

Does the Use of Social Media Change Communication between Candidates and Voters?

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1. Introduction

This study analyzes how candidates were using Social Networking Service (SNS) in the election of the House of Councilors in Japan in July, 2013. Whether an election campaign's use of the Internet brings about any changes between candidates and voters is examined. A revision of the Public Office Election Law (POEL) passed in the House of Councilors plenary session on April 19, 2013. Therefore, election campaigns' use of the Internet became possible in time for the election of the House of Councilors.

Recently, the turnout for House of Councilors' elections has shown a downward tendency in Japan, and political apathy is remarkable. Of course, this tendency is not limited to elections of the House of Councilors. Moreover, the tendency for young people to not vote in elections is more remarkable than for other generations in Japan.⁽¹⁾ However, this declining turnout is not a tendency peculiar to Japan. It is said that the Internet was key during the American presidential election that Barack Obama won in 2008. It was clarified that young people were positively seeking political information from the Internet during the election period. However, turnout for the presidential election in 2008 was not especially high, at 64.1%⁽²⁾ (Pew Research Center 2008). On the other hand, an environment in which citizens can use the Internet has existed since the 1990s in advanced countries. In politics, the interactive communication that is characteristic of the Internet enables sharing of political information between politicians and voters or citizens. Therefore, it is expected that citizens' political participation has changed, and numerous scholars have commented on the way in which information and communication technologies have changed how political campaigns are run (Margolis & Resnick 2000; Johnson & Kaya 2009; POEL 2013).⁽³⁾

Using the Internet, people can deliver information at a low cost. Therefore, it is possible to solve the problem of asymmetric diversity in citizens' access to political information. Moreover, the Internet allows for communication that is interactive. Also, because political information has increased on the Internet, political participation is being promoted more than before. Due to these facts, it is expected that the Internet will be a tool that prevents declining turnout, including turnout by young people. In the 2010 UK election, young people (18–24 year olds) used social media to engage in political discussion and debate. Newman (2010) pointed out that

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social media and Internet activity provided new routes to transparency during the 2010 UK election. In the American presidential election in 2012, it was found that about 20% used SNS to participate in politics (Pew Research Center 2012)⁽⁴⁾. Also, some smart phone users were able to inspect candidates' information using SNS.

A discussion concerning election campaigns' use of the Internet has been taking place in Japan since 1996⁽⁵⁾. However, this usage was not achieved until 2013. In Japan, the use of the Internet exceeds 75% and smart phone coverage for young people (20–29) exceeds 60%⁽⁶⁾. Recently, the spread of political information by politicians over Internet can prevent political participation, including that by young people, and a decrease in turnout in Japan because of communication using SNS like Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, this study explores candidates' SNS usage trends in the 2013 election.

For the 2013 election of members of the House of Councilors, turnout was low. Yomiuri (2014) pointed out that the lifting of the ban on election campaigning via the Internet did not have an impact on the electorate. Kono and Kobayashi (2014) explored the use of information from the Internet, such as that on candidates, during the election period, 51% of voters answered that they browsed information on the Internet.

In addition, only 23% of voters who used the Internet answered that election campaigning via the Internet affected their vote. Voters who browsed election campaign sites on the Internet were more open to political participation. However, in the end, communication between voters and candidates did not increase participation. So, a different result was achieved than what was originally desired from election campaigning via the Internet.

However, Okamoto (2015) compared the elections of 2010 and 2013, and empirically proved that the contact information on the candidates' sites affected voting behavior during the latter election. Based on the results of an online survey of voters, Ogasawara (2014) said that the use of SNS in the House of Councilors election in 2013 was not very high, but the transmission of information over the Internet had a certain effect on voters' attitudes and perceptions.

This study looks at three factors. First, it ascertains whether candidates sent voters any information. Second, it determines the level of interactive communication between candidates and voters on SNS. Finally, it examines whether the relationship between candidates and voters was changed by election campaigns' use of the Internet.

2. Use of the Internet in politics

Political participation and the Internet

So then, what influence has Internet use had on citizens' political participation? The relation between Internet use and citizens' political participation can be divided into two study trends (Boulianne 2009; Kim 2009). The first is an optimistic opinion, and the second is a pessimistic opinion. In pessimistic studies, Internet use deprives people of leisure time, as Putnam (1995, 2000) pointed out, therefore, is the deprivation of association with people in the vicinity.

