RICH INFORMATION, LESS PARTICIPATION
-WHY DID VOTERS’ PARTICIPATION DECREASE IN THE 2007 KOREAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS ONE?

A Thesis
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By

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This paper explores the relationship between Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and political participation of the Korean public by examining the two most recent presidential elections.

The 2002 presidential election was a symbolic moment in South Korean political history when fast-emerging civic engagement fueled by new ICTs finally had a significant impact on the outcome. However, the voter-centered participation was not seen again in the 2007 election, in which the 17th (2008-2012) Korean president Myeong-Bak Lee was elected. Despite much more advanced technologies for efficient social conversation, voters did not show as much enthusiasm in the election process as they had five years before, and many active supporters as well as campaign volunteers suddenly disappeared. Why has the vigorous online participation and voter-centered campaign not been replicated? Would the decreasing political participation be a universal trend or just a special feature of the 2007 election in Korea?

To answer these questions, this paper first examines the successful points in producing massive participation in 2002 and the limitations of online participation in 2007, considering why voter engagement disappeared so suddenly. At the same time, having investigated the character of online participation in the two consecutive elections, I propose the idea that the Internet or ICTs cannot automatically lead to advancement in political behavior unless accompanied by solid democratic experience shared by members of society.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

While I have observed the fast developing Information Communication Technologies and dynamic Korean politics between 2000 and 2008, I have been intrigued by the issue of “Internet and Democracy”. However, the relationship between these two concepts was hard to pin down in the beginning, making it a complicated thesis topic. That said, although I had to struggle in designing the thesis, the challenge gave me a deeper sense of accomplishment in the end.

First of all, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Diana Owen. Without her endless support and encouragement I could have not finished the work. Being a political scientist who specialized in media and American politics, she is highly knowledgeable in the topic and gave me tremendous academic inspiration. I sincerely thank her for the substantial advice throughout the process.

It was also a big challenge personally to finish my Masters course with a thesis while becoming a mother at the same time. My daughter Sophia Joon-hee Lee was born on May 14, 2010. Undoubtedly, she is the best gift I have ever received. However, throughout the summer I had to struggle between taking care of the newborn and working on my thesis. Even with her imperfect mother, Joon-hee did well the whole time, and was the biggest motivation for me to complete the task. My husband Seung Yong Lee also assisted me a lot despite his own busy life as a doctoral candidate. I appreciate his everlasting interest and support.

Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank my mother, Tae-Soon Kim, who has always stayed by me whenever I needed her. I love you mother.

Many thanks,
SANGJU LEE
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Will the Internet promote democracy or lead to its decline? This question would be one of the long lasting puzzles in all information societies. Basically, the Internet provided a better environment for fertilizing democracy by empowering individuals over the authorities. For example, with the advent of the Internet individuals acquired means to access more information, to communicate interactively with broader audiences, and to act collaboratively. On the other hand, there also exist negative views that the Internet distracts the public from central issues and promotes individualism to decrease interest in politics as well as active participation.

My personal experience as a journalist also gives me ambivalent feelings about the Internet as a means of political development. The Internet has surely removed barriers of information providers so that anyone can speak about anything. This has resulted in a new media explosion representing diverse voices. The abundance of news outlets in the society seemed to destroy opinion monopolies and the new media explosion itself was expected to promote democratic values. However what I have noticed in the Korean media industry since the Internet media proliferated is somewhat different. The rapid increase in the number of news outlets set off excessive competition among players, and they started to value speedy and sensational reporting, which is easier to achieve than quality reporting. The media explosion has also failed to bring about diverse opinions in Korea as the multiple media produce only similar content everyday, mostly derived from the wire news services, routine press releases, and
government announcements. Consequently, amid the richness of news providers, audiences still feel this is not the real alternative journalism.

I cannot offer any conclusive views about the Internet’s role in politics whether it increases, decreases, or supplements democracy. Nevertheless, I will argue in this paper that information and communication technology (ICT) development does not automatically guarantee more participation and better democracy, as suggested by an examination of two consecutive Korean presidential elections in 2002 and 2007.

The 2002 Korean presidential election was a symbolic moment in Korean political history when the fast emerging civic engagement fueled by new ICTs finally led to significant outcomes. Most importantly, it was no longer the influential mass media and powerful politicians but the countless voters and Internet based smaller news media that played a conclusive role in making the young progressive candidate Roh Moo-Hyun the president of South Korea. Equipped with a fast and prompt communication tool, the Internet, general voters across the country could act swiftly to participate in the whole campaign process as volunteers, small donors, and citizen journalists. The vibrant movement also changed the old way of creating political discourse. Messages are created in not only a top-down but also a bottom-up fashion, and disseminated vertically as well as horizontally. Public opinion about the Korean presidential election was largely influenced by messages created by three major newspapers-*The Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Daily, and The Dong-A Ilbo*- that account for over two thirds of the Korean newspaper market. These major actors of the news media have been generating influential views on all political issues in the society, mostly
representing the vested interests. In this oligopolistic system, political messages
hierarchically transmitted to the crowd and minor voices were buried under the
dominant voices. The 2002 presidential election is evaluated so highly because it was
the moment when the citizens’ peaceful engagement in politics finally achieved a
change defeating Korean conventionalism. The empowered civic engagement and its
success in 2002 also ignited hope for democratic evolution in the near future through
ongoing growth of participation that is organized by the highly developed networking
technology.

However, the voter-centered participation was not replicated in the following
2007 South Korean presidential election, in which the Korean current president
Myoung-Bak Lee was elected despite even highly developed social communication
technology. Voters did not show enthusiasm in the election process as much as they did
five years ago, and many active supporters as well as campaign volunteers suddenly
disappeared. Consequently, voter turnout decreased by almost 8%, from 70.83% in
2002 to 63.01% in 2007, and voters’ sense of political efficacy withered considerably.
Despite much more advanced technologies for efficient social conversation, voters did
not participate proactively in the election and the major media recaptured their role as
public opinion controllers. My research was stimulated by a curiosity about the decrease
in dynamic participation and voter-centered campaigning in 2007. Would the
decreasing participation be a universal trend or just a special feature of the 2007
election in Korea? In this paper I will explore the successful points in producing
massive participation in 2002 and the limitations of online participation in 2007 at the
same time. Having investigated the character of online participation in the two consecutive elections, I would like to propose that the Internet or ICTs cannot automatically lead to advancement in political behavior unless accompanied by solid democratic experience shared by members of the society.

In chapter 1, I explain the two consecutive Korean presidential elections to provide a general idea about the campaign procedure, the degree of civic engagement, and the consequences of each election. To do this objectively, official data from the Korean National Election Commission and some published survey results are used.

