

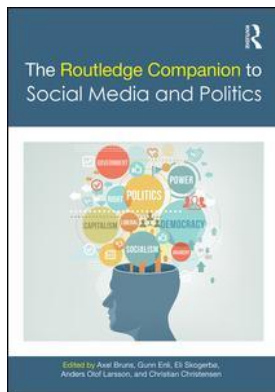
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Axel Bruns, Gunn Enli, Eli Skogerbø, Anders Olof Larsson, Christian Christensen

### **The Emergence of Social Media Politics in South Korea**

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## 28

# THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICS IN SOUTH KOREA

## The Case of the 2012 Presidential Election

*Lars Willnat and Young Min*

### Introduction

South Korea ranks among the most Internet-connected nations in the world, with slightly more than 92 per cent of its 50 million citizens online (Internet Live States 2014). As in other democracies with well-developed online environments, digital media have played an important role in South Korea's local and national elections. During the 2011 mayoral election in Seoul, for example, Twitter users overwhelmingly supported the opposition candidate Park Won-soon, which contributed to his unexpected victory in a highly competitive race (S.-Y. Lee 2012). Similarly, during the legislative election in April 2012, which was considered a bellwether for the presidential election later that year, nearly half of the 1,090 candidates used Twitter as part of their campaign strategy (W. Chang & Ryu 2013).

This sudden rise of social media as a strategic campaign tool was no coincidence. Beginning with the 2007 presidential election, the Korean National Election Commission placed a 180-day ban on the display and distribution of election-related information through the Internet and social media before elections. However, in December 2011, the Constitutional Court ruled that the ban was unconstitutional and infringed upon free expression, thus allowing candidates' use of all available digital media throughout the upcoming election year (Ser 2011). This ruling marked an important turning point in South Korean politics. Politicians could now mobilise younger citizens who often could not be reached through traditional media (D. Chang & Bae 2012). Candidates also could reach far more citizens through the Internet as more and more citizens accessed social networking services through their smartphones. As a result, the main political candidates in the 2012 presidential election mounted aggressive online campaigns, using a wider range of social media than in previous elections.

Given the important political changes in South Korea's digital media environment, this chapter aims to analyse the political role of social media, particularly their function as newly emerging channels of political learning and participation during the 2012 presidential election. We will start with a brief overview of South Korea's digital media environment, the political context of the 2012 presidential election campaign, and the main candidates' social media strategies. This will be followed by an empirical analysis of how social media were used during the 2012 presidential election in South Korea.

The analysis draws on data from an online survey we conducted shortly before the election in December 2012 with a national sample of 1,063 Koreans. The survey focused on how citizens used social media to gather election information and their overall level of political engagement. To provide a wider context for the South Korean survey results, we will compare them with findings of an identical survey we conducted shortly before the 2012 U.S. presidential election with a national sample of 1,064 U.S. citizens. Because most of the questions in the Korean and U.S. survey were identical, we were able to compare the findings of both.

These comparisons, upon which most of our analyses are based, were done to provide a contextual baseline for the analysis of the Korean findings on social media use in politics. These findings would have been difficult to evaluate without knowing how much citizens in other media-rich nations rely on social media during political election campaigns. The fact that both presidential elections happened around the same time in two highly developed countries that share several political characteristics makes such comparisons even more valuable in our eyes. Overall, we believe that this cross-national comparison of social media users will help to more accurately gauge the political role that social media played during South Korea's 2012 presidential campaign.<sup>1</sup> The chapter will conclude with a final discussion of the current role of social media in South Korean politics.

### The 2012 South Korean Presidential Election

The 2012 South Korean presidential election was held on 19 December 2012. According to the National Election Commission, more than 30.7 million people or 75.8 per cent of eligible voters (aged 19 or over) cast their ballots ("Presidential Election Turnout at 75.8%" 2012). This record turnout was 12.8 per cent higher than the last presidential election in 2007, due mainly to increased participation among voters between 20 and 40 years.