Research on Internet paradoxes by Kraut et al. (2002) clarified that social participation decreases in citizens with high usage frequency, though Internet use was expected to increase social participation; conversations with one's family decrease as well. It has been concluded that Internet use deprives people of the chance for social participation and weakens social relations, so that the time they spend online may negatively affect the time they spend offline. Moreover, it has been pointed out that citizens do not positively present information when opinions are exchanged on a bulletin board, based on an analysis of a political discussion site (Hill & Hughes 1997). In addition, Research on political participation of citizens using the Internet for political problems pointed out that direct communication between citizens and the government became possible. Also, political participation was poorly promoted (Colema & Gotze 2001). Kim (2009) researched whether inspecting posts on SNS, blogs, etc., encouraged political participation through comparison testing of Japan and South Korea. As a result, inspecting posts and posting did not encourage political participation. In brief, the act of inspecting posts and declaring one's opinion did not promote participation in voting.⁽⁷⁾

On the other hand, numerous scholars have pointed out that the Internet has a positive influence on citizens' participation (Bimber 1999; Krueger 2002; Norris 2001). Political participation increases because the Internet may reduce the cost of accessing political information. Thus, it can be understood that there is the possibility that political participation is promoted by acquiring political information using the Internet. However, on the other hand, it is possible that political participation is not promoted.

Therefore, how much political information candidates sent via SNS in the 2013 election, which was the first election in which campaigns could use the Internet in Japan, will be verified in this study. Also, whether information was interactively exchanged between candidates and voters will be verified. As a result, we will be able to answer the following question: Did communication between candidates and voters actively take place?

Politicians' Internet use

Internet use by candidates, who use it to present political information, has become important. In the electoral system, in which the mass media is required, the media tools by which candidates passed on information on their policies directly to voters had been considerably limited by the Public Office Election Law. In 2013, it became possible for politicians to encourage voter participation in the election using the Internet during the House of Councilors election. Voters will be able to show their will and stress a political cause to other voters. Discussions concerning policy became possible during that election period as well. E-mail was not allowed during this election year, and interactive communication between politicians and voters was expected. Information on the candidates' activities and policies during the election period had been provided by the mass media and "*bunshoutoga*," which were previously restricted in Japan under the Public Office Election Law as personal communication.

Candidates' information was not necessarily easily available to voters during the election period. This was because the electoral system ensured the fairness of the election. Candidates' information in the electoral district was homogenized. Thus, it was necessary to limit dissemination of the information for that reason. Therefore, the chances for candidates to voluntarily send out information were limited during the election period. As for the reason, Nishida (2013a) points out that it was part of the institutional design of the Public Office Election Law of Japan. In the current Public Office Election Law and Broadcast Act, television broadcasting is still subject to restrictions during the election campaign period, which will be explained in more detail later. Clearly, a lot of restrictions exist in the political environment of Japan, especially during election campaigns. Therefore, election campaigns using the Internet are expected to feature interaction between the candidates and voters.

So then, in what ways can voters and candidates use the Internet during the election period? In the existing law, the distribution of posters and flyers during the election period is limited so that candidates who have more funding do not have a big advantage. Information on the Internet faced the same treatment as posters and flyers, so it was not possible to use it. Because only some people were able to obtain information via the Internet, election campaigns' use of the Internet were prohibited. However, the Internet has spread widely and has enhanced the information on political parties and candidates during election years; therefore, voter participation, especially by young people, is promoted, and election campaigns' use of the Internet has become possible.

It is possible to use the Internet in election campaigns in the following ways (see Table1) :

- Election campaigns using e-mail and websites by candidates, political parties, etc.
- SNS homepages, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc. (by voters).
- Online videos and election campaigns using websites, animation relay sites, etc.

It is not possible to do the following after the revision (see Table1) :

- Election campaigns by minors (people under 20).
 - (Ex) Writing on bulletin boards and blogs for the purpose of electing a specific candidate.
 - Known with the candidates and supporters messages using SNS, etc., by retweeting and sharing.
- Election campaigns use of voters' e-mails
 - ※ Message functions on SNS, like the direct message function of Twitter and the toque function of LINE, are excluded.
- E-mails for election campaigns that reach out from homepage of a political party, candidate, etc.
- Printing out "*bunshoutoga*" (literature and images) for the election campaign and distributing it.

