

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET PORTALS AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEDIUM IN
SOUTH KOREA

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THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET PORTALS AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEDIUM IN
SOUTH KOREA

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THESIS ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET PORTALS AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEDIUM IN
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This thesis explores the role of the Internet as an alternative to traditional news media. More specifically, I examined the correlation between the agenda of traditional news media (two newspapers and two television news programs) and the agenda of an Internet portal forum during the 2007 presidential campaign in South Korea. Findings did not support the idea that the Internet plays a role as an alternative medium. Traditional news outlets and the Internet covered mostly the same issues. This finding may indicate that Internet users first find important issues from traditional media, and then turn to an

Internet portal to discuss their opinions. I conclude that the Internet may play a role as a supplementary medium to traditional news media.

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I . INTRODUCTION

The Internet brings considerable changes in how news media and political communication operate. The Internet has established new ways of communicating information, which is different substantially from traditional mass media. For example, interactivity, one of the prominent features of the Internet, has facilitated a significant advancement in communicating news and information. Internet users not only receive news information but also can exchange their own opinions. This interactivity allows Internet users to participate actively in discussing social, political and economic issues (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005). This participatory forum on the Internet allows for an active exchange of personal views through electronic bulletin boards, blogs and Internet portals.

As an increasing number of Internet users participate in online discussions, the diversity of the topics discussed is also increasing in online media. Internet users are willing and able to introduce the issues that are not often covered in other traditional media. That is, the Internet allows Internet users to customize their own news selection (Dimitrova & Neznanski, 2006). The customized news is transferred broadly to other users with low costs through online publications (Curran, 2003). It is therefore likely that the Internet functions as an alternative to traditional media, as users can expose themselves to the topics and information that cannot be easily found elsewhere.

South Korea is no exception. The three major newspapers in the country – *Chosun Ilbo*, *JoongAng Ilbo*, and *Donga Ilbo* – and the two national network channels – *KBS* and *MBC* – have dominated the news industry. Mass media have led public opinion and public discussions in South Korea. However, the newly emerging online media have provided an alternative space for public discussions (Chang, 2005). As an increasing number of Internet users participate in online debates, the role of the Internet as an alternative medium has become an important topic for media researchers. Internet users began to produce alternative opinions and information sources, which can not be found in the mainstream media. The Internet can play an important role in shaping public discourses that can become an alternative to traditional media.

Internet portals in particular have played a crucial role as an emerging alternative medium in South Korea. In the environment where a few major newspapers and television networks dominate the media market, Internet portals allow their users to exchange their own opinions and to produce their own news information. Also, Internet users can adopt news and untraditional values, often introducing unusual topics and their own daily experiences (Atton, 2002). The difference in news values between alternative and traditional news media results in a difference in news sources they rely on. Internet users employ ordinary and non-elite sources, as opposed to government or Public Relations sources often used by the mainstream media. (Atton & Wickenden, 2005). This may indicate that the boundary between sources and reporters has been disappearing (Atton & Wickenden, 2005). Moreover, the changes in news values and in news sources may trigger a change in the organizational structure of the Internet. As ordinary people produce and consume news that produced by their own news values and sources, the

boundary between writers and readers has begun to disappear, which would restructure news organizations as a horizontal, rather than a hierarchical, structure (Harcup, 2005). News in alternative media would be able to “tell their own stories and to reconstruct their own culture, using their own symbols, signs, and languages” (Atton & Wickenden, 2005, p. 351).

As the Internet becomes a popular news source, media scholars raise question about whether the Internet will become a supplement or a replacement for traditional news media (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Tewksbury, 2003). The Internet may offer the users with enhanced opportunities for getting information because it is fast, cheap and geographically unlimited (Albrecht, 2006). Norris and Sanders (2003) note that the Internet provided important information about policy issues, candidates, and campaign strategies during the 2001 British general election. However, Althaus and Tewksbury (2000) argue that the Internet generally is not employed to replace traditional news media, but instead used to supplement them for gaining additional information unavailable in traditional media. The Internet may function as a supplementary medium largely because it tends to redistribute information from traditional news outlets, rather than creating new information (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001).

This thesis examines whether the Internet can play a role as an alternative medium. Do the Internet and traditional news media cover mostly the same issues? Or, does the Internet offer an opportunity to discuss the issues that are not often presented in traditional news media? More specifically, this research looks at the correlation between the agenda of traditional news media (television news programs and newspapers) and the agenda of an Internet portal forum during the 2007 presidential election in South Korea.

Intermedia agenda setting explains the impact of leading news media on the selection of news items in other news outlets. It is my assumption that if the Internet plays a role as an alternative medium, there should not be a meaningful correlation between important issues in traditional media and the prominent topics in the Internet. This thesis puts forth the following research question: Does the Internet forum play a role as an alternative to traditional news media?

II . LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the spread of the Internet and advancement in digital technologies have facilitated alternative media activities from production to distribution (Coyer, Dowmut, & Fountain, 2007). With the increased penetration of alternative media, more people have experienced media activities, as readers, as the audiences, and as producers, than ever before (Coyer et al, 2007). For example, web blogs, one of the most popular alternative media, allow citizens to express their own opinions, transmit them to neighbor blogs and receive feedback from other bloggers through “post” and “comments” functions. These activities by ordinary citizens differ from the traditional ways of using the media in terms of news sources, news values, and news organizations.

The function of the Internet as an alternative media can create an alternative public sphere, in which citizens freely discuss various issues that are not often covered in the mainstream media. It is the role of the media to provide a public sphere in democratic society (Curran, 1996). Mainstream media have provided the public with a sphere that enables people to participate in the political process and shape opinions on important issues. As Fraser (1992) indicates, however, the traditional public sphere has not fully functioned because it failed to guarantee open access, participation, and social equality. In order to overcome this limitation, it is necessary for democratic society to maintain a multiplicity of public arenas that provide alternative public spheres (Fraser, 1992). The

Internet as an alternative medium can promote interactivity between audience members, social equality among users, and open access to citizens.

Alternative media: Definition

The term “alternative” in this study means a continuous movement to counter mainstream and existing systems across politics, culture, and society (Park, 2002). Park (2002) explains four implications of the term “alternative”:

First, an alternative is needed when existing systems have problems, and the systems in place have heavy influences on society. Second, an alternative may oppose the existing systems that are exposing defects. The alternative is not only non-mainstream, but also suggests a new ideology. Third, an alternative contains more possibilities and speaks for social minorities. Fourth, an alternative does not mean completion; it could be a substitute or complement depending on its consequences. (p. 156-157)

An alternative provides more opportunities for complementing or substituting for traditional norms and systems. The alternative media have evolved from the questions of whether they replace or complement traditional media’s functions.

It would not be easy to define alternative media because they in general employ unique news value, news formats, and organizations. Although many researchers have used the term “alternative media”, there is not yet an agreement on its definition (Harper, 2005). This study explores several areas of research on alternative media, and attempts to explain why the Internet can function as alternative media and as an alternative public sphere as well.

While past research has theorized widely on alternative media, the concept has been termed in various forms: the media projects, radical media (Downing, 1984; 2001), alternative media (Atton, 2002), citizens' media (Rodriguez, 2001), underground press (Glessing, 1970), dissident press (Kessler, 1984; Streitmatter, 2001), community media (Halleck, 2003), indymedia journalism (Platon & Deuze, 2003), grassroots media (Traber, 1985) and public journalism (Merrit, 1995; Rosen, 1996). As these many terms show, each medium has its unique characteristics. For instance, community media are intended to promote open access and participation of community members (Atton, 2002). Grassroots media focus on alternative news values represented in the gatherings of ordinary people (Atton, 2002). The dissident press seeks social changes by voicing the interests of social minorities (Streitmatter, 2001). The underground press attempts to establish a counterculture that estranges from the mainstream America (Lewes, 2000). Indymedia reshapes the relationship between the readers and news production (Platon & Deuze, 2003).

Alternative media movements arose as a form of counter-culture movement during the late 1960s and the 1970s (Dorothy, 1999). The movement was intended to overcome the limitations of the capitalistic media industry such as the concentration of the media power (Downing, 1984; 1992). The movement aimed to correct the unequal distribution of information produced by media corporations (Rodriguez, 2001). The history of alternative media evolved in an effort to resist the monopolistic power of the media conglomerates.