Six candidates officially sought office in 2012. They included Park Geun-hye of the ruling Saenuri Party, Moon Jae-in of the main opposition Democratic United Party, and four other minor candidates. Park is the daughter of Park Chung-hee, who seized power in a 1961 military coup and ruled as autocratic president until his death in 1979. A legislator since 1998, Park's work has always been evaluated in light of her father's legacy. Among her supporters, she is seen today as a principled, determined leader who endured extreme personal tragedy. Her critics, on the other hand, mostly view her as a symbol of Korea's authoritarian past (Rauhala 2012). By contrast, challenger Moon was a former human rights lawyer once jailed for leading student protests against the elder Park's authoritarian rule. Moon later served as chief of staff for President Roh Moo-hyun, who was in office from 2003 to 2008. As a consequence, both candidates' political careers were deeply connected with Park's father, a fact that quickly became the focus of the 2012 election campaign (Choe 2012).

Both candidates agreed on the need for economic democratisation, extensive political reforms, and greater engagement with North Korea. Park employed a more pro-business approach and focused on continued economic growth. Moon campaigned for more liberal policies such as universal social-welfare systems, regulating big corporations, and a closer embrace of North Korea (Colapinto 2012). These relatively large political differences, however, were not much debated during the election campaign. Instead, the candidates focused on mutual accusations and personal attacks throughout the campaign (“Presidential Election Campaigns Turn Negative” 2012).

While Moon was especially popular among younger voters, many of Park’s constituents were older and more conservative (Yoon 2012). Opinion polls consistently indicated a small lead for Park throughout the election year, but Moon gradually eroded this gap as the campaign drew to a close. Nevertheless, the bitter contest ended with a narrow 3.6 per cent margin of victory for Park, making her South Korea’s first female president (H.-J. Kim & Klug 2012).

### The Rise of Social Media in South Korean Politics

At the time of the presidential election in December 2012, about 82 per cent of South Korea’s 50 million citizens had access to the Internet, with slightly more males (53 per cent) than females online. The vast majority (83 per cent) of Internet users also read newspapers online and almost 6 in 10 netizens (55 per cent) said they used social media within the past year. About 9 in 10 (94 per cent) of social media users were members of networking services such as Facebook, 25.5 per cent used microblogs such as Twitter, 23.1 per cent used blogs, and 22 per cent participated in so-called *minihompy* (personal webpages that feature personal profiles, background music, photo albums, etc.; Lim et al. 2013).

Like many other developed nations in Asia, South Korea saw a significant surge in social media users in 2012. The total number of Korean Facebook users, for example, surpassed 10 million, an increase of 47 per cent in one year (Socialbakers 2013). Similarly, the number of Korean Twitter users surged from 780,000 in September 2009 to 6.4 million in May 2012—up more than eightfold (Twitter Korean Index 2012). This rapid adoption of social media was partly credited to the wide adoption of smartphones among Koreans seeking Internet access through mobile devices. By the end of 2012, more than 90 per cent of social media users were accessing social media through their smartphones (Lim et al. 2013).

Because of Koreans’ preference for mobile Internet applications, one of the most popular services was KakaoTalk, a multiplatform texting service that allows free messaging. KakaoTalk attracted a huge following of all ages during the 2012 election, as many Koreans used it to receive real-time text messages from the main political candidates. By early December 2012, more than 441,000 Koreans received so-called Ka-talks from Park and about 305,000 citizens ‘friended’ Moon through this service (Im 2012; M.-J. Lee 2012).

Overall, Koreans clearly were well-connected throughout the 2012 presidential election, with many taking advantage of the new social media services offered by the political candidates. In turn, this allowed the candidates to creatively use social media to increase their name recognition, empower previously disengaged young voters, and build political momentum.

### Candidates' Social Media Strategies

While previous election campaigns in South Korea revolved mostly around Twitter, the 2012 presidential campaign used a variety of social media that allowed candidates to circumvent traditional media and reach voters directly (Park & Cho 2013). The two main candidates, Park and Moon, strategically connected with citizens and sought more personal and reciprocal interactions with online 'followers' or 'friends', thus enthusiastically embracing the direct reach of social media.

