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Netizens, South Korea and Participatory Democracy

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## Introduction

In his research and writing about the impact the net and netizens could have on the future struggle for more democracy, Michael Hauben wrote:

We are seeing a revitalization of society. The frameworks are being redesigned from the bottom up. A new more democratic world is becoming possible.

("The Net and the Netizens: The Impact the Net has on People's Lives")

While the netizen research and writing by Hauben demonstrates the potential contribution by the netizen and the net toward a “new more democratic world” that Hauben predicted could come into existence, the practices being developed in the Candlelight Revolution in South Korea are exploring how to make this potential a reality.

This issue of the *Amateur Computerist* is dedicated to both marking the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the publication of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* and to recognizing the significance of the Candlelight Revolution that has emerged in South Korea over the past two decades.

The recent candlelight demonstrations that gripped South Korean society for six months (from October 2016 until March 2017) succeeded in achieving the impeachment and then prosecution of the president, Park Geun-hye, for the corrupt activities she and her colleagues were part of.

Two of the articles in the issue, “South Korea’s Candlelight Protests” and “South Korea’s Blue House” provide background on the particular developments of the 2016-2017 candlelight demonstrations.

The significant element of what has happened in South Korea this past year, however, is only secondarily whether the former public and private parties will be adequately punished for their abuse of the public. More important is the fact that the citizens of South Korea not only succeeded in determining the public interest but also in finding a means to direct the politicians toward implementing their public interest obligations.

How this has been accomplished needs to be understood and built on.

The article “Korean Candlelight Model for More Democracy” summarizes some few of the analyses contributed by researchers and others toward exploring the goal of the Candlelight Revolution, i.e., to provide a means beyond representative democracy, for a new form of democracy that supports the participation of the grassroots in more of the decisions that determine the present and future of society.

These recent developments, however, build on a longer tradition of candlelight demonstrations in South Korea.

One critical aspect of the 2008 candlelight demonstration which lasted for 106 days was the role of netizens in helping to explore the

political alternatives to representative democracy. The article “The Candlelight Demonstrations in South Korea as a Laboratory for Democracy” explores this important 2008 precedent.

The article “The Rise of Netizen Democracy: A Case Study of Netizens Impact on Democracy in South Korea” puts candlelight demonstrations into the context of earlier South Korean netizen activities.

The article “Considerations on the Significance of the Net and the Netizens” explores how the pioneering research and writing by Michael Hauben recognized that along with the development of the Internet was the emergence of the netizens. Netizens, for Hauben identified those online citizens who devoted time and effort to achieve the public interest goals that Netizen empowerment and contributions make possible. The article also considers contributions by computer pioneer JCR Licklider and media theorist Mark Poster to formulating a theory of the nature and importance of the netizen phenomena.

Other articles in the issue help to put these developments into the broader context that is being developed through the Candlelight demonstrations in South Korea.

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[Editor’s Note: The following is a proposal made to the re:publica 2017 Conference organizers for a celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the print publication of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. It was accepted.]

## **Celebrate 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet**

by Ronda Hauben  
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### **Short Thesis:**

“Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. You are a Netizen (a Net Citizen),” wrote Michael Hauben in 1993 when he discovered that along with the

Internet there had emerged a new form of citizen and citizenship. He called this new form of citizen “netizen.” The article Hauben wrote introducing his research and the concept of Netizen to the world soon became the first chapter of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. Come celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this book with us.

## Description:

In 1993 Michael Hauben recognized that along with the Internet there had emerged the netizen. He observed that the netizen was not all users, but the online user who recognized the empowerment the Net made possible and who sought to utilize this empowerment to contribute to the Net and the bigger world it was part of.

This May marks the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the print edition of *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. The book was first published online and then in a print edition in English and in a Japanese translation.

We want to mark this occasion by a presentation celebrating the milestone the book represents. While there are many publications exploring the social impact of the Internet, it was and continues to be rare for a book or other publication to document and make the case for the importance of recognizing the social impact of the Net and Netizens.

Our presentation will explore the historic and scientific roots of the phenomenon, the early vision, the research that led to the recognition of the emergence of the netizens and the continuing development of both the theory and practice of netizens and netizenship. Several names stand out in the history of this achievement. Among these are J C R Licklider for the guiding vision, Michael Hauben for the pioneering research and scientific insight for recognizing that along with the Internet had emerged the Netizen, and Mark Poster’s work realizing that the netizen could be the social force waging a successful struggle against the harmful effects of globalization.

The netizens have carried forward the torch so the Internet can continue to evolve and thrive. Particularly, the contributions of the South Korean and Chinese netizens have turned the concept of netizens into a national laboratory for democracy.

We plan two informative presentations. One presentation will include a case study of the candlelight revolution by citizens and netizens in South Korea which demonstrates in practice the efforts toward forging a new governance model for participatory democracy. The second will argue that netizens are having a sustained impact and are contributing to developing Chinese society in the direction of greater citizen participation.

There will be time for comments, contributions and discussion by those joining us for the presentation. Leif Kramp has written about re:publica, “Every May, Berlin transforms into the European capital of ‘netizens’.” What more fitting venue to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the print edition of Netizens than in Berlin as part of re:publica 2017.

Come celebrate this 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with us.

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[Editor’s Note: The following article appeared on Feb. 7, 2017 on East Asia Forum at: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/02/07/south-koreas-candlelight-protests/>]

## **South Korea’s Candlelight Protests**

by Sun-Chul Kim

Political protest has always propelled South Korea’s democratization. It was through the mass uprising in April 1960 that South Koreans ended the autocratic rule of Syngman Rhee. The democracy that followed the ‘April Revolution’ was short-lived, but the subsequent military regimes of Park Chung-hee (1961–79) and Chun Doo-hwan (1980–87) had to cope with a recalcitrant opposition that tirelessly protested authoritarian rule. In June 1987, another mass mobilization eventually forced the authoritarian rulers to concede democratic reforms.

Political protest did not slow down with South Korea’s transition to democracy. On the contrary, street protest became the new normal as democratic space expanded. Students, workers, civic organizations, and even opposition political parties and lawmakers took to the streets in protest of government policies. Observing the pervasiveness of protest in

South Korea in 2008, an Al Jazeera reporter came to the conclusion that ‘protest has become part of [South Korean] culture.’ Given this context, the recent candlelight protests that erupted in response to the scandals of President Park Geun-hye and her confidante, Choi Soon-sil, were no isolated event.

The use of candlelight as a form of protest traces back to 2002 when two teenage girls were killed by U.S. armored vehicles on military training maneuvers. A proposal for a candlelight vigil circulated among internet cafes after the news spread that the U.S. soldiers responsible for the deaths of the Korean girls had been acquitted in the U.S. court-martial. Thousands gathered in Gwanghwamun Square to commemorate the victims. The candlelight vigil was picked up by activist groups and turned into a symbol of the movement against the perceived injustice. Ever since 2002, mass demonstrations in South Korea have taken the form of candlelight protest.

The advent of the candlelight protest signified important changes distinct from earlier protests. In the past, it was impossible to picture a protest scene in South Korea without conjuring up the image of violent clashes and the exchange of teargas and Molotov cocktails between protesters and riot police. Violent protests persisted into the 1990s, well after South Korea’s democratic transition, but the emergence of the candlelight protest offered a new platform that enabled protesters to convey their seriousness of intent through peaceful means.

Specifically, the candlelight protests of the past three months have been remarkable in their absence of violence, despite the high political tension and massive number of protesters roaming the streets. On the one hand, this had to do with greater tolerance on the part of the police and favorable court rulings that opened up new marching routes previously unavailable to the protesters – a trend not uncommon during times of revolutionary change. But it also had much to do with the adept handling of the rallies and marches by the organizers.

The weekly candlelight protests were organized by Emergency Action for Park’s Resignation, a coalition of more than 1500 civic organizations. In the past, large coalitions were often plagued by fierce infighting among competing political groups. To avoid discord, the anti-Park coalition set rules for decision making based on the lowest common

denominator among participant organizations.

Its role was focused on providing political space for citizens of all walks of life to come and express their views freely. From booking celebrities to setting up lost-and-found services, the coalition paid close attention to the details of the rallies to make them more accommodating to all.

Combined with unprecedented levels of frustration and anger among South Koreans, the outcome was explosive. Week after week, the coalition successfully mobilized millions of South Koreans on the streets of dozens of cities and channeled their anger into a powerful political message. Eventually, the candlelight protests pushed reluctant lawmakers to cast their vote to impeach the president in the National Assembly, marking one of the most significant events in South Korea's political history.

The success of the anti-Park candlelight protests illuminates the growth and maturity of civil society in South Korea. At the same time, it brings to attention the weakness of its party system as a mechanism for political mediation. South Korean political parties have been characterized by their extreme fluidity, which involves frequent splits, mergers and name changes.

In the absence of stable political parties with which to communicate political agendas and develop a shared identity, civil society organizations often bypassed the mediation of political parties when it came to promoting new agendas or resisting policies. Consequently, direct action was frequently used as leverage vis-à-vis the decision makers.

The latest candlelight protest set an unusual example in that street protesters and opposition lawmakers found themselves in sync throughout the impeachment campaign as well as the subsequent legal proceedings. But this rare accord is unlikely to be sustained as the ruling party goes through another split and the fractured opposition field prepares for an early presidential election in late spring, pending confirmation of President Park's impeachment by the Constitutional Court.

Lacking a reliable partner in party politics, the anti-Park coalition will likely break into multiple political lines as the competition for the president's office deepens. Precisely because they lack reliable partners in party politics, however, they will most likely get together again and return to street politics when there is another serious breach of democratic

principle. Protest politics will continue in South Korea.

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[Editor's Note: The following article appeared on the E-International Relations website\* on Feb 21, 2017 at: <http://www.e-ir.info/2017/02/21/south-koreas-blue-house-scandal/>.]

## **South Korea's Blue House Scandal**

by Mi-yeon Hur

Since October 2016, every weekend, Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul has been flooded with hundreds of thousands of people demanding the ouster of current South Korean President Park Geun-hye. Park faces allegations that she helped her close confidante, Choi Soon-sil, extract money from South Korean conglomerates to use for personal gain, while Choi Soon-sil was arrested on charges of fraud and abuse of power. Pundits outside South Korea tend to focus on the unusual and sensational aspects of the issue, such as Choi's shamanism, how much control Choi enjoyed over Park, or when and how Park would step down. However, these aspects hardly give a clear understanding of the Blue House<sup>1</sup> scandal and the series of ongoing public demonstrations in South Korea. The core issue amid the chronic scandals engulfing South Korea is the country's distorted economy and immature democracy. The title of "11<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world" is the wrapping paper that covers the political discrepancies and socio-economic disparities that South Korean society is currently experiencing. Outsiders must understand that what South Korean citizens are demanding is not only the removal of an incapable and apathetic ruler but also meaningful changes to the rigged economic and political structure.

More specifically, what South Koreans want to achieve is the



completion of the 1987 democracy movement and revision of the chaebol-driven economic system.<sup>2</sup> To fully grasp what is actually going on in South Korea, people must understand how defective and inefficient the South Korean political system has been and how South Korean presidents with their imperialist power have pursued economic policies that have deteriorated economic justice and social equality. This will allow people to understand that the recent candlelight protests are an extension of the pro-democracy movement that started decades ago, how such detestable leaders were able to occupy the Blue House, and why South Korean people call their home country “Hell Chosun.”<sup>3</sup>

## South Korea’s Democracy: Already but Not Yet

South Korea is witnessing what I would call a “civil revolution without bloodshed,” a citizen struggle against authoritarian rule and for a true democracy. Politically, South Korea has been under a quasi-democratic system where public opinion is restrained and manipulated. The recent Choi Soon-sil scandal shows that the media was never free from political pressure; the political parties neither respect public sentiments nor represent public preferences; Park Geun-hye was able to rule the nation as an imperialist dictator.<sup>4</sup> All of these truths stem from the fact that South Korea has yet to complete its democratization process.

In its process of democratization, South Korea has experienced a few nation-wide democratic uprisings. The first democratic protest, which occurred on April 19, 1960, is known as the “April Revolution.” Thousands of college students and citizens took to the streets of Seoul, boldly demanding the resignation of Rhee Syng-man, who was elected as the first president through massive electoral fraud. The April uprising successfully toppled the Rhee regime, but the Blue House was taken over by General Park Chung-hee, who seized the opportunity and political uncertainty to lead a coup on May 16, 1961. Under Park Chung-hee, democratization movements became more intense. A series of protests developed into massive uprisings in the southern cities of Busan and Masan in October 1979, triggering internal conflicts among the coup leaders, which led to the assassination of Park.

The brief period after the dictator’s assassination, often called the “Seoul Spring,” gave people high hopes for a democracy. However, Major

General Chun Doo-hwan began maneuvering to gain control over the Korean Central Intelligence Agency and declared even more draconian forms of martial law. In May 1980, the country exploded into protest against the possibility of a renewed military dictatorship. Gwangju, the capital of South Jeolla province, was the city that resisted until the end, but hundreds of people were massacred during a military siege tacitly approved by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, whose top priority for South Korea was political stability.<sup>5</sup>

Chun's government, which gained power illegitimately, was never a very popular one. Throughout its tenure it was dogged by constant protests from dissident groups. In June 1987, millions of citizens poured out onto the streets, marking the final blow to Chun Doo-hwan's dictatorial regime. Many scholars have commented that the June Uprising of 1987 paved the way for South Korea to emerge as Asia's most vibrant democracy, but unfortunately, due to a political split in the opposition camp, the South Korean president-elect in 1987 was none other than Chun's long-time friend and accomplice to the Gwangju massacre, Roh Tae-woo. South Korea would not have a true civilian president until 1993, and it was not until 1998 that an opposition party won the presidential election.

As described above, for decades the South Korean public has consistently protested against undemocratic governance and oppression, yearning for the socio-political transformation of their homeland. The recent candlelight demonstrations against the Park Geun-hye government also need to be seen within a broader framework of public struggles against non-democratic forces. Yet, how could the protests be so incredibly peaceful? I assume that civic consciousness matured under the progressive governments of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun from 1998 to 2007, which did not attempt to control or repress dissenting voices, while the Park government's authority has been weakened to the point where it dares not use force against the public.

At any rate, though direct elections were incorporated into the presidential voting system with the Declaration for Democratization on June 29, 1987, a direct vote by the people alone could not create a proper democratic system.<sup>6</sup> A single round of voting with a first-past-the-post presidential election made for many "wasted" votes. If there had been a

two-round system that prevented a less-popular candidate who did not receive an absolute majority from winning, South Korea would have had a different outcome than Roh Tae-woo who won with only 36.6% of the votes in the presidential election of 1987.

Similar to South Korea's presidential elections, its legislative elections also generate too many "wasted votes." Unlike many other countries that introduced party-list proportional representation for their parliamentary elections in their transition to democracy, in 1988 South Korea adopted a plurality voting system with single-member constituencies combined with a bit of proportional representation. The plurality system was not introduced based on a broad consensus between the major political parties at the time, but rather unilaterally passed by the ruling Democratic Justice Party, founded by Chun Doo-hwan. Mechanically, the plurality rule imposes formidable entry-barriers on minor parties with new ideas, consequently leading to a two-party system where diverse public opinions and preferences are not effectively represented.

Though democratic leaders occupied the Blue House for a decade from 1998 to 2007, the fundamentals of legislative elections remained unchanged. Civil society organizations have continually demanded reform of the electoral system so that new and minor parties can have a better chance to get seats in the parliament, but the privileged successfully resisted such reform that could lead to a loss of their power in the national assembly. Worst of all, there is literally no ideological distance between the two major political parties of South Korea. Choi Jang-jip, the author of "Democracy after Democratization," characterizes the South Korean political party system as a "monopolistic conservative party system" where people can hardly find an inspirational candidate whom they can expect to actually bring about change in their country.<sup>7</sup> For the most part, with little exaggeration, political parties, whether they identify as progressive or conservative, are preoccupied with permanent campaigning for the next presidential election. This is because they know that the president has absolute power to steer the country as he or she wishes. In fact, this effectively explains both Choi Soon-sil-gate and the sarcastic term "Hell Chosun."

## South Korea's Economy on Shaky Ground

The expansion of presidential powers has been a distinctive feature of South Korean democracy. The South Korean president enjoys almost absolute power over the executive, legislative, and judicial bodies. One of the main sources of presidential power is the authority to appoint or influence the appointment of as many as 10,000 senior officials in the bureaucracy, military, and government-affiliated organizations. This accumulation of power in the hands of the president was in fact gradual and usually done under the demand or pretext of a national emergency. The confrontation with North Korea has permitted a larger concentration of authority in the presidency and has given presidents the opportunity to exercise almost royal prerogatives. What began as emergency powers were soon consolidated into the ultimate cultural and constitutional authority inherent in the presidential office, which became the so-called "imperial presidency."

