appeals. Thus, a pre-written (but totally non-committal) message is transmitted to the effect that “We received your message without any problem and your matters are under consideration.” The website host does not waste time responding to messages individually, but uses the time saved for working on substantive measures (perhaps)!

Without denying the far-reaching potential of the Internet for easing, speeding, and broadening communication between citizens and government, two notes of realism must be sounded. First, the issue of inequality of resources in traditional political processes is now compounded by that of inequality in technological opportunity, the so called ‘digital divide’. In all countries so far studied, individuals with readiest access to the Internet are disproportionately found, at present, among the better-off and better educated strata of the population. Those already well furnished with conventional political resources are also likely to be early adopters of the Internet for political uses, realising how it can dramatically ease the burden of acquiring and disseminating information. In the absence of sustained and substantial public policy to widen access to the Internet, the outcome of the Internet “revolution” may well be to widen political inequality further (Margolis and Resnick, 2000). As these and other analysts have also pointed out, and contrary to the euphoric expectations of some early commentators on electronic democracy, “traditional interests and established authorities have the capacity to reassert their control in the virtual political sphere, …rather than [the Internet functioning] as interactive ‘bottom up’ format for public comment and discussion” (Norris, 1999).

**Political Opportunity Structure Online**
Among many possible frameworks for considering political utilisation of the Internet, we will argue that the theory of the Political Opportunity Structure (POS) provides an effective tool for the analysis of virtual politics, especially from the perspective of the policy-maker or political activist or electoral candidate. New social movements, from which POS theory has evolved, have several factors in common with the concept of the virtual community. One feature that has emerged in recent years is the potential of the Internet for protest politics: a highly dynamic mobilisation of support or protest is possible on the net.

Introducing the concept of POS provides an effective way to develop a more contextually grounded analysis of political activities and movements and a more systematic comparison of the cases between our two countries. Among the advantages of this analysis, it makes it possible to depict evolving virtual political communities within the setting of given formal institutions and informal procedures; the former can be described as ‘hard’ factors and the latter as ‘soft’ factors. Broadly speaking, informal procedures and strategies employed within the existing institutional structure are rather flexible but unpredictable, in other words, they are relatively ‘soft’. The institutional structure, by contrast, is procedurally less flexible in accommodating citizen demands (and perhaps substantively less receptive too). With formal institutions, it is important for citizens to identify the correct access point. This paper attempts to apply POS theory to the following questions: to what extent is the Internet actually altering political processes in Britain and Korea; and are there variations as to how these societies and their governments are using the Internet for political purposes?

As defined by Tarrow (1994), the POS is the ‘consistent - but not necessarily formal and permanent - dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations of success or failure’. Kriesi (1995) proposes three broad sets of the political system’s properties, at which the level of the POS can be measured; (1) formal institutional structure; (2) informal procedures and prevailing strategies; and (3) the configuration of power.

The Formal Institutional Structure

The level of the POS on the Internet is determined in a major way by the extent to which governmental power is concentrated or diffused. Where authoritative powers are decentralized decision making processes may be shorter or more accessible, where the extent of decentralisation is substantial, channels enabling a degree of direct control over policy agenda setting and decision-making process within government may exist. That is, the extent of formal
access to political institutions and political decision making processes will be a function of the
degree of decentralization, and of the degree to which direct democratic procedures have been
institutionalised.

The greater the degree of decentralisation, that is, the greater the number of points of
access to formal institutions, the wider may be considered the extent of formal citizen access.
Decentralisation of access is regarded as one of prominent properties of the Internet by many
analysts, who deem the Internet as a medium enabling better democracy (Abramson at al, 1988;
Tyler, 1997). Email speeds and eases communication between citizen and decision-makers.
More fundamentally, the extent to which information can be electronically stored, sorted,
transferred and manipulated on networked PCs goes a long way to level the playing field
between officialdom and citizen. If knowledge, proverbially, was power, then information – the
prerequisite of knowledge – has become infinitely more transferable with networked digitisation.
In that respect, power based upon centralised possession and use of knowledge tends to seep
away through networks – or rather, it becomes more evenly dispersed. While this can lead to
hyper-pluralism and political entropy, it also forces adjustments in typical modes of political
decision-making, away from authoritative imposition towards bargaining, cooptation, coalition-
formation and consensus-seeking.

The degree of formal access to political institutions also embodies the extent to which
direct democratic procedures are institutionalised. This varies considerably, of course, from
extensive, regular, and binding (Switzerland, and many US states) to distinctly limited (the
occasional, technically “consultative” referendum in Britain, for instance) An instance of the
Internet modifying institutional process was the innovation of ‘Policy Discussion’ areas linked
to the homepage of the British Prime Minister, No.10 Downing Street, intended to encourage
website visitors to contribute their own opinions, purportedly for review by departmental
ministries. However, the government’s adoption of the Internet in no way automatically ensures
the decentralization of decision-making functions. Rather, these same technologies may enable
government decision-making to become more centralized, through enhanced co-ordination and
control through informatics. An effective capacity to implement decisions under conditions of
widely dispersed network-based power is quite another matter.