Hamilton and Atton (2001) investigated historical contexts of alternative media of the United States and the United Kingdom. The histories of alternative media in both

countries can be described as “the struggle for press freedom with the struggle for popular freedom” (Hamilton & Atton, 2001, p. 119). The alternative media in the U.S. played a role in facilitating radical social reform during the American Revolution in the 1770s. The alternative media in the U.S. functioned to show the connections between the citizens’ power and the elites’ view of the new nation. The tradition has later expanded into the race, labor, and gender issues, and was transformed as a social movement.

On the other hand, the early U.K. alternative media started from unstamped papers that played a role in criticizing the British government’s suppression of dissenting voices (Hamilton & Atton, 2001). Historically, the media as a working class press have been concerned with class formation and class liberation among the working-class in society. In modern times, the alternative media have broadened in subculture perspectives (fanzines) and community practices. Hamilton and Atton (2001) conclude that the U.S. alternative media have portrayed a national struggle based on a tradition of the American Revolution, whereas the U.K. alternative media have represented a class struggle based on a tradition of social, political radicals.

As the early history shows, alternative media have radical and revolutionary characteristics that distinguish themselves from other established media. O’Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery, and Fiske (1994) categorized the alternative media as a type of mass communication that challenges institutionalized traditional values. The Royal Commission on the Press (1977) suggested three elements in defining alternative media; they pay attention to opinions of the minorities, express critical angles to generally-accepted values, and embrace subjects that do not appear in traditional news outlets. This definition indicates that alternative media operate in opposition to the

mainstream media as binary separation. Also, Comedia (1984) gives a definition that “they are not the established order; they are not the capitalist system; they are not the mainstream view of a subject...; or they are simply not the conventional way of doing something” (p. 95). This definition well demonstrates the polarity between the alternative media and the mainstream media, viewing the former as an opposition or a resistance against the latter (Atton, 2002).

Early studies of alternative media are located in a marginal area of communication research (Atton & Couldry, 2003). However, as anti-globalization and new technology have advanced since the late 1990s, media scholars have begun to pay more attention to studying alternative media. In particular, the anti-neoliberalism and the global anti-capitalism movements against the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in 1999 contributed to the establishment of the Independent Media Center (IMC) website for networking across countries and communities (Atton, 2003; Downing, 2003). Independent journalists, environmentalists, animal rights activists, and anti-capitalists employed the website to report viewpoints that had been largely ignored by mainstream media (Atton, 2003). The IMC website functioned as an alternative medium during the summit and expanded its alternative media research activities.

Atton and Couldry (2003) explained why scholarly attention to alternative media is increasing. They cite “a) the rebirth of social activism in the late 1990s and the advancement of communication technology; b) the deficit of a critical tradition within the media and cultural studies of the 1990s; c) the demolition of Western style democracy caused by political apathy; and d) the increasing influence of global institutions on education, society, politics, and global issues” (p. 579-580). These changing

environments have helped to diversify and promote discussions about the functions of alternative media.

Media scholars have employed unique approaches to understanding alternative media because of the alternative nature. Atton (2002) points out that earlier research was not enough to explain what alternative media were because it did not provide a specific understanding of the phenomenon. Rather, he argues that alternative media should be understood in terms of “how the media are organized within their sociocultural context” (p. 10). Rodriguez (2001) points out that alternative media have been trapped in the limitation of a binary model between the power and the powerless. She suggests that alternative media should be perceived in terms of “how power is produced, who produces power, and how processes of constitution and reconstitution of power affect democratic processes”(p. 17).

Atton (2002) argues that an alternative medium is not only a cultural journalistic field but also where a discussion between participants takes place. Atton explains the meaning of the “alternative” by comparing alternative and oppositional practices, referring to Raymond Williams’s interpretation: “Alternative seeks a place to coexist within the existing hegemony, whereas oppositional aims to replace it” (McGuigan, 1992, p. 25). As an alternative public sphere, alternative media express opinions on the behalf of ordinary citizens, empowering the citizens by allowing them to participate in the process of information production. Also, alternative media products include cultural practices, in which artistic and literary values are used to overcome the restricted sources of information.

Rodriguez (2001) argues that alternative media have emerged from an unequal inflow of information. Citizens use the media in their own ways; and they pursue democracy of communication, in which citizens use the media equally. In this framework, Rodriguez employs the term *citizens' media* instead of using *alternative media*. She explains that as citizens “actively participate in actions that reshape their own identities, the identities of others, and their social environments, they produce power” (p. 19). Therefore, the term citizens' media implies:

Collectivity is enacting its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape: Second, it also means that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations: Finally, it suggests that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 20).

The citizens' media not only participate in different ways of communicating in the public realm, but also attempt to intervene the existing mediascape by emphasizing the citizens' own values and voices.

Alternative media are conceptualized in several different ways, from their relations to the mainstream media to their cultural and participatory aspects. Despite the fact that the early alternative media debates have been criticized for their binary approaches, alternative media – as opposed to mainstream media – provide a clear position in a sense that they have established boundaries as a type of media outlet. Because alternative media started as a response to the criticism that the mainstream media do not fully function in a democratic way, the early definition was inevitable. With

an oppositional discrepancy between alternative and mainstream media, the theories about alternative media have established their own identity as an independent area. These discussions, taken together, identify distinctive characteristics of the alternative media in their structure and in the process of producing, and distributing information.

An analysis of these characteristics may help us understand how alternative media are different from the mainstream media. Alternative media have built their own identity to differentiate themselves from traditional media and to emphasize their uniqueness in their organizations, contents, and circulations. Hamilton (2001) argues that the distinctive features of alternative media are their de-professionalized, de-capitalized, and de-institutionalized business practices. Atton (2002) explains the characteristics of alternative media practices as follows: “horizontal and dialogic forms of communication, an emphasis on self-reflexivity, the employment of everyday language, critical approaches to the media and its objects, mobilizing power and the significance of prefigurative politics” (p. 154). In particular, these distinctive characteristics allow the alternative media to play a role as being autonomous from the traditional media establishments.

One of the prominent characteristics of alternative media is the shift of news values from social and political issues to ordinary issues. The traditional media pay attention mainly to political and social issues of the day and to producing profits for shareholders (Manning, 2001; McChesney, 2002). They are targeted to the interests of the middle and upper classes (McChesney, 2002). The news selection of alternative media, on the other hand, involves stories of ordinary people’s daily lives (Atton, 2002). As ordinary citizens participate actively in the production content, news values will

reflect people's daily work, community interests, and voices of the minorities. *Ohmynews*, one of the most popular alternative online newspapers in South Korea, reports mainly news about daily lives, personal experiences, and neighborhood stories (Park, 2001). News values are found not in huge discourse, but in ordinary personal stories.

These new news values of alternative media may lead to a change of news sources. The question of who are the major news sources tells us who controls and distributes information (Manning, 2001). Such sources, as government, lobbyists, academics, public relations, and authorities, can easily access the mainstream media (Mason, 2007). These sources may influence the agenda of mainstream media. While the mainstream media predominantly use elite sources, alternative media balance their use of elite and counter-elite sources. Alternative news writers are increasing their use of ordinary and non-elite sources, such as witnesses of the events, consumer groups, and citizen experts (Atton & Wickenden, 2005). The types of news sources allow the average person to access the media.

Changes in news values and in news sources are reshaping the structure of news organizations. In alternative media, ordinary citizens are producing and consuming news simultaneously; and the line between writers and readers is becoming blurred (Harcup, 2005). Alternative media have a horizontal organizational structure, whereas the mainstream media have a hierarchical structure from the top – the editor – to the bottom – reporters. Alternative media promote openness through active interactions between writers and readers. The process of news selecting, news writing, and news editing is managed by all writers and readers of the content. These interactive processes accelerate

horizontal communications, which in turn establishes a horizontal organizational structure.

The Internet as an alternative medium

There are various types of alternative media. They are diverse in their forms and perspectives (Atton, 2002). Early alternative media have used traditional communication methods such as newspapers, pamphlets, newsletters, books, meetings and events, as well as modern technologies such as film, video and telephone news. An average consumer now has much easier access to the media through electronic technologies such as home videos, portable cameras, FM radios and cable television (Kang, 2000). Alternative media have provided an opportunity to express opinions and to share news information with citizens groups, communities, and other average people who were largely excluded from the process of news production.