Chapter 2 surveys the theoretical foundations of the issue before analyzing the depleted citizen participation in the 2007 Korean presidential election. I mainly discuss various theories on the role/effect of technology on political advancement in a society. Established works of several scholars and researchers in media studies and political science are cited.

Chapter 3 provides details of the research method. To investigate my topic, I used the historical observation method with descriptive data and documentary analysis. For example, to show the relationship between new communication technology and political participation in Korea after 2000, I compare Internet usage behavior and voters’ sense of political efficacy during the examined period. I found that although ICT as well as the voters’ Internet usage was much more apparent in the 2007 presidential election, voters’ sense of political efficacy and the degree of participation significantly decreased. Also, I try to explain the contextual reasons for the change-why once wide spread
participation collapsed within a few years-through historical observations of Korean politics during the examined period.

In chapter 4, I present the actual findings and analysis of my research. It is revealed that the Internet usage rate and some ICT development indicators had a negative relationship with the Korean voters’ political efficacy in the given period. Besides, the increase of Internet usage was related to the expansion of individual rather than public life. Additionally, I show how the proactive followers of Roh suddenly withdrew their support as they were disappointed by some of his policies. I also investigate how election issues could affect voters’ attitude in evaluating candidates. What voters think important in selecting a leader changed according to electoral issues during the campaign period. Specifically, in 2002, Koreans, especially the young, were very excited about the strong reformation will and progressive image of Roh, although he was relatively inexperienced and politically rigid. However, five years later, in the middle of the global economic crisis, voters turned toward the older and more experienced candidate regardless of his moral defects.

Chapter 5 contains a summary of the research and suggestions for further discussions and future research.

Civic engagement and democracy enhancement through ICTs has received tremendous attention internationally. In addition, it is believed that ICTs play a significant role in democratization, especially in politically underdeveloped countries. However, the Internet was not sufficient for democratic progress, at least in Korea. I hope my work will contribute to clarifying the limitations of the role of technology in
the enrichment of social capital and stimulates further research on the use of Internet for
the advancement of democracy.

CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF KOREA’S 2002 AND 2007 ELECTIONS

Internet and Political Change in Korea

South Korea’s election process was entirely democratized only in the late 1980s
after a long period of military authoritarian government. Since then, several
conservative media outlets that conduct and report public opinion polls became key
players in political decision making processes to replace the past authoritative
government. Korean major media, especially the big three newspapers, The Chosun Ilbo,
JoongAng Daily, and The Dong-A Ilbo, has been dominating around 80% of the news
market and they have been immensely influencing elections by not only just reflecting
but also leading public opinion (Lee 2003, 65). These conservative media have also
reinforced Korean conservatism by reducing the chance of transmitting diverse voices
from civil society to the political system and by reinforcing the voices of vested
interests (Choi 2002). However, this construct started to be drastically challenged with
the development of new information and communication technology from the late
1990s.

The watershed event of the communication revolution in Korean politics was
the 2000 National Assembly election, when the civic alliances’ anti-campaign
movement against incompetent and corrupt candidates started. A total of 981 civil
communities and activist groups organized an association called Chong-sun Shimin
Yeondai (Citizen Alliance for General Election) to act collectively for the development of a deliberative voting culture. By scrutinizing each candidate’s antecedents and performance as a political figure, Chong-sun-Shimin-Yeondai made a list of candidates unfit for the public service, and publicized it. Although the list was unbiased and reliable, traditional media had paid little attention to it because spreading the list was against the election law banning open support by civic organizations toward a political party or politician. However, the alliance’s “blacklist” disseminated rapidly into the civic society via the Internet, and 59 out of 86 candidates on the blacklist consequently failed to be elected, achieving a 68.2% success rate for the civic alliance. In the capital area (including Seoul and Kyoung-gi province where one fourth of Korean population are residing), the success rate reached 95%, with the dropping of 19 candidates out of 20 in the list (Kwon 2003, 263). Because Korean election law circumscribes civil organization’s freedom of expression in the context of political elections, the defeat movement triggered nation-wide discussions on civil disobedience and provoked dynamic interaction among general citizens. As a result, the Supreme Court fined seven civil alliance leaders for organizing the unlawful defeat movement (Koh 2001).

Although the Chong-sun Shimin Yeondai’s defeat movement was judged illegal, the spirit of citizen activism was set in motion and continued to energize later political events. Now the Internet came to be recognized as a vehicle for political participation and collective action that could make a difference to conventional politics. It also meant that the social agenda is not decided by the center or the top anymore but is created from the bottom or the periphery.
Internet and Online Media

If the civic alliance’s defeat movement in 2000 was the seed for the massive civic participation in the 2002 presidential election, the fast emerging information communication technology (ICT) was its fertilizer. With the government’s bold IT policy in the late 1990s, South Korea became one of the world leaders in broadband and Internet usage by the year of 2002. With her high population density, new technology could disseminate throughout the country at a remarkable speed.

The fast technology dissemination lowered the cost of Internet access significantly, and the number of Internet users also increased rapidly. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the number of Internet users per 100 inhabitants in Korea in the year of 1999 jumped to 23.55 from 6.78, recording a 247.3% growth. It made another 74.1% growth in the next year (see Table 1).
Table 1. Internet Users per 100 Inhabitants (ITU)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Internet Users</th>
<th>Growth Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>23.55</td>
<td>247.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>41.01</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>59.80</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>70.61</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>74.10</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>76.50</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Telecommunication Union (2009)

With the remarkable increase in accessibility, the Internet rapidly became an integral part of Korean life. The social networking website Cyworld (www.cyworld.com), which is perceived as “Korea’s Facebook”, acquired its popularity in 2002. Daily visitors to Cyworld jumped from 142,000 in September 2001 to 335,000 (136% increase) in a year and further to 935,000 (another 179% increase) in September 2003 (Lim 2003). E-commerce market size doubled during the same period from 11,900 trillion won to 235,000 trillion won\(^a\). Cyber shopping and online banking also became prevalent, achieving three digit growth between 2001 and 2003 (KOSIS 2009). In addition, star dotcom companies started to prosper after having survived the 2000 and 2001 global IT business depression. For example, Daum, one of the pioneer Korean

\(^a\) 1 dollar = 1,250 won as of June 11, 2010
dotcom companies, reported a near net profit of 15.3 billion won in fiscal 2002—a
growth of almost 60 times. NHN which operates the largest Korean web-portal Naver
and a web game service Hangame also accomplished a net profit of 30 billion won in
2002, growth of almost 600% compared to the previous year (Korea Internet Whitepaper
2003).