It should be recognized, however, that despite the possibility of more centralization with
respect to the output side, the Internet can and does contribute to improved public access to
formal institutions. To take a simple example, most British MPs now have email addresses, for
instance. Or the Westminster Parliamentary website now enables those with a personal or
professional interest in the institution to follow its affairs or to research specific issues with an ease and convenience unimaginable when the researcher relied perforce on drudging through Hansard and Parliamentary Papers. Another example would be the Thomas website of the Library of Congress, which emphatically demonstrates the transformative effect of a magnificent electronic resource being placed at the service of the public, as well as those who work in the US legislature and its support services “The people’s business” has become far more accessible to the people in their wired-up homes and workplaces than ever before in the history of the American republic – though not necessarily more transparent.

**Informal Procedures and Prevailing Strategies**

In so far as there is (as yet, to our knowledge) no legislative framework in Britain or Korea regulating the delivery of public services through the Internet, informal strategies or procedures typically employed by decision-makers in response to citizen inputs are more important than formal arrangements. The points of access open to the public may be many or few, but it is the informal interactions between decision-makers behind the websites and also with those using the website that “generate trust and norms of reciprocity” (Malony, Smith and Stoker, 2000). Kriesi (1995) introduces the concept of the ‘dominant strategy’ to characterise the informal premises of procedure as “the shared implicit or explicit understandings that emerge from the political process and guide the actions of the authorities”. He categorises such strategies into two broad groups; strategies of exclusion (repressive, confrontatory, polarizing) and strategies of integration (facilitative, cooperative, assimilative).

However, a modified classification is needed to describe online politics more appropriately, rather than the terminology of exclusive or integrative strategies originally intended to characterise relationships between authority and civic movement activists. In practice, we would argue that government’s informal procedures and strategies fall into either “active” or “passive” reactions. A government with a passive orientation toward citizen’s participation in online participation tends to confine online engagement to relatively narrow channels, for example e-mail exchange. An active government, by contrast, shows greater willingness and openness, by establishing and promoting, for instance, a fully interactive online channel through which people can share opinions and interact with each other, as well articulate a varied range of opinions and demands to government.
**Power Arrangement within and between Political Institutions**

The distribution of power within and between political institutions affects the POS, and we postulate that the Internet tends to reinforce, rather than alter, this relationship. The political authorities, particularly the executive, have the advantage of superior resources to set up and maintain websites and e-services to fully professional standards (Margolis and Resnick, 2000). The citizen using a government website does so on the webmaster’s (i.e. the government’s) terms. Sometimes, however, the advantage may not entirely lie with those in authority. The distribution of power may be narrowly balanced, or competition between political parties at national or local levels may affect the expectations of citizen participants. In his discussion of the POS, Tarrow (1994) points out that electoral instability may induce political elites to compete for the support of voluntary associations. Maloney et al (2000) argue that the configuration of power among senior officers and between different departments may create cleavages and divisions that can be exploited by voluntary associations. This creates niches and access points that can be identified and exploited by nimble groups and resourceful citizens, using the capabilities of the Internet.

Using POS from the perspective of the political activist and candidate for office, we would hypothesise that in the forthcoming 2001 UK General Election, political candidates for the major parties fighting marginal seats will be readier than candidates in safer seats to utilise the Internet to garner support and mobilise voters. In other words, political decision-makers and candidates for office will seek to exploit the potential of the Internet where there are politically or electorally compelling reasons to do so.

Given the relatively low rate of total Internet usage for political purposes in Korea and the UK, politicians and civil servants may expect just marginal effects at present from the development of the Internet as a channel of political communication. As the Korean and UK cases show, however, almost all the political institutions, ranging from local government agencies to central government ministries and parliamentary, have established their own websites; providing functional and promotional information about the organisation, delivering online public services, and (to some extent) hearing public voices. Websites demonstrate governmental commitment to technological change, and help the political authorities to present an image of ‘open government’. It may be that this transitional period is the best chance for citizens and civic groups to attain their goals through the Internet while an internal debate continues among political elites, between those committed to the comprehensive adoption of information technologies, including the Internet, and their opponents.
Power configuration between different institutions or organisations, for example, between the executive and the parliament, or between the ruling and the opposition parties, determines the POS. According to the theorists of the POS, competition or conflict between governmental branches or party organisations in the balance of power will produce more opportunities for civic groups and citizens (Maloney, 2000). However, it is not clear whether this argument can be applied to online politics. In most cases, political websites reflect the political resources available overall to the organization concerned, or the network of political elites behind the website.