Despite the fact that they can offer diverse communication possibilities, however, alternative media still have several limitations (Kang, 2000).

First, the social impact of alternative media is substantially less significant than the mainstream media. Second, the mainstream media have more advanced technologies and expert resources. Third, with respect to their information distribution, alternative media do not have the same regularity of distribution and circulation as do traditional media. Fourth, alternative media reach a smaller size of audience than mainstream media. Due to these weaknesses, many alternative media have been disappearing and many new ones emerging at the same time, without sustaining their forms and perspectives (p. 12).

Despite these shortcomings, the prospect of alternative media has grown with the birth of new technology. The Internet – a newer communication technology – allows alternative media to function as an autonomous form of communication (Atton, 2002). The Internet, as an alternative medium, can produce synergy by being combined with existing forms of communication, such as face-to-face, print, and cable television. At the same time, online media create new communication forms, such as webcam feeds, email, blogs, Internet radio, archives, discussion lists, chat rooms, and bulletin boards (Atton, 2002). In addition, as McQuail (1994) notes, alternative media in the Internet age can reactivate the idea of a civic participation model. They also offer an opportunity to generate an alternative public opinion sphere.

The importance of interactivity to alternative media

Communication researchers in the early 1990s explored the concept of interactivity (McMillan, 2006). Initially, interactivity has been considered primarily as an element of interpersonal communication; however, it has now become the most salient characteristic of new media, especially the Internet (Morris & Ogan, 1996). Entman (1989) argues that technology gives more possibilities for active citizenship; and new media may therefore lead our society to participatory democracy. The interactivity of the Internet, in particular, provides an alternative public sphere that embraces a wide range of voices, which in turn would facilitate horizontal communications. As Morris and Ogan (1996) contend, interactivity is the primary element that distinguishes alternative media from traditional media. That is, interactivity allows the Internet to function as alternative media.

Interactivity in communication has existed a long time in the form of person-to-person conversations (Johnson, Bruner, & Kumar, 2006). Rafaeli (1988) states that interactivity is “an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges” (p. 111). As a process-related construct, interactivity produces meaning in contexts, and forms social reality through interactive participations (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997). This concept is grounded on continuity by responsiveness (or feedback) (Johnson et al., 2006). Williams, Rice, and Rogers (1988) define interactivity as the extent to which participants in a communication process control a conversation and exchange their roles during the conversation. These researchers explain that the sender and receiver roles are interchangeable and that the participants’ messages are transmitted simultaneously.

Interactivity has not only influenced the pace, structure and content of human communication, but also expanded the practicality of new media (Rice, 1984). Rogers (1986) argues that all media have a certain level of interactivity. This interactivity is provided by a technological environment that allows individuals to converse with each other (Kim, 2002). Interactive communication is “expected to be more accurate, more effective, and more satisfying to the participants in a communication process; and it is, therefore, a required element of new media” (Rogers, 1986, p. 5).

Interactivity in new media is multidimensional in many respects. Steuer (1992) argues that, because interactivity is decided by the technological frame of the medium, the concept may be considered as a mediated communication in a mediated environment. Focusing on the relationship between individuals and the environment, Steurer defined interactivity as “the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time” (p. 84). He also explains interactivity as

a way in which participants can experience the media in the mediated environment created by new technologies. There are three factors of the interactivity: “(1) *speed of response* refers to the rate at which information can be absorbed into the mediated environment; (2) *range* means the amount of change that is able to be effected on the mediated environment; and, (3) *mapping* is the way in which human actions are connected to actions within a mediated environment” (Steuer, 1992, p. 85-86).

Kiousis (2002) understands interactivity as a hybrid concept. It is founded on three factors: technological structure of the media used including speed, range, time flexibility, and sensory complexity; communication context; and user perceptions, specifically, proximity, sensory activation, and perceived speed. He defines interactivity as “the degree to which participants can communicate both synchronously and asynchronously and participate in reciprocal message exchanges” (Kiousis, 2002, p. 379).

As Kiousis (2002) points out, there is little consensus on how to conceptualize interactivity; there are many academic and professional conceptions, and scholars have suggested numerous implicit and explicit definitions. Researchers have tried to narrow down the extensive discussions on this topic. Johnson et al. (2006) explain that the general concept of interactivity may be categorized into non-mediated (behavioral) and mediated (technology-based) interactivities. The two types of interactivity influence human perceptions of interactivity. In addition, Johnson et al. (2006) argue that users’ perceptions of interactivity depend on four factors:

- a) reciprocity, or the extent to which communication is perceived to be reciprocal or to allow mutual action;
- b) responsiveness, or the degree to which the responses in a communication are perceived to be appropriate and relevant, and resolving

the information need of the interaction episode or event; c) the speed of response, or the extent to which a response to a communication event is perceived to be immediate, or without delay; and, d) the extent to which the communication is perceived to be characterized by nonverbal information – the use of multiple channels for communicating information” (p. 41).

McMillan (2007) proposes that interactivity studies have evolved in three traditions: user-to-user interaction, user-to-documents interactivity, and user-to-system interactivity.

User-to-user interaction is a traditional way of interpersonal communication. User-to-documents interactivity focuses on interactivity with documents and the producers of the documents. This tradition looks at the ways that active audiences interpret and use mass media messages. The user-to-system interactivity tradition is the interaction between users and the computer (or new media system).

Interactive communication technology has developed in the field of mass communication since the 1950s (Pavlik, 1998). Interactive technology was not very successful in television because of technological and expense problems. However, cable television has broadcasted numerous programs and channels since the 1970s, and the selectivity of the programs and channels is considered a type of interactivity (Choi & Kim, 2000). In the 1980s, teletext and videotext were adopted and allowed cable television to function as a type of two-way communication. The convergence of telecommunication and personal computers in particular allowed for interactivity – reciprocity and feedback – between senders and receivers (Pavlik, 1998).

The Internet presents an expanded concept of interactivity that includes access, production, transmission, exchange, and control. Advances in communication technology

have extended both the scope and practicality of interactivity. Kenney, Gorelik, and Mwangi. (1999) argue that interactivity influences users' satisfaction with their experiences with different media platforms. Kenney et al. (1999) explain that interactivity improves:

(1) when the goal of communication is more to exchange information than to persuade; (2) when participants have greater control of the communication environment; (3) when they take an active role to benefit fully from the communication; (4) when they act and react to messages via two-way communication; (5) when timing of communication is flexible and responsive to demands of participants; and, (6) when the communication environment creates a sense of place.” (p. 4)

Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997) also argue an increase in interactivity influences the amount of media use and satisfaction, self-efficacy, sociability, and sources.

The interactivity feature has evolved in online journalism, both in news content and news organization (Pavlik, 1997). In particular, interactivity allows people to participate in news production. Emails, online forums, chat rooms, and electronic bulletin boards all produce a two-way communication between journalists and their audiences. Feedback techniques in online journalism can establish reactive and interactive processes (Schultz, 1999). This technological development provides a virtual and actual space for discussing and sharing both journalists' and readers' experiences, problems, opinions and solutions. The relationships among journalists, readers, and sources are based on interactive communication processes; and readers take important part in news production through these interactions.

The role of hypertext functionality

In addition to the benefits of its interactivity environment, the Internet includes a powerful hypertext (hyperlink) capability. In online news sites, most news articles are intertwined with each other by means of hyperlinks, including text, video, audio, and photo links. The “hypertextuality” of news sites distinguishes them from traditional news media, such as newspapers and broadcastings news. Printed newspapers arrange their news articles spatially, depending on their news worthiness; and broadcasting news is deployed by time order (Yoon & Kang, 2001). In contrast, news articles on the Internet overcome these two limitations – spatial and time order – in the layout and arrangement; and the Internet news provides integrated deployment through the functionality provided by the hyperlinks.