The media industry rode the wave of Internet-driven change as well. From the
mid 1990s, the traditional media competitively launched its online service. The Chosun
Ilbo, the daily newspaper that commands the largest readership in Korea, opened
Digital Chosun in 1995. Not far behind were the big five daily newspapers: The Dong-A
and The Hankyoreh (2000). More importantly, independent online media not associated
with either the established media giants or any other vested interest groups sprang up to
change the landscape of the media industry. For example, citizen journalism website
OhmyNews was launched on February 22, 2000 under the slogan of “All Citizens are
Journalists” with an initial participation of 727 news guerillas (citizen journalists). With
great interest from the citizens who were thirsty for alternative media, citizen journalists
in Ohmynews became over 40,000 until February 2006. Pressian was established in
September 2001 by several professional journalists, proposing a quality and an
alternative online news provider. In addition, political column websites in which non-
gaek (poliemists) proactively posted partisan arguments about political issues sprouted
in 2002. Seoprise, the most successful non-gaek media, showed up in October 2002 and
played a significant role in the 2002 presidential election.
Before the appearance of alternative online media, Korean public opinion was heavily dependent on several major media outlets, especially the three major newspapers- *The Chosun Ilbo*, *Joongang Ilbo*, and *The DongA Ilbo*. Moreover, all three newspapers represented conservative interests and always influenced public opinion to lean to the right. Yeon Ho Oh, the CEO of OhmyNews, called it “8 to 2 society”, where major newspapers have 80% of the power to generate public opinion and hundreds of other players shares the remaining 20%. In this structure, the voice of minorities hardly reached the audiences and whatever major newspapers said was perceived without doubt as the widely held public opinion (Oh 2003, 108).

However, the open nature of computer mediated communication (CMC) created a new communication culture in the society. Most prominently, CMC destroyed the boundary between information creators and audiences and demolished professional editors’ gatekeeping process in publishing news (Hall 2001, 68). As a result, the monopoly of the opinion market by the three major newspapers had been seriously challenged for the first time.

*The Night Drama of December 19, 2002*

Roh, Moo-Hyun’s victory in the 2002 presidential election was the victory of cybercitizenship. Although Roh did not receive much attention from mainstream media in the beginning of the race, his online supporters snowballed and actively participate in the entire election as campaigners, small donors, and political information spreaders. In
particular, politician Roh’s online fan club *Nosamo* (an acronym for “those who love Roh Moo-Hyun”) was the epicenter of the unprecedented voter-centered election.

*Nosamo* (www.nosamo.org) was organized in April 2000 by 40 initial members who were not associated with established political organizations. Right after Roh had failed to acquire a National Assembly seat in the 2000 general election, they spontaneously gathered to support Roh because they admired his serious approach to the struggle for regionalism and old politics. The members also voluntarily collected fund to set up a *Nosamo* website as the center for supporting activities, and they gradually organized offline chapters throughout the country as well. Although *Nosamo* was treated as a passing fad by mainstream media, it attained great interest from netizens, and its members increased significantly during the 2002 presidential election campaign to reach 120,000 at the peak. (Cheon 2009)

The appearance of *Nosamo* indicated the political activism of the young generation. It is widely perceived that the older generation is more diligent to participate in public events. However, the *Nosamo* phenomenon was different. The core members were in their 20s and 30s who previously had an apathy or aversion to politics. The fan club was organized purely by voters, and not by political parties or the candidate himself. In particular, *Nosamo* brought “386 generation” (named after the 386 computer and refers to those who were in their 30s in 2002, attended college in the 1980s, and were born in the 1960s) to the mainstream politics. The Korean 386 generation has an exclusive identity as it is remembered in the context of Korea’s democratization history. When these young people were college students in the 1980s, many of them vigorously
participated in fiery demonstrations calling for true democracy. They finally achieved some success in 1987 when President Roh Tae Woo (1988.2-1993.2) agreed to a direct presidential election system (Park 2007, 83). Soon after the success, the protesting students disappeared from the streets, but the passions for real democracy was still alive in their mind. Roh Moo Hyun and his ideal views on politics stimulated their latent desire to reform Korean society once again.

Nosamo members and the 386 generation carved out a miracle-like victory in the 2002 presidential election. The critical issue of the election was regionalism, which had caused a rift in the Korean peninsula for a long time. It was, at the same time, a confrontation between older- and younger-generation Koreans. The older generation with a clear memory of the catastrophic Korean War and postwar poverty feels a strong affiliation to their region of origin. They supported Lee Hoi Chang, the candidate for the conservative Grand National Party (GNP) and a former Supreme Court justice, because they preferred social stability to change/reform. On the other hand, younger voters (386 and under), most of whom are politically progressive and dislike the conservative’s blind hatred toward North Korea, felt less affiliation to where they are from and had a strong hope to change old politics. They widely supported Roh who had become a human rights lawyer without a college degree by passing the state-run judicial examination and who highly evaluated ICT’s democratic values. The Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) candidate Roh sturdily insisted on abolition of regionalism and transparency in Korean politics. He also represented the progressives on North Korean issues and international relations. Because of his clean image and strong
commitment to reforms, Roh rapidly emerged as a symbol of change and acquired more and more support from young voters. The change in Roh’s approval rate well explains how radically he acquired popularity. In January 2000, three months before the 16th general election, Roh’s voter support was only 1.4%. However the rate gradually increased to 3.2% in May 2000 and 7.6% in August 2000, and it soared to 60.5% in April 2002 (Hwang 2005). It is especially notable that this dramatic change in the support rate was not accomplished by the candidate or his professional aids but by Internet users. Reform-hungry citizens, including Nosamo members, made Roh widely known by participating in online political debates among voters, cross-posting Roh’s messages, texting to promote more participation, micro-fundraising, and organizing offline chapters across the nation (Chang 2005, 926).

Digital citizenship showed its true strength on December 19, 2002, the election day. On the night before the election, Roh was in danger of losing a substantial number of votes because the chief of the People’s Consolidation Party Cheong Mong Joon, who endorsed Roh before, suddenly withdrew his endorsement. Since Cheong held considerable publicity in the election, his recantation was quite a shock for Roh. Although Roh was slightly ahead of Lee at the last survey before the election, exit poll results on the decision day showed that Roh was behind his conservative challenger, Lee, by approximately 2% points. Therefore, young voters’ turnout in the afternoon became a crucial factor for Roh’s victory in the election. As soon as Cheong’s decision was reported, Roh’s supporters rushed to the Internet to debate how to react as well as to encourage younger voters’ participation by posting, e-mailing, and texting. In the
meantime, online media, especially Ohmynews, became the center of the online
deliberation (Joyce 2007, 5). As a result of netizens’ efforts on the day, Roh made a
dramatic come-from-behind victory by a 2.3% (570,980 votes) margin.

To summarize, young grass-root voters’ participation stimulated by ICT was the
key factor in Roh’s 2002 victory. It was also the moment when the latent desire for new
politics was activated by the new communication technology.