With volatile political parties, an ineffective national assembly and weak civil society, South Korea has every condition for the president to control the nation through authoritative power. Worst of all, when the president is fascinated with and addicted to economic growth, South Korean society faces formidable social problems. As any president, regardless of which party he or she is from, believes that national economic policy should be designed and operated based on economic development and expansion, it has become South Korean government's unchanging goal to make the country an ideal location for conglomerates to do business.

Park Chung-hee was the one who made chaebols become the backbone of the South Korean economy. The Park regime offered them a variety of incentives such as subsidized loans from state banks, low interest rates, tax exemptions, import and export licenses, and myriads of government contracts. In return, chaebols were expected to achieve higher levels of exports and to surreptitiously provide kickbacks to the government. Although this system helped the country reach double-digit economic growth rates, labor exploitation and human rights abuses increased in the course of the country's rapid industrialization. In addition, by the late 1960s, the financial structures of many companies had already become fragile due to their heavy debts. However, under the successive

Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo eras, the chaebol continued to expand without taking any steps to reduce their leverage. As most of the new capital formation was financed by major South Korean banks that were under effective government control, the risks of debt financing rose.

In the early 1990s, with the recession of the global economy, South Korea's economic balance rapidly deteriorated. By the end of 1996, South Korea's external debt had grown to over \$150 billion, while usable gross international reserves were no more than \$30 billion. Needless to say, a major portion of the foreign debt was borrowed by the chaebol. When the Asian currency crisis first broke out in Thailand in 1997 and swept through the Southeast Asian countries, South Korea could not avoid a wave of financial crises. It was the shaky financial institutions that triggered the crisis, rather than speculative attacks on the Korean won. Poor financial regulation and supervision failed to deter financial institutions' reckless lending and investing, which eventually made the economy increasingly vulnerable to a foreign exchange crisis. Inevitably, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) became involved in Korea's financial crisis. The IMF's conditions for financial assistance ranged from macroeconomic policies to structural reforms, especially in the financial sector and labor market. Under the IMF's excessive austerity programs, South Korea experienced an avalanche of corporate bankruptcies, high interest rates, and a sharp decline in growth rates. Social instability was an inevitable outcome. South Korea's painful labor market reforms, conducted at a time when adequate social safety nets had not yet been developed, produced quiet desperation and a salient increase in suicide deaths among people who suddenly became unemployed due to their company downsizing and restructuring.<sup>8</sup>

Without eradicating the root cause of the economic crisis – the chaebol – both Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung hastily implemented financial market liberalization and labor market reforms while paying little attention to the possible incompatibility of neoliberal economic policies and social welfare. President Roh Moo-hyun, who was regarded as progressive in his approach, also continued to pursue his predecessor's neoliberal economic policies that further widened social gaps, while putting patches on the social welfare system. Under the conservative administrations of Park Geun-hye and her predecessor Lee Myung-bak

(2008-2013), polarization has worsened in all areas.

## A Need for Transformation

Unfortunately, South Koreans have become victims of their country's economic success under the tenet of accelerating and sustaining economic growth, and more recently that of promoting globalization. A highly competitive environment with little tolerance for failure has made people become overly self-centered and lethargic at the same time. The sarcastic term "Hell Chosun" frequently used among young people reflects the dire social situation of South Korea, where ordinary people feel more deprived than ever. The thousands of people gathering in Gwanghwamun Square are expressing that they will no longer put up with the kind of society that asks people to give their whole lives for the sake of the nation's trade surplus, even when fair distribution cannot be expected. Outsiders need to understand that it is not just a protest against an incapable leader but an all-out struggle against an undemocratic and inhumane system. The South Korean protesters demand not only a different state leader but also a different national community: a welfare state where they feel secure raising their children. There is every reason to sincerely hope that South Korea's revolutionary peaceful candlelight protests will become a catalyst to finally transform the system that gave birth to Park Geun-hye and Choi Soon-sil, and lead to the development of a desirable state where people can fully enjoy political rights, civil liberty, and economic justice.

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### Notes:

1. Cheong Wa Dae, the residence of the South Korean president, is commonly referred to as the "Blue House" because the main building and its annexes are covered with traditional Korean blue roof tiles.
2. Chaebols refer to a small number of conglomerates – for example, Samsung, LG, and Hyundai, which are owned by the chairman's family. They have dominated the South Korean economic landscape, making up a large portion of South Korea's GDP. For more information on chaebols and their role in the South Korean economy, see Phil-sang Lee's "Economic Crisis and Chaebol Reform in Korea," available at: <https://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/apec/sites/apec/files/files/discussion/PSLee.PDF>
3. Chosun is the name of a Korean dynasty that lasted for over 500 years from 1392 to 1910. Young people in South Korea sarcastically call their homeland "Hell Chosun,"

expressing their anxiety over a society where they can find no hope unless they were born with a silver spoon in their mouth.

4. See Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2004). The South Korean presidential system has a great possibility to give birth to what Schlesinger characterizes as an “imperial presidency” by giving enormous power and privilege to a president while lacking checks and balances, and Park Geun-hye was a typical example of someone who abused the system. See also the interview article “2017 Presidential Dreams” by *Kyunghyang* newspaper (9 January 2017), available at [http://english.khan.co.kr/khan\\_art\\_view.html?code=710100&artid=201701091831257](http://english.khan.co.kr/khan_art_view.html?code=710100&artid=201701091831257)

5. For more information, see Tim Shorrock’s “Money Doesn’t Talk, It Swears,” available at: [http://timshorrock.com/?page\\_id=21](http://timshorrock.com/?page_id=21)

6. For the historical background of the South Korean electoral system, see Aurel Croissant’s “Electoral Politics in South Korea,” available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/01361008.pdf>

7. Jang-jip Choi, *Democracy after Democratization: The Korean Experience* (Seoul: Humanitas, 2012).

8. For more details on the dark side of Korea’s economic success, see *The Miracle with a Dark Side* (2003), published by the Institute for International Economics.

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[Editor’s Note: During the mass candlelight movement of 2016-2017 in South Korea, several articles appeared in the South Korean media analyzing the demands of the protesters. The following article points to some of these articles.]

## **Korean Candlelight Model for More Democracy\***

by Ronda Hauben  
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South Korea has reached a critical juncture. The National Assembly voted to impeach the President, Park Geun-hye and then the impeachment

went to the Constitutional Court. There, eight of the eight judges supported the impeachment for Park to be removed from the presidency permanently.

The impeachment resulted from a corruption scandal which had engulfed the administration of Park Geun-hye. There were allegations that her administration was plagued by corruption over the past few years, and by October, 2016 various news media were revealing evidence of that corruption.

Interviews published in the South Korean newspaper *Hankyoreh* began to show how the Korean government practices were being directly influenced or even decided by forces outside of the government. *Hankyoreh* interviews described meetings with other people carried out by Choi Soon-sil, a long time friend of President Park, discussing the President's upcoming schedule and national policy issues. This was substantiated when a computer tablet was found by reporters connected with the JTBC cable media. The tablet's memory contained many files that have been alleged to prove that President Park subordinated her presidency to Choi Soon-sil, who had no official role in the South Korean government. The allegation is that Park turned to Choi for advice and decisions concerning government matters.

The involvement of Choi Soon-sil in government matters was linked to her role in creating foundations and using the President's name and influence to raise funds from the chaebols, the big corporations dominating the South Korean economy. It is alleged that some chaebol executives then expected and received favorable decisions in government matters relating to their businesses.

Other examples of government corruption have emerged in areas like culture and sports. There is evidence that government contracts were given to those recommended by Choi Soon-sil or officials who had been appointed based on her recommendation. The news of these activities spread and the public came to understand what appeared to be serious systemic corruption involving the head of the South Korean government.

By the end of October, large weekly public demonstrations began to be held by South Korean citizens calling on President Park to resign. The demonstrations grew in size so that by December, 2016, over one million people of all ages and from many walks of life rallied in Seoul with almost



two million people protesting nationwide. President Park made some attempts at what she claimed to be public apologies, but the public was dismayed by what appeared more as attempts at justifying her behavior.

By December 9, a vote was taken in the National Assembly to impeach the President. The result was 234 to support the impeachment resolution and 56 against. The number voting to impeach Park exceeded the 200 votes needed for the impeachment resolution to pass. As required by the Constitution, the impeachment resolution was taken to the Constitutional Court, which had up to 180 days to review the merits of the resolution.

Commentary in the media by scholars, journalists and citizens seeks to analyze what is happening in South Korea. The article “A Historic Juncture” in the South Korean newspaper *Joong Ang Ilbo* by Political Science Professor Jaung Hoon of Chung-An University proposed that South Korea was at a critical crossroads.<sup>1</sup> Describing this juncture, he wrote that this was “a decisive moment at which the god of history differentiates the fraying established power from the new force of the future.”

He proposed that ending Park Geun-hye’s presidency and finding a way to amend the constitution so no such corruption could be repeated was important, but that this was not what he called “the ultimate issues.” What the people truly want, he explained, is a new form of civic politics and political platform that go beyond the representative democracy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to allow continuous exchange and communication between the representative system and the general will of the people. Professor Hoon proposes the need to strengthen communication between the political system and the people.

Several other articles in the Korean media express a similar urgency, but they propose the need to change the political structures, not merely make them more responsive. For example, the editorial “Impeachment Means a New Dawn for South Korean Democracy” in the Korean newspaper *Hankyoreh* proposed the need for changing the political framework that allowed such corruption to take place.

The *Hankyoreh* editorial argues:<sup>2</sup>

If representative democracy is unable to adequately express the demands of direct democracy, there is no reason for it to

continue. Politics has been distorted by political interests that reject the will of the people, and it's time for that to stop. We hope that the politicians will stop testing the protesters' patience.

This *Hankyoreh* editorial notes, "This is an opportunity not merely to remove the people who appropriated state resources for themselves but to replace the obsolete systems, conditions and structures that made such appropriation possible." The impeachment motion is viewed as but "the first step on the long journey toward completing the civic revolution in the truest sense of that phrase."

The editorial "Candlelight Revolution Mandates Rebuilding of Nation" in the newspaper *The Korea Times*, in a similar vein, explained that what was happening in South Korea was a "candlelight revolution" which mandates, "the rebuilding of the nation."<sup>3</sup> The editorial reports that people involved in the protests "commonly pledged to support the fundamental reformation of society and continuously participate in decision making."

The editorial explained that, "The incompetence of the political parties encouraged people to participate directly." It quoted as an example, one demonstrator who said "We don't have a clear plan yet, but we all share in the belief that we need more action for changes."

The article "Three Points of the Constitutional Court 'Impeachment Trial'," in the Korean newspaper *OhmyNews* explained that what had happened in South Korea is that citizens took the lead and led political circles and the media. Although only 40 days earlier it was expected that the impeachment vote would be difficult, this writer observed how public anger skyrocketed in the Park Geun-hye-Choi Soon-sil Gate scandal, endlessly revealing more, like the peeling of an onion. Citizens came out in the square and declared "we are the sovereigns." The article argues that if it were not for these "sovereigns," it would not have been possible to pass the impeachment resolution in the National Assembly on December 9, 2016.<sup>4</sup>

The author of this article argues that there is a need for citizens to remain strong. If the amazing power of candles does not remain as memories of winter, but continues, this author predicts, "Korea should become a country of strong citizens.... The role of the parliamentary elite

is important, but I dream of a society...in which ordinary people can discuss constitutional principles.” The article argues for the need for reflection and the involvement of the ordinary people to determine the vision for the constitutional change needed so as to lay the foundation for change. The article proposes favoring the presidential candidate who advocates many citizens discussing the constitutional principles to be proposed, rather than prematurely formulated constitutional amendments.

Other articles in the media and online caution against allowing politicians to quickly formulate and pass constitutional amendments that they claim deal with the problems, but which have excluded citizens from the formulation process.

The editorial “To Go Beyond June of 1987” in the Korean newspaper *Kyunghyang Shinmun* explains how such a process happened in 1987 excluding those who had been the protesters from being part of formulating the mechanisms that would provide a continuing democratic process for them. Instead, a small group of politicians formulated the constitutional language to provide for direct election of the President, a process that did not provide for democracy for the people.<sup>5</sup>

Instead, the author explained now there is the “need to introduce and expand direct democracy and the participation of the citizens. What the National Assembly should be doing is not to discuss constitutional amendments but to enact a bill that will establish the constitutional procedures for citizen participation in (the process of) amending the constitution.”

The people protesting are concerned about the structural weakness of the South Korean political system where there are such weak safe guards against high level corruption. Therefore, there is a demand among the protesters for a structural means for their ongoing participation in the affairs of government.

People are expressing their recognition that the so called “democratic institutions” have demonstrated their weakness, and that there is a need for what they refer to as a 21<sup>st</sup> century politics. Among the Korean people, there is a recognition of the need to create new forms of democratic institutions which deal with the deficiencies of the current institutions and provide for a form of ongoing citizen participation in government processes and decision making.

South Korea has an important legacy that can help it to meet this challenge. It is a country that is first in the world in the spread of the Internet and the use of the Internet by people online. Many South Koreans are netizens, those seeking to utilize the empowerment made possible by the Net for a more democratic and participatory society. During the past two decades, netizens in South Korea have explored various forms of online participation so they have a rich experience to draw from towards creating the forms and structures needed for the civic revolution they realize is needed. Their mass participation in the candlelight activities to expose the corruption and failures of the current government demonstrates that they have been mastering the need for the civic participation of netizens and citizens in the affairs of the society. Hence they are not looking for better leadership, but for the participation of the citizens themselves as leadership. Citizens of South Korea are acting to change the governmental model. They are not just looking for a next 'great leader' but for a much enhanced participation of citizens in the determination and functioning of their political system. Will what they envision be able to impact the future political direction for South Korea?

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#### Notes:

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See also Article 1 of the Republic of Korea (ROK) Constitution.  
"The sovereignty of the Republic of Korea shall reside in the people, and all state authority shall emanate from the people."  
[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_protect/@protrav/@ilo\\_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms\\_117333.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_117333.pdf)
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\*This is an edited version of an article, “Ban Ki-moon’s Idea of Leadership or the Candlelight Model for More Democracy?” that first appeared Dec. 12, 2016 on the netizenblog at:

<http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2016/12/21/leadership-or-candlelight-democracy/>

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[Editor’s Note: The following is a slightly edited version of a talk give at the re:publica 2017 conference in Berlin, Germany on May 9, 2017. It is a work in progress.]

# **The Candlelight Demonstrations in South Korea as a Laboratory for Democracy**

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## **Part I – Introduction**

May 2017 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the print publication of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, which I will refer to as the *Netizens* book. This coincided with a series of candlelight demonstrations that took place in South Korea calling for and resulting in the impeachment of the former President of South Korea, Park Geun Hye, and her arrest on charges of corruption and bribery.

From October 29, 2016 to April 29, 2017 there were 23 candlelight demonstrations. These demonstrations succeeded in strengthening, first the National Assembly and then the Constitutional Court to rule in favor of Park’s impeachment. These demonstrations also emboldened the Prosecutors Office to call for the detention and then the arrest of Park and of a number of other former government and corporate officials.

The significance of the candlelight demonstrations is that they were made possible by the Internet and by the citizens and netizens of South Korea, who are taking up what is a critical issue for our times. They are exploring how in practice to deal with the lack of democracy experienced

by the people in South Korea. This is an all too common problem for people around the world as well. If progress can be made tackling this problem, it is important that this progress be shared and understood by others who are also suffering under its yoke.

In my talk I want to focus on two particular aspects of networking developments:

1) The vision that helped to inspire the creation and development of the Net.

2) The emergence and development of the Netizens.

The discussion of these two aspects of network development will help to provide the context for the importance of these and earlier South Korean candlelight demonstrations.

## Part II – Background

In 1992, Michael Hauben, one of the co-authors of the *Netizens* book, was a student at Columbia University. He was online as part of the Columbia University connection at the time to the Internet. By 1992 the Internet had been in the process of being built for 20 years, but it was only then spreading and connecting up people around the world. Michael posted a paper on what was at the time a network known as Usenet, originally created for those using the Unix Operating System.

Michael's paper described an article, titled "Liberty of the Press," written for the Supplement to the 1825 *Encyclopedia Britannica* by James Mill.

Mill argued about the need for people to be able to keep watch over their government officials. Mill maintained that "government will be corrupt if the chance exists" and that "those in position to rule would abuse their power." In his paper Michael proposes that computer networks give people a means of publicly evaluating and spreading information about the activities of government officials.

Michael referred to the experience he was having on Usenet, as an important example of how to provide for the open discussion about the workings of government and government officials that Mill proposed as critical for good government.

The article about James Mill and the need for computer networks for citizens to provide oversight over government officials became the final

chapter in the *Netizens* book titled “The Computer as a Democratizer.”

A few months later Michael took a class in computer ethics. For that course, he put together a post on several mailing lists and on Usenet titled, “The Largest Machine: Where it came from and its importance to society.”