The term hypertext was coined by Ted Nelson in 1962 (Pavlik, 1998). Basically, hypertext is a way to connect a story to other stories, archives, and resources (Deuze, 2003). Hypertext – as a tool – manages textual documents in a non-linear or non-sequential way (Agosti & Smeaton, 1996). Hyperlinks in Web text have evolved as a technique that promotes information availability, and offers a more accessible way to explore a large amount information (Dimitrova, Connolly-Ahern, Williams, Kaid, & Reid, 2003). That is, as Web texts are linked together electronically in multi-dimensional places, the users may access a variety of information anywhere on the Internet, and may build their own unique information pathways.

Dimitrova et al. (2003) introduce several hyperlink characteristics in online news environments. First, hyperlinks allow readers to directly access source documents. Hyperlinks provide links to various information sources. The Internet provides news

information, ranging from raw data such as graphs and tables to refined news articles, such as text, audio, video and multi-media. The audiences also have an option to access non-edited news versions instead of reading edited ones. In addition, this access may help readers build their own exploratory experiences and avoid traditional news reading patterns.

Second, hyperlinks can get the audience exposed to more diverse opinions and points of view. Hyperlinks connect the audience to diverse news sources, such as wire services, independent media, broadcasting, and print media. These diversified links to news information can help users diversify their opinions. It is a unique feature that differentiates the Internet from traditional news media. Traditional media have time and spatial limitations and, therefore, can not offer such a wide range of viewpoints. In the Internet news, it is unlikely that a single perspective will be the only one available; or that a single viewpoint can dominate public discourse on an issue because news readers have access to numerous viewpoints.

Most traditional media arrange news information using their own way of editing. News readers are forced to follow a reading pathway that has already been established. In contrast, Internet news allows users to create their own reading pathway. Users can share, post, and upload their information, files, and opinions through hyperlinks without moderating or filtering intervention (Deuze, 2003). As Dimitrova et al. (2003) point out, hyperlinks are particularly useful because they provide interactivity and in-depth reporting.

Interactivity and hypertextuality can help the Internet function as an alternative medium. In particular, these two functions allow Internet users to participate in news

production processes. These unique functions differentiate the Internet from traditional media in a sense that these new technological features can influence the processes of selecting, distributing, and organizing news. Due to the openness of information, online news media can create a public sphere, in which readers have greater control over content and access to diverse viewpoints. This alternative public sphere, in turn, can contribute to promoting more democratic participation to the process of forming public consent.

Alternative public spheres created by new media

One of the most important roles of news media is to provide a healthy public sphere, where the public is able and willing to participate in the process of consensus building. However, as traditional media do not fully function as a public sphere, media critics have advocated an important role of alternative media in establishing a better-functioning public sphere (e.g., Park, 2001).

Jurgen Habermas (1989) introduced the term “public sphere” in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Habermas explains that a public sphere is a public setting for public opinions, in which people participate freely and independently in debates about public issues. He argues that all citizens can take part in the debates and the public sphere should be independent from any economic or political pressures.

The public sphere created by traditional media may not be fully functioning as a public sphere in a sense that the political and economic powers have degenerated its main functions (Park, 2001). The state has screened people’s opinions in many places.

Capitalistic interests, not the will of the public, have often dominated the process of consensus building.

McKee (2004) discusses several shortcomings of the current public sphere. First, they provide too much trivial information; and, as a consequence, many citizens are becoming more interested in minor issues, such as gossip and celebrities, being distracted from the real issues. Second, the public sphere is too commercialized. Traditional news media, in particular, care only about making profits. Third, the culture of the public sphere is too spectacular. Citizens look for flashy images and enjoy superficial debates. Fourth, the public sphere tends to create apathy. Citizens become lazy and passive, and do not care much about important political issues. Their participation in politics becomes unnecessary. A true public sphere would be one that enhances critical and deliberative participation of the public. This can be achieved by creating alternative media and making it possible for the new public sphere to play its democratic role. Fraser (1992) argues that a public sphere should guarantee free access to everyone, including social minorities. Alternative public spheres can reinforce the notion of shared governance by providing minority voices with an opportunity to be heard. Alternative public spheres may contribute to healthier democracy by allowing for greater diversity of viewpoints among citizens.

For a number of reasons, the Internet is expected to provide an alternative public sphere (Brown, 1996). First, the Internet offers great opportunities to express diverse political views. It also provides the public with an opportunity to become politically active, taking part in the process of policy making. Internet users, for example, can easily locate voting records of representatives, track congressional and court ruling, and become

a member of many interest groups, advocating for consumer's rights. Also, they can easily acquire information about government services with a minimum amount of time and effort.

The online public sphere has the capacity to connect citizens from diverse backgrounds, providing a critical forum for political discussions. The Internet can play an important role in promoting grassroots democracy, bringing citizens all around the world together (Papacharissi, 2002). In particular, geographical boundaries can be easily overcome. Anonymity, key features of computer-mediated communications, allows citizens to communicate more freely and openly, thus facilitating exchange of ideas and enhancing the freedom of expression (Papacharissi, 2002). These key features of the Internet can allow the new technology to function as an alternative public sphere.

Intermedia agenda-setting

The traditional media and online news may differ not only in how they organize and distribute news, but also in terms of which issues to cover. As Reese and Danielian (1989) note, comparing issue selection among news media would be helpful in explaining how they function. In this study, an analysis of intermedia agenda-setting will examine how similar or different traditional media and Internet portals are in their news selection. It is likely that there is a considerable correlation of news selection between these two if they cover similar news stories.

In general, intermedia agenda-setting research looks at how the media influence each other, especially, in regard to their news selection. The research focuses on which medium tends to make other media follow, that is, which medium set the agenda for other

media. Early studies of intermedia agenda-setting elaborated on the relationships between wire services and daily newspapers. In a case study, for example, White (1949) examined a news selection process by a wire news editor, Mr. Gates. The study found that there was a strong correlation between wire services and newspapers in their top seven news categories. The study also confirmed that the news selections of different media outlets influence each other.

Intermedia agenda-setting has been tested with television and newspapers. By investigating news coverage of the cocaine issue, Reese and Danielian (1989) found that the *New York Times* influenced on the news selection of not only other major newspapers (the *Washington Post*), but also network news. The *New York Times*, as an elite paper, exerted leadership to other news media. This finding means that other news media followed news selections of the *New York Times*. In other words, the *New York Times* set the agenda for other news media.

The influence of intermedia agenda-setting has been extended to the Internet. Robert, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) examined a correlation between traditional news media and an electronic bulletin board on the Internet. The research showed that the *Associated Press*, *Reuter*, and the *New York Times* influenced the topic discussed on the Internet. That is, traditional news media played an important role in setting the agenda for online discussions. The online bulletin board covered the issues similar to those found in traditional media.

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

The key question of this thesis is whether the Internet can play a role as an alternative to traditional media. As explained in the literature review, the key role of any alternative media is to provide the audience with an opportunity to be exposed to the issues and perspectives that are not often found in traditional news.

In order to look at this specific role, I will examine whether the popular topics found in Internet forums are considerably different from the news agenda in traditional media. More specifically, I will analyze the intermedia agenda-setting between traditional media and Internet forums. That is, I will examine whether there is or is not an association between the prominent issues in traditional media and the popular topics found in Internet forum.

Thus, this study puts forth the following research question to explore the role of the Internet as an alternative media:

RQ: Are the popular topics discussed in Internet forums different considerably from the key issues covered in traditional news? Or are they in general quite similar?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the difference in news selection between traditional news and the Internet. In order to identify prominent issues in both media, the current study employed a content analysis of election during the 2007 presidential campaign in South Korea. Data for the content analysis came from two nightly television news programs (*KBS News 9* and *MBC News Desk*), two major newspapers (*Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*), and an Internet portal forum (*Daum Agora*).

The election coverage in television and newspapers along with the content of the Internet forum was analyzed for two three-week periods in six weeks before the election day, December 19, 2007. The first period, Time 1, was from November 9 to November 26, 2007. The second period, Time 2, was from December 1 to December 18, 2007. There was a four-day time lag (November 27-30) between the two periods. All Sundays were excluded from the analysis because the newspapers do not publish a Sunday edition. The total time period of analysis, therefore, was 30 days, with 15 days in each period.