Both campaigns were built on a variety of social media platforms that included blogs, Twitter, Facebook, KakaoTalk, *minihompy*, Plickers, Opencast, and YouTube (Park & Cho 2013). Park, for example, posted videos on her YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/user/pgh545](http://www.youtube.com/user/pgh545)) that discussed her private life and delivered numerous campaign messages designed to improve her political image. Alongside her campaign's official Twitter account (@at\_pgh), Park maintained a personal account (@gh\_park) mostly for retweeting the campaign's official posts. Similarly, Park's Facebook account was used mainly to provide additional publicity for official campaign messages (Keum 2014).

Moon also actively used Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. His YouTube channel Moon Jae-in TV ([www.youtube.com/user/moonriver365](http://www.youtube.com/user/moonriver365)) featured audio and video podcasts, which were particularly popular among young citizens (H.-N. Jeon 2012; Min 2014). These podcasts resulted in numerous comments on other social media and links to them were frequently shared and retweeted.

Both campaigns also were fairly successful in soliciting campaign donations from Korean citizens through digital media. Social media served as key drivers for such donations by rapidly sharing fund raising campaigns across online communities. The first creative user of this strategy was Moon, who asked his social media followers to invest in the Moon Jae-in Ivy Fund. Through this unconventional method of crowd-funding, Moon raised more than 30 billion won (\$27.8 million) from 40,000 'investors', who he promised to pay back after the election with an interest rate of 3.1 per cent per year (Ser 2012; Song 2012). Park quickly mounted a similar effort with her Park Guen-hye Promise Fund and raised 25 billion won (\$23.1 million) from 11,800 social media followers in less than 52 hours (B.-Y. Jeon & Lee 2012). The minimum investment in these funds was 10,000 won (\$9), but no upper ceiling was set.

Yet, the campaign strategies of the two main candidates were also characterised by some key differences. Because the main targets of social media strategies were young voters, a group that traditionally shuns politics as well as news originating from mainstream media, social media were more important to Moon, whose main constituents were young and liberal (Choi & Shim 2014). Park focused more on strengthening her image as a strong, dependable politician with older citizens, who still could be reached through television and traditional newspapers.

As a result, Moon relied much more heavily on Twitter than Park, who he quickly surpassed in total number of followers and tweets posted (Park & Cho 2013). During the campaign's final stage, Moon's two Twitter accounts (@moonriver365 and @mooncamp1219) attracted 374,317 followers, compared to Park's 261,685. More importantly, Moon's followers were more likely to retweet political messages than Park's followers. And unlike Park, Moon often tweeted about personal observations, the campaign, and his planned policies (Park & Cho 2013), which made his posts much more interesting to the average voter.

Moon's Facebook page also attracted more fans than Park's. By early December 2012, Moon's page had received 77,663 'likes' compared to Park's 20,280 (Im 2012). To make his page more attractive to potential voters, Moon's staff regularly uploaded multimedia messages about campaign activities and Moon personally posted messages to his timeline (Keum 2014).

Overall, both presidential candidates successfully integrated social media into their campaigns to directly reach voters with their messages. Neither Park nor Moon, however, took full advantage of the technological and political potential of social media. Both failed, for example, to develop a comprehensive plan for how different social media could be integrated into one coherent campaign strategy. As a result, each medium was used in isolation. More importantly, their strategies mostly ignored ways to empower citizens to organise themselves into small or large voluntary groups—a strategy that Barack Obama's presidential campaigns successfully employed in 2008 and 2012. While social media became central for more customised and tailored political campaigns in South Korea, in many ways they remained top-down channels to transmit messages to voters (Park & Cho 2013).