**Collapsed Participation: The 2007 Korean Presidential Election**

In 2007, the infrastructure for online campaigning and online participation had
significantly developed compared to five years prior. According to Korea Internet and
Security Agency (KISA), 8 out of 10 Koreans (79.5%) used the Internet in 2007,
whereas only 4.5 (44.7%) did so in 2002\(^b\). Furthermore, about a half (45.3%) of
Koreans and 78.8% of people in their 20s used wireless Internet through hand-held
devices at the end of 2007, whereas 32.3% of Koreans did so in 2002. Korea was also
ranked the world’s number one country in broadband proliferation by the Information
Technology & Innovation Foundation (ITIF) in 2007.

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\(^b\) Internet Usage Rate=Internet Users who are over six and use Internet at least once a
month/Survey Population.
### Table 2. 2008 ITIF Broadband Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Nation (Composite Score)</th>
<th>Household Penetration (Subscribers per household)</th>
<th>Speed (Average download speed in Mbps)</th>
<th>Price (Lowest monthly price per Mbps, US $ purchasing power parity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>South Korea (15.92)</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Japan (15.05)</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Finland (12.20)</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Netherlands (11.77)</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>France (11.59)</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sweden (11.53)</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Denmark (11.44)</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Iceland (11.20)</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Norway (11.05)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Switzerland (10.78)</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Canada (10.61)</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Australia (10.53)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>United Kingdom (10.30)</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Luxembour (10.25)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>United States (10.25)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Information Technology and Information Foundation (2007)

* Each nation’s overall score is the sum of its standard deviation score for each of the three indications.
At the same time, various platforms for political debates such as blogs, online communities, Web-cafes, and social media flourished in cyberspace during the period. Formats of expression also diversified from mainly text to images, flashes, and video clips. In particular, unlike in the 2002 election, where only young progressive voters made use of the Internet for political participation, Internet and online activism were not an exclusive property of younger people anymore in 2007. For example, the Internet usage rate in the 40-49 age group jumped from 39.3% to 79.2% over the period 2003 to 2007, and the rate among those 50 and above rose to 46.5% from 9.3% (KISA, 2003, 2008).

In addition, Korean conservatives who had sensed a crisis in Korean conservatism in the 2002 election started to plunge into online space. The entry of the older generation as well as conservatives in cyberspace meant a transformation of the ideological spectrum on the Web. Considering all these remarkable upgrades in dynamic political debates on the Internet, many scholars and journalists expected that online campaigning and civic engagement would play a bigger role in the 2007 presidential election. Besides, until early 2007, the media loudly forecasted that user created contents (UCC) would influence the voters’ decision immensely.

However, despite all the favorable factors for widespread participation, the voters’ interest and engagement in the presidential election shrunk considerably. The Internet was nearly useless for innovative campaigning, so it helped neither the weak candidates to make a turn-over or the strong candidates to attract online audiences. For example, although there were on average 300,000 daily visitors to the Nosamo Web site
in addition to almost 100,000 members in the 2002 election, the leading candidates in 2007 had only 100,000 monthly visitors to their official Website (Yun 2008, 204). Consequently, voter turnout decreased by almost 8% points, from 70.83% in 2002 to 63.01% in 2007, recording the lowest rate since Korea democratized the election process in 1987.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Internet and ICTs could play a significant role in broadening political participation. Most of all, they have promoted users’ access to information and have opened up various alternative ways of information circulation that once was dominated by the mass media. Although there remain concerns about access gaps, the Internet surely provides greater usability than any other communication technologies ever invented. The Internet has an egalitarian structure as it facilitates interactive communication in all directions and makes people reach out for various social communities and political processes (Di Gennaro and Dutton 2006, 299). In particular, the younger generation is more susceptible to this transforming society because they accept technological adventures more willingly and vigorously to create new participating practices and culture (Owen 2008/09, 14).

Despite all the advantageous features of the Internet, there have been conflicting assessments about whether they have positively affected politics and civic engagement. According to one view, the new ICTs do not inherently encourage participation and social capital since they, by eroding community ties, isolate groups of
people who have different views, and distract people from the central public issues
(Putnam 2000; Sunstein 2001). On the other hand, other scholars say that the new ICTs
can actually invigorate citizen participation. Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward (2005, 578)
found that the Internet not only makes existing activists even more active but also
stimulates distancing or disengaged people to act, creating a net positive political
change in the European context. Some research has also declared that there is a positive
relationship between Internet use and participation in terms of voter turnout (Bimber
2003; Tolbert and McNeal 2003) and campaign contributions (Bimber 2003).

In addition, there have been skeptical voices, especially among political
scientists, at the same time that technologies just reinforce the offline society. These
views are based on the normalization theory, which states that that technology, despite
the initial expectation, does not create further political enactment. Schuefele and Nisbet,
who conducted a telephone poll among New York residents to examine the relationship
between Internet usage and political behavior, concluded that the Internet has a limited
impact on promoting citizens’ participation. They found that respondents use the Web
frequently to be entertained, not to get informed politically. Other scholars simply show
ambivalent perspectives on the relationship between the Internet and citizens’
 participation or just put off a decision until a later time. (Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward 2005)

The changed cybercitizenship in South Korea’s two consecutive presidential
elections is worth examination because it empirically demonstrates the ambivalent role
of the Internet in helping political development within a state. In the Korean context, the
Internet once accelerated citizen participation but its role changed to normalize or
reinforce the conventional social structure. By examining the decreased political participation in a highly technologized society, I would like to propose that the development of Information Communication Technology itself will not have a significant effect on invigorating political participation.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

In this paper, I am going to navigate the relationship between developed ICT and political participation by analyzing various data and documents about Korea’s most recent presidential election, in which voter engagement significantly decreased compared to the previous one.

Most of all, I investigate the ICT penetration/usage status and voter engagement in the 2002 and 2007 Korean presidential elections to suggest the relationship between new communication technology and political participation in Korea after 2000. Surveys on Internet use conducted by the Korean Internet and security agency (KISA) under the Korean national Internet development agency of Korea (NIDA) are used to provide a general idea about ICT proliferation and usage patterns in Korea. The survey is administered twice a year to a nationwide sample of over 25,000 persons aged six years and above through computer-aided telephone interviews. At the same time, a voter opinion survey conducted by The Korean National Election Committee and The Korean Political Science Association is utilized to show the official election result as well as voters’ feeling of political efficacy in the presidential election. In addition, candidates’
Contrary to the general expectation, trends of ICT proliferation in the society and political activism appeared to have a negative relationship at least during the five years in Korea. To provide an explanation as to why voter engagement decreased despite the highly developed communication technology, I am going to discuss limits of the Internet as a tool for political development by analyzing Internet usage habits mainly with NIDA’s annual reports and some media statistics.

