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# Exploring the Relationship Between Online Comments Usage and Civic Engagement in South Korea

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**Abstract:** Using logistic and hierarchical regression analysis (N=798), the present study explored the relationship between civic participation and daet-geul, the online comments posted under online news articles as well as comments underneath other comments. Our analyses showed that individuals' online media use (two types of online news use and online community use) principally predicted two types of daet-geul behavior. Also, writing daet-geul behavior increased the level of individuals' community participation, whereas reading daet-geul has no effect on either political participation or community participation. The results also indicated that civic attitudes (trust in community, trust in individuals, and tolerance) significantly enhanced civic and political participation, but those effects on each kind of participation were varied. The implications and limitations of the study were also discussed.

**Keywords:** Civic Engagement, Daet-geul, Online Media Use, Online Comment, Civic Attitude

As online news consumption dramatically grew since the advent of the Internet, the Internet has become one of the most crucial platforms for news reading in the United States (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010). Likewise, online news services in Korea are regarded as an important alternative to existing media in terms of overall Internet usage including the number of users, the number of page views, duration, and so forth. Many scholars have examined the Internet's role in changing individuals' news consumption, and argue that the Internet is gradually replacing the traditional news media. Moreover, the advance of participatory media promotes individuals' social engagement and allows them to easily express themselves by connecting with peers.

In traditional news media, news readers were limited in the ways that they could express their opinions. The only way to do so was to write a letter to the editor; and even if they made it to the letters page, their opinions were not published immediately. However, users of online news media can make their contributions to the media by posting comments that are immediately published as the user's comments under online news articles. In South Korea, those comments written by online news readers underneath news articles on the Internet have been called "*daet-geul*." The term *daet-geul* includes various forms of online comments such as the comments under comments, and blogs, community's dashboard and so forth. By reading and/or writing *daet-geul*, users can express their opinions, read the opinions of other members of the public, and even engage in discussions in the *daet-geul* forum (Kim & Lee, 2006). Online users, thus, have the opportunity to become active participants. Recently, in South Korea, the posting of *daet-geul* has been recognized as a social issue because it both expresses and influences public opinion; therefore, it seems influential to the actual civic engagement. To date, *daet-geul* research has focused on the Internet's ability to not only enable but promote interactivity and the potential of that interactivity to foster information and opinion

sharing. Thus, the primary goal of this study is to investigate whether *daet-geul* is properly considered a form of civic engagement, and if so, how *daet-geul* is associated with civic engagement in South Korean context. Specifically, the study explores the relationships among South Korean Internet users' online news consumption and their civic attitudes, *daet-geul* usage, and civic engagement.

### Internet and Civic Engagement in the South Korean Context

The South Korean Government's strong support for telecommunication technology and infrastructure has made the fast growth of the Internet in South Korea possible. South Korea is rating as having one of the highest Internet penetration rates worldwide. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) statistics also show that South Korea became the first country to pass 100% of the rate of high-speed wireless Internet access versus population at the end of 2011 (Korea Herald, 2012). Because of South Korea's well-established infrastructure, the country's citizens are more civically engaged through their own efforts acquiring and exchanging information via the Internet than are individuals in societies that are less connected via the Internet. According to Rojas and Puig-i-Abril (2009), information communication technologies (ICTs) can foster users' expressive behaviors in regard to civic and political matters, which, in turn, can foster users' civic and political participation. Therefore, the authors expect the present study's findings regarding South Koreans' Internet usage to provide important insights into the role of the Internet in forming public opinion and boosting civic participation.

In South Korean context specifically, among the Internet-related political activities of the last two decades are the citizens' *gold*-collecting campaign in 1997, the candlelight rally in 2002 in memory of Hyo-soon and Mi-sun, victims

killed by a U.S. armored vehicle; the emergence of Roh-Sa-Mo, a voluntary political campaign activity in support of former president Roh Moo Hyun during presidential election 2002; and the candlelight protest against U.S. meat imports in 2008. These examples indicate how millions of South Koreans could participate in emerging social and political affairs, enabled by the rapid and wide penetration of high-speed broadband Internet. In fact, Korean media scholars who have investigated the relationship between new media and civic engagement have found a significant relationship between them (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2006; Yoon, Song, Kang, & Park, 2010).

Further, rapid economic growth combined with rapid democratization in South Korea has had the effect of undermining the citizens' trust in government and institutions. This appears to be the case even though South Korea is generally regarded as a highly bonded society because the country comprises only one ethnic group (e.g., Lee, 1998; Park, 1999). On the other hand, scholars have also pointed out that South Koreans have expressed a relatively high level of interpersonal trust and a low level of trust in institutions or government. The issue of trust is particularly important in the South Korean context because civic participation can be affected differently depending on the level of interpersonal trust and of institutional trust. Therefore, the South Korean case is expected to offer an interesting point of departure in regard to better understanding the relationship between different kinds and levels of trust and participation.

