



# Delineating the complex use of a political podcast in South Korea by hybrid web indicators: The case of the *Nakkomsu* Twitter network



Jiyoung Kim<sup>a</sup>, Yeon-Ok Lee<sup>b</sup>, Han Woo Park<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Yeungnam University, South Korea

<sup>b</sup> SOAS, University of London, UK

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 8 April 2015

Received in revised form 15 September 2015

Accepted 9 November 2015

Available online 28 December 2015

### Keywords:

Alternative media

Hybrid media

Korea

Multimethod research

*Nakkomsu* (NKS)

Podcast

Twitter

## ABSTRACT

This study provides an empirical and longitudinal account of how the South Korean podcast series *Nakkomsu* (NKS) employed a hybrid media strategy and served as an alternative political force challenging the ruling conservatives during three elections in South Korea between December 2011 and December 2012. The study is based on the methodological triangulation of hybrid web indicators resulting from a social network analysis, a semantic network analysis, and a link impact analysis, all conducted using big data mined from social media during the 13-month period. To examine the emergence and evolution of communication patterns around NKS on Twitter, all tweets that contained the Korean word for NKS and were publicly accessible were collected, amounting to a data set of 79,028 unique vertices and 1,866,085 edges. Our findings include the following. First, network density increased gradually over the period, reflecting a continuous decrease in the number of users participating in discussions around NKS. Second, according to quadratic assignment procedure (QAP) correlations, the semantic network characteristics of those discussions also changed over time, partly due to some systematic interference from members and supporters of the conservative party. Third, in this context Twitter served as a space where individual listeners interacted directly with the podcast and fellow listeners—a space that podcasts themselves do not provide. Fourth, the NKS phenomenon was characterized by the wide range of offline activities in which listeners were encouraged to participate alongside the podcast, such as books authored by panelists, public talks, and fundraising events. Such activities were marked not only by their critical content but also by elements of playfulness.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Inc.

## 1. Introduction

The word “podcast” is a portmanteau of “pod” and “broadcast,” the former coming from the success of Apple’s iPod, in that podcasts combine characteristics of both traditional and new media. The New Oxford American Dictionary added the word to its 2005 online update, defining it as “a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the Internet for downloading to a personal audio player,”<sup>1</sup> and went even further to declare it as the word of 2005 to mark its amazing growth (BBC, 2005).

In Korea, however, podcasts did not take off until 2011, when a political podcast called *Naneun Kkomsuda*, or more commonly known by its Korean acronym *Nakkomsu* (which can be translated roughly as “I am a weasel!”), was launched. *Nakkomsu* (hereinafter referred to as NKS) started as an informal chat show by four men ridiculing Lee Myung-bak,<sup>2</sup> the then president of the country, as well as offering

sharp criticisms of contemporary political affairs, with an explicit goal to facilitate the return of liberal democrats to power in the 18th presidential election on December 19, 2012. Its first episode was released on April 28, 2011, and the last one on the eve of the presidential election day. There were a total of 71 episodes. During its two-year life, NKS saw an average of two million downloads for each episode and became one of the world’s most downloaded political podcasts in Apple’s iTunes store, despite the Korean language being a serious barrier for global audiences. NKS played an important role in directing public attention to sociopolitical issues that were neglected by traditional media, and its four panelists received the 2011 Democratic Media Award from the Korean Federation of Press Unions in recognition of their efforts. Furthermore, its popularity triggered the mushrooming of other political podcasts reflecting diverse viewpoints across the country.

In many ways, NKS was very different from any other political programs in the country. First, it made innovative use of podcasting as an alternative medium in Korea. The four producers audaciously covered thorny political issues while circumventing domestic censorship by using the iTunes server in the U.S. (Kwon, 2012). Second, NKS was not a professionally polished media outlet. The four panelists employed casual and lively conversation techniques to encourage listeners to perceive the podcast as a form of entertainment. Third, the NKS team

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: hanpark@ynu.ac.kr (H.W. Park).

<sup>1</sup> Technically, the term “podcast” refers not only to audio clips but also to videos and PDF files. However, it refers mainly to audio media, and some use the term “vodcast” for video-based series.

<sup>2</sup> In Korea and many other parts of East Asia, family names precede given names.

engaged the listeners through an array of new communication spaces, both online such as Twitter and offline such as “Talk Concerts” (a hybrid form of events between public talks and concerts) and book signings.

Twitter played a particularly important role in the development of the NKS phenomenon. As the third most popular social networking site in Korea after KakaoStory (a domestic service comparable to Instagram) and Facebook (Kim and Shin, 2013), Twitter has allowed Korean users to engage in public discourse on a real-time basis. This is in line with observations in other parts of the world (e.g., Parmalee and Bichard, 2013; Tumasjan et al., 2010). In an electoral context, Maruyama et al., (2014) suggested that Twitter activities matter in voter choice. Based on controlled observations during the Hawaiian Congressional election in November 2012, the authors found that active Twitter users changed their voting preferences in order to reflect majority sentiment on Twitter. This finding provides support for Ciulla et al., (2012), who saw the popular TV contest *American Idol* as a simplified imitation of political elections and offered empirical evidence of a correlation between Twitter activities during the TV show and the contestants' rankings determined by viewer voting following the show.

Similarly, NKS, capitalizing on its phenomenal popularity, emerged as a powerful alternative media channel for political discourse and had considerable effects (although to differing degrees) on three crucial elections that came after its launch, namely the Seoul mayoral by-election on October 26, 2011, the National Assembly election on April 11, 2012, and the presidential election on December 19, 2012.