**Part II: The Political Opportunity Structure of Online Politics in Korea and the UK**

**The Growth of Online Participation**

The trend of online engagement in Chart 3 below confirms that the Internet is drawing steadily growing numbers of citizens to the leading “Blue House” Presidential website of the Korean government. This is probably also true for other government and public websites. The sharp increase in usage around March and again in October 2000 coincided with the advent of critical politico-economic events - the summit meeting between the leaders of South and North Korea, and the government drive to reform the banking sector in the wake of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98. This surge in usage demonstrates Korean citizens using the Internet for information as major issues emerge or intensify; it also suggests the potential of the Internet for rapid political mobilization.

**Chart 2: Number of Users of the Korean Presidential Website, by month, November 1999-December 2000.**
An equivalent case for the UK can be found in the increasing access traffic of open.gov.uk. The service was launched in August 1994, and by December of that year was receiving 3,500 page accesses a week. By August 1999, it saw up to 14 millions pages accessed per week. In particular, with crisis events in Britain as in Korea, the usage of the website rapidly increased. For example, the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in September 1997 triggered 3.5 millions page accesses per day.

Table 1 below about the users of the official website of the Office of the Korean President characterises the orientation of the citizens surfing the government website. During December 2000, about 20,000 users visited the website per day; the typical visitor viewing at least 20 pages (presidential website, monthly report at http://www.cwd.go.kr/report.html). While Internet use for public information is overall relatively low in Korea, the presidential website is a demonstrably significant attraction. The evidence at present available does not allow us to quantify different categories of user with any precision. However, we can report on the hit-rates for individual menus within the presidential website.

Table 1: Number of Hits on Selected Individual Menus, Korean Presidential Website, December 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Menu</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Hit</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Forum</td>
<td>Free BBS</td>
<td>1,905,987</td>
<td>I; S; M; C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>Official documents and press release</td>
<td>1,845,537</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit</td>
<td>Special edition for South-North Summit</td>
<td>1,002,979</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit</td>
<td>Special edition for Nobel Peace Prize</td>
<td>567,373</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>The President’s biographical data</td>
<td>363,575</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kid Section</td>
<td>Educational material for kids</td>
<td>214,102</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Forum</td>
<td>Magazine for younger users</td>
<td>45,775</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Section of Public Affairs, the Office of the President

Note: In Category column, ‘C’ stands for consumption of political information, ‘I’ for interest articulation, ‘S’ for supporting or disapproving activities for politician or other member’s argument, and ‘M’ for political mobilization.

The largest category of usage in Table 1 is the Open Forum bulletin board system (BBS).
This contains messages of many kinds; though at any time communication about specific controversies may predominate. For instance, over 40% of messages on the BBS in December 2000 involved a dispute between chemists and physicians, with spokespersons and supporters on each side engaging in public online lobbying regarding the government’s intention to amend related legislature. Another 40% of contributions focused around discussion and criticism of government policy to reform the financial market. Other messages amounted to mobilization efforts.⁴ There are also likely to be numerous consumers of political information, who did not themselves contribute to Open Forum, but who browsed the messages contained in it. Other menus in the presidential website provide background information about major policies and (self-)estimations of government performance.

According to Kim and Yoon (1998), Korean Internet users are more interested in obtaining government documents and political information than in engaging in interactive discussion. They claim their findings reflect the practice in Korea for government and political organization to bar public access to information crucial for control of political power. Whatever the truth of this accusation, a more plausible explanation would seem to be that Korean citizens were not familiar with, or trained for, interactive discourse on political issues. As we now see, people are becoming keener to interact online with other members of the public, as well as being more ready to contact government officials. The following chart shows that people have been switching to Open Forum, the BBS one-to-many and more interactive channel, away from the official email channel to the President.

Chart 3: Changes in the Number of Messages on Open Forum, E-mail to the President and E-mail to the Webmaster During the Year 2000
Chart 3 shows the number of emails to the President declining, while BBS messages have increased. At least two interpretations are possible to account for this trend. Firstly, that many users are turning their back on the President, and using Open Forum to ventilate their criticisms. Secondly, the shift may be one of user orientation towards the Presidential website, away from using one-to-one channels towards a more public, one-to-many channel.