### Studies on Social Media Effects in the 2012 Presidential Election

A significant number of studies have explored the impact of Internet use on political attitudes and behaviors in South Korea (for an overview, see Choi & Shim, 2014). Yet, there are only a few studies with a specific focus on the impact of social media on political participation and voting behavior. Among those few, however, there are noticeable findings about social media as a factor that might engage citizens politically (D. Chang & Bae 2012; S.-Y. Lee 2012). In particular, so-called 'proof of vote' images posted on social media during Election Day have received a great deal of scholarly attention. According to Seo and Lee (2012), voter 'selfies' contributed to a greater turnout among fellow SNS users during South Korea's 2010 parliamentary elections. Similarly, the 'proof of vote' images of celebrities and opinion leaders were retweeted widely during Seoul's 2011 mayoral election and significantly boosted young voters' turnout at the polls (S.-Y. Lee 2012).

According to W. Chang and Ryu (2013), political Twitter campaigns also had significant effects on the results of the 2012 legislative election. The length of the Twitter campaign, the number of followers, and the number of retweets were found to be significant predictors of a candidate's vote share. These findings indicate that social influence on political behavior can be diffused through online social networks and, in turn, can have real effects on politics.

At the same time, social media also have been shown to contribute to a growing ideological divide among Koreans. According to S.-S. Lee (2013), social media use increased the intensity of political polarisation during the 2012 presidential election. Based on a national survey conducted immediately after the election, the author found that social media users were significantly more likely to hold extreme attitudes compared to non-users. In another study, Moon supporters perceived mainstream news media to be hostile toward their candidate, while social media were seen as more friendly toward Moon. Meanwhile, Park advocates were more likely to judge social media opinion toward their candidate as antagonistic (Y. Lee, Jeong & Min 2013). Thus, use of social media might have significant polarising effect by intensifying the ideological divide between conservative and liberal voters in South Korea.

Overall, it appears that social media use is associated with political attitudes and behaviors among the Korean public. However, exactly how citizens use social media for political purposes and what consequences it may have remains a relatively open question that requires more detailed exploration. In the following sections, we will address this question with new survey data collected shortly before the 2012 South Korean presidential election.

### 2012 Pre-Election Survey Findings

The following section will first describe how Korean citizens used social media to obtain information about the political candidates and the election campaign itself. We will focus specifically on the use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, yet also evaluate the utilisation of more localised networks such as KakaoTalk. We will also discuss how Koreans felt about social media as a political information tool and how much they participated politically during the campaign using such media. In the last section, we will analyse whether social media use might have been associated with higher levels of political participation during the campaign and, ultimately, a higher likelihood of voting for either candidate.

As explained earlier, we will compare the Korean survey findings with findings obtained in a similar survey conducted in the United States shortly before the 2012 presidential election. The goal of this comparative analysis is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how frequently Koreans used social media to learn about the 2012 election campaign and the main candidates and what effects this usage might have had on their political attitudes. Due to President Obama's extensive use of social media in the 2008 and 2012 election campaigns—and the widespread adoption of such digital networks among the American public—the political use of social media among Americans should serve as a valid benchmark against which the Korean findings can be judged and evaluated.

As expected, our survey findings indicate that the Internet has become a major source for political news among audiences in South Korea and the United States. Most Koreans (49 per cent) saw the Internet as the most important news source for information about the 2012 presidential election, closely followed by television (46 per cent). In the United States, the pattern was reversed as 54 per cent named television as the most important information source and only 35 per cent mentioned the Internet. The growing importance of online news is underscored by the fact that about half of all Korean and American respondents said they did not read printed newspapers (46 per cent Korea vs. 54 per cent U.S.) or listen to radio news (54 per cent Korea vs. 48 per cent U.S.).

Possibly as a result of the perceived importance of the Internet as a news source, Koreans were significantly more likely than Americans to use the Internet for gathering news and information about the presidential campaign. During the month prior to the election, 59 per cent of Korean respondents used the Internet at least once a day to get campaign information, compared to only 35 per cent of Americans. One reason for this finding might be the fact that the Korean media are dominated by public broadcasters, which are less critical in their political reporting than the commercial broadcasters in the United States.

