MODELING INTERNET-BASED CITIZEN ACTIVISM AND FOREIGN POLICY: THE ISLANDS DISPUTE BETWEEN CHINA AND JAPAN

Brown University’15
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Does the Internet empower citizens?
Research Question:

To what extent has the increased use of the Internet among citizens affected foreign policymaking?

What are the mechanisms through which citizens utilize the Internet to influence foreign policymaking?
How Conventional Scholarship Explains Internet-based Citizen Activism?

Internet and Citizen Behavior → Political Representation → Foreign Policy Decision Making

- Bottom-up Activism
- Top-down Structure
- International/Domestic Decision Factors

- Scarce Analytical Models
- Scarce Analytical Models
- Models before the Internet
Research Methods and Sources: Process Tracing and Discourse Analysis

Case: 2010 Boat Collision Incident

Policymakers → News Reporting → Citizen Activism
Comparative Case Study: Conditions for Successful Activism

Policy Impact?

Collaboration with Other Actors?

Masaharu Isshiki
YouTube Whistleblowing

Ganbare Nippon!
Inclusive Rallying Platform

Zaitoku-Kai
Anti-China Exclusionists
FINDINGS
Finding 1: Hybrid Strategy of Citizen Activists

- **Individual Citizen Actions**
- **Sharing & Movement-making**

**Online Space**
- Participation
- Encouragement

**Offline Space**
- Participation
- Contents

**Online**
- Demonstrations & Offline Lobbying

**Participation**
- Sharing
- Making
Finding 2: Media as Translator of Significance

“Watching the leaked video felt just like watching a movie. Although it was the first time we watched the full version, we were already familiar with the storyline because we saw the trailers over and over on the news.”

— Parliament Member Jiro Ono
Finding 3: Competition between Citizen Activism and Conventional Media

ONLINE SPACE

Individual Citizen Activism → Sharing & Movement-making

OFFLINE SPACE

Demonstrations & Offline Lobbying → Conventional Media

Monitor Reporting

Translate Significance

Public Opinion → Conventional Media

Policymakers

Domestic Politics Debates

Foreign Policymakers
Findings of Hybrid Model:

- Hybrid Model of Internet-based Citizen Activism
- Self-Reinforcing Cycle of Citizen Movements
- Persistent Role of the Conventional Media
ANSWER TO RESEARCH QUESTION
Does the Internet empower citizens? Citizens as Watchdog of Watchdogs

Foreign Policymakers

Conventional Media

Monopoly of Significance
Evaluate Significance
Monitor Reporting

Citizen Activism
3 Channels of Citizen Influence on International Relations

1. Direct Engagement with Foreign Actors

2. Intervention

3. Hybrid Channel

OFFLINE SPACE: Country A

OFFLINE SPACE: Country B
## Implications and Future Research

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<th>Theory:</th>
<th>• Online citizen activism alone cannot create policy impact</th>
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<td>Policymakers:</td>
<td>• Tool to monitor radical online extremism</td>
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<td>Conventional News Media:</td>
<td>• Competitive advantage beyond news sharing</td>
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<td>Future Research:</td>
<td>• International collaboration?</td>
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<td>• Alter/weaken national identity?</td>
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<td>• New forms of political representation?</td>
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“The Internet is a tool just like pencils and erasers.”