An unresolved question in agenda setting research is about the optimal time lag, or how long it takes that the issues travel from the media to the public. A time-lag selection is crucial in that it determines the causal effect (Roberts et al., 2002). In general, the optimal time span can be different, depending on the types of the issues analyzed. In an agenda- setting study of the civil rights issue, Winter and Eyal (1981) suggested that an optimal effect span would be between four and six weeks. Stone and McCombs (1981)

argued that a time lag might need two to six months for the issues to transfer completely from the media to the public. In this regard, Robert and McCombs (1994) argued that a strong correlation between agendas would be attenuated by the use of shorter time lags. As Roberts and his colleagues (2002) proposed, however, the time lag between traditional and online media should be much shorter because the transfer of news information between traditional media and the Internet would be very immediate. For example, Internet users usually post almost immediate reactions to messages of television or print news. I, therefore, used a relatively shorter time lag, which was a four day period.

This study examined the campaign agenda in *KBS News 9* and *MBC News Desk* in network television news programs airing between 9 and 10 p.m. These programs were selected because of their prestige and their impact on public opinion in the country. *KBS* (<www.kbs.co.kr>) and *MBC* (<www.imbc.com>) are representative national networks in South Korea. *KBS* is a national public broadcasting established in 1947. *MBC*, another national broadcasting, was established. According to a 2004 report of news ratings by the Korea Broadcasting Institute, *KBS* and *MBC* were selected as the most preferred news channels (Lee, 2006). According to the report, *KBS New 9* reached a rating of approximately 18%; and *MBC News Desk* reported around 13 %.

The present study selected two daily national newspapers to determine the campaign agendas: *Chosun Ilbo* (<<http://www.chosun.com>>) and *Hankyoreh* (<<http://www.hani.com>>). These newspapers were chosen because of their significant impact on public opinion particularly in regard to campaign issues. *Chosun Ilbo*, founded in 1920, is largely considered as the most conservative paper in South Korea. *Hankyoreh* was founded in 1987 and is known as the most liberal newspaper in the country.

According to a 2006 report of newspaper readership by Committee for Local Press (2006), *Chosun Ilbo* was estimated a readership of 13.6%, the highest rate among daily newspapers. *Hankyoreh* recorded 2.0%, which is the highest among liberal newspapers in the country.

An Internet site chosen to represent Internet news forums was the *Agora* forum on the *Daum* portal site (<<http://www.daum.net>>). *Daum* was chosen because it is one of the most well-known Internet online news sites and home to one of the most lively online discussion forums in South Korea. *Daum* accounted for 39.2% of online news coverage in South Korea (Kim, 2005). It is the highest portion among online news websites.

The present study took the Internet users' agendas from "Today's Best Discussion" in the Internet forum, *Agora*. Today's Best Discussion shows the most viewed and recommended issues by Internet users in the *Agora* forum. Only presidential campaign issues were selected for the content analysis. I downloaded the online discussion issues between 3 and 5 p.m. According to *Daum*, this is the site's peak daily usage time.

News transcripts television news programs were obtained from the web sites of the news programs (<<http://www.kbs.co.kr>> and <<http://www.imbc.co.kr>>). The content analysis of newspapers was conducted by scanning news stories on PDF files made available on the web sites (<<http://www.chosun.com>> and <<http://www.hani.co.kr>>). As noted earlier, my content analysis of the Internet portal was performed with the online forum on *Daum*.

The units of analysis for this study were the issues mentioned in news articles, news programs and online discussions. I counted how many times a particular issue was

mentioned in each news story and in Internet users' discussions. My issue and topic categories were based on previous research (Lim, 2006; Tedesco, 2005; Whitney & Becker, 1982). The total number of issue categories analyzed was 31. The 31 issue categories include the economy, education, welfare, real estate, labor, and so on. (See Tables 1, 2, and 3 for the categories). The issue categories were ranked in terms of how many times they were mentioned.

Date Analysis

The present research employed a cross-lagged correlation analysis based on the Rozelle-Campbell baseline. The cross-lagged analysis examines the effect of the independent variable at Time 1 and the dependent variable at Time 2. The analysis is particularly useful in determining the correlation between the agenda of different forms of the media (Brosius & Keppinger, 1992). The cross-lagged analysis has been employed in many studies of agenda setting (Zhu & Blood, 1997).

The analysis examines three specific correlations between four variables: autocorrelation, synchronous correlation and causal-correlation. Four variables are X1, X2, Y1, and Y2 (See Figure 4.1 for details). X1 is the independent variable at Time 1 and X2 is the dependent variable at Time 2. Y1 and Y2 represent the independent variable at Time1 and the dependent variable at Time 2, respectively. Autocorrelation refers to the relationship between X1 and X2 or Y1 and Y2 over time. It indicates the relationship between the X medium at Time 1 (X1) and the X medium at Time 2 (X2) or the Y medium at Time 1 (Y1) and the Y medium at Time 2 (Y2). Also, synchronous correlation refers to the relationship between X1 and Y1 or X2 or Y2. It refers to the

relationship between the X medium at Time 1 (X1) and the Y medium at Time 1 (Y1) or the X medium at Time 2 (X2) and the Y medium (Y2). A causal-correlation shows the correlation between X1 and Y2 or Y1 and X2 as a diagonal line (cross-lagged) over time. Therefore, this analysis will examine the effect of the X medium (X1) on Y medium (Y2) or the effect of the Y medium (Y1) on X medium (X2) over time. The causal correlation should exceed Rozelle-Cambell baseline, “which is the level of correlation to be expected on the basis of the autocorrelations and synchronous correlations alone”, to be determined as significant (Lopez-Escobar, McCombs, & Lennon 1998, p. 233; Roberts & McCombs, 1994). The cross-lagged design has six correlations: the autocorrelations X1X2 and Y1Y2, the synchronous correlations X1Y1 and X2Y2, and the cross-lagged correlations X1Y2 and X2Y1 (Kenny, 1973).

In this study, a significant X1Y2 means X (traditional media) influences Y (Internet forum). A significant Y1X2 will indicate Y (Internet portal) influences X (traditional media). Non-significant correlations indicate that they are unrelated; that is, the prominent issues in the Internet forum are quite different from the agenda of traditional media. The present study separated the two three-week periods into two time spans: Time 1 and Time 2. Spearman’s rho (a rank order) correlation was used for the cross-lagged analysis. The formula for calculating the Rozelle-Campbell baseline is as follows:

$$\frac{X1/Y1 + X2/Y2}{2} \sqrt{\frac{(X1/X2)^2 + (Y1/Y2)^2}{2}}$$

V . FINDINGS

The present study reports two sets of findings. First, to identify the important campaign issues, a descriptive analysis counted how many times an issue was mentioned in different media outlets. Second, an analysis of Spearman's *rho* correlation and the Rozelle-Campbell baseline looked at the significance of the relationship between the agendas of traditional news media and the Internet forum.

Descriptive Analysis

These 31 issues analyzed were mentioned a total of 2,605 times in television news stories, newspaper articles, and the Internet portal forum during the time periods from November 9, 2007 to December 18, 2007. The total issue mentions in television news were 905 (468 at Time 1 and 437 at Time 2). There were 1,510 mentions in newspapers (707 at Time 1 and 803 at Time 2). The same issues were mentioned 190 times in the Internet portal forum (55 at Time 1 and 135 at Time 2). See Tables 1, 2, and 3 for details.

As indicated in the tables, the 2007 presidential election had only a few prominent issues: *BBK* was an investment fraud scandal in which a major presidential candidate was involved. *Candidate Merger* was an attempt by two liberal parties (the United New Democratic Party and Democratic Party) to merge and pick a single candidate. The issue of *Candidate Mr. Hoi Chang Lee* was a controversial announcement that another major conservative candidate unexpectedly decided to run for the presidency. *The Special*

Prosecutor Team dealt with an illegal wealth transfer and the creation of slush funds in which the chairman of Samsung was involved. *Camouflaged Employment* was a tax evasion scandal in which a major candidate was involved.

Table 1 presents the total number of issues mentions in the Internet portal forum at Time 1 and Time 2. In addition, the percentage of each issue category is listed. Table 1 reveals that BBK was the most prominent issue in each time period, making up 20.0 percent of the total of 55 issue mentions at Time 1 and 17.7 percent of the total of 55 mentions at Time 2. The top five issues, BBK, The Special Prosecutor Team, General Economy, Integrity, and Camouflaged Employment, accounted for 52.4 percent of the total issue mentions at Time 1. At Time 2, another top five issues, BBK, General Economy, Integrity, Candidate Merger, and Real Estate, accounted for 52.4 percent of the total mentions. In particular, BBK, General Economy, and Integrity were the most frequently- mentioned issues during the both time periods.