The speculation that the traditional news media in South Korea are perceived as politically biased is supported by the fact that most Koreans considered social networking sites much more important for politics than Americans did. As Table 28.1 shows,

Table 28.1 Importance of Social Media for Politics among Korean and U.S. Citizens (in per cent)

		Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important
Keeping up with political news on SNS	Korea	10.0	47.2	29.7	13.1
	USA	20.1	27.9	21.8	30.2
Expressing my feelings and opinions on political issues on SNS	Korea	13.7	46.2	27.1	13.1
	USA	16.2	29.2	21.7	32.8
Discussing political issues with others on SNS	Korea	13.7	45.7	26.9	13.7
	USA	15.1	27.3	24.7	32.9
Finding people on SNS who share my views about important political issues	Korea	13.4	46.0	27.8	12.8
	USA	13.1	29.0	24.6	33.2

while about 6 in 10 Koreans believed that social media are ‘somewhat’ or ‘very important’ to stay abreast of political news (57 per cent vs. 48 per cent in U.S.), express political feelings and opinions (60 per cent vs. 45 per cent), discuss politics with others (59 per cent vs. 45 per cent), or find people who share their views on key political issues (59 per cent vs. 42 per cent), significantly fewer Americans believed that social media can assist such actions.

Despite the fact that most Koreans believed that social media have an important political role, they were somewhat less likely than their American counterparts to use social media as a political tool. First, Koreans were less likely than Americans to use social media as part of their daily media routine. While only about 6 in 10 (61 per cent) Koreans said they use social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, about 8 in 10 (81 per cent) Americans reported such use. The findings also indicate that most (79 per cent) Koreans spent less than an hour on social media each day, compared to slightly more than half (58 per cent) of Americans. Similarly, only 1 in 10 (10 per cent) Koreans said that they spent between one and three hours on social media, compared to 23 per cent of Americans.

Second, only 19 per cent of Korean respondents used social media as a political information and communication tool, while one-third (33 per cent) of American respondents did so. Similarly, few Koreans followed the candidates on social network sites such as KakaoTalk (6 per cent Park; 6 per cent Moon), Twitter (4 per cent Park; 3 per cent Moon), or Facebook (3 per cent Park; 2 per cent Moon).<sup>2</sup> Finally, posting political messages on social media was equally unpopular in both nations. Fewer than 1 in 10 Koreans and Americans said that they posted election-related messages on social networks such as Twitter or Facebook.

Overall then, Koreans obviously considered social media to have an important role during the 2012 presidential election, but many hesitated to use these media to communicate about politics during the campaign. This, of course, might have been the result of social media being a relatively new form of communication in Korean politics, which many citizens in this young democracy still might have to get used to.

To determine more specifically how Koreans used social media during the 2012 campaign, we asked a series of questions that probed their political use of Facebook, Twitter,



and YouTube. As expected, Koreans were less likely than Americans to use Facebook and Twitter to gather and discuss election-related news and information. However, it appears that respondents in both nations equally enjoyed watching political videos on YouTube.

As Table 28.2 shows, 17 per cent of Korean social media users used Facebook at least 'sometimes' to 'get information about the election campaign or the presidential candidates' (23 per cent U.S.), 13 per cent used it to 'discover which presidential candidate your friends will vote for this year' (19 per cent U.S.), and 10 per cent to 'share content related to the presidential election' (22 per cent U.S.). Other political activities on Facebook, such as signing up as a presidential candidate's 'friend', subscribing to political journalists' posts, or posting election-related content or links were even less common than among American social media users.

The most popular political activity on Twitter during the 2012 election was to get news and information about the election or the candidates. Slightly more Koreans than Americans used Twitter as a political information tool (12 per cent Korea vs. 10 per cent U.S.). All other political activities, such as following presidential candidates or political journalists, posting election-related tweets, or retweeting political content were less common. However, differences in the use of these political activities between Korean and American social media users were less pronounced than those observed for similar activities on Facebook.