In it, Michael wrote: “I propose to write a paper concerning the development of the ‘Net.’ I am interested in exploring the forces behind its development and the fundamental change it represents over previous communications media. . . . I wish to come to some understanding of where the net has come from, so as to be helpful in figuring out where it is going.” (*Netizens*, p 36)

In a short time after his post appeared online, a number of e-mail responses arrived in his e-mail account, welcoming his post and responding to it. The people who wrote him in general shared their online experiences, and their great appreciation of the value they felt was now possible because they were able to be online. Michael studied their responses. Gathering them he put together a post which he titled “Common Sense: The Net and Netizens”. He wrote: “Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. You are a Netizen (a Net Citizen), and you exist as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible. . . .” He observed, “We are seeing a revitalization of society. The frameworks are being redesigned from the bottom up. A new, more democratic world is becoming possible.”

Subsequently, in a talk Michael gave in Japan he clarified that his view was that not all those online are netizens. Michael identifies those public spirited users who contribute to the Net and the bigger world it is part of, as the online users he refers to as netizens. He reserved the use of the word netizens to describe such users.

The book *Netizens* grew out of the experience of this research Michael was doing and the complementary research I began influenced by the fascinating material Michael was gathering and continuing to write about. In 1994 we put a draft of a book online. Then in 1997 a print edition of the *Netizens* book was published in English and Japanese editions.

### Part III – Pioneering Vision

In response to Michael’s question as to where the Net had come from, online networking pioneers pointed to the work of JCR Licklider as

the scientist who inspired and successfully set the research direction that made it possible to create the Internet.

In Chapter V of the *Netizens* book, Michael refers to the vision that guided the origin and development of the Internet, Usenet and the other associated ... networks, and he asked “What is that vision?”

The chapter points to the community that grew up around the people who were linked together by computer systems. Trained as a psychologist, Licklider observed what was happening to the people who were using the newly created computer systems. He observed that communities formed as people interacted and helped each other. A general phrase Licklider used at the time was “intergalactic networks.” It was a phrase that captured the grandeur of Licklider's vision for the future network.

Another key aspect of Licklider's vision was the need for the whole population to be connected if the developing network would represent a benefit to society.

## Part IV – South Korea and Netizens

Over the years there have been many examples of researchers referring to netizen developments in various parts of the world. But what I have found is that probably the most advanced examples of both the research and practice of netizens are in South Korea.

First, there is a proud tradition of protest and sacrifice on the part of South Koreans to win the minimal democratic rights they have gained. Secondly, South Korea is one of the most wired countries in the world where a larger percentage of its population, compared with many other countries, has access to high speed Internet connectivity.

My connection to South Korea began in February 2003 when I saw a headline on the front page of the *Financial Times* newspaper that the new President of South Korea had been elected by Netizens. For me, of course, this was a surprising and important headline.

I began to try to learn what was happening in South Korea. Indeed many netizens in South Korea had backed Roh Moo-Hyun who was a candidate for the South Korean Presidency from outside the political mainstream. Roh Moo-Hyun won the election in December 2002. That event and subsequent events I learned about led me to understand that already in 2003 netizens had become an important phenomenon in South



Korea.

I learned, too, that the word for netizen in the Korean language is pronounced the same as the English word, though spoken with a Korean pronunciation. I was also encouraged to see that our book was known in South Korea.

One example is in an English language research paper. The reference explains:

[Michael] Hauben (1997) defined the term Netizen as the people who actively contribute online towards the development of the Internet.... In particular, Usenet news groups or Internet bulletin boards are considered an ‘agora’ where the Netizens actively discuss and debate upon various issues.... In this manner, a variety of agenda are formed on the ‘agora’ and in their activity there, a Netizen can act as a citizen who uses the Internet as a way of participating in political society.

## Part V – Mark Poster and the Need for Netizens

Over the years, several commentators have written about the importance of the concept of netizens.

One example is the discussion of the potential impact of netizens and the Internet on globalization by Mark Poster, a media theorist. Poster was interested in the relationship of the citizen to government, and in the empowering of the citizen to be able to affect the actions of one’s government. With the coming of what he calls the age of globalization, however, Poster wondered if the concept of “citizen” can continue to signify democracy. He wondered if the concept is up to the task. “The deepening of globalization processes strips the citizen of power,” he argues. “As economic processes become globalized, the nation-state loses its ability to protect its population....” In this situation, “the figure of the citizen is placed in a defensive position.”

“In contrast to the citizen of the nation,” he notices, the name often given to the political subject constituted on the Net is “netizen.”

There is a need, however, to find instead of a defensive position, an offensive one. “The netizen,” Poster proposes, “might be the formative figure in a new kind of political relation, one that shares allegiance to the

nation with allegiance to the Net and to the planetary political spaces it inaugurates.” Thus for Poster, the netizen may make possible the offensive position needed to challenge globalization.

This new phenomena Poster concludes, “will likely change the relation of forces around the globe. In such an eventuality, the figure of the netizen might serve as a critical concept in the politics of democratization.”

One example that helps to demonstrate how Netizens can fulfill the role that Poster envisioned are the 2008 candlelight demonstrations in South Korea.

The following case study of the 2008 candlelight demonstrations explores how netizens were able to challenge the harmful effects of globalization.

## Part VI – 2008 Candlelight Demonstrations

By 2008 the U.S. had pressured the OIE, an international animal health regulatory body to change the evaluation criteria for beef to be considered safe enough to import to a country like South Korea. In April 2008, the newly inaugurated South Korean President Lee Myung-bak met with the U.S. President. On April 18 President Lee signed an agreement to end the former restrictions on the import of U.S. beef into South Korea.

The new beef import agreement provided that beef of any cut, any age and with bone in, could be imported into South Korea from the U.S. This was a striking departure from the previous beef agreements which since 2003 had required U.S. imports to meet requirements designed to protect the South Korean public against exposure to the human version of Mad Cow Disease. Posts critiquing the new beef agreement appeared online at Daum Agora, a South Korean networking site.

On April 29, a South Korean TV station aired a documentary exposing the poor U.S. safety practices in inspecting U.S. beef for Mad Cow Disease. Following the program there was increased online discussion about the problem of importing U.S. beef, given the minimal U.S. government inspection of this beef. In response to a lot of online discussion about the beef deal, the first candlelight demonstration for May 2, 2008 was called by middle school girls and high school students using their cell phones and a fan website among other online sites. When a large

turnout, estimated as at least 10,000 protesters appeared at the demonstration, many were surprised.

Then for more than 100 nights candlelight demonstrations were held in South Korea protesting the Lee Myung-bak actions and asking for regulations against the import of what much of the South Korean public deemed potentially unhealthy beef imports from the U.S.

These demonstrations were nonviolent evening vigils with candles. People of all ages and all walks of life took part, from students to families, to older people. Though called to protest the U.S.-South Korean beef agreement, the underlying demand of the demonstrators was that the program of South Korean President Lee and his conservative party not be allowed to take South Korea back to the days of autocratic rule.

In contrast to the somber and militant demonstrations in South Korea in the 1980s and 1990s, the 2008 candlelight vigils, instead, were treated like a festival with people bringing their instruments and playing them, dancing, singing, having heated discussions, and participating in new institutions such as the free speech stage. Also some of the participants would stay late into the night and through to the next morning.

Another new aspect was that protestors would come with their laptops and digital cameras and send out reports on the Internet to other netizens in South Korea and around the world as the demonstrations were in progress.

One report by the international TV channel France 24 describes what happened: “In South Korea a new form of democratic expression has emerged via the Internet. Its followers call themselves Netizens and when demonstrating against the government they carry their laptops to broadcast the event live....”

The report explained that netizens, “first voiced their discontent in cyberspace before taking to the streets. One man sitting on the floor in front of his laptop is writing a live transcript of what is being said on the stage for a website.”

“What I want to do is inform people through the Internet,” he said, to “provide them with detailed information on the situation and tell them the facts the government is hiding.”

People participated both online and in person at the demonstrations. Among the participants were “members of a cooking club, a classical

music society, a fashion club, a U.S. major league baseball watching club,” and other similar groups on the Internet. “Some of them joined the protests with their flags, distributed snacks and water to fellow protesters and started fundraising for paid advertisements in daily newspapers.” One researcher who described these various participants and their activities noted that such online clubs and groups had not previously engaged in politics. But remarks made by some in the group led others to join the online discussion and participate in trying to get what they considered to be a bad government policy changed.

## Part VII

A theory and practice of a more participatory form of democracy was being developed by netizens online and in the streets of South Korea. In looking at the 2008 candlelight demonstrations, however, a particularly salient example of the significance of the experience of Candlelight 2008 is a set of events that occurred during the early hours of June 10 to 11, 2008.

June 10, 2008 was going to be the largest demonstration in recent history in South Korea. The police prepared for the demonstration by erecting a barrier to prevent the demonstrators from marching on the President’s compound. The police brought eight 40-ton shipping containers, filled them with sand and soldered them together to blockade the President’s compound.

Netizens observing the building of this blockade named it Myungbak’s castle. An entry was created in the Korean Wikipedia for “Myungbak’s Castle” as a landmark of Seoul. Some people brought styrofoam blocks to the demonstration. These blocks later became the subject of a lengthy outdoor discussion as to whether to use them to build a staircase to make it possible for protesters to go over the barricade.

## Part VIII – The Outdoor Forum

On June 11, from midnight to 5:30 a.m. netizens and citizens held an outdoor forum to determine whether or not demonstrators should try to climb over the barrier to march to the President’s compound. Through the process of a 5-1/2 hour outdoor discussion, with people around the world

watching online and with many commenting online as the discussion was taking place, the demonstrators came to a widely supported decision to climb to the top of the barrier to show they could go over it if they chose, but that they had decided not to march on the Blue House.

This was an important demonstration of the fact that even those with different views of what should be done were able to communicate with each other to determine what course of action would be most in the public interest. Several participants then created the styrofoam block structure they needed, and some went up to the top of the structure, parading across the top with their banners and flags, including a banner that indicated what they wanted was to communicate with the government.

The demonstrators who went up on the barrier installed a large banner which read “Is this how MB communicates with his People?” Also the banners of some of the major groups at the demonstration were brought up on the barrier, with the online forum Agora Daum as one of the banners.

This image was in sharp contrast to the other side of the shipping containers, the area around the Blue House. The Blue House, the home and office of the head of the government, was surrounded by police, ready to attack anyone who came into the area. The message there clearly was that no communication between the citizens or netizens and the government was desired by the government. Describing the event, one netizen writes:

Through this demonstration, many netizens comment on the significant meaning of this event to ask what is democracy, and what are the rights of citizens. Steps that participants made in order to climb on the container boxes showed what they wanted was not being against the government in a riot, but being in mutual communications...with the government.

Another explained:

Honestly, I assumed that people would try to find a way to climb over the container boxes when they had been piled up during the day. But when I learned that steps of styrofoam were built up after arguments and discussion by participants, not by a few extreme elements, I was really impressed. Even though we learn that problems should be solved by dialogue in

textbooks, we are not used to having discussions and are not willing to have arguments....

The netizen continued: "I am impressed that there was a nice result after peaceful dialogue. This is real democracy."

One researcher, Min Kyung Bae poses the problem as the contrast between "Analog Government, Digital Citizens." He documents how the South Korean government continues to follow old, outmoded ways from pre-digital days. While the netizens, the digital citizens are acting in line with the new capabilities and advances of the times. Min argues that, "The gap between Lee's 1980's style analog government and the digital citizens of 2008 is huge." He gives as one example that the "Lee administration was more interested in knowing who paid for the candles than in understanding why people were holding them." Min explains that when Lee Myung-bak closed off the Plaza to the public, the netizens took on to create an online public square and from that online commons to move the public back onto the offline public square.

Min ends his article with the call, "Analog politicians must realize that the Internet offers an opportunity for a breakthrough to improve Korea's stagnant political culture. The candles lighting up Gwanghwamun Plaza are carrying the demand that representative democracy evolve into a new form suitable to the Internet age."

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[Editor's Note: The following article is a 2017 revision of a presentation made on May 1, 2012 at a small celebration in honor of the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the publication of the print edition of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet.*]

## **Considerations on the Significance of the Net and the Netizens**

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### **Abstract:**

The book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* celebrates in 2017 the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication in English and Japanese in 1997. The book documents how along with the development of the Internet came the emergence of a new form of citizen – the netizen. In his pioneering online research in the early 1990s Michael Hauben gathered data and did analysis demonstrating that not only the Internet but also the netizen would have an important impact on society. This article explores Hauben's research recognizing that netizens are a new social force. The article also looks at other contributions which help to provide a conceptual framework to understand this new social force. Media theorist Mark Poster's work about netizens is discussed, as is Karl Deutsch's theoretical understanding of the role of communication in creating a new model for good government. But it is the candlelight revolution by citizens and netizens in 2016-2017 in South Korea which demonstrates in practice the importance of the netizen forging a new governance model for participatory democracy.

### **Introduction**

With the introduction of the Internet, the question has been raised as to what its impact will be on society. One significant result of the impact already is the emergence of the netizen. Michael Hauben's work in the 1990s recognized the significant impact not only of the development of the

Internet but also of the role of the netizen in forging new social and political forms and processes.

While the role of netizens in working for social change has been documented around the world, the role of netizens in working for social and political change has been an especially important aspect of South Korean experience for nearly the past two decades. Most recently, however, widespread political and economic corruption at the highest levels of the South Korean society has led citizens and netizens to take part in peaceful but massive candlelight demonstrations advocating the need for fundamental change in the political and economic structures of South Korean society. The question has been raised whether there are models for such change. In such an environment there is a need to consider the importance of the Internet and of the netizen in helping to forge the new forms for grassroots participation in the governing structures of society. At such a time it seems appropriate to consider the conceptual framework for the role of the netizen in contributing to a new governing model for society.

These developments in South Korea come at a time when the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* celebrates the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since its publication in 1997, making a review of the significant contribution of the book particularly relevant to the events of our time.

## Looking Back

Twenty years ago in May 1997, the print edition of *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* was published in English. Later that year, in October, a Japanese translation of the book was published. In 2017, we are celebrating the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of these publications.

In honor of this occasion I want to both look back and forward toward trying to assess the significance of the book and of Michael Hauben's discovery of the emergence of the netizen. I want to begin to consider what has happened in these 20 years toward trying to understand the nature of this advance and the developments the advance makes possible.

By the early 1990s, Hauben recognized that the Internet was a



significant new development and that it would have an impact on our world. He was curious about what that impact would be and what could help it to be a beneficial impact. He had raised a series of questions about the online experience. He received responses to these questions from a number of people. Reading and analyzing the responses he explained:

There are people online who actively contribute to the development of the Net. These people understand the value of collective work and the communal aspects of public communications. These are the people who discuss and debate topics in a constructive manner, who e-mail answers to people and provide help to newcomers, who maintain FAQ files and other public information repositories, who maintain mailing lists, and so on. These are the people who discuss the nature and role of this new communications medium. These are the people who as citizens of the Net I realized were Netizens.

The book was compiled from a series of articles written by Hauben and his co-author Ronda Hauben which were posted on the Net as they were written and which sometimes led to substantial comments and discussion.

The most important article in the book was Hauben's article, "The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net Has on People's Lives." Hauben opened the article with the prophetic words, which appeared online first in 1993:<sup>1</sup>

Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. You are a Netizen (a Net Citizen) and you exist as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible. You consider everyone as your compatriot. You physically live in one country but you are in contact with much of the world via the global computer network. Virtually, you live next door to every other single Netizen in the world. Geographical separation is replaced by existence in the same virtual space.

Hauben goes on to explain that what he is predicting is not yet the reality. In fact, many people around the world were just becoming connected to the Internet during the period in which these words were written and posted on various different networks that existed at the time.

But now twenty years after the publication of the print edition of

*Netizens*, this description is very much the reality for our time and for many it is hard to remember or understand the world without the Net.

Similarly, in his articles that are collected in the *Netizens* book, Hauben looked at the pioneering vision that gave birth to the Internet. He looked at the role of computer science in the building of the earlier network called the ARPANET, at the potential impact that the Net and Netizen would have on politics, on journalism, and on the revolution in ideas that the Net and Netizen would bring about, comparing this to the advance brought about by the printing press. The last chapter of the book is an article Hauben wrote early on about the need for a watchdog function over government in order to make democracy possible.

By the time the book was published in a print edition, it had been freely available online for three years. This was a period when the U.S. government was determined to change the nature of the Net from the public and scientific infrastructure that had been built with public and educational funding around the world to a commercially driven entity. While there were people online at the time promoting the privatization and commercialization of the Internet, the concept of netizen was embraced by others, many of whom supported the public and collaborative nature of the Internet and who wanted this aspect to grow and flourish.

The article “The Net and Netizens” grew out of a research project that Hauben had done for a class at Columbia University in computer ethics. Hauben was interested in the impact of the Net and so he formulated several questions and sent them out online. This was a pioneering project at the time and the results he got back helped to establish the fact that already in 1993 the Net was having a profound impact on the lives of a number of people.

Hauben put together the results of his research in the article “The Net and Netizens” and posted it online. This helped the concept of netizen to spread and to be embraced around the world. The netizen, it is important to clarify, was not intended to describe every net user. Rather netizen was the conceptualization of those on the Net who took up to support the public and collaborative nature of the Net and to help it to grow and flourish. Netizens at the time often had the hope that their efforts online would be helpful toward creating a better world.