Table 1 also shows the changes in the diversity of the issues over time. At Time 1, 19 issues were mentioned at least once. On the other hand, 27 issues were mentioned at Time 2. It indicates that issue coverage in the online forum was becoming more diversified moving from Time 1 to Time 2.

Table 2 shows the frequencies in two daily newspapers (*Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*) at Time 1 and Time 2. The most salient issue was BBK during both time periods. The issue comprised 24.4 percent and 27.1 percent of the total issue mentions at Time 1 and Time 2. Candidate Merger was ranked as the second most frequently- mentioned issue for each time period (12.5 percent at Time 1 and 8.8 percent at Time 2). The five major issues, BBK, Candidate Merger, Candidate Mr. Hoi Chang Lee,

Campaign, and Political Process, made up 55.7 percent of the total issue mentions at Time 1. At Time 2, another five major issues, BBK, Candidate Merger, Campaign, General Economy, and Integrity, composed 52.6 percent of the total mentions. BBK, Candidate Merger, and Campaign were mentioned as the top three issues during the two time periods.

Table 3 shows how many times each issue was mentioned in two television news programs (*MBC News Desk* and *KBS News 9*) at Time 1 and Time 2. The most frequent mention for both periods was the BBK scandal, making up about 32.2 percent at Time 1 and 33.4 percent at Time 2. The major five issues, BBK, The Special Prosecutor Team, Candidate Merger, General Economy, and Integrity, made up 59.4 percent of the total mentions at Time 1. BBK, Candidate Merger, General Economy, Integrity and Campaign accounted for 61.1 percent at Time 2.

This descriptive analysis yielded three important findings. First, BBK was the most prominent issue in the media. It accounted for about 17-33 percent of the total issue mentions in each medium. Second, five issues dominated over 50 percent of total issue mentions. This means that the media have focused predominately on a few major issues rather than dealt with a wide range of issues. Third, the tendencies above were consistently the case across different media outlets during the presidential campaign.

Cross-Lagged Correlation

In order to examine the correlation of the agenda between traditional news media and the Internet portal forum, this study conducted a cross-lagged correlation using the Rozelle-Campbell baseline. In particular, the cross-lagged analysis tested whether the

agenda in traditional news media (television news programs and newspapers) is correlated to the issue selection of the Internet forum. A significant correlation between prominent issues in traditional media and those in the Internet forum will indicate that the two forms of media are similar in selecting the issues to cover. A non-significant correlation, on the other hand, will suggest that the Internet is covering issues quite different from traditional news media. That is, the Internet forum may function as an alternative to traditional media. The results of the cross-lagged correlation analysis are reported in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2 shows the correlations between the newspapers (*Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*) and the Internet forum (*Daum Agora*). As the figure indicates, the agenda in newspapers at Time 1 is correlated to the Internet forum at Time 2 ($r = .595$). Also, there is a correlation between the Internet forum at Time 1 and the newspapers at Time 2 ($r = .588$). These two correlations of .595 and .588 were both greater than the Rozelle-Campbell baseline of .536, indicating that they are reliable and significant. These significant correlations suggest that prominent issues in newspapers are also important topics in the Internet forum, raising question about the idea that the Internet can play a role as an alternative medium.

Figure 3 presents the relationship between the agendas of television news (*KBS* and *MBC*) and the Internet forum (*Daum Agora*). The agenda of television news at Time 1 is correlated to the discussion agenda of Internet users at Time 2 ($r = .610$). The agenda of the Internet portal forum at Time 1 and that of television news at Time 2 have a correlation of .514. The correlations of .610 and .514 were obviously greater than the Rozelle-Campbell baseline of .454. Again, these significant correlations indicate that

there is not a meaningful difference between the issues in television and the topics discussed in the Internet forum. These findings, taken together, reject the idea that the Internet forum acts as an alternative to traditional media. As Figures 2 and 3 show, there is a significant correlation between the agendas of traditional news (television news programs and newspapers) and the important topics in the Internet portal forum. The finding suggests that the three media (television programs, newspapers, and an Internet forum) cover quite similar issues during the election campaign.

VI. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the Internet can play a role as an alternative to traditional news media. In particular, the present study has explored the correlation between the agenda of traditional news media (newspapers and television news programs) and the agenda of an Internet forum during the 2007 presidential election in South Korea. Findings did not support the claim that the Internet functions as an alternative medium. Instead, I found a significant similarity between the agenda of traditional media and the prominent topics in the Internet forum. In this section, I will discuss the implications of the findings. I will also point out some limitations of the study, making suggestions for future study.

Implications of the Findings

The key question of this study was whether the Internet forum covers mostly the same issues as traditional news media. My counting of how many times the issues were mentioned in different media outlets indicated that traditional news media and the Internet forum covered largely similar issues. In particular, all media outlets reported the issue of BBK, an investment fraud scandal, as the most prominent issue during the presidential campaign. Also, the top five prominent issues accounted for over 50 % of the total issue coverage in the media. In other words, the media devoted great emphasis on a few major issues rather than dealing with a wide range of issues. Internet users'

discussions also focused largely on a few of the same issues that were prominent in traditional media.

More specifically, by using a cross-lagged analysis, this research examined the correlation between the agenda of traditional news media and that of the Internet forum. As the indicated in Figures 2 and 3, the hypothesis that the Internet may play a role as an alternative to traditional news media was not supported. There was a significant correlation between the prominent issues in traditional news media and the important topics in the online forum. In other words, there was great similarity between the traditional and the Internet forum in terms of important issues during the president race. These findings also suggest that Internet users discuss almost the same issues that are found frequently in traditional news media.

The media have been expected to play a role as a watch dog of the current powers, and thereby contribute to healthier democracy. As Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1980) argue, however, the current mainstream media tend to reflect the interests of the dominant power groups rather than to mirror the concerns of a variety of other social groups. The media may in fact lead the society to rely more on the economic capital and the political power. It is likely that mass media serve as a guard dog that protects “those particular groups who have the power and influence to create and control their own security system” (Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1995, p. 116). The communication system, which is dominated by the mainstream media, may make the audiences become more passive and may impede the audiences from developing more diverse viewpoints in society.

In this study, I explored the idea that alternative media can allow citizens to engage more actively in communication processes, and expressing a wide range of views and opinions. In particular, the Internet is expected to play a role as an alternative medium, which would facilitate active civic participations in the democratic process. As Habermas (1989) argues, as the media become more commercialized and focused more on entertainment functions, the society may lose a deliberative public sphere, where citizens discuss important social issues, promoting greater social consensus. The Internet as a new medium may provide an alternative public sphere; and people can discuss important issues more freely and openly. Also, Curran (2003) explains that the Internet can reduce the costs of news production, and can also transfer news information to larger audiences via online publications. Based on these speculations, this study examined whether the Internet may function as an alternative to traditional news media.

Findings of this thesis, however, show that the Internet may not play a role as an alternative medium. I found that online discussions and traditional news media tended to cover mostly similar issues. As Althaus and Tewksbury (2000) argue, the Internet may not *replace* traditional news media. Rather, it may *supplement* traditional news media. It is likely that Internet users first find an interesting issue from traditional media and then turn to the Internet to explore the issue in more detail. Therefore, the Internet may play a role as a supplementary medium in a sense that it functions to redistribute, rather than replace, the information found in traditional news media.

Although the Internet and traditional news media cover mostly the same topics, this does not necessarily mean the Internet fails to play a role as an alternative to traditional media. The Internet still provides a public space, where citizens participate in

discussing important social issues. In particular, where a few major news media dominate public opinion, the role of the Internet is very important because it at least provides a space as an alternative public sphere where citizens can discuss openly and freely. The emergence of the Internet itself may play an important role in society. Despite the idea that the Internet can provide an alternative public sphere, however, my findings suggest that Internet users do not use the Internet as an alternative medium. The role of an alternative medium seems to be decided by the need of citizens rather than by a technological advance itself. Before the Internet, alternative media emerged in a variety of forms, including books, pamphlets and newsletters. It is likely that a new medium cannot play a role as an alternative unless its users motivated to harness its possibilities as such.