While I try to show the impact of technology on political activism, I also suggest contextual reasons why the once wide-spread participation collapsed within a few years through an historical observation of Korean politics during the examined period. I hypothesize that the Roh administration’s poor job performance in social unification affected young voters’ sense of political efficacy and in turn lowered their political participation. To examine this hypothesis, I track Roh’s approval rate during his term of office. Although Roh obtained 59.6% approval rate when he started his term, it dropped to 22.3% at the end of the first year and swung between 12.3% and 34.3% (Korean Gallup 2007d). At last, different central issues in each election should be discussed as another factor that affected voters’ primary concern. By scrutinizing the voters’ ideological preference by age and then central election issues, we can imagine how the central issues played a role in voter’s interest toward election and the turnout.

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d The survey is conducted quarterly through telephone among a nationwide sample of voters aged 19 years and above by Korean Gallup (www.gallup.co.kr).
rate. To test this argument, I am going to use the same data and documents introduced above already.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

Full-Fledged Internet Life and Decreasing Voter Turnout Rate

According to the “Survey on Internet Uses,” conducted annually by the Korean Internet and Security Agency (KISA), Korea achieved remarkable development in ICT proliferation since 2000. The Internet usage rate, defined as “the ratio of Internet users aged six years and above who have used the Internet at least once in the last month,” jumped to 75.5% at the end of 2007 from 44.7% in 2000 and 59.4% in 2002 (Figure 2).

At the same time, the cost of using the Internet significantly lowered from 32,800 Korean won in 2002 to 19,000 Korean won in 2007 as the national IT infrastructure was completed. Due to the lowered cost and better services, near 79.8% of Korean households could access wired Internet at home by the end of 2007, whereas 70.2% had Internet access at home in 2002. Needless to say, the Internet became an integral part of everyday life during the period. In the 2007 survey, 74.1% of Internet users answered that they used the Net at least once a day, and 96.6% said they accessed the Internet at least once a week.
Figure 1. Trends in Internet usage rate and Internet users (%, amount in thousands.)

Source: Korean Internet & Security Agency (2010)

Internet access by mobile devices, in particular, significantly increased after the 2002 election. When asked what devices are used for Internet access (multiple responses), 46.2% of Internet users chose the mobile phone (or other hand held devices) as means to access the Net, making it the second popular mode of using the Internet after personal computer (KISA 2003, 2008).

As explained in chapter 2, Roh Moo-Hyun’s victory in the 2002 presidential election was due to enriched cybercitizenship. After the 2002 election, many scholars and journalists predicted that much bigger participation movements would take place in the 2007 presidential and later national elections because voters now possessed even better and easier tools to engage in politics. However, the reality was much different from this expectation. Most important, the voter turnout rate, which is a direct
indication of political interest among the public dropped drastically from 70.8% in the 2002 presidential elections to 63% in the 2007 election. The voter turnout rate in the National Assembly elections during the same period also dropped from 60.6% in 2004 to 46% in 2008. To see the trend, I generated graphs of voter turnout rate for both presidential and national assembly elections since 1987, which is the year when Korea finally established the democratic direct election procedure.

Figure 2. Voter Turnout Rate on Presidential Elections Since 1987 (unit: %)
Obviously, the voter turnout rate in Korea’s major elections has been decreasing continuously. It also means that ICT proliferation since the end of the 1990s has not contributed to promoting voter turnout. However, it is hasty yet to conclude that Internet proliferation has a negative relationship with political participation because of the following three reasons. First, the voter turnout rate does not represent the quality of voter participation. Some people do not vote although they have a great interest in politics. Some still participate in other supporting activities such as donating and volunteering without voting. They believe voting is not the only way to express their opinion. Second, although the voter turnout rate has shown a decreasing trend in other democracies as well, there also are democracies where voter turnout rate has significantly increased with ICT proliferation. Actually, there are mixed results of the
relationship between the voter turnout rate and a developed communication technology.

As shown in Table 2, the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom have been experiencing increased voter turnout rates roughly from the end of 1990s when ICT revolution had started in those countries, whereas Germany, France, and Italy show decreasing trends.

Table 3. Voter Turnout Rate in Major Elections of G7 Countries Since 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Election Type</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Voter Turn-out (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>69.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>61.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>60.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>64.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>59.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>68.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>67.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>60.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>60.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>79.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>79.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>83.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>77.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>78.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>79.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>77.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continues)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>87.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>86.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>82.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>81.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>83.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>80.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>73.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>67.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>60.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>67.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>69.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>77.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>71.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>59.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>61.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>65.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>56.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>78.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>57.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>65.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>51.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>63.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>45.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>68.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>47.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>89.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>82.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>81.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>86.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>89.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IDEA, Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2010)
Third, Korea’s higher voter turnout rate in the 1980s and 1990s are somewhat related to the authoritarian government. Under authoritarianism, Korean voters were somewhat forced to vote by legislative powers. Thus, some scholars view the declining voter turnout rate as a normalization process rather than a meaningful trend.

**Younger Voters’ Return to Political Apathy**

As an explanation for the decreased participation despite the more participation-friendly environment, I suggest the reduced political interest of voters after disappointing experience of their previous action. The younger voters’ interest, in particular, changed remarkably between 2002 and 2007. To examine voters’ attitudinal change toward politics as well as elections, I tried to inspect how voters’ sense of political efficacy has transformed between the 2002 and 2007 elections. I mainly used the voter opinion survey conducted by the National Election Committee (NEC) in December 2007. It was a telephone survey among a sample of 1,500 persons (aged 19 years and above) with a 95% confidence interval and 2.5% sampling error.

Most important, respondents who said “I will definitely vote” just before the 2007 presidential election decreased significantly by 13.5% point compared to the same survey in 2002. According to NEC, while 80.5% had said they would certainly vote on election day in the 2002 election, only 67% chose the same answer in 2007. Moreover, the reasons indicated for not voting show that the voters’ political efficacy decreased while their political apathy increased. Furthermore, 29.2% of the respondents answered that they did not feel like voting because “voting would not change anything,” and 26.6%
answered they would not vote because they had no interest in politics (NEC 2002, 2007). It is a meaningful result because political interest and political efficacy are very important factors affecting voters’ behavior (Abramson and Aldrich 1982).

The remarkable change in the political interest of the younger Korean voters is especially noteworthy. As described in chapter 2, the younger generation represented by “386” was the central group in the massive participation in the 2002 presidential election. However they disappeared from the core stage and did not play a significant role at all in the later elections. As we can see in Figure 5., voters in their 20s and 30s were a major factor in candidate Roh’s victory. Although The Grand National Party candidate Lee Heo-Chang received strong support from the 50s and over group, it was not adequate to defeat the change-wanting younger voters. Consequently, Roh won the election with a slight margin of 2.3% point (570,980 votes).