However, few studies have empirically analyzed the NKS phenomenon, although it requires close scholarly attention. In addition, previous studies examining podcasts in a more general sense of the term have typically focused on specific “episodes” or times. Against this backdrop, the present study extends the literature by examining audience networks formed on Twitter around NKS and monitoring changes that occurred in those networks over a 13-month period. Based on analytical results, the study opens a discussion on the potentials and limitations of political podcasts in Korea as well as in a broader context.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Political podcasts as critical media

As discussed in the previous section, the most important characteristic of podcasts is that they possess the characteristics of both traditional and new media, consequently blurring notions of “public” and “private” (MacDougall, 2011). According to Sterne et al., (2008), podcasting is “linked to radio since it sounds like an audio broadcast” but is also “a close relative of blogging because of its amateurism and its serialization through RSS”. They argued that “podcasting is an ‘empowered’ version of radio broadcasting, aided by the internet, which enables both audiences and producers.” According to Berry's argument (2006), podcasting reflects the classical “horizontal” media in that it derives from open-source technologies.

Nevertheless, the political use of podcasts has not received much attention in the academic literature. There is no general consensus on the extent to which podcasts influence the political arena, and the 2006 general election in Singapore is a case in point. On the one hand, the Singaporean government banned political podcasting during the campaign period, stating the reason that digital audio media such as podcasts would have a greater effect on the public than text-based websites. On the other hand, Skoric et al., (2009a) tested media effects and found that political speeches were no more persuasive than their textual transcripts in the context of that particular election.

Numerous podcasts have been produced by political actors, especially in the U.S., including the White House, Congressmen across the spectrum, well-established journalists, and ordinary citizens. However, such podcasts have not been considered as part of the mainstream media but an alternative, if not additional, means of communication. In this regard, it is useful to invoke a framework proposed by Fuchs (2010) for

**Table 1**  
Potential dimensions of traditional and critical media (Fuchs, 2010: 178).

| Dimension               | Capitalist mass media          | Critical media             |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Journalistic production | Elite journalism               | Citizen journalism         |
| Media product structure | Ideological form and content   | Critical forms and content |
| Distribution structure  | Marketing and public relations | Alternative distribution   |
| Reception practices     | Manipulative reception         | Critical receptions        |

conceptualizing alternative media. As shown in Table 1, he argued that “a minimum requirement for speaking of an alternative medium is critical content or critical form” (p. 178), whereas “citizen journalism, self-managed ownership, alternative distribution, and critical reception are desirable qualities of alternative media, but not necessary conditions” (p. 180). Here “critical” refers to “Marxian critique,” which is to be understood as “opposition to all domination” (p. 181).

Fuchs's framework bears particular relevance to the present study for the following reasons. The landscape of political information and discussion in Korea has long been dominated by three conservative news providers: Chosun Ilbo, JoongAng Ilbo and Dong-A Ilbo. Widely dubbed as *Chojongdong*, the media troika accounts for more than two-thirds of the country's total daily circulation. This oligopoly has been identified to limit the expression of liberal or left-wing opinions in the mass media (Lee, 2015). Moreover, in 2011, the U.S.-based watchdog Freedom House downgraded the country's press status from “free” to “partly free” in its annual index because of an increase in official censorship as well as the government's attempts to influence media content (Freedom House, 2011).

Consequently, citizens with liberal or left-leaning stances have been using the Internet as a tool to develop citizen journalism and social movements to challenge the conservative-oriented mass media since the mid-1990s (Chang, 2008). More specifically, through “online cafés” (virtual communities) and social networking sites, progressive-minded Korean citizens have disseminated information, initiated public discussions, and organized collective action (Hsu et al., 2013). One among many examples is a recent Twitter-mediated mobilization aiming to “shut down” Chosun Ilbo (Choi and Park, 2014).

Against this historical backdrop, the popularity of NKS reflected a widespread belief that the mainstream media in the country served partisan or corporate interests at the expense of “truth” (Kim and Park, 2014). In terms of journalistic production, NKS was the brainchild of four men who had backgrounds and characteristics that distanced themselves from traditional and elite journalism. The leading host of the podcast was Kim Ou-joon, the founder and director of Ddanzi Ilbo, a The Onion-like satire news website dating back to 1998. The other three panelists were Chung Bong-ju, a former student activist and a Democratic Party member, who served one term from 2004 to 2008 in the National Assembly during the liberal administration; Kim Yong-min, a radio producer, a political commentator, and an activist for Korean church reform; and Choo Chin-woo, an investigative journalist at an alternative weekly magazine titled *SisaIn*, which had been born out of a strike in 2007 for editorial independence against *chaebol* influence.<sup>3</sup>

NKS was effectively these four men sitting around in a recording booth and ridiculing the then president Lee. One of its most distinct features was its casual language. That is, the panelists acted as if they were in their living room or a pub. Jarrett (2009) conducted a conversation analysis using a sample of three Australian podcasts and pointed out that podcast producers with little institutional authority tend to engage strategically in mundane talk. To be more specific, Jarrett's examples demonstrate the complex mixing of expert speeches and mundane

<sup>3</sup> Literally meaning a “money clan,” a *chaebol* is a large, family-controlled conglomerate in South Korea. *Chaebol* groups are characterized by their strong alliance with the ruling conservatives.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/896325>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/896325>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)