Hauben described this experience in a speech he gave at a conference

in Japan. Subsequently in 1997, his description became the Preface to the *Netizens* book, Hauben explained:<sup>2</sup>

In conducting research five years ago online to determine people's uses of the global computer communications network, I became aware that there was a new social institution, an electronic commons, developing. It was exciting to explore this new social institution. Others online shared this excitement. I discovered from those who wrote me that the people I was writing about were citizens of the Net or Netizens.

Hauben's work which is included in the book and the subsequent work he did recognized the advance made possible by the Internet and the emergence of the Netizen.

The book is not only about what is wrong with the old politics, or media, but more importantly, the implications for the emergence of new developments, of a new politics, of a new form of citizenship, and of what Hauben called the "poor man's version of the mass media." He focused on what was new or emerging and recognized the promise for the future represented by what was only at the time in an early stage of development.

For example, Hauben recognized that the collaborative contributions for a new media would far exceed what the old media had achieved. "As people continue to connect to Usenet and other discussion forums," he wrote, "the collective population will contribute back to the human community this new form of news."<sup>3</sup>

In order to consider the impact of Hauben's work and of the publication of the book, both in its online form and in the print edition, I want to look at some of the implications of what has been written since about netizens.

## Mark Poster on the Implications of the Concept of Netizen

One interesting example is in a book on the impact of the Internet and globalization by Mark Poster, a media theorist. The book's title is *Information Please*. The book was published in 2006. While Poster does not make any explicit reference to the book *Netizens* he finds the concept

of the netizen that he has seen used online to be an important one. He offers some theoretical discussion on the use of the “netizen” concept.

Referring to the concept of citizen, Poster is interested in the relationship of the citizen to government, and in the empowering of the citizen to be able to affect the actions of one’s government. He considers the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* as a monument from the French Revolution of 1789. He explains that the idea of the Rights of Man was one effort to empower people to deal with governments. But this was not adequate, even though he recognizes the concept of the rights of the citizen was an important democratic milestone.

“Human rights and citizenship,” he writes, “are tied together and reinforce each other in the battle against the ruling classes.”<sup>4</sup> He proposes that “these rights are ensured by their inscription in constitutions that found governments and they persist in their association with those governments as the ground of political authority.”<sup>5</sup>

But with the coming of what he calls the age of globalization, Poster wonders if the concept “citizen” can continue to signify democracy. He wonders if the concept is up to the task.

“The conditions of globalization and networked media,” he writes, “present a new register in which the human is recast and along with it the citizen.”<sup>6</sup> “The deepening of globalization processes strips the citizen of power,” he writes. “As economic processes become globalized, the nation-state loses its ability to protect its population. The citizen thereby loses her ability to elect leaders who effectively pursue her interests.”<sup>7</sup>

In this situation, “the figure of the citizen is placed in a defensive position.”<sup>8</sup> To succeed in the struggle against globalization he recognizes that there is a need to find instead of a defensive position, an offensive one.

Also he is interested in the media and its role in this new paradigm. “We need to examine the role of the media in globalizing practices that construct new subjects,” Poster writes: “We need especially to examine those media that cross national boundaries and to inquire if they form or may form the basis for a new set of political relations.”<sup>9</sup>

In this context, for the new media, “the important questions, rather, are these:” he proposes, “Can the new media promote the construction of new political forms not tied to historical, territorial powers? What are the

characteristics of new media that promote new political relations and new political subjects? How can these be furthered or enhanced by political action?”<sup>10</sup>

“In contrast to the citizen of the nation,” Poster notices, the name often given to the political subject constituted on the Net is “netizen.”

The observations that Poster makes of how the concept of “netizen” is used online represents a recognition of the significant role for the netizen in the future development of the body politic. “The netizen,” Poster writes, “might be the formative figure in a new kind of political relation, one that shares allegiance to the nation with allegiance to the Net and to the planetary political spaces it inaugurates.”<sup>11</sup>

This new phenomena, Poster concludes, “will likely change the relation of forces around the globe. In such an eventuality, the figure of the netizen might serve as a critical concept in the politics of democratization.”<sup>12</sup>

## The Era of the Netizen

Poster characterizes the current times as the age of globalization. I want to offer a different view, the view that we are in an era demarcated by the creation of the Internet and the emergence of the netizen. Therefore, a more accurate characterization of this period is as the “Era of the Netizen.”

The years since the publication of the book *Netizens* have been marked by many interesting developments that have been made possible by the growth and development of the Internet and the spread of netizens around the world. I will refer to a few examples to give a flavor of the kind of developments I am referring to.

An article by Vinay Kamat in the Reader’s Opinion section of the *Times of India* referred to something I had written. Quoting my article “The Rise of Netizen Democracy,” the *Times of India* article said, “Not only is the Internet a laboratory for democracy, but the scale of participation and contribution is unprecedented. Online discussion makes it possible for netizens to become active individuals and group actors in social and public affairs. The Internet makes it possible for netizens to speak out independently of institutions or officials.”<sup>13</sup>

Kamat points to the growing number of netizens in China and India

and the large proportion of the population in South Korea who are connected to the Internet. “Will it evolve into a 5<sup>th</sup> estate?” Kamat asks, contrasting netizens’ discussion online with the power of the 4<sup>th</sup> estate, i.e. the mainstream media.

“Will social and political discussion in social media grow into deliberation?” asks Kamat. “Will opinions expressed be merely ‘rabble rousing’ or will they be ‘reflective’ instead of ‘impulsive’?”

One must recognize, Kamat explains, the new situation online and the fact that it is important to understand the nature of this new media and not merely look at it through the lens of the old media. What is the nature of this new media and how does it differ from the old? This is an important area for further research and discussion.

## Looking for a Model

When visiting South Korea in 2008, I was asked by a colleague if there is a model for democracy that could be helpful for South Korea – a model implemented in some country, perhaps in Scandinavia. Thinking about the question I realized it was more complex than it seemed on the surface.

I realized that one cannot just take a model from the period before the Internet, from before the emergence of the netizen. It is instead necessary that models for a more democratic society or nation, in our times, be models that include netizen participation in the society. Both South Korea and China are places where the role not only of citizens but also of netizens is important in building more democratic structures for the society. South Korea appears to be the most advanced in grassroots efforts to create examples of netizen forms for a more participatory government decision making process.<sup>14</sup> But China is also a place where there are significant developments because of the Internet and netizens.<sup>15</sup>

In China there have been a large number of issues that netizens have taken up online which have then had an impact on the mainstream media and where the online discussion has helped to bring about a change in government policy.

In looking for other models to learn from, however, I also realized that there is another relevant area of development. This is the actual process of building the Net, a prototype which is helpful to consider when

seeking to understand the nature and particularity of the evolving new models for development and participation represented in the Era of the Netizen.<sup>16</sup>

In particular, I want to point to a paper by the research scientist who many computer and networking pioneers credit with providing the vision to inspire the scientific work to create the Internet. This scientist is J C R Licklider, an experimental psychologist who was particularly interested in the processes of the brain and in communication research.

In a paper Licklider wrote with another psychologist, Robert Taylor, in 1968 a vision was set out to guide the development of the Internet. The title of the paper was “The Computer as a Communication Device.”<sup>17</sup> The paper proposed that essential to the processes of communication is the creation and sharing of models. That the human mind is adept at creating models, but that the models created in a single mind are not helpful in themselves. Instead it is critical that models be shared and a process of cooperative modeling be developed in order to be able to create something that many people will respect.<sup>18</sup>

## Nerves of Government

In his article comparing the impact of the Net with the important impact the printing press had on society, Hauben wrote, “The Net has opened a channel for talking to the whole world to an even wider set of people than did printed books.”<sup>19</sup> I want to focus a bit on the significance of this characteristic, on the notion that the Net has opened a communication channel available to a wide set of people.

In order to have a conceptual framework to understand the importance of this characteristic, I recommend the 1966 book by Karl Deutsch, *Nerves of Government*. In the preface to this book, Deutsch writes:<sup>20</sup>

This book suggests that it might be preferable to look upon government somewhat less as a problem of power and somewhat more as a problem of steering; and it tries to show that steering is decisively a matter of communication.

To look at the question of government not as a problem of power, but as one of steering, of communication, I want to propose is a fundamental paradigm shift.

## What is the difference?

Power has to do with the ability to exert force on something so as to affect its direction and action. Steering and communication, however, are related to the process of the transmission of a signal through a channel. The communication process is one related to whether a signal is transmitted in a manner that distorts the signal or whether it is possible to transmit the signal accurately. The communication process and the steering that it makes possible through feedback mechanisms are an underlying framework to consider in seeking to understand what Deutsch calls the “Nerves of Government.”

According to Deutsch, a nation can be looked at as a self-steering communication system of a certain kind and the messages that are used to steer it are transmitted via certain channels.

Some of the important challenges of our times relate to the exposure of the distortions of the information being spread. For example, the misrepresentations by the mainstream media about what happened in Libya in 2011 or what has been happening in Syria since 2011.<sup>21</sup> The creation and dissemination of channels of communication that make possible “the essential two-way flow of information” are essential for the functioning of an autonomous learning organization, which is the form Deutsch proposes for a well-functioning system.

To look at this phenomenon in a more practical way, I offer some considerations raised in a speech given to honor a Philippine librarian, a speech given by Zosio Lee. Lee refers to the kind of information that is transmitted as essential to the well being of a society. In considering the impact of netizens and the form of information that is being transmitted, Lee asks the question, “How do we detect if we are being manipulated or deceived?”<sup>22</sup>

The importance of this question, he explains, is that, “We would not have survived for so long if all the information we needed to make valid judgments were all false or unreliable.” Also, he proposes that “information has to be processed and discussed for it to acquire full meaning and significance.”<sup>23</sup> Lee writes, “When information is free, available and truthful, we are better able to make appropriate judgments, including whether existing governments fulfill their mandate to govern for



the benefit of the people.”<sup>24</sup>

In his article “The Computer as a Democratizer,” Hauben similarly explores the need for accurate information about how government is functioning. He writes, “Without information being available to them, the people may elect candidates as bad as or worse than the incumbents. Therefore, there is a need to prevent government from censoring the information available to people.”<sup>25</sup>

Hauben adds that, “The public needs accurate information as to how their representatives are fulfilling their role. Once these representatives have abused their power, the principles established by [Thomas Paine] and [James] Mill require that the public have the ability to replace the abusers.”<sup>26</sup>

Channels of accurate communication are critical in order to share the information needed to determine the nature of one’s government.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

The candlelight revolution is still in process in South Korea. It is demonstrating in practice that we are in a period when the old forms of government are outmoded. The paper by Licklider and Taylor proposes that the computer is a splendid facilitator for cooperative modeling. It is such a process of cooperative modeling that offers the potential for creating not only new technical and institutional forms, but also new political forms. Such new political forms are more likely to provide for the democratic processes that are needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence it is the efforts of citizens and netizens who are involved in collaborative modeling to create the more participatory forms and structures as is happening during the candlelight processes being explored in South Korea that provide for the development of a more equitable and democratic society.<sup>28</sup>

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### Notes:

1. Hauben, M., R. Hauben. (1997). *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. Los Alamitos: IEEE Computer Society Press, p. 3. Also available online in an earlier draft version, <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/>. Retrieved on Jan.18, 2017.
2. *IBID.*, p. ix.
3. *IBID.*, p. 233.
4. Poster, M., (2006). *Information Please*. Durham: Duke University Press, p.68.

5. *IBID.*
6. *IBID.*, p. 70.
7. *IBID.*, p. 71.
8. *IBID.*
9. *IBID.*, p. 77.
10. *IBID.*, p. 78.
11. *IBID.*
12. *IBID.*, p. 83.
13. Kamat, V. (2011, December 16). "We are looking at the Fifth Estate." Reader's Opinion, *Times of India*, p. 2.  
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/edit-page/ampnbsWe-are-looking-at-the-fifth-estate/articleshow/11133662.cms>. Retrieved on Jan. 10, 2017. The quote is taken from Hauben, R. "The Rise of Netizen Democracy: A Case Study of Netizens' Impact on Democracy in South Korea." <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/other/misc/korean-democracy.txt>, Retrieved on Jan. 10, 2017.
14. In South Korea there are many interesting examples of new organizational forms or events created by netizens. For example, Nosamo combined the model of an online fan club and off line gathering of supporters who worked to get Roh Moo-hyun elected as President in South Korea in 2002. Also, *OhmyNews*, an online newspaper, helped to make the election of Roh Moo-hyun possible. Science mailing lists and discussion networks contributed to by netizens helped to expose the fraudulent scientific work of a leading South Korean scientist. And in 2008 there were 106 days of candlelight demonstrations contributed to by people online and off to protest the South Korean government's adoption of a weakened set of regulations about the import of poorly inspected U.S. beef into South Korea. The debate on June 10-11, 2008 over the form the demonstration should take involved both online and offline discussion and demonstrated the generative nature of serious communication. See for example, Hauben, R. "On Grassroots Journalism and Participatory Democracy." [http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/other/netizens\\_draft.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/other/netizens_draft.pdf). Retrieved on Jan. 10, 2017.
15. Some examples include the Anti-CNN web site that was set up to counter the inaccurate press reports in the western media about the 2008 riot in Tibet. The murder case of a Chinese waitress who killed a Communist Party official in self defense. The case of the Chongqing Nail House and the online discussion about the issues involved. See for example, Hauben, R. (2010, February 14). "China in the Era of the Netizen." [http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2010/02/14/china\\_in\\_the\\_era\\_of\\_the\\_netizen/](http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2010/02/14/china_in_the_era_of_the_netizen/). Retrieved on Jan. 10, 2017.
16. *IBID.*, *Netizens*.
17. "The Computer as a Communication Device", (1968, April) *Science and Technology*. <http://memex.org/licklider.pdf>, 21-41. Retrieved Jan. 21, 2017.
18. The Licklider and Taylor paper also points out that the sharing of models is essential to facilitate communication. If two people have different models and do not find a way to share them, there will be no communication between them. *IBID.*, 21-30.
19. *IBID.*, *Netizens*, p. 299

20. Deutsch, K. (1966). *Nerves of Government*. New York: The Free Press, p. xxvii.
21. See for example, Hauben, R. (2012, Winter). "Libya, the UN and Netizen Journalism," *The Amateur Computerist*, Vol. 21, No. 1. <http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/ACn21-1.pdf>. Retrieved Jan. 10, 2017 and Hauben, J. (2007). "On the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Netizens: Netizens Expose Distortions and Fabrication." [http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/Book Anniversary/presentation\\_2.doc](http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/Book_Anniversary/presentation_2.doc). Retrieved on Jan. 10, 2017.
22. Lee, Z. (2011). "Truthfulness and the Information Revolution," *JPL* 31, p. 105.
23. *IBID.*, p. 106.
24. *IBID.*, p. 108.
25. *IBID.*, *Netizens*, p. 316.
26. *IBID.*, *Netizens*, p. 317.
27. Hauben explains: "Thomas Paine, in *The Rights of Man*, escribes a fundamental principle of democracy." Paine writes, "that the right of altering the government was a national right, and not a right of the government'." (*Netizens*, Chapter 18, p. 316)
28. Hauben, R. (2016, December 21). "Ban Ki-moon's Idea of Leadership or the Candlelight Model for More Democracy?" *taz.de*. <http://blogs.taz.de/netizenblog/2016/12/21/leadership-or-candlelight-democracy/>. Retrieved on Jan. 21, 2017.

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[Editor's Note: This article written in 2005 can be seen online at: [http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/ronda2014/Rise\\_of\\_Netizen\\_Democracy.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/ronda2014/Rise_of_Netizen_Democracy.pdf)]

# **The Rise of Netizen Democracy: A Case Study of Netizens' Impact on Democracy in South Korea**

by Ronda Hauben  
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*The history of democracy also shows that democracy is a moving target, not a static structure.*

John Markoff

*What does it mean to be politically engaged today? And what does it mean to be a citizen? The transformation of how we engage and act in society challenges how we perceive the concepts of civic engagement and citizenship, their content and expression. The introduction of new information technologies, most notably in the form of internet, has in turn reinvigorated these discussions.*

Ylva Johansson

*Someone may construe that in South Korea politics the major source of power moved from 'the muzzle of a gun (army)' to 'that of the emotion (TV)' and then to 'that of logic (Internet)' in a short time.*

Yun Young-Min

## Abstract

South Korean netizens are exploring the potential of the internet to make an extension of democracy a reality. The cheering during the World Cup games in Korea in June 2002 organized by the Red Devils online fan club, then the protest against the deaths of two Korean school girls caused by U.S. soldiers were the prelude to the candidacy and election of Roh Moo-hyun, the first head of state whose election can be tracked directly to the activity of the netizens.

This is a case study of the South Korean netizen democracy. This case study is intended as a contribution to a needed broader project to explore the impact netizens are having on extending democratic processes today.