Table 28.2 Political Activities on Social Media by Korean and U.S. Citizens (in per cent)

	U.S.	Korea
<b>Facebook activities</b>		
Get information about the election campaign or the presidential candidates	23.4	17.2
Discover which presidential candidate your friends will vote for this year	19.4	12.9
Sign up as a 'friend' of a presidential candidate, party, or interest group	15.3	6.0
Subscribe to postings of political journalists, analysts, & commentators	10.8	8.7
Share content related to the presidential election	22.0	10.4
Post content related to the presidential election	21.1	4.9
Post a link about the presidential election	17.1	5.3
Post a wall comment about the presidential election	18.0	6.0
Post a status update that mentions the presidential election	14.2	5.7
Join a political group related to the presidential election	7.5	3.0
Start a political group related to the presidential election	2.5	0.8

	U.S.	Korea
<b>Twitter activities</b>		
Get information about the election or the presidential candidates on Twitter	10.2	12.1
Follow a presidential candidate, party, or political interest group on Twitter	8.8	6.0
Follow tweets of political journalists, analysts, commentators or columnists	8.7	4.9
Post a tweet that mentions the presidential election	8.0	4.3
Post a tweet that included a link to content about the presidential election	5.6	2.5
Reply to tweets about the presidential election	4.9	2.6
Retweet content related to the presidential election	5.3	3.1
<b>YouTube activities</b>		
Watch videos on Park's/Obama's YouTube channel	13.3	12.0
Watch videos on Moon's/Romney's YouTube channel	11.0	12.2
Watch political news and other videos about politics on YouTube	13.8	15.3
Watch official campaign advertisements on YouTube	11.4	17.6
Watch videos about the candidates or the election created by citizens	11.7	7.5
Watch videos about the candidates or the election created by celebrities	—	3.8

Korean and American social media users were most similar in their use of YouTube during the 2012 presidential election. Only a slightly larger percentage of Korean users watched campaign advertisements (18 per cent Korean vs. 11 per cent U.S.) and political videos (15 per cent Korea vs. 14 per cent U.S.) than Americans. In addition, about 12 per cent of Koreans watched videos on Park's and Moon's YouTube channel (similarly, 13 per cent of American users said they watched videos on Obama's YouTube channel, and 11 per cent on Romney's channel). A small percentage (8 per cent vs. 12 per cent U.S.) of Koreans also said they watched political videos created by other citizens.

Because social media use during the campaign might have encouraged concerned citizens to become politically more engaged, we decided to test whether social media use might be associated with higher levels of political efficacy and a greater likelihood to vote on Election Day.<sup>3</sup> While prior research has shown that social media use can be associated with higher political participation in a number of Asian nations (Choi & Shim 2014), it is reasonable to assume that citizens who use social media to discuss politics also feel more efficacious politically because they can actively share their political

views with others. Such connectedness, in turn, might bolster feelings of ‘having a voice’ in the political process, even if such online connections have little ‘real’ impact on politics. However, even actions that seem trivial online can impact voter behavior. As noted earlier, there is empirical evidence that the ‘I voted’ pictures, posted on Facebook by people who voted, encouraged at least some social media users who saw the images to vote as well (Bond et al. 2012). Consequently, we also test the possibility that political social media use is associated with a higher likelihood of voting.

The regression model shown in Table 28.3 tests whether there are significant relationships between respondents’ political efficacy and likelihood of voting and their (1) demographic characteristics (age, sex, political ideology, income, interest in the election, and frequency of discussing politics with friends and family in person); (2) traditional media use (TV news, newspapers, radio news, online news, and number of political TV debates watched); and (3) political social media use (political information posted online, political information from SNS, political discussion with online friends, political discussion on Twitter or Facebook, and political videos watched on YouTube).<sup>4</sup>

Table 28.3 Predictors of Political Efficacy and Likelihood of Voting among Korean Citizens

