



Political efficacy, community collective efficacy, trust and extroversion in the information society: Differences between online and offline civic/political activities[☆]



Byoung Joon Kim^{*}

School of Public Administration and Public Policy, Kookmin University, Republic of Korea

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ABSTRACT

A number of prior studies found that the level of an individual's political efficacy is highly correlated with civic engagement, mainly offline civic and political activities such as signing petitions, donating money to political campaigns, or doing volunteer work in local communities. However, a few studies have focused on online civic and political activities with political efficacy such as posting factual information for other citizens, working for a political party, or sending e-mails to local government officials since the beginning of the internet. Thus, this study explores the relationship between internal/external political efficacy and online civic/political activities. In addition, to understand the multidimensional relations, other psychological factors such as the level of trust, extroversion and community collective efficacy are also examined. In this study, the National Science Foundation Digital Government Survey of 2005/2006 and 2012 were used. By using the Hierarchical Regression Model, this study found different patterns between measures of efficacy such as internal/external political efficacy including community efficacy and offline/online civic/political activities. Related to offline civic and political activities, the external political efficacy was positively associated with those activities. Meanwhile, in online activities, the internal political efficacy was more strongly related than the external one. In other words, individual citizens who have higher internal political efficacy may use the internet more as an imperative communication channel to reach elected officials or public servants. Furthermore, community collective efficacy is positively related with both offline and online civic activities. This case study contributes to expanding our understanding on political efficacy, collective efficacy, civic and political behaviors, and internet use at the local community level.

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1. Introduction

A number of studies have proven strong enough for individual characteristics of psychological actions,¹ especially political efficacy, to be a relatively effective predictor of civic engagement, such as signing petitions, donating money to political campaigns, or doing volunteer work in local communities (Bandura, 2001, 2002; Campbell et al., 1954; Milbrath, 1965; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba et al., 1995). In addition, the community collective efficacy, which refers to beliefs on the capacity of collective actions and extends the notion of self-efficacy to

organizations and groups, has focused on a meaningful mediator (Carroll et al., 2005). However, a small number of studies since the birth of the internet have focused on political efficacy,² community efficacy and online civic and political activities such as posting factual information for other citizens, working for a political party's website, or sending e-mails to local government officials.

Civic and political use of the internet among citizens has increased significantly since the 1990s (Davis, 1999; Galston, 2004; Shah et al., 2005). Recently, emerging online social network technologies (a.k.a. social media) such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube provide more opportunities for citizens to express their public opinions,

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^{*} Corresponding author at: Kookmin University, College of Social Sciences, School of Public Administration and Public Policy, 77 Jeongneung-ro Seongbuk-gu, Seoul 136-702, Republic of Korea.

E-mail address: kimbj@kookmin.ac.kr.

¹ Philip Tetlock, a political psychologist, argues that all political actions can be reduced to psychological action (2005).

² Political efficacy can be considered as an endogenous variable. Thus, the influences of the Internet use on the variation of political efficacy have been studied in different age cohorts (Lee, 2006; Kenski & Stroud, 2006). However, in this study, the notion of political efficacy is more likely to work as an exogenous variable because the level of internal and external political efficacy measured like as the other psychological variables, and the objective of this research is to examine the influence of several psychological predictor variables on online and offline civic and political activities in a sequential way by using hierarchical regression models.

to participate in a public conversation and discussion, and to contribute to public life (Lopez et al., 2006; Shah et al., 2005). In addition, a number of studies consistently find the level of trust and extroversion³ to be important predictors of civic and political activities since going online (Carroll & Reese, 2003; Kavanaugh et al., 2005, 2007; Uslaner, 2004).