Limitations of the Research

Before further discussing my findings, I must point out a number of limitations. First, this study was carried out in a limited region, South Korea. It may be difficult to generalize the findings of this study to other cultures and countries. Moreover, because the history of alternative media in South Korea is relatively short (the first underground magazine in South Korea, “*Mal*” (voice), was published in 1985), the Internet may not function fully as an alternative in South Korea; but it may in other countries.

Second, the present study analyzed the news coverage and the Internet users’ discussion of the issues during the 2007 presidential campaign. Use of this relatively short time frame might have limited the ability to capture a long term effect that one medium has on the use of another medium. Nonetheless, given the great intensity of the

presidential election, it is not very likely that the use of one-week as a time frame necessarily hindered the ability to capture a real media effect.

It also should be pointed out that traditional media would not be “the” factor but simply one of many factors that shape which issues will be heavily discussed in the Internet. In this regard, it is an important shortcoming of this study that I did not take those other factors into account in analyzing the role of the Internet as an alternative medium.

Fourth, data were collected from a limited number of media outlets: One Internet portal (*Daum*), two newspapers (*Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*) and two television news programs (*KBS News 9* and *MBC News Desk*). Use of limited number of media raises concern about the generalizability of the findings. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that my selection of the media was based on the size of audiences. The media I selected represent the most popular news outlets with the largest circulation and rating numbers.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of suggestions for future research can be made to better deal with the issues and limitations mentioned above. First, future research may need to conduct an interview to explore the viewpoints of Internet reporters, looking at how much they rely on traditional media for news selection. Second, future study should explore various elements of the alternative media. In particular, it is necessary to analyze the management structure of the media. Since the independence from the capital and political power is crucial to the alternative media, it will be necessary to take into account such important factors as distribution and advertising. Lastly, future research should be international in

scope. The Internet is characterized by unlimited boundaries. Important issues are shared across nations. Comparing alternative media between different nations will be very helpful to better understand the role of the Internet as an alternative medium.

VII. CONCLUSION

As the Internet has paved a new way of communication, many people have come to participate in online discussions, which in turn significantly influenced the way news is produced. In particular, the Internet, characterized by its interactivity and hyperlink technology, allows citizens to exchange their views more effectively. It has been anticipated that creating another public sphere on the Internet, where the mass public can exchange their opinions more freely and openly, would play a more democratic function that traditional media have not much provided in the past. Focusing on the role of the Internet as an alternative to traditional media, this study examined the correlation between the agenda of traditional news media and that of the Internet during the 2007 presidential campaign in South Korea.

Findings indicate that the Internet does not always play a role as an alternative medium. All news outlets, including television news, newspapers, and an Internet forum, covered mostly the same issues. This finding may indicate that Internet users first find important issues from traditional news media, and then turn to the Internet to talk about their views on the same issues. It appears that the Internet may play a role as a supplementary medium to traditional news media rather than creating a new source of information. It may be users' willingness and ability, not necessarily the development of a new technology itself, that allows people to use the new technology as an alternative to traditional media.

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Table 1

Issues in the Internet portal forum (*Daum Agora*)

| Time 1 Rank | Mentions (%) | Time 2 Rank | Mentions (%) |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. BBK | 11 (20.0) | 1. BBK | 24 (17.7) |
| 2. The Special Prosecutor Team | 5 (09.0) | 2. General Economy | 13 (09.6) |
| 2. General Economy | 5 (09.0) | 2. Integrity | 13 (09.6) |
| 4. Integrity | 4 (07.2) | 4. Candidate Merger | 11 (08.1) |
| 4. Camouflaged Employment | 4 (07.2) | 5. Real Estate | 10 (07.4) |
| 6. Candidate Mr.Hoi Chang Lee | 3 (05.4) | 6. Campaign | 8 (05.9) |
| 6. Society Divide | 3 (05.4) | 7. Labor Issues | 5 (03.7) |
| 6. Campaign | 3 (05.4) | 7. Society Divide | 5 (03.7) |
| 6. Political Process | 3 (05.4) | 9. The Special Prosecutor Team | 4 (02.9) |
| 10. Candidate Merger | 2 (03.6) | 9. Legal Issues | 4 (02.9) |
| 10. Real Estate | 2 (03.6) | 11. U.S. Relations | 3 (02.2) |
| 10. Employment | 2 (03.6) | 11. Employment | 3 (02.2) |
| 10. Education | 2 (03.6) | 11. Social Welfare | 3 (02.2) |
| 14. Power Replacement | 1 (01.8) | 11. Camouflaged Employment | 3 (02.2) |
| 14. U.S. Relations | 1 (01.8) | 11. Tax cut | 3 (02.2) |
| 14. Labor Issues | 1 (01.8) | 11. Oil leak | 3 (02.2) |
| 14. Social Welfare | 1 (01.8) | 11. Political Process | 3 (02.2) |
| 14. Legal Issues | 1 (01.8) | 18. Candidate Mr.Hoi Chang Lee | 2 (01.4) |
| 14. Social Cultures | 1 (01.8) | 18. Korea Canal Project | 2 (01.4) |
| 20. Nation Balance Development | 0 (00.0) | 18. North Korea | 2 (01.4) |
| 20. Korea Canal Project | 0 (00.0) | 18. Defense and Foreign Affairs | 2 (01.4) |
| 20. North Korea | 0 (00.0) | 18. Election Turnout | 2 (01.4) |
| 20. Defense and Foreign Affairs | 0 (00.0) | 18. Social Cultures | 2 (01.4) |
| 20. Tax cut | 0 (00.0) | 18. Deregulation | 2 (01.4) |
| 20. Oil leak | 0 (00.0) | 25. Power Replacement | 1 (00.7) |
| 20. Government Reform | 0 (00.0) | 25. Education | 1 (00.7) |
| 20. Environment | 0 (00.0) | 25. Environment | 1 (00.7) |
| 20. Technology and Science | 0 (00.0) | 28. Nation Balance Development | 0 (00.0) |
| 20. Social Problems | 0 (00.0) | 28. Government Reform | 0 (00.0) |
| 20. Election Turnout | 0 (00.0) | 28. Technology and Science | 0 (00.0) |
| 20. Deregulation | 0 (00.0) | 28. Social Problems | 0 (00.0) |
| Total | 55 (100) | | 135 (100) |

Note:

Time 1: November 9 - November 26, 2007.

Time 2: December 1 - December 18, 2007.

Table 2

Issues in the Two Daily Newspapers

| Time 1 Rank | Mentions (%) | Time 2 Rank | Mentions (%) |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. BBK | 173 (24.4) | 1. BBK | 218 (27.1) |
| 2. Candidate Merger | 89 (12.5) | 2. Candidate Merger | 71 (08.8) |
| 3. Candidate Mr.Hoi Chang Lee | 45 (06.3) | 3. Campaign | 59 (07.3) |
| 3. Campaign | 45 (06.3) | 4. General Economy | 42 (05.2) |
| 5. Political Process | 44 (06.2) | 5. Integrity | 34 (04.2) |
| 6. The Special Prosecutor Team | 37 (05.2) | 6. Social Welfare | 32 (03.9) |
| 7. General Economy | 32 (04.5) | 7. Political Process | 30 (03.7) |
| 8. Camouflaged Employment | 27 (03.8) | 8. Education | 28 (03.4) |
| 9. North Korea | 24 (03.3) | 8. North Korea | 28 (03.4) |
| 10. Power Replacement | 21 (02.9) | 10. Power Replacement | 24 (02.9) |
| 11. Integrity | 20 (02.8) | 11. Real Estate | 23 (02.8) |
| 12. Education | 19 (02.6) | 12. Society Divide | 20 (02.4) |
| 13. Society Divide | 17 (02.4) | 13. Labor Issues | 19 (02.3) |
| 14. Labor Issues | 14 (01.9) | 13. Defense and Foreign Affairs | 19 (02.3) |
| 15. Real Estate | 13 (01.8) | 13. Tax cut | 19 (02.3) |
| 16. Social Welfare | 11 (01.5) | 16. Employment | 17 (02.1) |
| 17. Defense and Foreign Affairs | 10 (01.4) | 17. Camouflaged Employment | 15 (01.8) |
| 17. Tax cut | 10 (01.4) | 18. Korea Canal Project | 13 (01.6) |
| 19. Employment | 8 (01.1) | 19. Nation Balance Development | 12 (01.4) |
| 19. Legal Issues | 8 (01.1) | 20. The Special Prosecutor Team | 11 (01.3) |
| 21. Korea Canal Project | 7 (00.9) | 20. Legal Issues | 11 (01.3) |
| 21. Government Reform | 7 (00.9) | 22. Oil leak | 9 (01.1) |
| 21. Deregulation | 7 (00.9) | 23. Candidate Mr.Hoi Chang Lee | 8 (01.0) |
| 24. U.S. Relations | 5 (00.7) | 23. U.S. Relations | 8 (01.0) |
| 25. Nation Balance Development | 4 (00.5) | 23. Social Cultures | 8 (01.0) |
| 25. Election Turnout | 4 (00.5) | 23. Deregulation | 8 (01.0) |
| 25. Social Cultures | 4 (00.5) | 27. Election Turnout | 7 (00.8) |
| 28. Technology and Science | 1 (00.1) | 28. Government Reform | 4 (00.5) |
| 28. Social Problems | 1 (00.1) | 29. Environment | 3 (00.3) |
| 30. Oil leak | 0 (00.0) | 30. Technology and Science | 2 (00.2) |
| 30. Environment | 0 (00.0) | 31. Social Problems | 1 (00.1) |
| Total | 707 (100) | | 803 (100) |