	Political efficacy	Likelihood voting
<b><i>Demographics</i></b>		
Age	.12***	.11***
Female	-.09***	.04
Education	.15***	.03
Political ideology (conservative)	.03	.03
Income	.05	.06
Interest in election campaign	.33***	.33***
Discuss politics with friends	.09**	.05
Political efficacy	—	.03
Incr. $R^2$ (%)	22.1***	16.4***
<b><i>Traditional media use</i></b>		
TV news	-.04	-.04
Newspapers	.07*	-.14***
Radio news	.04	-.04
Online news	.04	.02
TV debates	.06	.12***
Incr. $R^2$ (%)	1.1**	2.9***

	Political efficacy	Likelihood voting
<b><i>Social media use</i></b>		
Posted political information on SNS	-.08	-.05
Got political messages on SNS	.13***	.03
Discuss politics with friends on SNS	-.01	.05
Political use of Facebook	.10*	.01
Political use of Twitter	-.03	-.05
Political use of YouTube	.03	.01
Incr. R <sup>2</sup> (%)	1.8***	.30
Total R <sup>2</sup> (%)	25.0***	19.6***
N	1,010	1,010

Note: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ . Cell entries are before-entry standardised beta coefficients.

Overall, the findings indicate that social media use was indeed associated with stronger feelings of political efficacy. Especially those respondents who received political news and information on social media and participated in political Facebook groups were more likely to think their voices and opinions mattered in politics. While these relationships were relatively weak, they remained significant despite the control for respondents' demographics, which turned out to be the strongest predictors of political efficacy (older, educated males interested in the campaign were especially likely to report high levels of political efficacy).

At the same time, respondents' likelihood of voting was not associated with social media use. Rather, it appears that older citizens who were interested in the election and watched the candidates' televised debates were especially likely to vote. Surprisingly, reading printed newspapers more frequently was associated with less enthusiasm for voting on election day, while social media use did not show any correlation at all. Thus, while frequent social media users tended to feel politically more powerful, these feelings of political efficacy might apparently did not combine with social media use to make these citizens more likely to vote for their candidates.

### Conclusions

South Korea's 2012 presidential election proved to be a seminal moment for social media in this media-rich nation. For the first time since the emergence of social media as a significant force in modern politics, Korean politicians and voters were completely free to utilise these digital communication tools during a national election campaign. As a result, the main political candidates launched extensive social media campaigns especially targeting young voters who traditionally shun politics and have been difficult to reach with traditional television and newspaper campaign advertisements. Korean netizens, on the other hand, enthusiastically embraced social media to discuss the candidates, the campaign, and key election issues. Given that online political discussions

are a relatively new phenomenon in South Korea due to its turbulent political past, it would be difficult to overstate the importance of how communicating and processing political information was changed.

A comparison with U.S. citizens—also in the midst of a presidential campaign at the end of 2012—shows that Koreans depended much more on the Internet for accessing campaign news and information. As discussed earlier, this tendency to rely on online news rather than television for election information—as most Americans do—is probably related to the fact that the dominant public broadcast media in Korea are much less diverse than the commercial broadcast media in the United States. As a result, almost half of Koreans found the Internet to be the most important news source for information about the election campaign. Only about one-third of Americans concurred; they still found television to be their main political news source.

While Koreans clearly preferred the Internet as a source of political news, they appeared to be somewhat less likely than Americans to rely on social media for such news. Although 6 in 10 Koreans used Facebook or Twitter within six months of the election (compared to 8 in 10 Americans), only about 2 in 10 of Korean netizens made daily use of social media for political news. This contrasted with about one-third of Americans who relied on social media for election news. Thus, while most Koreans consider social media to be important political discussion tools, they seem to remain reluctant to take advantage of these new communication forms. This reluctance to use social media during the 2012 campaign was likely due to the fact that such communication is relatively new in South Korea and has yet to be adopted by citizens as a routine information source. In contrast, Americans have had significant experience with political social media during the 2008 U.S. presidential election, which was dominated by Barack Obama's sophisticated Internet strategies that embraced social media as a central campaign tool (see also Chapter 8 in this volume).

It is important to note, however, that most Koreans saw social media as politically important. Consistently, about 6 in 10 Koreans believed that social media are important for keeping up with political news, expressing political feelings and opinions, discussing political issues, and finding people who share their views on important political issues. Americans, on the other hand, were far less enthusiastic about these utilities of social media. Only about one-third of U.S. netizens believed it was important to discuss political issues or sharing political views with others through social media.