## I – Preface

In the early 1990s, a little more than two hundred years after the French Revolution, a new form of citizenship emerged. This is a citizenship not tied to a nation state or nation, but a citizenship that embodied the ability to directly participate in the decisions that govern one's society. This citizenship emerged on the internet and was given the name 'netizenship.' The individuals who practice this form of citizenship refer to themselves as 'netizens.'<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1990s, Michael Hauben, recognized the emergence and spread of this new identity. In the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, he describes how he came to recognize that not only was there a new technical development, the internet, but also, there was a new identity being embraced by many of those online. Hauben writes:<sup>2</sup>

The story of Netizens is an important one. In conducting research five years ago (in 1992-1993-ed) online to determine people's uses of the global computer communications network, I became aware that there was a new social institution, an electronic commons developing.

It was exciting to explore this new social institution. Others online shared this excitement.... There are people online who

actively contribute toward the development of the Net. These people understand the value of collective work and the communal aspects of public communications. These are the people who discuss and debate topics in a constructive manner, who e-mail answers to people and provide help to new-comers, who maintain FAQ files and other public information repositories, who maintain mailing lists, and so on. These are people who discuss the nature and role of this new communications medium. These are the people who as citizens of the Net, I realized were Netizens.... [T]hey are the people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource.... The word citizen suggests a geographic or national definition of social membership. The word Netizen reflects the new non-geographically based social membership. So I contracted net.citizen to Netizen.

Just as many different meanings have developed for 'citizen,' so 'netizen' has come to have several meanings. The early concept of 'netizen' is 'one who participates in the affairs of governing and making decisions about the internet and about how the internet can impact offline society.' A further development of this concept is 'one who is empowered by the net to have an impact on politics, journalism, culture and other aspects of society.'<sup>3</sup> This article will explore this new socio-political-cultural identity, the identity of the netizen in the context of recent developments in South Korea.

While there is a large body of literature about the internet and its impact on society, there has been considerably less attention paid to those who are empowered by the internet, to the netizens, who are able to assume a new role in society, and to embody a new identity. This article will explore how the netizens of South Korea are helping to shape the democratic practices that extend what we understand as democracy and citizenship. Their experience provides an important body of practice to consider when trying to understand what will be the future forms of political participation.

## II – Introduction

In his article “Where and When was Democracy Invented?,” the sociologist John Markoff raises the question of the practice of democracy and more particularly of the times and places where innovations in democracy are pioneered.<sup>4</sup>

Markoff writes that a dictionary in 1690 defined democracy as a “form of government in which the people have all authority.” (p. 661) Not satisfied with such a general definition, Markoff wants to have a more concrete definition or conception of democracy. He wants to investigate the practices that extend democracy. He proposes looking for models or practices that will help to define democracy in the future. Such models or practices, he cautions, may be different from what we currently recognize as democratic processes. “We need to consider,” he writes, “the possibility that somewhere there maybe still further innovations in what democracy is, innovations that will redefine it for the historians of the future.” (p. 689)

Markoff suggests that researchers who want to understand the means of extending democracy in the future not limit themselves to the “current centers of world wealth and power.” (p. 663) Similarly, he proposes that the poorest areas of the world will not be the most fruitful for researchers looking for innovations in democracy.

Considering Markoff’s guidelines, South Korea fits very appropriately with regard to the size and environment likely to innovate democratic practices. Events in South Korea confirm that indeed there are pioneering practices that can give researchers a glimpse into how democracy can be extended in a practical fashion.

## III – The South Korean Netizens Movement

Various factors have contributed to democratic developments in South Korea. For example, the activities of Korean non governmental organizations (NGOs) have played an important role. Similarly, the student movements at least since 1980 have served to maintain a set of social goals in the generations that have grown up with these experiences. Government support for the spread and use of computers and the internet

by the South Korean population has also played a role.

For the purposes of this article, however, I want to focus on the practice of the Korean netizen. Along with the pioneering of computer networking in South Korea (1980s) and internet technology (1990s), there was the effort to maintain internet development for public purposes. This is different from how in the 1990s, for example, the U.S. government gave commercial and private interests free reign in their desires to direct internet development.

#### A – South Korean Networking as a Social Function

This case study begins in 1995.<sup>5</sup>

In 1995, the U.S. government privatized the U.S. portions of the internet backbone. The goal of the U.S. government was to promote private and commercial use. At the same time the concept of netizen was spreading around the U.S. and the international networking community, partially in opposition to the trend of privatization and commercialization.<sup>6</sup>

In South Korea, however, there was a commitment to “prevent commercial colonization” of the South Korean internet. The effort was to promote the use of the internet for grassroots political and social purposes, as a means of democratizing Korea. In a paper presented in 1996, “The Grassroots Online Movement and Changes in Korean Civil Society,” Myung Koo Kang,<sup>7</sup> documents the netizen activity in South Korea to “intervene into the telecommunication policy of the government which is pushing toward privatization, and to build an agenda for non-market use of the electronic communications technology.”

Kang describes the formation of the Solidarity of Progressive Network Group (SPNG) in 1995. He wrote, “It is now estimated that the South Korean online community is populated by as many as 1.5 million users.” (p. 117) In the early 1990s, commercial networks like Chollian, Hitel, and Nowururi were main providers of internet access in South Korea. Those interested in developing the democratic potential of the internet were active in these networks in newsgroups devoted to specific topics or on internet mailing lists. Online communities developed and the experience was one that trained a generation in participatory online activity. Describing the experience of being online in one of these



communities in the early 1990s, a netizen writing on Usenet explains:<sup>8</sup>

There were Hitel, Chollian, Nownuri, three major text based online services in Korea. I think they boomed in early 90's and withered drastically as the Internet explosion occurred in mid and late 90's.

They provided the bbs, file up/download, chatting and community services.

Their community services were very strong. I also joined some such groups and learned a lot. Community members formed a kind of connection through casual meeting, online chatting, studygroups and etc. The now influential Red Devils...was at first started as one of such communities. It introduced new forms of encounter among the people with the same interest.

They also had some discussion space, similar to this news group and people expressed their ideas....

## B – How the Net Spread

When the Asian economic crisis hit South Korea in 1997, the Korean government met the crisis partially with a commitment to develop the infrastructure for high speed access. It gave support for the creation of businesses to provide internet access and to provide training to use computers and the internet. Describing the program of the South Korean government, Kim, Moon and Yang write:<sup>9</sup> “It invested more than 0.25% of the GDP to build a high-speed backbone and is also providing more than 0.2% of GDP in soft loans to operators from 1999 to 2005.”

Along with the financial and business investment, the government supported training programs in internet literacy. One such program was called the “Ten Million People Internet Education” project to provide computer and internet skills to 10 million people by 2002. Unemployed South Korean housewives were particularly targeted and reports indicate that one million were provided with courses as part of the 4.1 million people who participated in government initiated programs. Primary and secondary schools were also provided with high speed internet access. Internet cafes with high speed access called PC-bangs spread widely, offering another form of cheap internet access.<sup>10</sup>

## C – Netizen Events

Several developments in the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century demonstrate the impact the spread of the internet has had on South Korean society. A key result of widespread access to the internet in South Korea has been the emergence of the netizen and of examples of netizen democracy.

### 1) The Red Devils and World Cup Cheering

The Red Devils is a fan club for the South Korean national soccer team. It developed as an online community. The club became the main soccer cheering squad. Its original name had been “Great Hankuk Supporters Club” when it was created in 1997. It was renamed “Red Devils” after an online e-mail process “collecting public views through e-mail bulletins.”<sup>11</sup> The group utilized the internet for the 2002 World Cup cheering. Describing how the internet was utilized, Yong-Cho Ha and Sangbae Kim write:<sup>12</sup>

[T]he Web was a thrilling channel for many soccer fans across the country to satisfy their craving for information on the Cup. The 2002 World Cup provided Koreans with an opportunity to facilitate the dynamic exchange of information on the Web. In particular, the existence of the high-speed Internet encouraged the dynamic exchange of information about World Cup matches, players and rules. The Internet, which has become an essential part of everyday life for the majority of Koreans, helped raise public awareness about soccer and prompted millions of people to participate in outdoor cheering campaigns.

Major portal sites were flooded with postings on thousands of online bulletin boards. Online users scoured the Web to absorb detailed real-time match reports, player-by-player descriptions, disputes about poor officiating and other soccer information. Instant messenger also played a role in spreading real-time news and lively stories to millions of people. Korea has more than 10 million instant messenger users and many of them exchanged views and feelings about World Cup matches through the new Internet communications tool.

During the World Cup games held in June 2002, crowds of people gathered in the streets in South Korea, not only in Seoul. The Red Devils organized cheering and celebrating by 24 million people.<sup>13</sup> Sang-Jin Han describes how the Red Devils carefully planned for the massive cheering “through on-line discussions about the way of cheering, costumes, roosters’ songs and slogans, and so on.” The Red Devils functions democratically and has online and off-line activities. “Anyone who loves soccer can be a member of the Red Devils,” Sang-Jin Han explains, by going to the website, logging on, and filling out their form. The website is (<http://reddevil.or.kr>) When the club started they had 200 members. During the world cup events, they had a membership of 200,000.<sup>14</sup>

The massive street celebrating during the soccer games has been compared in importance with the victory of the June 1987 defeat of the military government in South Korea.

To understand this assessment, it is helpful to look at an article written during the event by the Gwak Byuung-chan, the culture editor of *Hankyoreh*, a South Korean newspaper. I will quote at length from this article as it provides a feeling for the unexpected but significant impact that the world cup event in 2002 had on Korean society. Gwak Byuung-chan writes:<sup>15</sup>

To be honest with you, I was annoyed by the critics who compared the cheering street gatherings in front of the City Hall in June 2002 to the democratic uprising in June 1987. Much to my shame I criticized the foolish nature of sports nationalism...and even encouraged others to be wary of the sly character of commercialism.... However as time passed, I began to wonder whether I wasn’t being elitist and authoritarian.... I was blind to a changed environment and to a changed sensibility. I assumed that people were running around because of blind nationalism and commercialism.

However, this was not a group that was mobilized by anybody nor a group that anyone could mobilize.... On June 25, I wandered around Gwanghwamoon and in front of City Hall trying to get an understanding of the future leaders of this country. Otherwise, my clever brain told me, I would end up

an old cynic confined to my own memories. After spending a long day wandering amongst young people, I finally understood. Although trying to understand their passion through this experience was like a Newtonian scientist trying to understand the theory of relativism, I understood. What we had experienced at that moment was the experience of becoming a ‘Great One.’ In a history with its ups and downs, we had more than our share of becoming this ‘Great One’ The 4.19 Revolution and 6.10 Struggle are two examples. So are the 4.3 Cheju Massacre and the 5.18 Democracy Movement. The gold collection drive during the IMF financial bailout was part of this effort too – trying to find a ray of hope in a cloud of despair....

The flood of supporters in June 2002, however, was no longer about finding hope. It was about young people dreaming dreams that soared higher and further than those of the past generations. Unlike the older generation, the younger generation is ready to meet the world with open hearts. They have the imagination to reinvent it and the flexibility to come together and then separate as the occasion calls for it. The whole world was rapt with attention on ‘Dae-han Min-gook (Great Korea)’ not just because of our soccer ability but because of this young generations’s passion and creativity. Does this mean that their dreams have come true? No. Does this mean that all this was nothing more than one summer night’s feast? No. These dreams will continue to flourish and the responsibility for making sure that they do belongs to the older generation, which has had the experience of becoming a Great One through such events as the 6.10 or 4.19....

Not only did the cheering crowds joyously celebrate the Korean team victories in the World Cup events, they also helped clean the streets when the event was over. Another aspect of the Red Devils achievement was to remove the stigma attached to the color red. Previously, avoiding the color red was a form of anti-communism in South Korea. The Red Devils’ organization of the street cheering is a demonstration of how

communication among netizens that the internet makes possible had a significant impact on the whole of South Korean society as the celebration unfolded off-line.

Recognizing the importance of analyzing this experience to the people of Korea, a symposium was held on July 3, 2002 by the Korean Association of Sociological Theory shortly after the World Cup events.<sup>16</sup> The title of the symposium was “World Cup and New Community Culture.” The theme was “Understanding and Interpreting the Dynamics of People (National People) Shown at the 2002 World Cup.” Sang-jin Han described the dynamics of the culture that emerged from the World Cup events. Cho Han Hae-joang writes (p. 13):<sup>17</sup>

What Han found during the collective gathering was a new community that possessed values of open-mindedness and diversity, of co-existence and respect for others.... Impressed by the cheering crowds, Han Sang-jin suggested looking for a point where the values of individualism and collectivism can synergize rather than collide. He wrote ‘If there is a strong desire for individual self-expression and spontaneity blooming in the on-line space on one hand, there must be a strong sense of cohesion and desire for unity in the socio-cultural reality on the other. The new community culture will be equipped with the ability to harness these two forces into a symbiotic relationship.’ In fact, at the symposium, many sociologists confessed to having been astounded at witnessing what they had considered to be impossible ‘the coming together of the generations and the coexistence of the values of collectivism and individualism.’ Influenced by the joy of the World Cup experience, the committee of Munhwa Yondae (the Citizens’ Network for Cultural Reform) organized a campaign. They sought to reclaim the streets for public purposes, and to designate July 1 as a holiday. Also they gave support to the campaign to establish a 5-day work week and one month holidays for Koreans.

## 2) Candle-light Anti-U.S. Demonstrations

On June 13, 2002, while the World Cup games were being held in South Korea and Japan, two 14 year old Korean school girls were hit and killed by a U.S. armored vehicle operated by two U.S. soldiers on a training exercise. Once the games were over, many of those who had been part of the soccer celebrating took part in protests over the deaths, demanding that those responsible be punished. In November, 2002, the two soldiers were tried by a U.S. military court on charges of negligent homicide. The verdict acquitting them was announced on November 19, 2002. Some protests followed. Then on November 27, 2002, at 6 a.m., a netizen reporter with the logon name of Ang.Ma posted a message online on the *OhmyNews* website saying he would come out with a candle to protest the acquittal of the soldiers. On Saturday, November 30, four days later, there were evening rallies in 17 cities in South Korea including thousands of people participating in a candlelight protest in Seoul. They demanded a retrial of the soldiers and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea. In subsequent weeks, candlelight demonstrations spread and grew in size. Protesters also demanded that the Status of Forces Agreement Treaty (SOFA) between the U.S. and South Korea be amended to give the Korean government more control over the activities of the U.S. troops in Korea.<sup>18</sup>

The impact of the “candlelight vigils that started from one netizen’s [online-ed] suggestion last month,” is described in a newspaper account:<sup>19</sup>

In Gwanghwamun, Seoul, the candles, lit one by one, form a sea. Tonight, on the 28<sup>th</sup>, without exception, the candles have gathered. About 1200 citizens gathered in the ‘Open Citizen’s Court’ beside the U.S. embassy in Gwanghwamun sway their bodies to the tunes of ‘Arirang’ which also played during the World Cup soccer matches last June. Middle-school student Kim Hee-yun says, ‘Every Saturday, I come here. There is something that attracts me to this place.’

Opposition to SOFA and to the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea continued to grow. The most well known outcome of this movement and the event most often cited as a result of the power of Korean netizens, is the election of Roh Moo-hyun as President of South

Korea on December 19, 2002.<sup>20</sup> The internet and netizens played a critical role in Roh's election.

An article in a women's newspaper on Dec 7, 2002, refers to the importance of netizens in South Korea.<sup>21</sup>

The netizens of the Korean Internet powerhouse are magnificent. They are reviving the youth culture of the Red Devils and the myth of the World Cup to create a social movement to revise SOFA.

### 3) Korean Netizens and the Election of President Roh

Of the candidates potentially running for the Presidency in South Korea in 2002, Roh Moo-hyun had been considered the underdog and least likely to win. He had made a reputation for himself by his willingness to run for offices where he was unlikely to win, but where his candidacy might help to reduce regional antagonisms.<sup>22</sup> Another basis for Roh's popularity was his campaign plank advocating citizen participation in government. Roh had opened an internet site in August 1999 and his site was one of the successful candidate websites at the time. In the April 2000 election, Roh ran for a seat to represent Pusan in the National Assembly as a means of continuing his struggle against regional hostilities.

Though he lost that election, thousands of people were drawn to Roh's website and the discussions that followed the failed election effort. Through these online discussions, the idea was raised of starting an online fan club for Roh. The Nosamo Roho fan club was started by Jeong Ki Lee (User ID: Old Fox) on April 15, 2000.<sup>23</sup> Nosamo also transliterated as 'Rohsamo,' stands for 'those who love Roh.'

The fan club had members both internationally and locally with online and offline activities organized among the participants. When Nosamo was created, a goal of the organization was a more participatory democracy. Sang-jin Han, reports that using the internet, the online newspaper *OhmyNews*, broadcast "live the inaugural meeting of the club held in Daejeon on June 6, 2000 through the Internet."<sup>24</sup>

In Spring 2002, the Millennium Democracy Party (MDO) held the first primary election for the selection of a presidential candidate in the history of South Korea. Nosamo waged an active primary campaign. "In

cyberspace, they sent out a lot of writings in favor of Roh and Nosamo to other sites and placed favorable articles on their home pages.” (p. 9) The internet activity of the fan club made it possible for Roh to win the MDP nomination. Nevertheless, he was still considered a long shot to win the Presidency.

