

Political Carnivalism: A New Participatory Culture in South Korea



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Introduction

- Increasing disengagement –detrimental to representative democracy → pessimism
Is that true?
- Individuals still consume diverse political contents
 - talk radio, political comedy show, interest in political talk online
- Maybe people try to gratify their political interest in other ways
- Political carnivalism
- Twitter was a venue of political carnival during the 2011 Seoul Mayoral election
- Goal: understanding of political carnivalism shown in social media use

Carnival - two aspects

- Originated from celebration and thanksgiving
 - Gaiety, conviviality, cheerfulness (Falassi, 1987; Waterman, 1998)
- A key component – “play” “leisure” (Sharpe, 2008)

- Simultaneously a sphere of political resistance (Brophy, 1997)
- Carnival has long been associated with resistance and social protests
- Official hierarchies of order are ridiculed, social and political authority are inverted
- Historical investigations described earlier festivals as a space for public to express dissent to the established order

Carnival - two aspects

- Stallybrass & White (1986)
 - (1) a potent, populist, critical inversion of all official words and hierarchies
 - (2) the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions
 - (3) positive degradation and humiliation and an attitude of creative disrespect
 - (4) a temporary re-textualization of social formations that exposes their “fictive” foundations

Political Carnivalism - components

- Classically
 - jests and insults directed toward political actors
 - satire and parody
 - transgression of social mores
 - inversion or suspension of hierarchical norms.
- Humor
 - vehicle for expressing popular disdain and opposition against repressive regimes
- Satire
 - mocks the existing rule and degrades the dominant hegemony thereby creating “a space of freedom through this counter-hegemonic project
- Parody
 - introduce counter meanings of the ruler’s words, ridicule the political agenda of the ruler

Political Carnivalism - South Korea



- “A people of carnival”
- Colonial period, authoritarian regimes - suppressed
- 1987 revolutionary democratization
 - broadening of free expression, newly-emerged generations → increasing participation in the public process
- 2002 World Cup
 - massive cheering organized by voluntary participation of citizens
- 2008 anti-beef import demonstrations

Online Political Carnivalism

- Cyberspace – a fertile soil of political carnivalism
- Easy expression of political views
- Reframing, reinterpretation of political content
- Witty and joyful comments
- Vitriolic postings about politicians

- Online political carnivalism
- A unique behavior that seek both enjoyment of individuals and resistance against the establishment

Social media & politics



- Potential to create and increase the relationships with others
Twitter - tweets of headline news spur various forms of participation
- Access and join collective decision-making in real time
- Expose user to political information, which in turn lead to political engagement
- Explosive use in Middle East and North Africa
- Egyptian revolution was tweeted and Facebooked rather than televised

Research topic

- Twitter messages during the 2011 Seoul mayoral election
- Seoul mayor – South Korea's high-profile position
- 985,158 tweets
- Analyzed 1,220 tweets having links

“Play” Connected with fun and joy

- humorous neologisms
- smile-causing emoticons
- hilarious videos and a variety of self-photos
- Funny parodies
 - - direct quotation, alternation of words, textual rearrangement, substitution of subjects or characters, and shifts in language
- Vote confirmation photo
 - “ Here is my vote confirmation photo. I was so happy to join the election campaign”
 - “My pretty vote confirmation photo”

Vote Confirmation Photo



Ridiculing the establishment

- Prohibition of speech freedom was the major target of Twitter users
- Frightened by the explosive tweeting mainly for the opposition party candidate, the National Election Committee announced an irrational action to ban celebrities from posting messages related to the election.
- “It is a perfect time to check whether you are famous or not. ‘witty’ tweeting
- The expressive resistance of Twitter users to the ideological hegemony of the ruling bloc is a good indicator of this satirical resistance.
- “fear-of-socialism” in almost all elections
- “North-Korea followers,” or “reds,” which always turned out to be successful.
- The electorate was not deceived by such hackneyed intrigue. “Again ‘color strategy’! “Hmm~. What is a lefty?”

Popularity of alternative voices

- The dominant voice on Twitter was not the mainstream media that had dominated the South Korean society for more than fifth decades.
- Content analysis
62.3% of media sources mentioned in Twitter messages came from the news stories of minor liberal newspapers (35.5%), online-only newspapers (11.4%), political blogs (3.7%), and postings on other social networking sites such as Facebook, Cyworld, and MySpace (11.7%).
- The wider popularity of voices from alternative new media on Twitter may imply that citizens are becoming a critical public, reworking and rethinking the content from the media

Formation of a new critical public?

- The lively correspondence of emotions and opinions foster political interest and efficacy, which in turn encourage political participation.
- citizen-initiated agendas increasingly influence public and political policies.
- “digital generations” - Instead of ‘hard politics,’ the young adults are more drawn by soft and pleasant discourse like everyday life entertainment. brought up with the Internet from their very early age tended to consider playfulness, humor, and fun as a natural way of behavior.
- Does South Korea see the birth of a new public that prefers to get involved in the political process in its own way?
- Portend a new evolutionary form of political communication.
- Signify a releasing of both more creative energies and a broader range of dissident voices than are usually expressed through traditional media.
- Carnivalistic actions triggered by new media technologies may create a new public sphere of participation



Thank you!