Table 1 Internet usage

It is possible to do/not possible to do		Party etc	Candidate	Others without Candidate, Party
Use the Web site by the election campaign.	HP, Blog etc	○	○	○
	SNS (Facebook, Twitter etc)	○	○	○
	Delivery of policy by the online video	○	○	○
	a broadcast of political views (by candidates)	△	△	△
Use the Email by the election campaign.	send E-mail concerning election campaign	○	○	×
	send E-mail apending election campaign advertizing	○	○	×
	forward E-mail concerning election campaign	△	△	×

○ available × not available △ available by limited
kaitei koushokusenkyohou gaidorain (Public Office Election Law) pp.6

Internet use during the election period was restricted in Japan. However, dissemination was done within the range of the Public Office Election Law outside of the election period. Therefore, Okamoto (2007) researched candidates' web sites in Japan and verified the influence that the features of the candidates who used the web and the electoral system exerted on the information the candidates sent. A normalization hypothesis that candidates who actively use web sites are those who have resources was advanced as a result. Moreover, he pointed out that the electoral system influences the candidates' information sending. Inaba et al. (2009) verified how interactive contents on members of the House of Representatives' web sites were set up. The features of assembly members who actively conducted interactive communication were clarified through an analysis of the factors involved in setting up contents with high interactivity. Studies on a series of assembly members' Internet use and how the Internet tied the assembly members to the voters were suggested indirectly. After the Public Office Election Law was revised and Internet use became possible, a lot of candidates starting using web sites and SNS. Research on assembly members' election campaigns aimed to search for factors related to assembly members' and candidates' web contents. Therefore, the nature of the messages that assembly members and candidates have sent to voters over the web has not yet been analyzed in detail (Okamoto 2003). The restrictions imposed by the Public Office Election Law have been subject to a series of studies. As discussed earlier, the numbers and locations of posters and flyers put up by election campaigns had to be equal before Internet campaigns were allowed. Therefore, a candidate conducted personal communication activities, speeches, etc., as part of the electoral campaign. Moreover, the Broadcast Act imposed severe limitations on offering voters' own information to the candidate's election campaign through mass communication. The regulations contained in the Broadcast Act are as follows:

Broadcast Act (Article 1)⁽⁸⁾

This law aims to ensure healthy development. Next, to protect public welfare related to broadcasting, the following rules were put in place:

- 1) It is clear that broadcasting reaches the most people and has an effect.
- 2) The freedom of expression of broadcasters is secured by ensuring the impartiality of broadcasting and its truth and autonomy.
- 3) Contributing to the development of a healthy democracy through broadcasting by clarifying the responsibilities of the persons involved in broadcasting.

The impartiality of broadcasters has become key, and broadcast stations cannot work to promote a specific candidate or political party during the election period. When a broadcast station reports on a candidate in an electoral district, the time is distributed impartially. Even minor candidates are reported on using on-screen graphics, etc. When a representative of a political party gives their views on a discussion program, the television broadcaster ensures that the time is allocated impartially. Moreover, it tries to make sure that chance remarks by the representatives are even. Therefore, in Japan, reports on candidates often feature homogeneous content. However, it has been clarified that the agenda setting function of the mass media happened to elect an assembly member to the House of Representatives in 2005 (Imai & Kabashima 2007). However, while the mass media's agenda setting function is a problem, neither the information nor the policy of a specific candidate can be emphasized over other candidates. Moreover, one study pointed out that the influence that the mass media had on voting in the 2005 election was insignificant (Ikeda 2007). A candidate cannot independently appeal to the mass media about whether certain information is presented to the voters, as there is a restriction on the television media in the Broadcast Act. To try to even up candidates' coverage, the mass media cannot allocate a lot of time to a specific candidate or electoral district.

Using the Internet in election campaigns asked voters on the Internet about the candidates for information on policy, it asked for voting poll participation, it called for participation such as speeches at events. It is possible that this will become an opportunity to change the relation between candidates and voters in current-day Japan. Therefore, this study analyzes the use of Facebook by candidates during the House of Councilors election in 2013.

There were up to 21 million active Facebook users in Japan as of August 2013. Facebook is a tool that voters can use constantly. Moreover, there is no limit on the number of characters like there is on Twitter. Content concerning political information can go into great detail. Facebook is suitable as a communication tool for Internet elections in terms of disseminating candidate information and viewing election information of candidates for voters.

3. Method

This section will explain the method of analysis used. In this study, the content of the

Facebook pages of electoral district candidates from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) during an election year is analyzed. The nature of the candidates' use of Facebook is clarified through a content analysis. In particular, an opposing party member (DPJ) or a new figure who drops in rank because of the election might show a tendency to use the Internet. Therefore, there is the possibility that the number of contributions and the frequency of references to policy will increase. Moreover, it is thought that interaction will produce a comparable result. To measure this, the use of interactive communication by the candidates and voters during the election year was classified into the following items.