Early in the 2002 campaign, the conservative press attacked Roh. In response, more and more of the public turned to the internet to discuss and consider the responses to these attacks. Analyzing how these attacks were successfully countered via online discussion and debate, Yun Young-Min writes, the “political influences” in discussion boards “comes from logic, and only logic can survive cyber-debate. This is one of the substantial changes that the internet has brought about in the realm of politics in South Korea.”<sup>25</sup> Also Yun documents that as the attacks increased, so did the number of visits recorded by Roh’s website and other websites supporting the Roh candidacy. (pp. 148-149) In a table comparing visits to websites of the two main candidates, Yun documents a significantly greater number of visits to the Roh website and Roh related websites as opposed to the websites of his opposing candidate. (p. 151)

Along with the Roh websites, the online newspaper *OhmyNews* was helpful to the Roh candidacy. *OhmyNews* developed a form of participatory citizen journalism. The online newspaper helped Roh counter the criticism of the conservative press. Roh gave his first interview to *OhmyNews* after winning the presidency.

The night before the election, a main supporter of Roh, Chung Mong-joon who had formed a coalition with Roh for the election, withdrew his support. That night, netizens posted on various websites and conducted an online campaign to discuss what had happened and what Roh’s supporters had to do to repair the damage this late defection did to the campaign. An article in the *Korea Times* describes how the online discussion helped to save Roh’s candidacy:<sup>26</sup>

The free-for-all Internet campaign also helped Roh when he lost the support of Chung Mong-joon just a day before the poll. Unlike other conventional media such as newspapers and televisions, many Internet websites gave unbiased views on the political squabble between Roh and Chung, helping voters to



form their reaction.... The Internet is now the liveliest forum for political debate in Korea, the world leader in broadband Internet patronized by sophisticated Internet users....

The *Korea Times* reporter describes the activity of netizens to get out the vote on election day in support of Roh:<sup>27</sup>

As of 3 p.m. on voting day, the turnout stood at 54.3 percent, compared with 62.3 percent at the same time during the presidential election in 1997. Because a low turnout was considered likely fatal for Roh – the young often skip voting – many Internet users posted online messages to Internet chattingrooms, online communities and instant messaging services imploring their colleagues to get to the voting booth. The messages spread by the tens of thousands, playing a keyrole in Roh’s victory.

During Roh’s election campaign, netizens turned to the internet to discuss and express their views, views which otherwise would have been buried. “The advent of the Internet can bring, by accumulating and reaching critical mass in cyberspace, a political result that anyone could hardly predict. No longer is public opinion the opinion of the press.... In fact the press lost authority by their criticisms,” Yun concludes.<sup>28</sup>

Because of the internet, Kim Yong-Ho observes, there is the “shift from party politics to citizen politics.”<sup>29</sup> The attitude of the two main candidates toward the internet proved to be a critical factor determining the outcome of the election. Roh’s main opponent approached the internet as a “new technology.” For Roh and his supporters, however, the internet became “an instrument to change the framework and practice of politics.” (p. 235) “Certainly, politics in Korea is no longer a monopoly of parties and politicians,” conclude Yong-Cho Ha and Sangbae Kim.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4) High School Students Protest Hair Length Restrictions

An example of how the younger generation in South Korea found the internet helpful was the struggle of high school students to oppose hair length restrictions set by the government and enforced by their schools. Teachers in some South Korean schools cut the hair of students who have hair longer than the school regulations permit. Such mandatory hair

cutting, students explained, was not only humiliating, but also can leave them with a hair cut that is unseemly. Considering the many pressures that high school students in South Korea are under, an editorial in the *Korea Times*, explains:<sup>31</sup>

Most egregious of all are their hairstyles – buzz cuts for boys and bob cuts or ponytails for girls.... At some schools, teachers still make narrow, bushy expressways on the crowns of boys' heads with hair clippers, and lay bare girls' ears with scissors. They say these are for the proper guidance of students by preventing them from frequenting adult-only places and focusing on only studies. But this is nothing but violence and abuse.

High school students opposed these restrictions and practices with a website to discuss the problem and how to organize their protests. Over 70,000 people signed an online petition protesting the hair length restrictions and practices. Also there were demonstrations organized online against these practices. The demonstrations were met with a significant show of force by police and from high school teachers.

## 5) Government Online Forums

Netizen activities in South Korea had an effect on official government structures. Government officials are under pressure to utilize the forms that are being developed online. For example, the online website for the President of Korea had a netizen section. Netizens could log on and post their problems and complaints. These could then be viewed by anyone else who logged onto the website. The open forum section of the website was left relatively free of government restrictions or interference for a while.

Uhm and Haugue provide a description of the participatory sections of the President's website. They write:<sup>32</sup>

Behind the outwardly chaotic Open Forum of the BBS on the Presidential Website, a team works quietly, browsing all the messages received through the BBS and other channels for user participation, and sorting them in terms of the need for specific attention and governmental follow-up. One of the

main jobs the team conducts is to transfer each of the messages to the relevant section of the Presidential Office, or to the ministry in charge of the policy area concerned. The other main job is to make a daily report to the President, based on the issues not necessarily ripe for media attention but showing signs of potential that could push the government into difficulties. These interactive channels function as a dynamic store of political issues, spanning the gamut of societal interests, ranging from key policy issues like the amendment of education acts to essentially private matters like a boundary dispute between neighbors.

Korean government ministries similarly had websites where anyone could post a message, “even anonymously, and share them with others.” (p. 28) These websites were offered as a place where “all public opinion” can be expressed. (p. 28)

Posting to an official site is not necessarily without concern about retaliation however. Recently, a high school student reported:<sup>33</sup>

We have no channel to convey our opinions to the education authorities. If we post a petition to a Web site of a provincial education office, the message is delivered to our school and teachers give us a hard time because of it.

There are other events which demonstrate the power of the net and the netizen in contemporary Korean politics. For example, there was the Defeat Campaign for the April 2000 election. NGO’s used the internet to wage a protest against the reelection of a number of politicians they proposed were too corrupt or incompetent to continue in office. They called this a blacklist. Several of the politicians they opposed did not get reelected.

Rather than gathering further examples, however, there is the challenge to understand the nature of the practice to extend democracy that has emerged in South Korea.

## D – The Netizen and Netizen Democracy in South Korea

One aspect identified as important for netizen democratic activity is that the netizen participation is directed toward the broader interests of the

community. Byoungkwan Lee writes:<sup>34</sup>

People who use the Internet for certain purpose are called 'Netizens' and they may be classified in various groups according to the purpose that they pursue on the Internet. While some people simply seek specific information they need, others build their own community and play an active part in the Internet for the interest of that community. [Michael] Hauben (1997) defined the term Netizen as the people who actively contribute online toward the development of the Internet.... In particular, Usenet news groups or Internet bulletin boards are considered an 'agora' where the Netizens actively discuss and debate upon various issues.... In this manner, a variety of agenda are formed on the 'agora' and in their activity there, a Netizen can act as 'a citizen who uses the Internet as a way of participating in political society'....

Another component of democratic practice is to participate in discussion and debate. Discussing an issue with others who have a variety of views is a process that can help one to think through an issue and develop a thoughtful and common understanding of a problem. The interactive nature of the online experience allows for a give and take that helps netizens dynamically develop or change their opinions and ideas. Several Korean researchers describe the benefit of online discussion. For example, Jongwoo Han writes:<sup>35</sup>

Another aspect of online is that participating in a discussion with others with a variety of viewpoints makes it possible to develop a broader and more all sided understanding of issues.

Jinbong Choi, offers a simliar observation:<sup>36</sup>

By showing various perspectives of an issue the public can have a chance to acquire more information and understand the issue more deeply.

Byoungkwan Lee observes how the net provides "a public space where people have the opportunity to express their own opinions and debate on a certain issue."<sup>37</sup> Comparing the experience online with the passive experience of the user of other media, Lee notes, "Further the role of the internet as a public space seems to be more dynamic and practical

than that of traditional media such as television, newspapers, and magazines because of its own distinct characteristics, namely, interactivity.” (pp. 58-59)

An important function of the internet is to facilitate netizens’ thinking about and considering public issues and questions. Byoungkwan Lee explains some of how this occurs:<sup>38</sup>

Various opinions about public issues, for instance, are posted on the Internet bulletin boards or the Usenet newsgroups by Netizens, and the opinions then form an agenda in which other Netizens can perceive the salient issues. As such it is assumed that not only does the Internet function as the public space, but it can also function as a medium for forming Internet users’ opinions.

Through their discussion and participation, netizens are able to have an impact on public affairs. Hyug Baeg Im argues that the internet even makes it possible for Korean netizens to provide a check on government activity:<sup>39</sup>

[The] Internet can deliver more and diverse information to citizens faster in speed and cheaper in cost, disclose information about politicians in cyber space that works 24 hours, transmit quickly the demands of people to their representatives through two-way cyber communication, and enable politicians to respond to people’s demands in their policy making and legislations in a speedy manner. In addition, netizens can make use of Internet as collective action place of monitoring, pressuring and protesting that works 24 hours and can establish the system of constant political accountability.

The impact the internet is having on the younger generations of Korean society has impressed several researchers. For example, Jongwoo Han observes that younger netizens are more quickly able to participate in political affairs than was previously possible. Jongwoo Han writes:<sup>40</sup>

Due to its effectiveness as a communications channel, the Internet shortens the time in which social issues become part of the national agenda, especially among populations previously excluded from the national discourse. The time

needed for one generation to learn from the previous one is also shortened. In newly created Internet cyberspace, the young generation, which did not use to factor in major social and political discourses in Korean society, is becoming a major player. The political orientation of the offline 386 generation was smoothly handed on to the 2030 apolitical young generation through the 2002 World Cup and candle light anti-U.S. demonstrations.

(Note: The 386 generation refers to those who were university students in the 1980s. Also they were the first generation of Korean students who had access to computers for their personal use. The 2030 generation refers to students currently in their 20's and 30's and who have grown up with the internet.)

Jongwoo Han argues that online discussion has brought a needed development in Korean democracy. All can participate and communicate.<sup>41</sup>

Due to the revolutionary development of information technology, the transition of power from one generation to the next will accelerate, thus maximizing the dynamics of changes in political systems. The duration of the overall learning and education process between generations will also be shortened. Especially, the Netizen transcends the boundaries of age, job, gender and education as long as participants share individual inclinations on topics.

Explaining how the participatory process works, Kim, Moon, and Yang provide an example from Nosamo's experience:<sup>42</sup>

Their internal discussion making process was a microcosm of participatory democracy in practice. All members voted on a decision following open deliberations in forums for a given period of time. Opinions were offered in this process in order to effect changes to the decision on which people were to vote.

Such online discussion and decision making was demonstrated when members of Roh's fan club disagreed with his decision to send South Korean troops to Iraq in support of the U.S. invasion. Even though they were members of a fan club, they did not feel obligated to support every

action of the Roh Presidency.<sup>43</sup> The fan club members held an online discussion and vote on their website about the U.S. war in Iraq. They issued a public statement opposing the decision to send South Korean troops to Iraq.

Several researchers are endeavoring to investigate the netizens phenomenon and the conscious identity that is being developed. They believe that the internet is providing an important way to train future citizens. For example, Sang-jin Han writes:<sup>44</sup>

I argue that a post-traditional and hence post-Confucian attitude is emerging quite visible particularly among younger generations who use the Internet, not simply as an instrument of self-interest, but as a public sphere where netizens freely meet and discuss matters critically.

In his research, Sang-Jin Han is interested in the impact the internet is having on the democratic development of South Korean society. He argues that the online experience provides an alternative experience to the authoritarian and hierarchical institutions and practices that are prevalent in society offline. The online experience in itself is a form of a laboratory for democracy. In the process of participating in the democratic processes online, a new identity is forged. One begins to experience the identity of oneself as a participant, not observer. Contributions online are appreciated or the subject of controversy. This is a different world than the one the ordinary person experiences offline and one that is a more dynamic and creative experience. Sang-Jin Han refers to research by Sunny Yoon about the impact of the internet on South Korean youth. Yoon writes:<sup>45</sup>

In short, the Korean new generation experiences an alternative identity in cyberspace that they have never achieved in real life. The hierarchical system of ordinary social reality turns up side down as soon as Korean students enter cyberspace. In interviews, most students claim that the Internet opened a new world and new excitement. This is not only because the Internet has exciting information, but also because it provides them with a new experience and an alternative hierarchical. It is something of an experience of deconstructing power in reality, especially in Korean society, which is strongly

hierarchical and repressive for young students.

## IV – Conclusion

In this case study I have explored several aspects of the online experience that generally are given little attention. South Korean netizens utilize the internet forums to let each other know of a problem or event, to discuss problems and to explore how to find solutions. This form of activity is a critical part of a democratic process. It involves the participant not in carrying out someone else's solution to a problem, but in the effort to frame the nature of the problem and to understand its essence.

The internet doesn't require that one belong to a particular institution. A netizen can express his or her opinion, gather the facts that are available, and hear and discuss the facts gathered and opinions offered by others. Not only is the internet a laboratory for democracy, but the scale of participation and contributions is unprecedented. Online discussion makes it possible for netizens to become active individual and group actors in social and public affairs. The internet makes it possible for netizens to speak out independently of institutions or officials.

The netizen is able to participate in an experience that reminds one of the role that the citizen of ancient Athens or the citizen just after the French Revolution could play in society. The experience of such participation is a training ground in which people learn the skills and challenges through the process. Considering the potential of the internet, the Swedish researcher Ylva Johansson refers to the potential of technology as contributing to political participation and the concept of citizenship on a higher societal level.<sup>46</sup>

Describing this important benefit of being online, Hauben writes:<sup>47</sup>

For the people of the world, the Net provides a powerful means for peaceful assembly. Peaceful assembly allows people to take control of their lives, rather than that control being in the hands of others.

This case study of Korean netizens provides a beginning investigation into the impact that widespread broadband access can bring to society.<sup>48</sup> The practices of South Korean netizens to extend democracy



is prologue to the changes that netizenship can bring to the world, to the rise of netizen democracy as a qualitative advance over the former concept of the citizen and democracy.

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## Appendix A

### The Early Development of Computer Networking in Korea

South Korea's first networking system was the connection of two computers on May 15, 1982, one at the Department of Computer Science, at Seoul National University and the other to a computer at the Korean Institute of Electronics Technology (KIET) in Gumi (presently ETRI ) via a 1200 bps leased line. In January 1983, a computer at KAIST (Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology) connected to the other two computers. These three computers at different networking sites used TCP/IP to connect. This is the communication protocol which makes it possible to have an internet. This early Korean computer network was called System Development Network (SDN).<sup>\*</sup> In August 1983, the Korean SND was connected to the mcVax computer in the Netherlands using the Unix networking program UUCP (Unix-to-Unix Copy). And in October 1983 the Korean network was connected to a site in the U.S. (HP Labs).

A more formal connection to the U.S. government sponsored network CSNET was made in December 1984. In 1990, the Korean network joined the U.S. part of the internet.

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\*See "A Brief History of the Internet in Korea,"

[https://net.its.hawaii.edu/history/Korean\\_Internet\\_History.pdf](https://net.its.hawaii.edu/history/Korean_Internet_History.pdf)

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### Notes:

1. See for example, Michael Hauben, Preface, in Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, IEEE Computer Society Press, 1997, p. ix.

2. *IBID.*, Chapter 1, p. 3.

3. This is a concept that Michael Hauben developed in an article "What the Net Means to Me," online at:

[http://www.ais.org/~hauben/Michael\\_Hauben/Collected\\_Works/Amateur\\_Computerist/What\\_the\\_Net\\_Means\\_to\\_Me.txt](http://www.ais.org/~hauben/Michael_Hauben/Collected_Works/Amateur_Computerist/What_the_Net_Means_to_Me.txt)

4. "Where and When was Democracy Invented," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41(4), 1999, pp. 660-690.

Online at: <http://pscourses.ucsd.edu/ps200b/Markoff%20Where>

[%20When%20Democracy%20Invented.pdf](#)

5. A significant caveat about this case study is that computer networking and the internet were developed relatively early in South Korea. (See Appendix A) The country is a showplace for the spread of broadband internet access to a large percentage of the population. A study of the spread of the internet in South Korea is a study of an advanced situation which allows one to see into the future. This study raises the question of whether knowledge of the practices of the South Korean netizen movement can help to extend democracy elsewhere around the world.

6. See note 1, Chapter 12, pp. 214-221.

7. Myung Koo Kang, "The Grassroots Online Movement and Changes in Korean Civil Society," *Review of Media, Information and Society* 3, 1998, pp. 107-127.