### **Expressive Participation and Civic Engagement**

A vast number of literatures (Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978) attempted to categorize specific type of participation based on the activeness/passiveness. Conway (1985) defined active participation as a goal-oriented activity such as institutional surveillance or voting in elections, whereas he considered following a

political campaign to be passive participation. Parry, Moyser, and Day (1992) subdivided expressive participation as one possible type of participation. These studies extended the concept of participation to the area of media usage and communicative behavior, and present media scholarship draws on this work in pointing out that new forms of participation have emerged in the digital new media environment (e.g., Bennet, Breunig, & Givens, 2008; Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti, 2005). According to Sung, Yang, Kim, and Im (2007), these new forms of participation are characteristically communicative rather than other off line political actions. These studies accounted that communicative behavior, for example, the discussion of political issues and the expression of political opinions, is itself highlighted as a form of participation. Based on the literature, the present study divides participation into two categories (expressive participation and actual participation) and seeks to establish which predictors enhance each form of participation.

The present study sheds light on the use of *daet-geul* as an emerging type of expressive participation. *Daet-geul*, regarded as a type of participation on the Internet, can be generally defined as comments posted under an online news article. Moreover, *daet-geul* is regarded as having the potential to shape public opinion because it has the following characteristics: (1) it relates to the news article and can constitute an "intertextuality" between the news article and comments posted by other users under the article; (2) it exists in the same space as the original posted messages, and is considered to be "parasitic texts"; (3) it is a "communicative text" that constitutes a response to the posted articles; and (4) it is purposive and asynchronous. As everyday news covers various topics and is widely accessible, *daet-geul* also varies in terms of format and content (Cho, 2007).

A number of online news sites such as Digg.com were based on the opinions of a large number of users. Such a new attempt to make a collective decision was referred to as the "wisdom of crowds" (Surowiecki, 2004). The creation of user-generated content has been realized

through digital publishing, web distribution, and social networking (Rheingold, 2008), and user participation in cultural production has opened discussions about the possibility that such engagement is associated with or even leads to offline public engagement. At present, the broad adoption of Web 2.0 technologies is coinciding with the more recent emergence of multiple public discussion platforms provided by many popular websites. Furthermore, with the increase of social networking services (SNS) and microblogging such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Plurk, which are leading the way in current digital participation, *daet-geul* in Korea is an important platform for shaping public opinion and promoting social participation. In particular, Twitter, a representative microblogging service, offers a way to post short text messages online in a way that allows for non-uniform distribution in terms of participating in socio-political issues including public discussion and collective problem-solving activities (Dunlap, Furtak, & Tucker, 2009; Java, Finin, Song, & Tseng, 2007; Khan, Moon, Park, Swar, & Rho, 2011; Kim & Park, 2012) and mobilization of citizens' political resources (Feezell, Conory, & Guerrero, 2009). The participatory characteristics of *daet-geul* have been mainly discussed regarding the journalistic feature. For example, Kim and Rhee (2006) examined how online users exchange opinions using *daet-geul* by focusing on the possibility of a new public sphere—one that is not divorced from one-way agenda-setting and public opinion formation by media still constitutes its own sphere. Online users' participation can even recast them in the role of agenda setters. In this new sphere, the audience can be reconceived and reconstituted as actors as well as observers. Online participants can mutually effect change and/or reinforce their views while discussing the issues in online news stories. Lee, Jang, and Kim (2009) found that *daet-geul* influenced other users' attitudes toward given news stories. But, as Walther, DeAndrea, Kim, and Anthony (2010) noted, it is hard to fully account for the effect of comments on readers with the nature of comments, as the

effects of online comments are more powerful when considered in multiple interactive contexts than when considered alone. Given that *daet-geul* is a participatory, communicative activity, studies are needed to better understand the relationships between *daet-geul* usage and online news consumption. Furthermore, it is crucial to explore whether participation in forming public opinion is associated with or even fosters other forms of civic participation. On this basis, our research question is set:

RQ1: Which factors are associated with users' expressive participation (*daet-geul* usage)? And, to what extent is *daet-geul* usage associated with offline civic engagement?