We can also gain some idea about the frequency, and intensity, of political participation on the Korean governmental websites. How many times in a given period has an individual participant sent messages to a government official or posted a message to a political BBS? The data indicate that some individuals communicate far more intensively than others. Among 9,721 messages posted on Open Forum in two weeks of December 2000 in the Presidential ‘Blue House’ website, over 60% of the messages were sent by just 10% of contributors. A relatively small number of concerned, angry and/or compulsive users account for most of the messages received. It is possible to classify these messages in some degree, based on the subject header and also on the use of user response. Most messages fall into one of four main kinds: reasoned criticism of governmental policy and/or record; policy-related suggestions; discussion of social issues; and unreasoned personal abuse of the President. The BBS on the ‘Blue House’ website is unmoderated. By contrast, the website for No 10 Downing Street does not host a similar BBS feature, while the Policy Forum linked to the website (now located in the portal UKonline.gov.uk) are highly structured and intensively moderated, with the emphasis on informed and reasoned contributions.
The experience of the Korean ‘Blue House’ Presidential BBS suggests that the quality of political participation does not improve just because the Internet is available. Participants need skill, as well as motivation: an unmoderated and relatively unstructured BBS may work against the acquisition of the skills needed for interactive discussion. Reasoned argument risks being crowded out by mindless and repetitious abuse. Virtual net or BBS communities may be dominated by minorities of heavy users. These may or may not disseminate well-written messages and reasoned appeals for support. But they are likely to be politically, as well as behaviourally, distinctive. As Norris (1999) put it, “net political activists who sought political information or communication can be categorized as a distinct group within the online user community, as in society”.

The quality of political participation depends upon the messages from citizens to government being clear and loud, as well as on a fundamental equality of standing as between one citizen and another. These criteria not only underpin the effectiveness of citizen participation but also contribute to the democratic ideal. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) comment that the voice of the citizen in politics should be “clear so that public officials know what citizens want and need, loud so that officials have an incentive to pay attention to what they hear, and equal so that the democratic ideal of equal responsiveness to the preferences and interests of all is not violated”. How far the Internet currently contributes to this concept of effective democratic participation is hard to address from the limited data available to us. The first two items can, however, be discussed in relation to informal governmental procedure, while the issue of inequality requires a different approach because that problem is closely related to the social distribution of technology as well as existing power configuration.

Interest groups and social movements have played crucial roles before in the relatively short and turbulent history of Korean democracy. Furthermore, the level of democratic reform which many Koreans expect tends to exceed that which political elites are prepared to meet. The Internet offers effective tools for citizens to amplify their voices for political reform. For the first time, however, Korean civic groups took an important role in political reform in the 2000 General Election as they led a successful campaign to persuade the public to throw out senior politicians whom they classified as unfit for public office because of corruption, laziness or incompetence. A coalition of civic groups, called the Citizens’ Alliance for the 2000 General Election (CAGE), launched a high profile movement against a blacklist of politicians, deploying their campaign principally through the Internet. According to CAGE, when it opened its homepage (http://www.ngokorea.org) to the public on 12 January 2000, there were almost 4,000 hits in the first 20 hours. By the time of the election, nearly 1 million users had visited its
homepage, many of them participating in online campaign activities. Though other factors than the CAGE campaign could be involved, 59 of the 86 politicians on the CAGE blacklist were forced from office.\(^9\)

Rather than seeking to ban this largely net-based civic movement, the government crucially authorised disclosure of information on the homepage of the Central Election Management Committee (CAGE; [http://www.nec.go.kr](http://www.nec.go.kr)). This included the criminal records (if any) of candidates, their military service records, and official records of their personal assets. This information attracted over 4,000 visitors within the first two hours, who between them posted 280 messages on its bulletin board. The government also approved the registration of the “Internet Korean Party”. Thus, government policy not merely tolerated but actively fuelled public engagement in an Internet-based social movement directed at political reform. In effect, the government went at least half-way towards meeting the expectations of its citizens on the Net.

**The Political Opportunity Structure on the Net**

As the Internet matured in the second half of the 1990s, it provided citizens in Korea and the UK, as in other democracies, with opportunities for new modes of participation in political affairs. The Internet has also begun to affect the formal institutions of both countries, their governmental organizations and legislative structures, particularly regarding access and transparency, as well the character of informal dealings with those citizen voices articulating through this new channel of political communication. Utilising the theoretical framework developed in Part One, this section of the paper shows how the formal institutional structure has been affected by official realisation that the Internet is a potentially more effective bridge between citizen and government than traditional modes of communication. We also examine the somewhat different ways the two countries’ governments are setting out to deal with emergent online participation.