Figure 4. The 16th presidential election result by age
However, Figure 6, which shows the votes obtained by the major two candidates in the 17th presidential election, suggests completely different patterns. Most significantly, there is little difference among age groups as regards their support for candidates. The conservative Grand National Party candidate Lee Myeong-Bak received greater support not only from older age groups but also from the younger.

When the voter turnout rate is reviewed by age group (Table 4), it is easier to see the sharp decline of younger voters’ interest in the presidential election. In the age groups of 25 -29, 30 -34, and 35 -39 the voter turnout reduced by two digits compared to the previous presidential election while the gap is only 2.4% to 7.1% (less than the average 7.8%) in other age groups.
Table 4. Voter Turnout Rate by Age (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60 and Over</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5. Political Indifference Rate (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>20s</th>
<th>30s</th>
<th>40s</th>
<th>50s</th>
<th>60 and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Korean Social Science Data Center (2007)

Another survey conducted by the Korean Political Science Association (KPSA) and the Korean Social Science Data Center also show the decreased political interest of younger voters between 2002 and 2007. As indicated in Table 5, the rate of voters who said “I have no or little interest in politics” increased most largely among the 20s and 40s than other age groups. In the 50s and 60-and-over age groups, the difference was only 2.5% point and 1.6% point, respectively. Sung-Yi Yun, a Korean political scientist
who analyzed the survey result in the KPSA’s journal, pointed that the decreased interest in politics among the younger generation affected the decreased online campaign culture in the 2007 presidential election (Yun 2008).

Table 6 also provides evidence of expanded political indifference during the examined period. While over a half of the respondents (54.6%) indicated that they would not vote because of personal reasons in 2002, a substantial proportion in the 2007 survey chose not to vote because of political cynicism (there is none to support, they have no interest in politics, the election result will not change anything).

Table 6. Reasons for Not Voting (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is none to support</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have no interest in politics</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The result will be the same regardless of my voting</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whoever the president is, it will not make any difference</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is little difference among candidates</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reasons</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Korean National Election Committee (2008)
These survey results primarily represent the diminished political interest of Korean voters but they also explain why political participation was so weak in the 17th presidential election.

The decreased participation can be understood as the normalization process after the bubble-like participation movement in 2002. Basically, Koreans in general do not participate aggressively in the political decision making process. Although they talk a lot about politics in smaller social groups, they rarely speak out or act for political change. In a similar vein, the Korean people rarely participate in institutionalized political organizations such as political party or civil society organizations, either. According to the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS), the participation rate in civil society organizations was only 6.2% and only 0.3% responded that they were engaged in any political party in 2008. Hence, the decreased participation can be explained as the Korean voters’ return to the status quo after the fever-like participation in 2002.

Table 7. Participation Rates in Social Organizations (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Socializing</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Recreation/Sports</th>
<th>NGOs/Civil-Society</th>
<th>Academy</th>
<th>Interest Groups</th>
<th>Political Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Electoral Issues Matter

Among many factors that affect voting behavior, the desire to punish/reward the current administration (retrospective voting behavior) has great impact (Fiorina 1981). If voters were disappointed by their former choice, they would not act in the same way. Korean voters in the 17th presidential election not only turned back from their former favorite party but also gave up their right to vote/participate because of the dissatisfactory political experience. At the same time, the online campaign as well as online journalism failed to create an attractive election agenda this time. Consequently, the Internet was not fully utilized but only reflected the old election rules and practices.

Roh’s historic 2002 victory supported by networked individuals came to be widely regarded as a failed revolution before long. Actually, Korea’s former president Roh Moo-Hyun (1946 -2009) was mainly supported by young voters because of his relatively clean image as well as innovative policy suggestions. He did not act according to political expediency and always tried to follow certain principles. He also stressed that the country should be governed by the well-established governing system, not by a few powerful persons. With his unconventional career and reform willingness, he was expected to change old politics and bring a new vision for Korea’s prosperity. However, his leadership became shaky from the very first year of taking the office. Although he won the election by acquiring 48.9% of the total vote, it was only 2.3% point ahead of his contender Lee Heo-Chang, who received 46.6% of the total vote. It means that there were still a substantial number of people who did not support Roh and his party. More importantly, his ethical image was seriously damaged in 2003 when the
Korean Prosecutor’s Office accused Roh’s core aides of receiving illegal campaign funds during the 2002 primary election. To make matters worse, the opposite party promptly proposed Roh’s impeachment in early 2004 asking him to take responsibility for his aides’ corruption and for the ongoing economic recession. Although Roh was not impeached after all (the Constitutional Court of Korea dismissed the impeachment request), his ethical image and leadership deteriorated considerably. At the same time, the ruling Millennium Democratic Party divided into two parties, the Democratic Party and the Uri Party, in 2003 amid Roh’s crisis, whereas the opponent Grand National Party stabilized on the basis of the steady support of Korean conservatives.

**Figure 6.** President Roh’s Approval Rate 2003-2007

Source: Korea Gallup ([www.gallup.co.kr](http://www.gallup.co.kr), 2010)

These political upheavals affected the approval rate of President Roh directly. Although he started with a 59.6% approval rate, it decreased sharply to 22.3% at the end of the same year. It rose temporarily to 34.3% at the first quarter of 2004 when his
impeachment was rejected by the Korean Constitutional Court, but the president could hardly achieve a 30% approval rate until the end of his term. The black trend line shows a continuous decline in Roh’s approval rate, falling below 20% in the last year of his term.

The real problem was that Roh lost support not only from his opponent groups but also from his supporters. In Korea, there has been a long term discord between the conservatives and the progressives along with regional conflicts. Roh was widely supported by the progressive population, but this support mostly collapsed after his pro-conservative policies such as entering into free trade agreement with the United States, sending troops to Iraq, and showing a rigid response to labor union strikes. Although the president promised to reduce the social divide, economic polarization increased and house prices went up rapidly, making it harder for the poor to have a roof over their heads. His reform effort took time and had to face severe backlashes from the opposition party. Although his intentions deserved praise, he met with miserable results. The progressive population had high expectations about Roh but was greatly disappointed by his poor performance and rapidly withdrew its support. The failed experiment affected people’s attitude toward politics/elections afterward. Some voters turned back to the opposite party, and some simply became indifferent to politics. There is strong evidence to support this explanation. The following two tables show how the voters’ evaluation of the past administration affected their candidate preference in the next election. Although the two survey questions were slightly different, it still provides a meaningful result. As shown in Table 7, the majority of voters who were not satisfied
(76.9% of whom strongly disapproved and 64.7% of whom disapproved) with the then Roh administration supported the opponent party candidate Lee as the next president. Only 4.3% of voters who were strongly unsatisfied with the Roh administration supported the ruling party candidate Cheong again.