## Media, Civic Attitude, and Civic Engagement

Ever since Putnam (1995) argued that there is a negative relationship between mass media use and civic participation, many communication scholars have investigated the ways in which media use is associated with individuals' civic engagement, particularly questioning whether the media negatively affects civic participation and people's trust in their communities (Norris, 1996; Lin, 2001). A huge body of literature (e.g., Moy & Scheufele, 2000; Livingstone & Markham, 2008) has endeavored to analyze media use based on the consumption of specific genres, media-use patterns, and user inclinations. Above all, unlike traditional media, online news media can provide topics for discussion that have the potential to motivate readers and increase their civic participation. Thus, the Internet news media facilitate a deeper understanding of the issues on the part of the audience than traditional media such as newspaper and television news (e.g., Bimber, 1999; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). For example, Norris and Jones (1998) classified Internet use into categories such as information-seeking, shopping, communicating, and entertaining, and they reported on social-participation levels according to this classification. For example, those who use the Internet mainly



for seeking information may be more likely to participate in social issues than those who use the Internet mainly for shopping or entertainment purposes. And, other scholars have supported the idea that the specific nature of Internet use is related to civic participation: The practice of visiting political websites in order to seek information is positively related to political participation (McLeod et al., 2001). Shah, Cho, Eveland, and Kwak (2005) found that informational Internet use fosters citizen communication by analyzing two-wave panel survey data with three different approaches—cross-sectional, fixed-effect, and auto-regressive. Specifically, information-seeking and interactive civic-messaging influence civic engagement. In discussing their results, they accounted for the possibility that Internet use could promote social withdrawal; yet, they suggested that “the most popular use of the Internet—browsing and emailing” are used to obtain information and express one’s opinions about specific public issues (Shah et al., 2005, p. 554). They also suggested that the Internet has the potential to facilitate collective action by enabling interactive civic-messaging focused on encouraging participation. Polat (2005) also explored the relationship between Internet use and political participation in terms of three aspects: information source, communication medium, and virtual public sphere. According to Polat, the Internet affects political engagement both in terms of level and style.

That being said, unlike traditional media, the Internet enables us to participate in creating and distributing information by using *daet-geul*. Studies have shown that people who exchange more opinions via online are active in political and civic participation than via traditional media, and that reading and responding to online news are related to more communication overall (Kang, 2004; Shah, 1998; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). However, the evidence across recent studies is conflicting for the relationships between online news and civic participation. For example, Kenski and Stroud (2006) found no relationship between online users’ news usage and their civic

participation, whereas Amadeo (2007) suggested that users’ online news behavior tends to be positively associated with the extent of their participatory activities. Even though numerous empirical studies have attempted to understand the Internet as a possible means of achieving a more democratic space, these studies are contradictory both in terms of their results and their conclusions (e.g., Amadeo, 2007; Bimber, 2001; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Norris, 2003). These contradictory findings may be due to their habitual differences on the Internet. Lupia and Philpot (2005) pointed out that the Internet has different effects on users’ attitudes toward online use and on their differentiated purposes for online use. In this regard, Johnson, Bichard, and Zhang (2009) suggested that the amount of time to consume, how to spend that time, and which genres they consult are all important in understanding the relationships between Internet use and civic participation. The previous studies remind the researchers of the necessity of investigating the relationship between civic participation and discrete Internet-use behaviors with the assumption that the degree of civic participation is related to the purposes for which given users access the Internet. Thus, we expect that the effects on civic participation are likely to vary based on the type of information consumed, paying attention to the effect of specific news content, particularly different types of news on several websites on individuals’ civic participation. On this basis, we predict:

H1: Online news consumption and news related online activities will be associated with individuals’ civic engagement as well as their expressive participations (*daet-geul* usage).

Further, we examined the relationship between the type of *daet-geul* use (writing and reading), civic attitude, and civic/political participation by dividing *daet-geul* behavior into writing and reading behavior, because reading is typically considered less active than is writing. As Lee and Kim (2009) observed, reading behavior has a positive association with civic attitude in online

discussions. They argued that reading behavior on the Internet has political importance in that it offers an opportunity to learn how to listen to others. Therefore, it can be assumed that each kind of activity has specific implications for civic participation, with writing being significantly correlated with it and reading less so, if at all.

Thus, given that *daet-geul* use is considered simply a means of expression, it would not be meaningful to connect it to civic participation. It is necessary to examine which factor is associated with *daet-geul* reading and writing behavior. Therefore, we predict:

H2: Expressive participation (*daet-geul* reading and writing) will be associated with individuals' civic engagement respectively.