Two significant events occurred in Korea in 1995, in terms of these issues. First, the General Election for Local Assemblies and Local Governments was held on 27 June 1995, the first time since 1961 when Local Assemblies were dissolved by the military government. Korea embarked upon a substantial decentralisation of power, further invigorating its young democracy. Political power, monopolized by small elites in central government throughout the previous four decades, began to be devolved to autonomous local government. In terms of the argument developed in Part One, numerous new points of access for citizen participation and influence were created. In the same year, the Korean government launched a comprehensive plan for the
construction of the National Information Infrastructure. Since then, and no coincidence, there has a rapid growth of governmental websites, often on an ad hoc and informal basis, as part of a public outreach programme. With rapidly growing ownership of personal computers that can be connected to commercial online ISPs, Korean citizens can now encounter a wide variety of political information, whether provided by government, media organisations, civic groups, or by concerned individuals. Users who feel so inclined have numerous opportunities to join online political discussion groups. In other words, network users have been exposed – and rather rapidly - to the era of extensive online political information\(^1\). The Korean Government’s initiative to embrace the information era went back to 1986, when it launched the National Administrative Information System (NAIS) based on an old style host-terminal network. It was then that the government set out a plan to establish a national backbone network into which all the public and commercial sub-networks would be incorporated, and when the basic structure of the client-server network was adopted for administrative affairs.

In October 2000, the Korean government published a draft Bill for the Establishment of Electronic Government for public discussion. The Bill focuses on the goals of extensive electronic governance; maximization of administrative effectiveness, and citizen benefit. It makes some provision for standardisation in electronic official document, as well as for the security of the administrative network. More importantly, the Bill endorsed the concept of Internet-based public services and also the operation of online consultative committees.

The UK government took an initiative to develop an information superhighway in March 1994, when the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency published a consultative report, “Information Superhighways, Opportunities for Public Sector Application in the UK”. In the same year, the government launched a pilot Internet information service, www.open.gov.uk, charged to investigate the technological and information issues associated with the electronic delivery of information and services to the public (http://open.gov.uk/services/about.htm). In 1999, the British government collaborated with a consortium of other organisations to launch a series of projects promoting public access to the Internet. This resulted in the formation of UKonline (http://www.ukonline.gov.uk/), which is an Internet based portal for public information, that is, a single online point of entry to government information and services, scheduled to be accessible from over 700 UKonline centres by September 2002.

The British government’s approach toward electronic government is clearly announced in the recommendation of UKonline (UKonline Annual Report, 2000): get all government service online; drive forward toward e-procurement and e-tendering; implement a cross-government knowledge management system; drive forward citizen participation in democracy as part of the
UKonline citizen portal; drive forward the use of authentication services both for e-government services and within government itself.

Those initiatives driven by both governments for the development of electronic government, parallel to the formal institutional structure, have in common that they are essentially top-down approaches, while accommodating public involvement in political process, and establishing patterns of partnership between public and private sectors. In the Korean case, especially, this strategy is linked to the localisation of public authority, which expand the POS.

According to our framework, the vigour and extent to which government proceeds with the project of electronic governance affects the POS in three ways; firstly, transparency and information sharing – the e-government projects in both Korea and the UK aim to enrich citizen’s awareness and knowledge about the policy agenda; secondly, the new technology is intended to speed up the circulation of information, and the cycle of decision-making and implementation; thirdly, e-governance may or may not offer channels for citizen engagement in policy making process, but it may still be vulnerable to “cyber-protest” or even “cyber-terrorism” (for example, even citizens with limited IT skills can identify exact access points to which they could send a cyber ‘mail bomb’.

The projects for electronic governance in Britain and Korea aim to create virtual government responsive to citizens and parallel to the real government. The frequency and intensity of citizen access to the formal institutions of government through the net decisively affects the level of the political opportunity structure. Each government’s e-government project reflects what is considered both feasible and effective within a given political structure and culture. As a framework for analysis, the characteristic features of, say, the legislature or the party system, may well provide a better guide to the POS than factors like the degree of direct access to the policy making process.

The legislative enactment of electronic government will eventually formalise a movement which started with small scale experiments. Much will still depend on informal procedure, particularly in how government deals with citizen engagement, and also how quickly elected officeholders embrace internet technology as a key campaign resource. In fact, because of knowledge sharing among many governments¹¹, formal comparison of electronic governance projects may not be very illuminating. In contrast, informal dealing with citizen participation (in other word, the selection of political options) may offer more insight. Though both Britain and Korea have similar strategies for electronic governance, there are significant differences. In particular, while the British government focuses on establishing “modern” electronic governance
as a whole instead of the Prime Minister’s advancement, in Korea, the website of the Korean President leads grass roots electronic democracy by promoting a large virtual community.

The popularity of the Presidential website has already been described. But what use is it, and to whom? Behind the outwardly chaotic Open Forum of the BBS on the Presidential Website, a team works quietly, browsing all the messages received through the BBS and other channels for user participation, and sorting them in terms of the need for specific attention and governmental follow-up. One of the main jobs the team conducts is to transfer each of the messages to the relevant sections of the Presidential Office, or to the ministry in charge of the policy area concerned. The other main job is to make a daily report to the President, based on the issues not necessarily ripe for media attention but showing signs of potential that could push the government into difficulties. These interactive channels function as a dynamic store of political issues, spanning the gamut of societal interests, ranging from key policy issues like the amendment of education acts to essentially private matters like a boundary dispute between neighbours.