- 1) The usage frequency of Facebook was counted. Concretely, the newsfeed of a candidate's Facebook page was inspected and all posts were counted from July 4th–20th, which was the campaign period. The posts that the candidates shared related to the election were counted.
- 2) The frequency of mentions of the candidate's policies was measured. If there was some mention of policy in text, images, or online videos posted by the candidate, it was counted and the frequency was measured. Images concerning policy were counted. Online videos that referred to policy were also counted.
- 3) The usage of images and online videos of the candidate was measured. Image and online video functions are a tool that helps voters learn about a candidate's election campaign. Photographs of campaign speeches, photographs with voters, and online videos of campaign speeches were counted. If an image or online video had been uploaded, it was recorded as 1, if it had not, it was recorded as 0. A dummy variable was used.
- 4) The frequency of replies to voters' comments by the candidate was measured. The frequency was measured using the real number. Whether or not the candidate was replying to a comment by a voter was recorded to clarify the frequency of interaction.
- 5) The number of "likes" on a candidate's contributions was measured. Also, the number of comments was measured. Because whether or not interactive communication had been done and how candidates' contributed could be judged, posts and "likes" were measured. The work of Inaba et al. (2009) was referenced when it came to measuring items 4) and 5). If feedback from the person who sent the message presented evidence of interaction, it was counted.
- 6) The content of comments by voters was described. Each candidate described the features of the content.

The coding sheet concerning the item of six of the content of the contribution with Facebook of the candidates of the LDP and the DPJ was made and classified. The contest analysis of Facebook focused on the period of July 21st–August 31st. Therefore, there was a candidate who did not remain on Facebook.⁽⁹⁾ Moreover, there was no candidate who deleted Facebook. In addition, pages used by "*kouenkai*" (supporters' associations) and those used by

candidates occasionally co-existed. In these cases, the Facebook page mentioned on the candidate's home page was counted. The author and a student worked separately to classify and confirm the data. The number of posts on a candidate's Facebook page, the number of "likes," and the number of comments were measured up to August 31, 2013.⁽¹⁰⁾ The object of the analysis was set as a candidate in an electoral district of the LDP or DPJ. The reason for this was that the LDP must be the governing party. Also, the DPJ is the top party in the House of Councilors. This also tempered the political party it that it advanced the net election opening, and it was selected as an object for comparison with the LDP.

4. Results

The results on the candidates' Facebook use in this election will now be presented. Table 2 shows the total average usage of Facebook by candidates from the LDP and DPJ. Looking at Table 2, it can be understood that the average number of posts was 76 (76.6 to be exact) during the election period. This works out to about five posts a day. Moreover, policy was referred to on average about eight times (7.79) during the election period. However, as shown in Table 2, the proportion of policy-related posts was only about 8%, which is not high.

Table 2 Candidates' Facebook usage during the election campaign

	post	policy	campaign schedule	campaign	comment reply	photos	videos
total average	76.6	7.79	16.4	68.21	6.1	56.21	8.16
LDP candidates	75.63	3.4(4.5%)	18.4(24.3%)	67.5(89.3%)	3.8(5%)	54.5(72%)	8.8(11.6%)
DPJ candidates	78.31	15.27(19.5%)	13.3(17.0%)	70.38(89.8%)	9.9(12.6%)	59(75.3%)	7.2(9.2%)
average(% = /post)							

In sum, it can be said that the candidates avoided policy during the election period and did not refer to it on Facebook. Moreover, 16 candidates did not once refer to policy on Facebook during the election period (22.9%). Some candidates did not see the value in referring to policy on Facebook.

As shown in Table 2, campaign-related content was posted about 68 times (68.21). Reports on the candidate's current state accounted for about 90%, which is very high. Photos were posted on average about 56 times; it seems that campaigns used images in their reports.

A positive correlation that was significant at the 1% level was found when a correlative analysis on campaigns and photos was done ($r = .946$, $p < .01$). It is thought that the candidates tried to visually tell voters about the progress of the campaign using photos. It was found that online videos were posted about eight times on average. These videos often showed campaign speeches. Moreover, links to YouTube were pasted in. The campaign activity from that day was posted for the voters to see.