8. Jongseon Shin, soc.culture.korea, April 10, 2005. Online at:

<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!original/soc.culture.korean/gbZORadACPQ/IxrUYb7FuE8J>

9. Heekyung Hellen Kim, Jae Yun Moon and Shinkyu Yang, "Broadband Penetration and Participatory Politics: South Korea Case," *Proceedings of the 37<sup>th</sup> Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2004, p. 4.

10. *IBID.*, p. 5.

11. Sang-Jin Han, "Confucian Tradition and the Young Generation in Korea: The Effect of Post-Traditional Global Testing," *International Symposium Dialogue among Youth in East Asia Project*, Yingjie Exchange Center of Peking University, delivered January 14, 2004.

12. Yong-Cho Ha and Sangbae Kim, "The Internet Revolution and Korea: A Socio-cultural Interpretation," *International Conference on Re-Bootting the Miracle? Asia and the Internet Revolution in the Age of International Indeterminacy*, Seoul, South Korea, December 4, 2002. Online at:

<http://www.sangkim.net/it&korea.pdf>

13. See Hyug Baeg Im, *From Democratic Consolidation to Democratic Governance: 21<sup>st</sup> Century South Korean Democracy in Comparative Perspective*, p. 28.

14. See note 11, p. 10.

15. Translated and quoted in Hae-joang Cho Han, "Beyond the FIFA World Cup: An Ethnography of the 'Local' in South Korea around the 2002 World Cup," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2004, p. 11.

16. *IBID.*, p. 5.

17. *IBID.*, pp. 17-18.

18. See *Korea Times* articles: Na Jeong-ju, "Anti-U.S. Protests Held Nationwide Over Acquittals of GIs," *Korea Times*, November 27, 2002 and Na Jeong-ju, "Entertainers, Priests Join Anti-U.S. Protests," *Korea Times* December 3, 2002

19. See note 15, p. 22.

20. Kim Hyong-eok, "The Two Koreas: A Chance to Revive," *Korea Times*, December

- 27, 2002. This article in the *Korea Times* attributes Roh's election to the euphoria generated by the World Cup Soccer Games, the hostility to the U.S. generated by the deaths of the two Korean school girls and the inadequacy of the U.S. response.
21. See note 15, p. 14.
22. Yun Young-Min, "An Analysis of Cyber-Electioneering Focusing on the 2002 Presidential Election in Korea," *Korea Journal*, Autumn 2003, pp. 141-164.
23. Jongwoo Han. "Internet, Social Capital, and Democracy in the Information Age: Korea's Defeat Movement, the Red Devils, Candle Light Anti-U.S. Demonstration, and Presidential Election during 2000-2002," p. 15, (no longer online). See also, Han Jongwoo, *Networked Information Technologies, Elections, and Politics: Korea and the United States*, Lanham, Maryland, Lexington Books, 2012, p. 85.
24. See note 11, p. 8.
25. See note 22, p. 157.
26. Kim Deok-hyun, "Roh's Online Supporters Behind Victory," *Korea Times*, December 23, 2002.
27. *IBID.*
28. See note 22, p. 143.
29. Kim Yong-Ho, "Political Significance of the 2002 Presidential Election Outcome and Political Prospects for the Roh Administration," *Korea Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 2003, p. 233.
30. Yong-Chool Ha and Sangbae Kim, "The Internet Revolution and Korea: A Socio-cultural Interpretation," paper delivered Dec. 4, 2005 at the conference *Re-Booting the Miracle? Asia and the Internet Revolution in the Age of International Indeterminacy*, Seoul, South Korea, December 4-5, 2005, p. 8.
31. "No Forced Haircut, Please," *Korea Times*, May 5, 2005.
32. Seung-Yong Uhm and Rod Hague, "Electronic Governance, Political Participation and Virtual Community: Korea and U.K. Compared in Political Context," paper presented at *European Consortium for Political Research, Joint Workshops*, Workshop on "Electronic Democracy: Mobilisation, Organisation and Participation via new ICTs," Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Grenoble, France, 6-11 April 2001, p. 24.
33. Bae Keun-min, "High School Students Stand Up for Rights," *Korea Times*, May 10, 2005.
34. Byoungkwan Lee, Karen M. Lancendorfer and Ki Jung Lee, "Agenda-Setting and the Internet: the Intermedia Influence of Internet Bulletin Boards on Newspaper Coverage of the 2000 General Election in South Korea," *Asian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 15, No 1, 2005, p. 58.
35. See note 23, 17.
36. Jinbong Choi, "Public Journalism in Cyberspace: A Korean Case Study," *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 2, No 3, 2003, p. 27. Online at: <https://pdfs.semantic scholar. org/5f61/7a8501127c4c99621569d649d6e49b8688c5.pdf? ga=2.120817920>.

37. See note 34, pp. 58-59.

38. *IBID.*

39. Hyug Baeg Im, "Democratic Consolidation and Democratic Governance: 21<sup>st</sup> Century South Korean Democracy in Comparative Perspective," *Sixth Forum on Reinventing Government*, Seoul, South Korea, May 24-27, 2005.

40. See note 23, p. 4.

41. Han Jongwoo, 2002, pp. 16-17.

42. See note 9,

43. An article in the *Korea Times* on March 24, 2003, quotes a member of the fan club: "When we say we love Roh Moo-hyun, we do not mean Roh is always right. We simply mean that we love his ideas for new politics and a democracy in which the people are the real owners of the country." Byun Duk-kun, "'Nosamo' Opposes Assistance to Iraq War."

44. See note 11, p. 4.

45. Sunny Yoon, "Internet Discourse and the Habitus of Korea's New Generation," *Culture, Technology, Communication*, edited by Charles Ess with Fay Sudweeks, State University of New York, 2001, p. 255.

46. Ylva Johansson, "Civic Engagement in Change – The Role of the Internet," *European Consortium for Political Research*, Edinburgh, U.K., 2003.

47. See note 1, for example, Chapter 18, "The Computer as a Democratizer," pp. 315-320.

48. Hauben quotes Steve Welch who recognized the importance of all having access (*IBID.*, p. 27): "If we can get to the point where anyone who gets out of high school has used computers to communicate on the Net or a reasonable facsimile or successor to it, then we as a society will benefit in ways not currently understandable. When access to information is as ubiquitous as access to the phone system, all Hell will break loose. Bet on it."

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[Editor's Note: The following appeared on various Usenet newsgroups on Feb. 7, 1996. It was first written for a class at Teachers College, Dept. of Communications, Columbia University, N.Y., N.Y.]

## **What Is of Value to Me On the Net**

by Michael Hauben

[Author's Note (1996): This was thoughts I wrote up in response to a computer and writing class in which I participate. I felt it worthwhile to share with others outside the class, and to hear people's responses. Please respond to the newsgroup so we can keep a discussion going. However, if possible please e-mail me a response so I know in which newsgroup to check.]

I was curious to hear my TA [Teaching Assistant] speak about the "What's hot!" lists on Yahoo and the various web search tools. The reason is that for me these represent "What's not!" In fact the media hype surrounding the World Wide Web (WWW) is being driven by the desires of commercial entities to make as large a profit as possible. This is not why I have used the Net, and not why I decided to make it my area of study. I am not saying that the web is not useful; I find it a valuable way to self-publish my writings and other creations. However, it is not what the media is hyping it to be. At some point in the future, I believe the hype will cause the bubble to burst. I predict that on-line advertising will dissipate when it is found it does not produce results. Already I have read articles on how people skip the ads by turning graphics off. Ha!

The reason why "What's hot" is not is I am not interested in the presence of big media companies on the Internet, WWW or otherwise. Fox, Sony, the Gap and the like already hold reign over the conventional media of TV, Radio, print advertisement and other mass medias. I am sick of the billboards around New York City, the magazine and subway

advertisements and the commercials polluting television. I am also sick of the effect this has on our society as a whole.

The Internet has represented a rebellion against these forces, a way for the little person to find an area free of commercial waste. I like to use the model of Central Park, as a public space, a public commons where people can escape from the giant media moguls to have some fresh air and space to be themselves. A cooperative global community has developed on-line in the communication channels which exist – in particular Usenet and mailing lists. The value of on-line has been in the social value. You come and join the community and make your voluntary contributions – whether it be responding to Usenet posts, compiling FAQs or ftp sites, now setting up valuable web pages, helping newbie's, protecting the Net from different kinds of attacks, contributing new technological developments in computer code, etc. These contributions are in a sense selfless. While they might help the individual, they are given to the community as a contribution to the whole of the community. And in return, since others are doing the same, one eventually gets value. This is a community where the concept of a 'stranger' does not exist.

This is the world of the Net (Internet, Usenet, etc) and the world of the Netizen, or citizen of the Net. This is what I am a part of and where I feel that I am connected to a larger part of the world. Being part of a world community is important, and very different from surfing the Net to read the latest multimedia advertisement for Disney or Sony – I'm sick of movie previews, thank you. In fact, I have a music index of web pages off my home page that is getting harder to maintain. This is true as I am getting more and more requests to put on major labels and artists that flood out all of the fledgling artists or fan-based pages which deserve much more of a chance to be heard. I am interested in the "new" contributions of the new person.

The Net is the chance for the little person, all of us, to gain more control over our lives from large corporate entities which have grabbed control of all past mass medias. Here is a chance for people to communicate with each other, for each other, and with each other against those that have interest in preventing us from organizing ourselves. Here we can distribute/broadcast our academic and creative works around the



world for others to see, and for us to receive comments, questions and criticisms. Mediums of communication represent power and control. Here is a chance to organize to protect and keep the Net in the control of the people. Please join this fight.

The places where I see this medium developing for the people is in the “communication” as opposed to “information.” Clinton/Gore get it all wrong when they look toward the future of the Information Superhighway. What we have is a communications interconnection. The give and take in the public discussion areas and forums on-line bring the potential for real participatory democracy. It is important for the future of our society to make literacy of discussion on-line important, and to make time in people’s lives to join that ever-flowing discussion.

The underground has become mainstream by highlighting the bottom-up rather than top-down. This is important to preserve as a place, a public commons for the individual to make his contribution to society.

I could go on, but I am losing my stream of thought. I would be interested in hearing thoughts and comments about this. I also hope in this class to work toward studying how writing plays a part in this since the communication channels I speak of are primarily text-based.

I feel it is important to spread access and knowledge of the Net. As a network of different contributions, ideas and thoughts, it is important that all possible parts can become interconnected to the Net. Commercial providers will not strive for this as all points are not profitable to provide access to. There will always be someone who lives too far away or who has a special problem to make it less of a profit maker. I feel it is important for society to understand the social value of connecting all its parts, giving all of its parts equal access to the information and communication out there and at the same time allowing those parts to provide their unique contribution. To me, the only way for society to make access and knowledge of the Nets and computers available to all is through the combined efforts of governments. The government is the social form for making things available to the masses. There are historical reasons for this as well.

In addition, to understand why the Net is the way it is, and how it can be this way, I feel it is important to understand the historical origins and

development of the Net. Like I mentioned earlier in class, Usenet was developed in 1979 in order to help further the development of the Unix operating system. In addition, technology requires a community of people active, a cooperative community, for its development. Technology only develops through the working together of people, not the competing of people.

Lastly, if you are interested in previous writings and research I have about the Net, you can look to <http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/papers/>

Thanks,

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See also: *Amateur Computerist Newsletter* at:

<http://www.ais.org/~jrh/acn/> and

WWW Music Index at:

<http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/music/>

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[Editor's Note: The following paper was prepared for a program at the UN Headquarters in New York City on May 2, 2014. It can be seen online at: <http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/ronda2014/May2.pdf>]

# **Netizen Journalism**

## **The Emergence of New Forms of News that Can Improve the Policy Making Process**

by Ronda Hauben  
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### **I – Preface**

In this paper I want to explore the new news that is emerging and how this new form of news is making it possible to improve the policy making process. This new news is part of the phenomenon I refer to as netizen journalism.

In exploring this question I will discuss a case study as an example to consider toward looking at the potential for both the present and future of journalism that this new phenomenon represents.

### **II – First some background**

In October of 2006, I began covering the United Nations as a journalist for the English edition of the South Korean online newspaper, *OhmyNews International*. When Ohmynews ended its English edition in 2010, I became a correspondent covering the UN for an English language blog – [http://blogs.taz.de/net\\_izenblog](http://blogs.taz.de/net_izenblog) at the web site of the German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*. Both *OhmyNews International* and my blog at the taz.de web site are online publications

With Michael Hauben, I am co-author of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* (Hauben & Hauben, 1997). The book was first published online in January 1994. Then, on May 1,

1997, the print edition of the book *Netizens* was published in English and in October, a Japanese translation was published. This was the first book to recognize that along with the development of the Internet, a new form of citizenship, called netizenship has emerged. This is a form of citizenship that has developed based on the broader forms of political participation and empowerment made possible by the Net.

I want to share a brief overview of the origin, use and impact of the netizen concept and its relation to what I call netizen journalism before presenting a case study about the impact netizen journalism has had on the UN Security Council's conflict resolution process.

### III – Introduction

While now many people are interested in the impact of the Internet on society, pioneering research was done by my co-author Michael Hauben in the early 1990s when the Internet was first beginning to spread and to connect people around the world. In his research, Hauben recognized that there were people who appreciated the communication the Internet made possible and that these people worked to spread the Net and to do what they felt needed for it to help to create a better world. Taking the common network term, 'net.citizen' used online at the time, Hauben proposed that these people who worked to contribute to the Net and the bigger world it was part of were 'netizens.'

In an article he wrote on the impact of the Net on journalism, he recognized that many people online were frustrated with the mainstream media and that the netizens would be creating a broader and more widespread media. As Hauben recognized in the early 1990s "the collective body of people assisted by (the Net)...has grown larger than any individual newspaper..." (Hauben, M., 1997b: 233). Predicting the important impact the Net and Netizens would have on the future of journalism and the media, Hauben (1997a: 3-4) wrote:

A new world of connections between people – either privately from individual to individual or publicly from individuals to the collective mass of many on the Net is possible. The old model of distribution of information from the central Network Broadcasting Company is being questioned and challenged.

The top-down model of information being distributed by a few for mass-consumption is no longer the only news. Netnews brings the power of the reporter to the Netizen. People now have the ability to broadcast their observations or questions around the world and have other people respond. The computer networks form a new grassroots connection that allows the excluded sections of society to have a voice. This new medium is unprecedented. Previous grassroots media have existed for much smaller-sized selections of people. The model of the Net proves the old way does not have to be the only way of networking. The Net extends the idea of networking – of making connections with strangers that prove to be advantageous to one or both parties.

This broader collective of netizens and journalists empowered by the Net are participating in generating and transmitting the news toward creating a better society. This is a basis for developing a conception of netizen journalism.

I want to look at a news event about Korea and the UN in the context of this description of the news the Net makes possible and then consider the implication of this case study for the kind of journalism that I propose netizens and the Internet are making possible.

## IV – Korea

First some background about South Korea and the Net and Netizen. In February of 2003, I was glancing at the front page summaries of the articles in an issue of the *Financial Times*. I saw a surprising headline for an article continued later in the issue. The article said that in 2002 netizens in South Korea had elected the President of the country, Roh Moo-hyun. He had just taken office on February 25, 2003. The new President promised that the Internet would be influential in the form of government he established. Also I learned that an online Korean newspaper called *OhmyNews* and South Korean netizens had been important making these developments possible. Colleagues encouraged me to get in contact with *OhmyNews* and to learn more about the netizens activities in South Korea and about *OhmyNews*.

I subsequently learned that both South Korea and China are places where the role of netizens is important in building more democratic structures for society. I began to pay attention to both of these netizen developments. South Korea, for example, has been advanced in grassroots efforts to create examples of netizen forms for a more participatory decision making processes. I wrote several research papers documenting the achievements and activities of Korean netizens (Hauben, R., 2005; 2006a; 2007a)

## V – Reporting on the UN

By October 2006 the second five year term for Kofi Annan as the Secretary General of the United Nations was soon to end. One of the main contenders to become the 8th Secretary General of the UN was the Foreign Minister of South Korea, Ban Ki-moon. By 2006, I was writing regularly as a featured columnist for *OhmyNews International*, the English language edition of *OhmyNews*. On October 9, 2006, Ban Ki-moon won the Security Council nomination. This nomination was to be approved by the General Assembly on October 13. I thought this would be a historic event for South Korea. I asked the Editor of *OhmyNews International* (OMNI) if I could cover the UN for it. He agreed and I was able to get my credential in time to go to the General Assembly meeting when the General Assembly voted to accept the Security Council's nomination of Ban Ki-moon.

I was surprised that some of the speeches welcoming Ban Ki-moon as the Secretary General elect were meaningful speeches referring to actual problems at the UN such as the need for reform of the Security Council. A significant focus of the comments to the new Secretary General from member states emphasized the importance of communication at the UN. That it was critical for the incoming Secretary General to listen to all states and to hear their views. Witnessing the vote for a new Secretary General who was from South Korea, I wondered if the Internet would be able to have any impact on the new Secretary General and on what happened at the United Nations, since the Internet had been able to make it possible for netizens in South Korea to impact politics.