The presidential website is popular, and for several reasons. First, the website satisfies individual users’ desire to talk to the most powerful man in Korea. The president is inescapably a target for love and hate, depending on people’s political preference. The BBS particularly attracts those seeking political catharsis, more so than the websites of other governmental ministries dealing with more practical but mundane matters. Second, the official documents, and presidential directives and statements available on the website are regarded as useful by businessmen and journalists, especially given the weight of the president’s power within the Korean political system. However, with regard to informal processes and the prevailing strategy of the POS model, a third factor is also important, namely to encourage large scale citizen involvement. Users of the Presidential website accumulate experience of procedural success, sometimes even substantive success, from their participation. This strengthens an awareness, which may become an expectation, that somebody in the Presidential Office listens to the voices on the bulletin board, and takes them into consideration. The Office restrains the extent of its involvement in Open Forum, whether as debate moderator or as final authority, but is responsive to what it considers to be valid requests for governmental action. As a result, an extensive virtual community has formed, with many participants recognising other members’ nicknames and their orientation, as they debate the day’s main issues. Thus, virtual settlement, as Jones (1997) terms it, emerges around the website of the President.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider fully whether the formation of a virtual
community is prerequisite for online politics. However, some elements of virtual settlement can be identified, and provide criteria for comparison of the Korean and British cases. John proposes a minimum set of conditions to constitute the virtual settlement; a minimum level of interactivity, a variety of communicators, a common-public space (for interaction), and minimum level of sustained membership. Core elements among these conditions appear to be interactivity, variety, and membership.

The British counterpart No 10 Downing Street website seems more passive in operating the interactive channel Your Say, more moderate in its outreach effort to attract people, and more structured in managing online debate. The site confines its purpose to “the communication of the UK overseas, the communication of news and information, the explanation of the role and history of Number 10, and demonstration of the government’s commitment to new technology” (webmaster’s answer to authors’ enquiry in the preparation of this paper, February 2001). The Policy Forum of the website, which was the only channel for interactive discussion, has been transferred to UKonline, resulting in a less interactive Prime Ministerial website. It is clear, however, that central government has developed and is implementing a strategy of modernizing government, focusing especially on ‘effective delivery of public service’. The role of promoting and accommodating online citizen involvement has been taken up by UKonline, provided by a partnership among government, commercial sector organizations and trade unions.
In contrast, almost all the websites managed by Korean governmental ministries and agencies have open bulletin board system (BBS) on which anyone can post his/her messages, even anonymously, and share them with others. For example, the website of the Korean President has received 200~500 messages a day over the last year. This website stresses the function of the Open Forum as a cyberspace to display “all public opinion.” While asking users to register their name and other personal information, the website confers the power to control the quality of the contents upon the users, collectively, free from intervention by the Presidential Office. In contrast, no website of the British government has such an open BBS permitting citizens to
interact freely with each other. UKonline operates a series of Policy Discussion Fora, taken over from the website of the Prime Minister, but a moderator sets the agenda for discussion, and intervenes whenever problematic messages are transmitted. This contrast arguably reflects the pervasive imprint of national political culture, both in the way that people behave online and in the management strategy evidenced by each government. Conscious of its image as upholding democratic values in the past when in opposition, the present Korean government displays utmost tolerance of public criticism, foregoing the power to control online content. Its political decision, “let the people speak, and we’ll hear”, appears to be working in building an online citizen community. A glance at the Open Forum gives some idea about the kinds of interests competing for attention, and where the shoe currently pinches at the citizen grassroots. In the Policy Forum in UKonline, by contrast, participants seem more knowledgeable and better trained in political discussion (or is it Whitehall house-trained?) than their Korean counterparts.

Second, among political options for the usage of the Internet, the attitude of politicians, especially Members of National Assembly in Korea and Members of Parliament in Britain, reveals the effect of differing context in relation to party competition and the system of electoral representation. As of February 2000, while 66% of Korean MNAs now operate websites (see table 2 below), only 16% of British MPs have set up their own websites, though just over one third now have email addresses. (see table 3 below). There are interesting regional and party variations in the pattern of website adoption. Our argument is that these variations are not haphazard, but the result of political calculation. The decision of elected office-holders to open a direct, online channel to voters reflects both their level of awareness of the new communication channel and the expected efficacy of the new medium in gathering votes. Our data for Korea and to some extent Britain indicates that elected representatives from constituencies with wealthier, better educated and more IT-aware voters are more likely to be early adopters of websites. Moreover, it shows that opposition party members in Korea are more likely to construct websites and use email, presumably in an effort to maximise marginal voter support. Davis (1999) argues that while politicians with substantial political resources tend to use information technologies actively, those politician with fewer resources rarely open websites. The evidence for the UK does not entirely support this thesis. The quickest and heaviest adopters of websites in the UK Parliament have been Liberal Democrat MPs, as table 4 clearly shows, and the Liberal Democrat party is certainly less well financed than its major party opponents.