Table 8. The Relationship between the Evaluation of the Then Administration and the Decision in the 2007 Presidential Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation of Roh Administration</th>
<th>Strongly Approve</th>
<th>Approve</th>
<th>Disapprove</th>
<th>Strongly Disapprove</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheong Dong-Young (The ruling party)</td>
<td>6 (50.0%)</td>
<td>65 (27.8%)</td>
<td>71 (14.7%)</td>
<td>12 (4.3%)</td>
<td>154 (15.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Myeong-Bak (The opponent party)</td>
<td>3 (25.0%)</td>
<td>91 (38.9%)</td>
<td>313 (64.7%)</td>
<td>216 (76.9%)</td>
<td>623 (61.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Hoe-Chang</td>
<td>24 (10.3%)</td>
<td>49 (10.1%)</td>
<td>37 (13.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>110 (10.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (25.0%)</td>
<td>54 (23.1%)</td>
<td>51 (10.5%)</td>
<td>16 (5.7%)</td>
<td>124 (12.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>1,011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research and Research (Ka 2008, 42)
However, the association between the evaluation of the then administration and candidate preference was not so strong in the 2002 survey. In the 2002 elections, 36.3% of the voters who think the Kim Dae-Jung administration and the ruling New Millennium Party (1997-2002) did a poor job still supported the ruling party candidate Roh. In short, the disappointing experience after the largely participatory election made voters feel more deeply disappointed and led them to turn around to other directions.

Table 9. The Relationship Between the Evaluation of the Then Administration and the Decision in the 2002 Presidential Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation of Kim Administration</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lee Heo-Chang (The opponent party)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roh Moo-Hyun (The ruling party)</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>87.7%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>1,314</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research and Research (Ka 2008, 43)

Furthermore, the economic downturn played an important role in bringing round voters to a conservative party that stands for economic growth and tax cuts
rather than distribution and public welfare. With the global financial crisis that swept through the world from the end of 2007 and the economic recession that followed, Korean voters’ primary concern shifted to jobs and stable economic growth. They were not concerned about political reform and abolishment of regionalism anymore. “It’s the economy, stupid!” thought in American politics, which was widely used during Bill Clinton’s successful presidential campaign against George H. W. Bush, also applied to the Korean politics in 2007 (Alvarez and Nagler 1995, 714). According to the survey conducted by the East Asia Institute just before the 2007 presidential election, the most of the voters indicated economy related issues as the most important national agenda (see Table 10).

**Table 10. Important National Issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Most Important Agenda for the Next Administration</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reducing economic polarization</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic growth</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the quality of life</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social amalgamation</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political reformation</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering the nation’s competitiveness</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving the relationship with North Korea</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening the national security</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: East Asia Institute (2007)
A weak and diffuse online campaign strategy is another reason for the absence of voter participation in the 2007 presidential election. For example, the United New Democratic Party (formerly New Millennium Party) candidate Cheong Dong-Yeong managed five different campaign Web sites during the campaign period: the candidate’s official homepage www.cdy21.com, the UNDP election center www.undp.kr, a voter participatory Web site www.happy1219.com, a user created content (UCC) sharing Web site www.bbldong.com, and an emotional content providing Web site www.happyman.com. However, none of them succeeded in capturing the voters’ interest. The UNDP itself assessed its online campaign in the 17th election white paper as a failure maintaining consistency in Web-campaigning as a result of unfocused operation and impromptu message creation, so that voters regarded their messages as spams (UNDP 2008).

The presidential candidates in 2007 also failed to develop online campaign plans that fit the web 2.0 environment. Specifically, they continued to manage centralized campaign Websites in much the same way as in the 2002 election and hardly utilized social networking services (SNS). Despite attempts to communicate with voters through Cyworld.com, the Korean social networking service, it could hardly attract voters. Because Cyworld.com is a closed social community in which individuals allow mainly acquaintances (friends, colleagues, and relatives) to be “friends,” it was not recognized as an effective tool like Facebook.com or Myspace.com, which enable us to establish wide-though weak-ties with friends as well as strangers. (Granovetter 1983, 203)
Along with the political as well as cultural discussions already presented, explaining why voters’ engagement in the 17th presidential election decreased, I would like to examine the limitation of the Internet itself as a tool for political development.

Historically, the advent of a new communication technology enormously affected civil life. For example, the introduction of newspapers in the early seventeenth century promoted a generation of public opinion, which was shared and spread with the rapid growth of civic societies.

The diffusion of television in the twentieth century also had a huge impact on the growth of participatory democracy by increasing individuals’ access to political information and discourses. The Internet, the most recent new communication revolution, brought another innovation on the public sphere. Its spontaneous, equal, and cost-effective nature created a convenient environment for various conversations as well as easier political participation. Certainly, the Internet has significantly increased the user’s exposure to major political events. However it is hard to say that the convenience of political communication automatically guarantees better conversation and greater participation for democratic advancement. Although we possess the most sophisticated communication tool for interactivity, it does not necessarily activate healthier political movements because of the following three reasons.

Most of all, media expansion fueled by the Internet has dispersed people’s interest in all directions, so that one cannot concentrate on a few really important national issues. Katz’s 1996 study of TV channel expansion in Israel and its social
effect is a very impressive example that shows the possible impact of media diversity. To summarize his argument, public television in Israel has functioned as a center for the national agenda setting for a long time. Most citizens listened to the national news through mass media (central space) to participate in conversation taking place in their companies, at restaurants and at pubs (smaller space) so that the public can generate a somewhat coherent public opinion to be delivered back to the center. However, TV viewers in the multi-channel era no longer watch prime time news as much as they did in the past and they selectively consume news from various channels. According to what you read and hear, current issues are different and audiences are segmented by generation, social classes, education level, region, and culture. As a result, “The here-and-now of current affairs is being minimized and ghettoized and overwhelmed by entertainment” (Katz 1996, 24).