In addition, civic attitude consists of two key concepts: trust and tolerance. First off, by referring to Paxton's (2002) study, we investigated the plausibility of subdividing trust as follows: trust in community and trust in individuals. In particular, this division has interesting implications in the South Korean context. That being said, South Korea is characterized by a high level of interpersonal trust and a low level of institutional trust. This also means that trust and participation are unequally distributed and that such an unbalanced trust distribution affects participatory behavior. And, some studies (e.g., Weaver & Drew, 2001) have indicated that Internet use is negatively correlated to institutional trust, whereas others (e.g., Norris, 2003) have suggested that total time spent information-seeking on the Internet is positively related to institutional trust. Thus, we can hypothesize that each kind of trust has a different effect on civic and political participation.

Next, we consider tolerance as an element of civic attitude. Tolerance is regarded as "opposition to state actions that limit opportunities for citizens, individually or in groups, to compete for political power" (Gibson & Bingham, 1985, p. 106). Although many studies primarily considered tolerance as a political term, tolerance has been broadly used as "the right to express cultural

difference and the acceptance of this by the native population" (Weldon, 2006, p. 355). Therefore, it would be meaningful to extend the concept of civic attitude to include such two concepts. On that basis, we hypothesize,

H3: Civic attitudes will be associated with expressive participation (*daet-geul* reading and writing) and offline civic engagement.

In addition, though the concept of civic engagement has been discussed mainly in regard to political behavior (e.g., voting, presidential election campaign), we considered the form of actual participation as inhering in two aspects: community participation and political participation. Putnam (1995) noted that civic participation (which includes community engagement) and political participation can be defined in terms of a society's structure, its institutional trust, and networks for cooperation. He further clarified the concept of civic participation by distinguishing it from institutional and political participation. Many studies have examined the effects of media on participation by dividing it into community participation (or community engagement) and political participation (e.g., McLeod et al., 2001; Zhang & Chia, 2006). Thus, the present study uses the term civic engagement as an indicator of actual participation, specifically in regard to offline political and social activities such as voting, political campaigning, taking part in community services, and volunteering.

In this context, the present study explores what factors differently predict two forms of offline participation (community and political participation). In this exploration, this study posits that there will be differences in civic engagement among *daet-geul* users, and their participation will be contingent upon the level of the practices associated with *daet-geul* into reading and writing behavior. Thus, the other research question is set:

RQ2: To what extent do factors differently predict two types of civic engagement (community participation and political participation)

## Methods

### *Data Source and Sample*

The current study used web log data combined with self-report survey data from a research project conducted by the Korea Information Society Development Institute (KISDI) in July 2007. With over 40,000 online panels, Nielsen-Korean Click, one of the major web research companies in Korea, collected the data on KISDI's behalf. Nielsen-Korean Click collected web log data from randomly selected panels throughout the month and then requested web survey participation on these same panels. In this way, 998 participants were initially recruited. Of this initial sample, 811 participants who use online news at least once a month were finally selected. However, of these 811 people, the study omitted 13 because they claimed to only write *daet-geul*. These people were, therefore, excluded on the basis that writing *daet-geul* on a subject without having read related content is technically impossible. Thus, 798 participants were actually included in the analysis. Demographically, the survey participants were 56.1% male and 43.9% female; 34.7% were in their 20s, 36.9% in their 30s, and 28.3% were 40 or older. According to the Korean Internet and Security Agency (2008), these demographic characteristics are very close to those for Internet users in Korea overall, of whom 53.8% were male and 46.3% female; and 33.1% were in their 20s, 36.8% in their 30s, and 30.0% in their 40s or older. Further, in terms of annual income, 12.0% of the participants had less than \$20,000, 44.9% had between \$20,000 and \$40,000, 29.1% between \$40,000 and \$60,000, and 14.0 % had over \$60,000 dollars. These figures are very close to those given in the Information Technology Review Report of 2007.

Additionally, most of the studies focus on classifying *daet-geul* or analyzing content, rather than using actual web log data. And, we expect that web log data, electronically recorded quantity of use collected from each user's desktop, can offer a means through which users' behaviors can

be better understood. Studies have generally not examined this data because by itself it does not furnish information through which users' values or purposes can be apprehended. Sufficient data, that is web log data combined with survey data, will solve these difficulties. Therefore, this study uses a combination of survey data and log data to determine whether *daet-geul* use influences news consumption, and if it does, how the related news consumption affects civic participation. Lastly, given the effects of *daet-geul* usage and civic engagement on each other, an explanatory research model was selected by referring to Zhang and Chia's (2006) study in which they employed a research model to examine the mutual effect among media use, social capital, and civic participation.

### *Measures*

***Daet-geul use.*** The study used web log data for measuring *daet-geul* use divided into two categories: writing on the basis of time spent on this activity during one month, and reading on the basis of a same criterion. We used two major portal websites NAVER and DAUM, which each offer one space to read *daet-geul* and another in which to write it. We were able to measure reading *daet-geul* and writing *daet-geul* separately, because the sites each provide one URL for reading *daet-geul* and another for writing it. For additional analysis, we divided the participants into three groups: reading-only users, reading-writing users, and non-users.