So why have the Liberal Democrats been quicker to adopt Internet technology? There appear to be several reasons, cumulatively amounting to a rational appraisal of the political opportunity structure from a Liberal Democrat perspective. Firstly, there was wide-ranging discussion in the party after 1997 election resulting in a decision to push Internet use forward. A
predisposing factor was that party activists had already been using Usenet discussion groups and a CIX bulletin board for some years.\textsuperscript{16} Secondly, Liberal Democrat seats are often marginal; therefore every campaigning and presentational device counts in mobilising electoral support. Also, as the third party in British politics, the party label is less protective for Liberal Democrat MPs than for Labour and Conservative MPs. – the individual effort, reputation and popularity of Liberal Democrat politicians can be crucial to their electoral survival. Thirdly, the Liberal Democrats have traditionally stressed grassroots campaigning and constituency service, and a website can permanently advertise to that effect. Fourthly, following the electoral success of the party in 1997, there were considerably more Liberal Democrat seats to defend in Southern England, where personal computer ownership and usage is highest, giving a website greater potential reach and making it an appropriate channel to adopt. A final factor was that the setting up MPs websites not only developed a campaign resource but in the process created a cost effective national network for the party internal communication requirements.
Table 2: Korean Members of the National Assembly: Websites and Email Accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Seoul Metro 86 (A)</th>
<th>Local 186 (B)</th>
<th>Rul. 132 (C)</th>
<th>Oppo. 139 (D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MNA with Web</td>
<td></td>
<td>(272)</td>
<td>66 %</td>
<td>83 %</td>
<td>59 %</td>
<td>67.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(181)</td>
<td>71% (A)</td>
<td>109% (B)</td>
<td>89% (C)</td>
<td>91% (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNA with Email</td>
<td></td>
<td>(255)</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: British Members of Parliament: Websites and Email Accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>London &amp; Southern 25% (A)</th>
<th>Rest of UK 400 (B)</th>
<th>Lab 417 (C)</th>
<th>Libdem. 47 (D)</th>
<th>Con. &amp; Other 139 (E)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MP with Web</td>
<td></td>
<td>(659)</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(107)</td>
<td>55% (A)</td>
<td>52% (B)</td>
<td>61% (C)</td>
<td>22% (D)</td>
<td>24% (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP with Email</td>
<td></td>
<td>(224)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

With the maturation of the Internet, citizens can readily interact with each other, simultaneously or asynchronously. Messages can be sent and shared, quickly and conveniently. Users can quarry information of almost every conceivable kind from a multitude of specialised online sources, no matter where these might be located and however physically remote from the user. This information can be transferred and exchanged on line with casual ease. Citizen activists can mobilize support online expeditiously. And they can do all this with remarkably low transaction costs. Once exposed to its advantages over traditional media and channels, it would be surprising if users did not adopt the Internet as the medium of choice for political communication. Whether governmental and political elites choose to adopt the Internet, and how they seek to adapt to their purposes, is a far different matter. We have argued that the government of both Britain and Korea have developed similar strategies for the development of electronic governance, parallel to rather than in any sense replacing the formal institutional structure. They have in common that both are essentially top-down approaches, while accommodating public involvement in political process, and establishing patterns of partnership.
between public and private sectors. While official strategy is broadly similar, there is a stronger emphasis on encouraging grass-roots participation in Korea, contrasting with a more structured approach to online policy participation in UK.

We have interpreted CIT adoption by politicians through the perspective of the political opportunity structure, and thus start by recognising that the selection of options operates in different political contexts. Political regionalism in Korea is quite marked, while party allegiances are weak, with numbers of politicians switching between parties. Korean Assembly Members need to appeal personally to voters, and so as the Internet has matured there has been a rapid adoption of websites over the last 3 years (though content is sometimes little more than token). A presence on the web is a form of permanent personal advertising. The development of MPs websites has been slower in UK, except by Liberal Democrats. Our argument is that for members of the two major parties, their electoral fate is largely determined by that of party. In safe seats, personal appeal is less critical, so from the perspective of the POS, the case for major party MPs developing websites is less compelling.