Thus, this study examines the relationship between measures of efficacy (internal/external/political efficacy and community collective efficacy) and online/offline civic/political activities. Additionally, to understand the multidimensional relations and to test theoretical assumptions and examine the influence of several psychological factors in a sequential way, the level of trust, extroversion and community collective efficacy are also examined. To discuss this inquiry, this study is divided into four sections. The first section examines a series of previous studies about psychological factors—internal and external efficacy, community collective efficacy, trust, and extroversion. Next, this study provides an overview of research method that is necessary to apply—the Hierarchical Regression Model (HRM). After articulating how analysis results can become a bridge spanning the relation of online/offline civic and political activities and of psychological factors, this study concludes by noting implications for understanding the influences of those factors, in particular the internal and external political efficacy, and by offering questions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Internal and external political efficacy

Political efficacy is defined as the belief “that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e., that it is worthwhile to perform one’s civic duties” (Campbell et al., 1954, p. 187). Subsequent scholars have distinguished between internal and external political efficacy (Balch, 1974; Bandura, 1997, 2001; Converse, 1972). The first belief, internal efficacy, is about one’s own confidence in their ability to understand and influence political discussions, events and outcomes; the second belief, external political efficacy, is about government responsiveness. This distinction attempts to highlight the difference between self-evaluations and evaluations of one’s position within a perceived political and social structure (Bandura, 2002).

Here are some examples of measures of political efficacy. Michelson (2000) poses the following questions for measuring political efficacy: Do you think that your [local] elected officials pay enough attention to the needs of your community? Do you think that government pays enough attention to the needs of your community? To measure internal political efficacy, Kavanaugh et al. (2008) ask the level of agreement with: Sometimes local politics and government seem so complicated that people like me can’t truly understand what’s going on. Miller et al. (1980) use the following questions for measuring external political efficacy. To measure external political efficacy, they examine levels of agreement with three statements: 1) I don’t think officials care much what people like me think, 2) Generally speaking those we elect to local government lose touch with the people pretty quickly, and 3) Political parties are only interested in people’s votes but not in their opinions.

These indicators of internal and external political efficacy are powerful predictors for understanding motivations for civic and political activities. For example, Lester Milbrath (1965) argued that

efficacious individuals are more likely to be involved in political activities than are non-efficacious individuals. Most commentators have found that political participation and political efficacy are related to the same demographic characteristics (Bandura, 2001, 2002; Michelson, 2000; Milbrath, 1965). Those with higher levels of political efficacy are most common among members of the educated upper class, and men are more likely to possess such feelings than women⁴ (Almond & Verba, 1963, 1989; Baker, 1973).

Recently, research provides information on the influence of the internet on civic/political activities. Kenski and Stroud (2006) contend that the internet provides less costly ways in which an individual can participate in politics with assuaging the fear of public embarrassment. Thus, the internet may be positively associated with internal and external efficacy by making people less embarrassed about their lack of civic and political competence through fast and cheap ways.

Based on these findings, internal and external political efficacy variables are included and the following hypotheses are tested in this study:

H1. Internal political efficacy is positively associated with online/offline civic/political activities.

H2. External political efficacy is positively associated with online/offline civic/political activities.

2.2. Community collective efficacy

People do not live lives of individual autonomy. Indeed, many of the outcomes they seek are achievable only through interdependent effort. Hence, they have to work together to secure what they cannot accomplish on their own. Collective efficacy is based on these collaborative efforts. Perceived collective efficacy fosters civic and political activities, resilience to adversity and performance accomplishment. Carroll and Reese (2003) developed a measure they call “community collective efficacy” which measures a person’s belief that the local community, as a whole, can work together to solve problems despite such obstacles as delays, shortage of resources, or other setbacks at the local community level. Carroll et al. (2005) found that greater community collective efficacy is associated with increases in both social and civic use of the internet. Also, Correa et al. (2010) found that people who are more extraverted will use social media more frequently. It may be that feelings of community collective efficacy encourage people to do things in the community and that the internet provides one channel or medium for civic and political activities.

Based on these findings, a community collective efficacy variable is examined and this study tests the following hypothesis:

H3. Community collective efficacy is positively associated with online/offline civic/political activities.

2.3. Trust

Traditionally, scholars have conceptualized trust as a product of a citizen’s preference regarding either policy or electoral outcomes (Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 2004). But preferences and outcomes explain only one part of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with government: Surveys show that only about 37% of Americans with low trust in government say that policies do not reflect their beliefs and values (Nye, 1997). Recent research provides evidence that citizens base

³ In previous studies, people who are extraverted use more instant messages and social media for general purposes (Correa et al., 2010; Ehrenber et al., 2008). This study applies the concept of extroversion to civil and political use of information and communication technologies.

⁴ A recent study shows that there is still a gender gap in political efficacy; yet it has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention in recent years (Marshall et al., 2007).

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