***News type and online community activity.*** We divided news content into two types. Im, Kim, Kim, and Kim (2008) examined online news consumption using four types of consumption resulting from a factor analysis of online news sections: general sections, cyber discussions, online issues, and entertainment. Drawing on from that study, we utilized web log data and re-categorized the seven types of news into two types based on the factor analysis using the principal axis factoring (Varimax rotation) method with .60=.40 rule for evaluating factor loading of



each item: general news and entertainment news. General news consists of political, economic, societal, culture, and international news, while entertainment news includes sport news as well as entertainment news which usually deals with information of popular film, music, game, and entertainment TV programs. These news types are on the basis of news category which two portal news media (Naver and Daum) utilize. Then, we asked how these two different kinds of content affect both civic and political participation. For the measurement of online community, the study used the web log data that measured the usage time of two major web communities (Daum webcafe and Naver webcafe) in Korea.

**Civic attitude.** Civic attitude consists of trust in community, trust in individuals, and tolerance. We understood trust as consisting of institutional trust and interpersonal trust, because it is assumed that people give different levels and kinds of trust depending on a number of factors. Some studies (e.g., Paxton, 1999, 2002) distinguish between interpersonal trust and institutional trust. But, here we distinguish trust in the community from trust in institutions in that our basic concern is whether a user's attitude toward community leads to participation. We used the following 5-point scale statements to measure the trust in community: "People of our country are credible," "Law and rule works in our country," and "It is beneficial to believe in people to start something in Korea" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .73$ ). Interpersonal trust was measured using a 5-point scale measurement with statements including "I would like to work on important issues with people close to me" and "It is safer to work with people I know rather than strangers" ( $r = .43$ ). Next, we measured tolerance on the same scale with these four statements: "Online users can evaluate the quality of others' opinions"; "People read news and others' opinions on the Internet assuming that they are valuable"; "Online debate can play an important role in forming public opinion"; and "The opinions of minorities should be protected the same as those of the majority" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ).

**Civic engagement.** The present study subdivided civic engagement into community participation and political participation. Specifically, community participation was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (thoroughly) with two statements: "I will participate in the civic organization's activity whenever I have an opportunity" and "I try to participate in community activity where I live." Political participation was measured on the same scale with statements including "I will participate in a voluntary activity which is related to voting and a political campaign" and "I will vote at the upcoming presidential election."

## Results

### *Predictors of Individuals' Daet-geul Usage as Expressive Participation*

We conducted a logistic regression analysis in order to determine which factors enhance *daet-geul* use. The fitness of each regression model was statistically significant, as shown in Table 1. First, the demographic factor of user's age was found to be the only significant factor for reading *daet-geul*. We found that older users were less likely to read *daet-geul*, even though its effect was marginal ( $B = -.15$ ,  $\text{Exp}(-.15) = .87$ ,  $p < .05$ ). None of the demographic factors were found to significantly affect the writing of *daet-geul*. Secondly, online media use was found to affect both reading and writing *daet-geul*. Specifically, with each unit of general news that they read, the higher the odds that they would read news-related *daet-geul* ( $B = .15$ ,  $\text{Exp}(.15) = 1.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ). But its effect was very small. Likewise, the odds of writing *daet-geul* increased by 46.1%, for each additional unit of general news usage ( $B = .38$ ,  $\text{Exp}(.38) = 1.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This result showed that the effectiveness of general news use was more powerful for writing *daet-geul* than for reading it.

Further, entertainment news use was found to be very powerful for predicting both the reading and writing of *daet-geul*. Specifically, the odds that users would write *daet-geul* increased by

**Table 1**  
*Factors Predicting Both Writing and Reading Daet-Geul*

		Writing Daet-Geul			Reading Daet-Geul		
		B	Wald	Exp(B)	B	Wald	Exp(B)
Demographics	Gender	-0.24	0.85	0.79	-0.32	3.41	0.73#
	Age	-0.14	2.57	0.87	-0.15	6.05	0.87*
	Education	0.04	0.09	1.04	0.07	0.63	1.07
	Income	-0.15	1.45	0.86	0.02	0.06	1.02
Online Media Use	General News	0.38	11.19	1.46**	0.15	6.19	1.16*
	Entertainment News	0.38	11.86	1.46**	0.34	28.33	1.40***
	Online Community	0.08	1.36	1.08	0.19	17.45	1.21***
Civic Attitude	Trust in Community	-0.08	0.39	0.92	0.09	1.12	1.10
	Trust in individuals	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.01	0.02	1.01
	Tolerance	0.11	0.34	1.12	0.06	0.23	1.07
Civic Engagement	Community Participation	0.37	6.92	1.44**	0.09	0.97	1.09
	Political Participation	-0.02	0.03	0.98	-0.03	0.07	0.98
Constant		-7.45	36.43	0.00***	-5.16	42.29	0.01***
-2 Log Likelihood		458.56***			847.55***		
$\chi^2$ , df		120.00***, 12			199.52***, 12		
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>		0.271			0.303		