Note:

The two daily newspapers were *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh*

Table 3

Issues in the Two Television News Programs

| Time 1 Rank | Mentions (%) | Time 2 Rank | Mentions (%) |
|---------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. BBK | 151 (32.2) | 1. BBK | 146 (33.4) |
| 2. The Special Prosecutor Team | 48 (10.2) | 2. Candidates Merger | 48 (10.9) |
| 3. Candidates Merger | 37 (07.9) | 3. General Economy | 31 (07.0) |
| 4. General Economy | 23 (04.9) | 4. Integrity | 25 (05.7) |
| 5. Integrity | 20 (04.2) | 5. Campaign | 18 (04.1) |
| 6. Candidate Mr.Hoi Chang Lee | 19 (04.0) | 6. Social Welfare | 17 (03.8) |
| 7. Society Divide | 17 (03.6) | 7. Education | 16 (03.6) |
| 8. Camouflaged Employment | 15 (03.2) | 8. Power Replacement | 11 (02.5) |
| 8. Political Process | 15 (03.2) | 8. Labor Issues | 11 (02.5) |
| 10. Labor Issues | 14 (02.9) | 8. North Korea | 11 (02.5) |
| 10. Campaign | 14 (02.9) | 8. Oil leak | 11 (02.5) |
| 12. North Korea | 13 (02.7) | 12. Employment | 9 (02.0) |
| 13. Power Replacement | 12 (02.5) | 12. Camouflaged Employment | 9 (02.0) |
| 14. Employment | 9 (01.9) | 12. Election Turnout | 9 (02.0) |
| 15. Education | 8 (01.7) | 15. Candidate Mr.Hoi Chang Lee | 7 (01.6) |
| 15. Korea Canal Project | 8 (01.7) | 15. Society Divide | 7 (01.6) |
| 15. Legal Issues | 8 (01.7) | 17. Real Estate | 6 (01.3) |
| 18. Real Estate | 7 (01.5) | 18. Nation Balance Development | 5 (01.1) |
| 19. Social Welfare | 6 (01.2) | 18. Tax cut | 5 (01.1) |
| 20. Nation Balance Development | 4 (00.8) | 20. The Special Prosecutor Team | 4 (00.9) |
| 20. Government Reform | 4 (00.8) | 20. U.S. Relations | 4 (00.9) |
| 22. U.S. Relations | 3 (00.6) | 20. Korea Canal Project | 4 (00.9) |
| 22. Environment | 3 (00.6) | 20. Legal Issues | 4 (00.9) |
| 22. Election Turnout | 3 (00.6) | 20. Social Problems | 4 (00.9) |
| 25. Defense and Foreign Affairs | 2 (00.4) | 20. Defense and Foreign Affairs | 3 (00.6) |
| 25. Social Problems | 2 (00.4) | 26. Political Process | 3 (00.6) |
| 25. Deregulation | 2 (00.4) | 26. Social Cultures | 3 (00.6) |
| 28. Technology and Science | 1 (00.2) | 26. Deregulation | 3 (00.6) |
| 29. Tax cut | 0 (00.0) | 26. Technology and Science | 2 (00.4) |
| 29. Oil leak | 0 (00.0) | 30. Environment | 1 (00.2) |
| 29. Social Cultures | 0 (00.0) | 31. Government Reform | 0 (00.0) |
| Total | 468 (100) | | 437 (100) |

Note:

The two television news programs were *MBC News Desk* and *KBS News 9*

Figure 1

Cross-Lagged Correlation Design

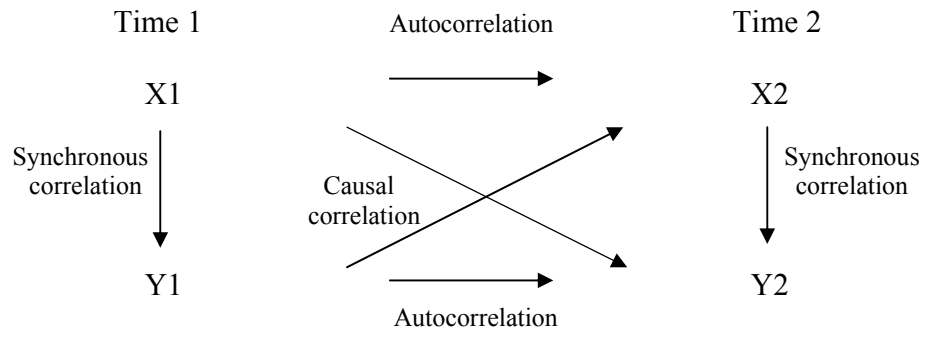
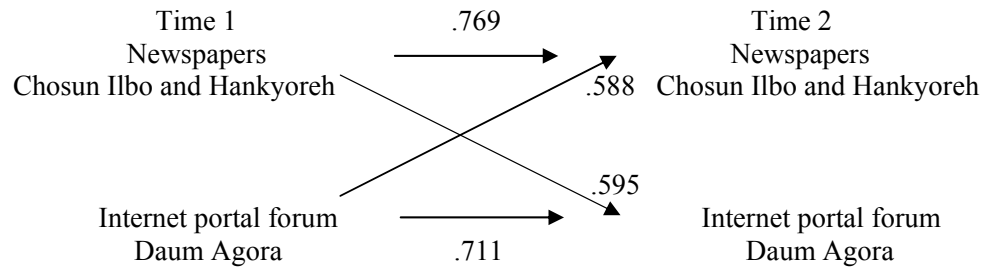


Figure 2

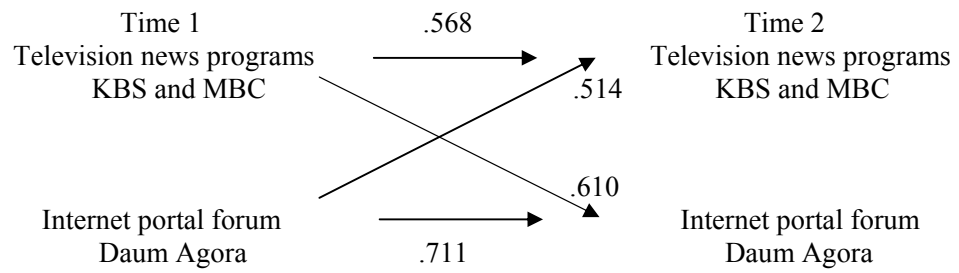
The results of the cross-lagged correlation between newspapers and the Internet portal forum (*Daum Agora*)



Rozelle – Campbell Baseline = .536

Figure 3

The results of the cross-lagged correlation between television news programs and the Internet portal forum (*Daum Agora*)



Rozelle – Campbell Baseline = .454