Next, was there a difference in the use of Facebook between candidates of the LDP and the DPJ? Table 2 shows the results. As for post frequency, it can be seen that the DPJ (about 78 times) was not very different from the LDP (about 76 times). In brief, it was clarified that there was little difference in the usage frequency of both parties' candidates. So then, was there a difference in the content of the posts? The candidates from the LDP referred to policy only about 3 times (4.5%), while those from the DPJ referred to it 15 times (19.5%). A t-test indicated that there was a significant difference between them at the 1% level ($t = 5.02$, $df = 28$, $p < .01$). It can be pointed out that the candidates of the DPJ positively appealed to people by referring to their policies. In order to clarify factors affecting mentions of the candidate's policies, multiple regression analysis was performed by adding social variables such as the number of times of winning in election, age, gender, political parties. Political party ($\beta = -0.566$, $p < .001$) was the most persuasive as an explanatory variable.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis

	β	P
party	- 0.566 ***	0.000
sex	- 0.344 **	0.001
age	0.044	0.660
times (being elected)	0.042	0.663
R2	0.467	
Adj.R2	0.434	
N	70	

***:p < 0.001, **:p < 0.01, *:p < 0.05

However, policy-related posts by candidates from the DPJ were 19.5%. This is lower than the ratio of other Facebook uses such as the campaign (89.8%). In short, candidates' appeals to policy were not very valued by voters during the electoral campaign.

Table 4

	like	comment
LDP candidates	8664	233
DPJ candidates	3359	110
total average		

The numbers of "likes" and comments were compared to determine whether there was a difference between the LDP and DPJ. The LDP received more "likes" than the DPJ. A t-test indicated that there was a significant difference between the two at the 1% level ($t = 3.30$, df

=53, $p < .01$). The LDP also received more comments than the DPJ. A t-test indicated that there was a significant difference between the parties at the 1% level ($t = 2.82$, $df = 58$, $p < .01$). In sum, it was clarified that a lot of voters' searches and posts were related to candidates from the LDP. As for comments made during the election period, the LDP commented 223 times and the DPJ 110 times—a big difference. The ratio of comments for the LDP was 2.9 comments for each post. The ratio of comments for the DPJ was 1.4 comments for each post. It can be said that this is a considerably low numerical value. Comments were occasionally not attached to the posts of all candidates of the LDP and DPJ during the campaign. In brief, interaction with voters' posts was low overall.

5. Conclusion

Interaction between candidates and voters on Facebook during the election campaign was found to be scarce. Candidates from the DPJ made more policy-related posts, while interaction by both parties was low. However, the use of Facebook by candidates was grasped as a whole. Therefore, it does not seem that there was a difference (see Table 2). The results of the t-tests also showed that there was no difference. In short, the election campaigns that used Facebook did not necessarily actively pursue interaction between the candidates and voters. The goal of the revision of the Public Officers Elections Law was not fully achieved.

So then, why was interactive communication between candidates and voters not promoted during this election? One reason is thought to be that this was the first election using the Internet. A lot of candidates reported on their election activities to the voters. Moreover, they tended to notify voters of their speech schedule for the next day. The candidates seemed not to aim to use Facebook to interact with the voters. Facebook was used for making announcements to the public. Therefore, it is thought that it became one-sided communication. Comments from voters on Facebook to candidates were only cheering and encouraging content throughout. For instance, encouragement to work hard and take care of their physical condition because it was hot and so on. It can be said that the voters did not consider the interactive aspect of SNS either, based on the content of their comments.

On this issue, it can be said that the purpose of Facebook for the candidates was as a tool to supplement personal communication like reports to voters who could not attend speeches on the streets, etc. However, quantitative information on voters' political participation is not enough; a content analysis of Facebook is also required. I want to take on this task in the future.

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- (6) Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. HP Results on 2012 Communication Usage Trend Survey, June 14, 2013. 30-39 group and 10-19 group use smart phones about 50%.
http://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000230980.pdf
- (7) The definition of "post" by Kim (2009) does not include past writing that expresses opinions on politics but does include downloading and uploading online videos.
- (8) The Broadcast Act accessed on the HP of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications http://www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000085298.pdf
- (9) It was pointed out that Okazaki participated in an anti-Japan demonstration, and this information was spread over the Internet. Therefore, after the election year, the formula's HP and SNS were closed. The Yomiuri Shinbun July 23, 2013
<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/election/sangiin/2013/news/net/20130723-OYT1T00662.htm?>
- (10) The data on voters' comments and "likes" automatically disappeared when the voter who commented on a certain candidate left Facebook. So, it is possible that some numerical values are different at present compared to the measurement period. In addition, there is the possibility that there is a gap between the numerical values measured and the values at present because comments on an account made under a disguise are automatically deleted by Facebook. This should be noted.
- (11) A dummy variable was used. Candidates belonging to the LDP were counted as 1, and those belonging to the DPJ were counted as 0. As for sex, males were counted as 1 and females as 0. Times being elected and age were the real numbers.