#p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

46%, for each additional unit of entertainment news usage ( $B=.38$ ,  $\text{Exp}(.38)=1.46$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This can be explained by noting that *daet-geul* usage was highly motivated by reading entertainment news. We also found online community activity to be effective in predicting the reading *daet-geul*. The more time the users spent on online community activities, the more likely they were to read *daet-geul*. However, online community activity did not affect the writing of *daet-geul*. It can be assumed that those who spent considerable time on online community activities were likely to allocate a lot of time to reading various online texts including news content. Yet, this activity was not directly associated with reading behavior.

Next, we could not find any significant factor to show that civic attitude affects *daet-geul* use, which means that *daet-geul* usage is not associated with civic attitude. Or, at least civic attitude

cannot be considered as an independent variable for predicting *daet-geul* usage.

But, finally, we did confirm that civic participation intention was effective in indicating the odds of writing *daet-geul*. Specifically, the odds that users would write *daet-geul* increased by 44.2% with each additional unit of community participation ( $B=.37$ ,  $\text{Exp}(.37)=1.44$ ,  $p<.01$ ). But political participation was not found to be a significant predictor of either reading or writing *daet-geul*. From these findings, we can see that *daet-geul* does constitute a kind of participatory activity, but its character can be distinguished from other participatory behaviors.

In order for a deeper understanding of the relationship between *daet-geul* use and social participation, the present study conducted ANOVA as a post-hoc test by categorizing *daet-geul* users into three groups: both reading and writing,

reading only, and non-use. A Scheffe's post hoc test was employed for all pair-wise comparisons of means among three groups. As shown in Table 2, there was a significant difference in community participation among the groups ( $F=3.56$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The reading-writing group showed a higher community participation than did the other two groups, but there was no significant difference between the reading-only group and the non-user group. These results indicate, as expected, that community participation is more closely related to writing behavior than to reading behavior.

However, political participation showed no significant difference based on *daet-geul* use ( $F=.36$ , n.s.).

Overall, writing *daet-geul* and reading *daet-geul* are both highly associated with online media use, news consumption, and online community activity. However, the results show that writing *daet-geul* is strongly related to participatory activity, whereas reading *daet-geul*, though it is a sort of online activity, may not be directly associated with participatory behavior.

**Table 2**

*Differences in Civic Engagement among Daet-Geul User Groups*

Civic Engagement	Reading-Writing		Reading-Only		Non-User		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Community Participation	.29 <sub>ab</sub>	.93	-.03 <sub>a</sub>	1.02	.02 <sub>b</sub>	.95	3.56*
Political Participation	.04	1.00	.02	.97	-.03	1.00	0.33
Total (N)	94		197		507		798
(%)	(11.8)		(24.7)		(63.5)		(100)

*Note.* The subscripts *a*, *b*, and *c* each indicates actual significant differences between groups after the post hoc test.

\* $p<.05$

### *Factors Predicting Civic Engagement*

As a next step, in order to examine the factors affecting both civic and political participation, multiple-regression analysis was employed. The fitness of both regression models was found to be statistically significant, as shown in Table 3.

Firstly, for online media use, two factors were shown to have a significant effect on both civic and political participation. Specifically, those who wrote *daet-geul* were found to have a greater civic participation than did users who did not use *daet-geul* at all ( $\beta=.11$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In addition, those who spent considerable time on online community

activities were more likely to engage in political participation ( $\beta=.07$ ,  $p<.05$ ). However, the effect of online community activity was a less powerful predictor of participation than we had expected. Further, neither writing nor reading *daet-geul* affected civic participation. These results did not correspond with Kim and Rhee's (2006) study, which reported that online discussion writing does have an effect on civic participation. This is likely to be because online discussion writing behavior is different from *daet-geul* writing in regard to textual characteristics. Of course, it is necessary to conduct more research about the differences between *daet-geul* writing and online discussion activity.