Korean Internet users also tend to be fragmentized and prefer small personal groups rather than bigger communities where bigger issues are discussed. According to the KISA’s Survey on Internet uses in 2008, the majority of Korean people used online community (cafes and clubs) only for personal reasons such as socializing, hobby and leisure, entertainment, and study, whereas only 2.9% responded that they joined an online community for sharing ideas as well as expressing opinions on current issues (see Figure 8).
Similarly, Internet users said that they visited blogs mostly for socializing (54.4%), hobby/leisure activities (50.4%), and watching interesting text, photo, video etc. On the other hand, only one in ten said they used blogs to express and to share ideas on current issues (see Figure 9).
Additionally, although 76.4% of Internet users (six years and above) in the same survey responded that they used online media to read news, only a few had shared the information or to participated in a discussion through “posting comments on news articles” (8.4%), “scraping and posting interesting news articles in other bulletin boards or sites” (7.4%), and “participating in discussion boards or online votes” (8.3%, multiple responses). Although Koreans achieved a meaningful progress in 2002 election, they went back to normal life style that use Internet mainly for personal and business purposes rather than participatory tool.
Moreover an interesting result shows the relationship between favorite media and voting action in a roundabout way. According to the EAI panel survey in 2008, while the majority of the population who voted (71.1%) in the 17th presidential election day responded that they mainly used traditional media (television and newspaper) rather than the Internet (22.8%) to collect election information, the group that did not vote utilized traditional media to a lower extent (56.7%). Instead, they used the Internet more (34.8%) than the group that voted. In other words, voting action was more likely to happen among traditional media users than among Internet users. (Lee and Kwon 2008, 138)

Figure 9. Most Used Media of the Voted (%)

Phamplets 1.5
Internet 22.8
Newspaper 17.2
TV 54.5
Other 4.1
Although it is premature to conclude that Internet usage negatively affects political participation, it is true that there was a significant difference in media-using behavior between those who voted and those who did not, at least in the 17th Korean presidential election. This result might be related to the distracting effect of the Internet.

To discuss further, with the explosion of the online/virtual network, people’s interest diversified rapidly, so that citizens do not pay much attention to a single public issue as much as they did in the past. Conventional wisdom tells us that a society in which diverse tools of communication exist, representing various views/voices, promotes better democracy. However, this is not always true, especially where excessive information is fed to the public. Excessive information distracts people’s interest from truly important matters and blurs the line between right and wrong, so that
people can hardly make a decision. People who do not seek truths assiduously even become indifferent to social issues or remain quiet to avoid conflicts.

Mutz’s experiment (2002) on the relationship between cross-cutting exposures and the likelihood of political participation support this idea. According to her findings, exposure to dissonant opinions did not promote more vigorous conversation or participation but rather encouraged people to be ambivalent and thus delay their decision making. More importantly, these hesitant attitudes proved to discourage the willingness to act. Mutz consequently stated that exposure to various views has a negative relationship with political participation.

**CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

To summarize, I examined why the energetic political participation in South Korea’s 16th presidential election collapsed in the following presidential election by analyzing various data and documents. Especially I explained why all the numerical results related to the voter engagement retrograded in the later election despite the highly developed social communication tool.

First of all, I closely watched how younger voters’ attitude toward election/politics changed during the examined period to elucidate the decreased voter turnout rate as well as cooled participation in the 17th presidential election. Korean younger voters, specifically the 386 and under generation, went back to the state of political apathy after the enthusiastic 2002 participation movement. The young voters’ willingness to participate, feeling of political efficacy and general interest in politics
have diminished considerably whereas the older generation showed steady or slightly declined interest in politics.

As the biggest reason why the younger lost their enthusiasm to do something in politics, I suggested the experience of political disappointment during the Roh administration. Although president Roh was the first president who was elected solely by people power and he raised immense expectation for reformation of old politics, he had to struggle from the very beginning of his term due to political strain and his lack of leadership. The opposite party GNP and Korean conservatives opposed most of Roh administration’s policies and tried to drag him down from the position incessantly. At the same time, Roh lost trust from his supporters rapidly as the Korean prosecutor’s office investigated on his aids’ corruption. Although it was revealed that GNP people received even more illegal funds from Korean leading companies, Roh and his party also could not avoid critics. Even after his term terminated in 2008, Roh and his family were alleged to have been bribed and Roh finally committed suicide in 2009 to stop the political assailment on him. Amid the unproductive disputes among politicians and social disintegration, voters became to see politics cynically and to believe that their choice would not change the old politics. A series of such experience affected voters’ attitude in the next election.

At the same time, it was observed that the electoral issues hugely affected voters’ thoughts about their wanting leaders. Whereas the slogans such as “reformation” and “change” captivated voters’ attention in 2002, the primary concern for voters in the
2007 election were economic growth and stability. Accordingly conservatives widened and the entire election atmosphere became different from the former election.

In this mood, there were little that the Internet could do as a tool for deliberative democracy. Political apathy was prevalent online as well and none of the candidates succeeded in generating fresh issues for triggering voter participation. In fact, although the Republic of Korea may have been a powerhouse in the acquisition of world’s highest Internet usage rate, the country is remaining in the elementary stage in using the tool constantly for political advancement.

To conclude, voter participation seems to be affected mostly by historical or political factors rather than fascinating social communication tools. Unlike our expectation that the Internet will bring better democracy, it was hard to find any clue that the more developed ICT promotes bigger political participation at least in the Korean context. Consequently the matured citizenship to utilize ICT for the better community is more important than technology itself.

However, it is still true that the advanced ICT provides us the fundamentals for the better democracy. Especially in a closed or controlled society where there are no efficient ways to deliver the bottom voices to the top, the Internet plays a very important role in enlightening people.

As far as the Korean democracy is concerned, the year 2012 when both the presidential election and the national assembly election are held at the same time will be the critical moment that will determine whether Korean voters will proceed to the next step for the bigger participation or they will be stalemated or even decreased. Although
it is hard to anticipate I believe there will be an increase in terms of voter participation in the 2012 elections based on the following three reasons. First of all, the importance of voting action will be maximized because the two national biggest elections happen at the same time. Furthermore, since the Lee administration received a lot of criticism because of several unreasonable policies, voters will want to punish him by the elections. Lastly, Korean people only recently started to utilize social media to make wider networks and they are fascinated by this new world of social networking. If they are not tired of new types of relationships online within a couple of years, the new channel of dialogue and the initial enthusiasm will affect positively the work toward participation work. However there are some barriers to be removed for ongoing wider participation. For example the state traditionally applies very strict rules in expressing individual opinions regardless of its form so expressive activities are not as active as in other developed democracies. Besides, it is hard for Korean workers to maintain deep and constant interest in politics due to their busy life. (Their average working hours are 2,256 a year which are near 500 hours more than the average of OECD countries. At the same time, Korean workers start to worry about enforced retirement from their 40s because the working environment is highly competitive.)

When I started this research I had a skeptical view on the role of the Internet as a tool for political advancement in the Korean context and I still maintain this view. Even in the web world where various voices/views coexist, people listen to what they want and follow like-minded people. Also, people spend more time pursuing entertainment or gathering information related to their personal life than using the Internet to
contemplate politics and social issues. They easily sign up for a website for cooking recipes, travel information, and shopping, and they are less likely to sign up for action required citizen movement.

However I still acknowledge the potential power of the Internet as a tool for political action. Specifically there can be a tipping point when the communities for small hobbies will change for asking political action.

In the future I would like to study about what are the tipping points of massive political action and how the movement spread throughout the Internet as well as in the real world. I hope this research will contribute to accelerate democracies as well as to reduce democratic trial and errors in both South Korea and democratically underdeveloped countries.
Works Cited