Overall, it appears that Koreans tend to believe much more strongly than Americans in the 'political utility' of social media, possibly because it became a widespread tool for citizens and politicians alike during the 2012 Korean presidential campaign. It is therefore not surprising that social media users in South Korea tended to feel politically more efficacious, especially those who exchanged political messages on social media and used Facebook to discuss politics. And while the 2008 U.S. presidential election might have provided Americans with an earlier glimpse at the power of social media during elections, many of them might have become disillusioned with the democratic power of social media during the first four years of the Obama administration. As a consequence, Korean citizens have been much more enthusiastic about the political power of social media than their American counterparts.

At the same time, the findings also indicate that both political efficacy and social media use were not associated with a greater likelihood of voting among Korean citizens. While this is somewhat surprising, we believe that the high participation rate in the 2012 presidential election might have been at least partly responsible for this

non-finding. After all, almost 8 in 10 of eligible citizens voted in the hotly contested 2012 election, thus greatly reducing the likelihood that social media might have had any significant additional impact on political engagement or voter turnout.

In the end, the strong emergence of social media in the 2012 Korean presidential election simply marked the beginning of an important trend toward more voter engagement and participation in the campaign itself. While American citizens have been exposed extensively to such engagement efforts during the 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential election (for example, through Obama's strategy to encourage citizens to become active 'grassroots' campaigners through his social networking communities), most Koreans still have to get used to the idea that they themselves can actively participate in political elections with more than just their vote.

### Notes

- 1 The South Korean survey was conducted online with a representative sample of 1,063 Korean citizens between 23 November and 6 December 2012. The survey, which took about 10 minutes to complete, contained questions that focused on (a) perceptions of the two main presidential candidates (Park Guen-hye and Moon Jae-in), (b) the use of traditional and social media for obtaining election information, (c) the use of social media for discussing the election with friends and relatives, (d) the level of political participation during the six months leading up to the campaign, and (e) voting behaviour. Additional questions probed respondents' political interest and efficacy, plus standard demographic characteristics such as sex, age, education, political ideology, and income. The survey's response rate was 15 per cent. Similarly, the U.S. survey was conducted online with a representative sample of 1,063 U.S. citizens interviewed between 26 October and 6 November 2012. The questions in the U.S. survey were mostly identical to the questions used in the South Korean survey and therefore can be compared directly. The response rate for the U.S. survey also was 15 per cent.
- 2 The findings also indicate that fewer than 2 in 10 Korean netizens visited either Park's (15.7 per cent) or Moon's (13.5 per cent) campaign website during the last six months of the election. Although this amounts to a fairly impressive use of a new political medium in South Korea, only a very small percentage used the websites to participate in activities such as fundraising (2 per cent both for Park and Moon) or volunteering to support events (3 per cent for Park and 2 per cent for Moon).
- 3 Political efficacy was measured by combining the agreement scores to the following three statements: "I consider myself well-qualified to participate in discussions about politics"; "Voting provides people with an effective way to influence government"; "I think I am better informed about politics than most people." The resulting scale ranges from 3 (= *low efficacy*) to 15 (= *high efficacy*;  $M = 9.98$ ,  $SD = 2.28$ , Cronbach's  $\alpha = .64$ ). Respondents' likelihood of voting was measured by asking respondents to rate their chances of voting in the presidential election on a scale from 1 (= *definitely will not vote*) to 10 (= *definitely will vote*).
- 4 The variables measuring political use of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were created by combining the answers to questions that probed the political use of each social networking site during the six months prior to the election (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*). For 'political use of Facebook', answers to 11 separate questions were combined into an index ( $M = .81$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ , range 0–11, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ), for 'political use of Twitter' seven questions were combined ( $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .93$ , range 0–7, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ), and for 'political use of YouTube' six questions were combined ( $M = .69$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ , range 0–6, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .66$ ).

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