However, online news consumption was not found to be a significant factor for predicting either community or political participation, and the same results were obtained for demographic factors. Despite results from other studies (e.g., Kim & Rhee, 2006) suggesting that *daet-geul* reading behavior has the possibility of shaping users' opinions through discussion, the results of the present study show no connection between *daet-geul* reading behavior and civic participation. This suggests the need for further research on the relationships between *daet-geul* use, opinion formation, and civic participation.

Secondly, civic attitude was shown to be strongly associated with both civic and political participation. High trust in community ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and high tolerance ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were each associated with strong civic participation. Similarly, a high level of trust in individuals ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and high tolerance ( $\beta = .32$ ,

$p < .001$ ) were associated with a strong political participation. The interesting point is that each of the civic attitude factors had a differentiated effect on each kind of participation. Specifically, tolerance was found to have a powerful effect on both civic and political participation. But trust in individuals had a strong effect on political participation, whereas trust in community was shown to be a powerful predictor for civic participation. The different effects on the two kinds of participation may indicate that potential participants in political action are likely to consider participating based on their individual interests, whereas those who are willing to participate in civic affairs may be likely to decide to participate on the basis of an interest in community welfare. This aspect will be discussed further in regard to the conceptual differences among the social capital in the next section.

**Table 3**  
*Factors Predicting Civic Engagement*

		Political Participation	Community Participation
		$\beta$	$\beta$
Demographics	Gender	.03	.01
	Age	.00	.04
	Education	.03	.03
	Income	-.01	.02
Online Media Use	General News	.01	.04
	Entertainment News	-.01	-.08
	Online Community	.07*	-.04
Daet-geul Usage	Writing Daet-Geul <sup>a</sup>	-.01	.11**
	Reading Daet-Geul <sup>b</sup>	.00	.00
Civic Attitude	Trust in Community	.05	.24***
	Trust in individuals	.14***	.03
	Tolerance	.32***	.11**
Adjusted R2		.149	.081
VIF (MAX) <sup>c</sup>		2.16	2.16
N		798	

<sup>ab</sup>Experienced=1, Not-experienced (reference group)=0

<sup>c</sup>VIF (variance inflation factor) was presented to check the severity of multicollinearity in an ordinary least squares regression analysis.

# $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



## Discussion

Questioning whether online *daet-geul* usage is properly regarded as a form of civic engagement, the present study examined the relationships among online media use, *daet-geul* usage, civic attitude, and civic engagement. The findings were as follows.

Firstly, our study showed that demographic factors were not associated with either *daet-geul* usage or civic engagement. Though age was slightly influential on predicting reading *daet-geul* behavior, other factors such as gender, education, and income were not shown to be significant predictors. Although previous studies (e.g., Putnam, Pharr, & Dalton, 2000) reported socio-economic status (SES), gender, and age as important factors in explaining political participation, the result of this study is not identical to that of previous studies. It can be inferred that South Korea established a universal Internet access environment, such that neither education nor income has an effect on Internet access.

Secondly, we explored factors predicting *daet-geul* use, and found that *daet-geul* use contributed to a strong association with both general and entertainment news usage. In particular, entertainment news use was the most powerful indicator for both reading and writing *daet-geul*. It indicates that those who read or write *daet-geul* are motivated to some degree by enjoyment, even though *daet-geul* use is in part associated with participation. Additionally, reading *daet-geul* behavior was found to be affected by online community activity. We also found that demographic attributes like the user's age affected the odds that the user would read *daet-geul*. That is, the younger the participants are that engaged in online communities, the more they read online news and the higher the odds that they would read *daet-geul*.

Thirdly, however, the findings showed that each of the factors had a different effect on writing *daet-geul* than on reading *daet-geul*. That is, writing *daet-geul* was shown to be highly associated with

civic engagement, whereas reading *daet-geul* was not. From these findings, we can infer that writing *daet-geul* and reading *daet-geul* each has a distinct participatory character, because of inherent differences between writing and reading behavior, as Kim and Rhee (2006) observed.

Next, we examined the factors in terms of their respective effects on community participation and political participation. Firstly, unlike previous studies that found a positive relationship between new media and civic engagement (e.g., Kim & Lee, 2006; Yoon et al., 2010), our finding showed little correlation between online news use and participation. Online activity was the only factor to predict political participation. As discussed, there are two oppositional arguments about the effect of the Internet use on political engagement. Of these two conflicting arguments, this finding was in accord with some previous research pointing out that there are no significant links between online news use and participation (e.g., Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Weaver & Drew, 2001). That being said, the present study on the South Korean case supported the argument that online media use has little influence on civic engagement. However, a consideration of other studies showing a positive relationship between online news use and participation (e.g., Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Shah et al., 2007; Amadeo, 2007) indicates that there is a need to explore other possible ways in which they may be connected. Several studies (e.g., Kang, Lee, You, & Lee, 2013; You, Lee, Lee, & Kang, 2013) uncovered that there were ways in which online discussion can mediate between individual's informative or psychological motives and civic and political participation; therefore, investigating structural relationships in this regard may be useful. By considering this, *daet-geul* usage could be another mediating factor between online media use and civic engagement in that online media use was highly associated with *daet-geul* usage, and in turn writing *daet-geul* was a positive predictor of enhanced civic engagement.