Online political participation is increasing in both Britain and Korea though from a very modest level compared with non-political usage. Our impression is that, especially in Britain, the internet has yet to make any real inroads at the mass political level. It is, as yet, largely the preserve of those with a professional interest in politics, special interest activists and a small minority of politics ‘junkies’. Indirectly, especially as a medium of dissemination from government and parties, particularly to journalists, and for interaction with organised interests, its significance is already arguably considerable. In Korea, where attachment to traditional political structures and modes of behaviour is less deep-rooted (because the institutions themselves are newer), the impact of online participation has been quicker and stronger. We would expect the scale of public participation to grow, as the costs of online participation are generally decreasing. Firstly, the growing competition in the market for high speed access to the internet is lowering the real price to consumers. Several companies in both countries are competing to connect the customer to the web with different technologies such as ADSL, ISDN, or Cable Modem. The costs of information, as well those for access and participation, will continue to fall. Secondly, newcomers to political issues can quickly accumulate relevant know-how and expertise, as the learning curve for effective political involvement shortens. Third, the costs of mobilization for political action are reducing as virtual communities emerge. Reducing monetary costs, opportunity costs and transaction costs should all make citizens more willing, even the very moderately motivated among them, to engage in online political activity.
In short, as the cost of online participation goes down, the virtual community, as the aggregation of people going online, pervades through the whole society, and political opportunity for better governance increase as well as boosting political participation. The question remaining is whether society should aim towards information welfare or accept the political and social consequences of a widening digital divide.
Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank Professor Peter Jones and the Department of Politics, University of Newcastle, for the financial support, which made it possible to participate in this workshop.
Bibliography

Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

- The Korea Network Information Centre (Jan. 2001) “Survey on the Number and Attitudes of Internet Users in Korea,” [http://www.nic.or.kr](http://www.nic.or.kr)
Note

1 This diagram will be developed with quantifiable data as research proceeds.
2 Over 56% of the messages posted on Open Forum in the Website of the Korean President are written by writers appearing at least 3 times during December 2000. Although the numbers of visitors to the website is growing, a relatively small number of users accounts for many of the postings.
3 According to a recent survey carried out in Korea, only 1.6% of Internet usage was for political information and public services compared to 53.7% for entertainment and games, 22.2% for leisure and sports, and 19.2% for general news service. Among those surfing the Internet for political information, males outnumber females by more than two to one, and there are over four times as many political surfers within the forty-plus age group than among those in their twenties (The National Survey of Attitude for Internet Use in Korea, February 2001, Korea Network Information Centre).
4 Open Forum, for instance, contains messages with similar content, for example, pressing for improved compensation for under-insured workers who have suffered accidents at work.
5 The sharp peak in the trend line of ‘email to the webmaster’ represents a ‘mail bomb’ form of cyber demonstration, as protestors attempted to crash the webserver.
6 Blue House is a nick name for the Office of the Korean President and the name of the website of the President, comparable to No 10 Downing Street for the Office of the British Prime Minister, and the White House for the American President.
7 See Pong Sul Ahn, “Industrialization and Democratisation: Korean trade unions in a double transition” PhD, University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1997.
8 In a survey, the New Korea Barometer, to the question, how much do you agree or disagree with the statement that our political system should be made a lot more democratic than what it is now?, seven out of eight endorsed reform. See Rose, R., Sin, D., and Munro,N.,(1999) “Tensions Between the Democratic Ideal and Reality: South Korea”, in Pippa Norris, ed. Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance, Oxford: Oxford.
9 The blacklist includes 34 politicians from ruling coalition, 28 from the major opposition party.
10 Some projects were carried out by government during the early stage; the Office of the President set up its website to provide official document and press release in 1995; the Ministry of Information started web based information service (Allim-Madang) with the support of the National Computerisation Agency (NCA) in 1995; the Ministry also launched information service project through PC online service (Yollin-Jungbu) in 1996; and other local government opened their websites.
11 Korean and the UK have been the participants of the Government Online (GOL) Project to exchange and share ideas and knowledge on electronic government, resulting in two e-government projects with no difference.
12 The reason for the reservation of direct response to individual message varies according to given situation. In general, as Stromer-Galley points out, burdensome, loss of control, and loss of ambiguity can be considered as part of factors to explain why politicians avoid interactive discussion. See Stromer-Galley (2000) Online Interaction and Why Candidates Avoid It, Journal of Communication, Autumn 2000, pp. 111-132
13 In some case, the Office presents favourable response, even in selective manner, and it provides the media with soft-touch news. For example, a user send e-mail to the President asking whether the President could present him a puppy, which appeared in the newspaper with the President. The user’s reason is that his family has fallen into grief since they lost their loving dog, the same breed with the first dog. The Office decided to present it to the user.
14 In analyzing data, in relation to interactivity, it represents different result between when email, one-to-one, to the President or the Prime Minister can be included as user-generating contents that contribute building a virtual community and when not.
15 The website has two menu button: after reading a message, user can click either of button to recommend the message to other users, or can request webmaster to delete the message by clicking other button.
16 Personal information to authors. Our thanks to Phil Appleby.