In the meantime, civic attitude was found to have no association with either writing or reading *daet-geul* behavior; this finding suggests that *daet-*



*geul* use is compounded with both participatory characteristics and entertainment characteristics. That is, in part the present study supports the argument of previous studies that consider *daet-geul* use as irrational and entertainment-motivated behavior (e.g., Kang, Ryu, & Lee, 2004). Unlike the relationship between online news use and civic engagement, online community and writing *daet-geul* behavior were shown to affect both political and civic participation. These findings indicate that a user's online use pattern affects the type of participation that he or she intends to undertake.

Meanwhile, civic attitude was shown to be a powerful indicator for predicting participation. Interestingly, in regard to the civic attitude factors, trust in community and trust in individuals have different effects on each kind of participation. That is, trust in community enhanced civic participation, while trust in individuals had an effect on political participation. This result is partly in line with Rhee, Kim, and Moon's (2005) study that found a significant correlation between trust in individuals and participation, although that study did not separate participation. Thus, we can infer that those who are likely to participate in political action are likely to decide to participate based on their own interests, whereas for civic participation, potential participants consider their participation on the basis of a wish to contribute to the community. The reason political participation is based on individual interest in Korea is in part because Korean citizens are likely to distrust institutions in general. This finding is in accordance with the results of other studies (e.g., Lee, 1998; Park, 1999) that have demonstrated that in Korea, trust in community is much lower than individual trust, the latter of which is relatively high. Nevertheless, in order to further our understanding, we need to look into how and to what extent this trust gap affects participation and how the trust gap, as noted, is associated with a users' media usage patterns.

The findings led us to a slightly complicated conclusion. Firstly and most importantly, we concluded that *daet-geul* usage should not be regarded as a form of civic engagement in that

it had no association with civic attitude: in this study, *daet-geul* usage was not generated by civic motivation. Rather, *daet-geul* usage seems to be a sort of mediator between media use and civic engagement rather than constituting expressive participation; that is, we found a limited but positive association between *daet-geul* usage and civic engagement. Although its influence is limited, we do not necessarily negate the association between writing *daet-geul* and forms of actual participation.

## Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relationship among *daet-geul* usage, civic attitude, and civic engagement. More specifically, we focused first on investigating the participatory character of *daet-geul* usage and then by categorizing online news types and two types of *daet-geul* behavior, writing and reading, we explored the effects of both online media use patterns including *daet-geul* and civic attitude in regard to social participation. Our results show that different types of *daet-geul* usage behavior were strongly enhanced by entertainment news use, while *daet-geul* usage was not found to be associated with civic attitude. This means that *daet-geul* can be considered a highly entertainment-motivated behavior rather than deliberative behavior. The results also indicate that writing *daet-geul* behavior was associated with civic participation. However, the results also show that reading *daet-geul* was compounded with other online media use and with demographic factors. This demonstrates that there is a need to separate *daet-geul* behavior into writing behavior and reading behavior because each behavior has its own attributes.

Additionally, this study found that online media use had a very limited effect on civic engagement. Based on this finding, the South Korean case support is one in which the Internet has very little effect on civic engagement. However, this study argues that it is necessary to

consider the possibility that other mediators such as online discussion may affect the relationship between online media use and civic engagement and that *daet-geul* usage may function as one such mediator.

Furthermore, types of *daet-geul* use and civic attitude were not related, whereas writing *daet-geul* was only related to civic engagement. The results of the analysis showed that the demographic variables had no influence on either political or community participation, but that writing *daet-geul* behavior was significantly associated with community participation. In addition, all the civic attitude factors—trust in community, trust in individual, and tolerance—were significantly associated with civic engagement. An interesting point here is that each kind of trust has a differentiated effect on civic engagement, which reveals that this trust gap should be understood within the societal context of the country.

In sum, the present study concludes that *daet-geul* usage as expressive participation can be regarded as civic engagement. However, given the positive association between writing *daet-geul* and other forms of actual participation, we could infer that writing *daet-geul* is a mediator for other forms of civic engagement. Thus, we propose that further research is necessary in regard to how *daet-geul* mediates between media use and civic engagement in order to clarify the association between expressive participation and other forms of civic engagement.

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