The very next day, on October 14, the Security Council took up to

condemn the recent nuclear test by North Korea. This had been North Korea's first nuclear test. The Security Council imposed sanctions on North Korea, not giving the North Korean Ambassador to the UN, Pak Gil Yon a chance to respond until after the sanctions had been voted on. When the North Korean Ambassador responded, he referred among other issues, to financial sanctions that the U.S. had imposed on North Korea. No one in the Security Council asked him what he was referring to or how this affected the issues the Security Council had just acted on. (Hauben, R., 2007c)

It impressed me that just as a new Secretary General from South Korea was being chosen at the UN, at the same time sanctions were being imposed on North Korea. The Security Council acted against North Korea before hearing its views on the issue they were considering. This was in sharp contrast to the emphasis member nations put on the importance of hearing the views of all members when they welcomed Ban Ki moon to the United Nations in the meeting just one day earlier in the General Assembly.

The article I wrote for *OhmyNews International* described this situation. It explained:

The urgent problem facing the UN at this juncture in history is not whether North Korea has developed and tested a nuclear device. It is the breakdown reflected by the lack of participation and investigation by the international community into how a crisis will be handled once it develops, and whether the concerns and problems of those involved in the crisis will be considered as part of the process of seeking a solution. It is how the UN functions when tensions reach a point where serious attention is needed to help to understand and solve a problem. (Hauben, R., 2006b)

## VI – The Phenomenon of Netizen Journalism

In the research I have been doing and the experiences I have had exploring the potential of what I call netizen journalism, several questions have been raised:

What is this new form of news and what are its characteristics?

Is this something different from traditional journalism?

Is there some significant new aspect represented by netizen journalism?

Traditionally, the press can function as a watchdog for society by exposing the use and abuse of power. Or, the press can act to support the abuse of political power. If netizen journalism can provide a more accurate understanding of conflicts, it can help make more likely the peaceful resolution of these conflicts.

## VII – The Cheonan – Some Background

The Cheonan conflict which was brought to the UN in 2010 provides an important example of how netizen journalism has helped to make a significant contribution to a peaceful resolution of a conflict by the Security Council. The Cheonan incident concerns a South Korean naval ship, a Navy Corvette, which broke in two and sank on March 26, 2010. Forty-six of the crew members died in the tragedy. At the time the Cheonan was involved in U.S./South Korea naval exercises in an area in the West Sea/Yellow Sea between North Korea and China. The sinking of the Cheonan and the South Korean government's investigation have been the subject of much discussion on the Internet.

Initially, the South Korean government and the U.S. government said there was no indication that North Korea was involved. Then at a press conference on May 20, 2010, the South Korean government claimed that a torpedo fired by a North Korean submarine exploded in the water near the Cheonan, causing a pressure wave that was responsible for the sinking. Many criticisms of this scenario have been raised.

First, there was no direct evidence of any North Korean submarine in the vicinity of the Cheonan. Nor was there any evidence that a torpedo was actually fired causing a pressure wave phenomenon. Hence the South Korean government had no actual case that could be presented in a court of law to support its claims. In fact, if this claim of a pressure wave were true, even those involved in the investigation of the incident acknowledge that “North Korea would be the first to have succeeded at using this kind of a bubble jet torpedo action in actual fighting.” (Lee, Y., 2010)



## VIII – The Cheonan Press Conference and the Local Election

A press conference was held by the South Korean government on May 20, to announce that North Korea was responsible for the sinking of the Cheonan. May 20, it turns out, was also the start of the local and regional election period. Many South Koreans were suspicious that the accusation was a ploy to help the ruling party candidates win in the elections. The widespread suspicions about the government's motives led to the ruling party's losing many of the local election contests. These election results demonstrated the deep distrust among the South Korean population of the motives behind the South Korean government's accusations about North Korea's responsibility for the sinking of the Cheonan.

In their article, "Blogging as 'Recoding': A Case Study of the Discursive War over the Sinking of the Cheonan", Kim, Jeong, Khang and Kim (2011), document that in the period between the day of the accident, March 26, 2010 and June 16, 2010 there were more than 120,000 posts by netizens about the sinking of the Cheonan. Though they reduced these to a sample set of 354, they found that the majority of the posts were critical of the Korean government's claims about the sinking of the Cheonan. Many netizens were critical of the investigation that the South Korean government conducted and sought to challenge the conclusions.

Significantly, netizens demonstrated how they were able to have an impact on the framing of the Cheonan story. They also were to have an impact on how the issue was to be treated at the UN Security Council.

## IX – The Cheonan and Netizen Journalism

While there was a substantial response to the Korean government's claims among Korean netizens, the issue also spread internationally. Netizens who live in different countries and speak different languages took up to critique the claims of the South Korean government about the cause of the sinking of the Cheonan. This netizen activity appears to have acted as a catalyst affecting the actions of the UN Security Council in its treatment of the Cheonan dispute.

Among the responses were substantial analyses by non-governmental organizations like SPARK, PSPD, Peaceboat and others, which were posted on the Internet, either in English, in Korean, or in both languages. Some of these online posts were in the form of letters that were also sent to the members of the UN Security Council (Hauben, R., 2010a; 2010c).<sup>1</sup> At the time, I saw discussions and critiques of the Korean government's claims at American, Japanese and Chinese web sites, in addition to conversation and postings about the Cheonan on South Korean web sites.

One such critique included a three part analysis by the South Korean NGO People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD).<sup>2</sup> This analysis raised a number of questions and problems with the South Korean government's case. The PSPD document was posted widely on the Internet and also sent to the President of the United Nations Security Council for distribution to those Security Council members interested and to the South Korean Mission to the UN.

While there were many blog comments about the Cheonan incident in Korean, there were also some bloggers writing in English who became active in critiquing the South Korean investigation and the role of the U.S. in the conflict. One blogger, Scott Creighton who uses the pen name Willy Loman, or American Everyman, wrote a post (Creighton, 2010a) titled "The Sinking of the Cheonan: We are being lied to." The South Korean government had claimed that a diagram it had displayed at the press conference on May 20 was from a North Korean weapons sales brochure which offered a torpedo similar to the torpedo part it claimed to have found near where the ship sank. The torpedo was identified as the CHT-02D. In a post he titled "A Perfect Match?", Creighton showed how there was a discrepancy between the diagram displayed by the South Korean government in the press conference, and the part of the torpedo it had on display in the glass case below the diagram (<http://willyloman.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/not-a-perfect-match-updated2.jpg>). He demonstrated that the diagram did not match the part of the torpedo on display. He pointed out several discrepancies between the two. For example, one of the components of the torpedo shown was in the propeller section, but in the diagram, the component appeared in the shaft section. There were

many comments in response to this post, including some from netizens in South Korea. Also the mainstream conservative media in South Korea carried accounts of this blogger's critique. Three weeks later, at a news conference, a South Korean government official acknowledged that the diagram presented by the South Korean government was not of the same torpedo as the part displayed in the glass case. Instead the diagram displayed was of the PT97W torpedo, not the CHT-02D torpedo as claimed.

In a post titled "Thanks to Valuable Input" describing the significance of having documented one of the fallacies in the South Korean government's case, Creighton (2010b) writes:

(I)n the end, thanks to valuable input from dozens of concerned people all across the world.... Over 100,000 viewers read that article and it was republished on dozens of sites all across the world (even translated). A South Korean MSM outlet even posted our diagram depicting the glaring discrepancies between the evidence and the drawing of the CHT-O2D torpedo, which a high-ranking military official could only refute by stating he had 40 years military experience and to his knowledge, I had none. But what I had, what we had, was literally thousands of people all across the world, scientists, military members, and just concerned investigative bloggers who were committed to the truth and who took the time to contribute to what we were doing here.

'40 years military experience' took a beating from 'we the people World-Wide' and that is the way it is supposed to be.

This is just one of a number of serious questions and challenges that were raised about the South Korean government's scenario of the sinking of the Cheonan.

Other influential events which helped to challenge the South Korean government's claims were a press conference in Japan held on July 9 by two academic scientists. The two scientists presented results of experiments they did which challenged the results of experiments the South Korean government used to support its case. These two scientists also wrote to the Security Council with their findings.<sup>3</sup>

Another significant challenge to the South Korean government report was the finding of a Russian team of four sent to South Korea to look at the data from the investigation and to do an independent evaluation of it. The team of naval experts visited South Korea from May 30 to June 7. The Russian team did not accept the South Korean government's claim that a pressure wave from a torpedo caused the Cheonan to sink.<sup>4</sup> Acquiring a leaked copy of the Russian Team's report, the *Hankyoreh* newspaper in South Korea reported that the Russian investigators determined that the ship had come in contact with the ocean floor and a propeller and shaft became entangled in a fishing net. Also the investigators thought it likely that an old underwater mine had exploded near the Cheonan adding to the factors that led to the ship sinking.

Such efforts along with online posts and discussions by many netizens provided a catalyst for the actions of the UN Security Council concerning the Cheonan incident.

When the UN Security Council took up the Cheonan issue in June, I learned that some of the members of the Council knew of the critiques of the South Korean government investigation which blamed North Korea for sinking the ship.

## X – The Cheonan and the UN Security Council

After doing poorly in the local and regional elections in South Korea, the South Korean government brought the dispute over the sinking of the Cheonan to the United Nations Security Council in June 2010. A Presidential Statement was agreed to a month later, in July (Hauben, R., 2010b).

An account of what happened in the Security Council during this process is described in an important article that has appeared in several different Spanish language publications (*Guerrero*, 2010) The article describes the experience of the Mexican Ambassador to the UN, Claude Heller in his position as president of the Security Council for the month of June 2010. (The presidency rotates each month to a different Security Council member.)

In a letter to the Security Council dated June 4, South Korea asked the Council to take up the Cheonan dispute (United Nations Security

Council, 2010a). Park Im-kook, then the South Korean Ambassador to the UN, requested that the Security Council consider the matter of the Cheonan and respond in an appropriate manner. The letter described the investigation into the sinking of the Cheonan carried out by South Korean government and military officials. In the letter South Korea accused North Korea of sinking the South Korean ship. How would the Mexican Ambassador as President of the Security Council during the month of June handle this dispute? This was a serious issue facing Ambassador Heller as he began his presidency in June 2010.

Ambassador Heller adopted what he referred to as a “balanced” approach to treat both governments on the Korean peninsula in a fair and objective manner. He held bilateral meetings with each member of the Security Council which led to support for a process of informal presentations by both of the Koreas to the members of the Security Council. He arranged for the South Korean Ambassador to make an informal presentation to the members of the Security Council. Ambassador Heller also invited the North Korean Ambassador to make a separate informal presentation to the members of the Security Council. Sin Son Ho was then the UN Ambassador from North Korea.

In response to the invitation from the President of the Security Council, the North Korean Ambassador to the UN sent a letter dated June 8 to the Security Council, which denied the allegation that his country was to blame (United Nations Security Council, 2010b). His letter urged the Security Council not to be the victim of deceptive claims, as had happened with Iraq in 2003. It asked the Security Council to support his government’s call to be able to examine the evidence and to be involved in a new and more independent investigation of the sinking of the Cheonan.

In its June 8 letter to the Security Council, North Korea referred to the widespread international sentiment questioning the conclusions of the South Korean government’s investigation. The North Korean Ambassador to the UN wrote: “It would be very useful to remind ourselves of the ever-increasing international doubts and criticisms, going beyond the internal boundary of south Korea, over the ‘investigation result’ from the very moment of its release....”

What Ambassador Heller called “interactive informal meetings” were held on June 14 with the South Koreans and the North Koreans in separate sessions attended by the Security Council members, who had time to ask questions and then to discuss the presentations. At a media stakeout on June 14, after the day’s presentations ended, Ambassador Heller said that it was important to have received the detailed presentation by South Korea and also to know and learn the arguments of North Korea.<sup>5</sup> He commented that “it was very important that North Korea approached the Security Council.” In response to a question about his view on the issues presented, he replied, “I am not a judge. I think we will go on with the consultations to deal in a proper manner on the issue.” Ambassador Heller also explained that, “the Security Council issued a call to the parties to refrain from any act that could escalate tensions in the region, and makes an appeal to preserve peace and stability in the region.”

Though at the time, it was rare for the North Korean Ambassador to the UN to hold press briefings, the North Korean UN delegation scheduled a press conference for Tuesday, June 15, the day following the interactive informal meeting. During the press conference, the North Korean Ambassador presented his government’s refutation of the allegations made by South Korea.<sup>6</sup> Also he explained North Korea’s request to be able to send an investigation team to the site where the sinking of the Cheonan occurred. South Korea had denied the request. During its press conference, the North Korean Ambassador said that there was widespread condemnation of the South Korean government’s investigation in both South Korea and around the world. The press conference held on June 15 was a lively event. Many of the journalists who attended were impressed and requested that there be future press conferences with the North Korean Ambassador.

During his presidency of the Security Council in the month of June, Ambassador Heller held meetings with the UN ambassadors from each of the two Koreas and then with Security Council members about the Cheonan issue. On the last day of his presidency, on June 30, he was asked by the media what was happening about the Cheonan dispute. Ambassador Heller responded that the issue of contention was over the evaluation of the South Korean government’s investigation. Ambassador Heller

described how he introduced what he refers to as “an innovation” into the Security Council process. As the month of June ended, the issue was not yet resolved, but the “innovation” set a basis to build on the progress that was achieved during the month of his presidency.

The “innovation” Ambassador Heller referred to, was a summary he made of the positions of each of the two Koreas on the issue, taking care to present each objectively. Heller explained that this summary was not an official document, so it did not have to be approved by the other members of the Council. This summary provided the basis for further negotiations. He believed that it had a positive impact on the process of consideration in the Council, making possible the agreement that was later to be expressed in the Presidential statement on the Cheonan that was issued by the Security Council on July 9 (United Nations Security Council, 2010c). His goal, Ambassador explained, was to “at all times be as objective as possible” so as to avoid increasing the conflict on the Korean peninsula. Such a goal was consistent with the Security Council’s obligation under the UN Charter.

In the Security Council’s Presidential Statement (PRST) on the Cheonan, what stands out is that the statement follows the pattern of presenting the views of each of the two Koreas and urging that the dispute be settled in a peaceful manner (United Nations Security Council, 2010c). In the PRST, the members of the Security Council did not blame North Korea. Instead they refer to the South Korean investigation and its conclusion, expressing their “deep concern” about the “findings” of the investigation. The PRST explains that “The Security Council takes note of the responses from other relevant parties, including the DPRK, which has stated that it had nothing to do with the incident.” With the exception of North Korea, it is not indicated who “the other relevant parties” are. It does suggest, however, that it is likely there are some Security Council members, not just Russia and China, who did not agree with the conclusions of the South Korean investigation.

Analyzing the Presidential Statement, the Korean newspaper *Hankyoreh* noted that the statement “allows for a double interpretation and does not blame or place consequences on North Korea.”(Lee, J., 2010) Such a possibility of a “double interpretation” allows for different

interpretations.

The Security Council action on the Cheonan incident took place in a situation where there had been a wide ranging international critique, especially in the online media, about the problems of the South Korean investigation, and of the South Korean government's failure to make public any substantial documentation of its investigation, along with its practice of harassing critics of the South Korean government claims. The Security Council action included hearing the positions of the different parties to the conflict. The result of such efforts is something that is unusual in the process of recent Security Council activity. The Security Council process in the Cheonan incident provided for an impartial analysis of the problem and an effort to hear from those with an interest in the issue.

The effort in the Security Council was described by the Mexican Ambassador, as upholding the principles of impartiality and respectful treatment of all members toward resolving a conflict between nations in a peaceful manner. It represents an important example of the Security Council acting in conformity with its obligations as set out in the UN Charter.

In the July 9 Presidential Statement, the Security Council urged that the parties to the dispute over the sinking of the Cheonan find a means to peacefully settle the dispute. The statement says:

The Security Council calls for full adherence to the Korean Armistice Agreement and encourages the settlement of outstanding issues on the Korean peninsula by peaceful means to resume direct dialogue and negotiation through appropriate channels as early as possible, with a view to avoiding conflicts and averting escalation.

The mainstream U.S. media for the most part, chose to ignore the many critiques which have appeared. These critiques of the South Korean government's investigation of the Cheonan sinking have appeared mainly on the Internet, not only in Korean, but also in English, in Japanese, and in other languages. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* on July 23 noted the fact, however, that the media in the U.S. had ignored the critique of the South Korean government investigation that was being discussed online



and spread around the world (Demick & Glionna, 2010).

In this case, the netizen community in South Korea and internationally were able to provide an effective challenge to what they believed to be the misrepresentations by the South Korean government on the Cheonan incident.

In his article “Social Sciences and the Social Development Process in Africa,” Charly Gabriel Mbock (2001) proposes that there is a need for netizens in different countries to work together across national borders to solve the problems of our times. Perhaps the response of netizens to the problems raised by the investigation of the Cheonan incident is but a prelude to the realization of this potential.

## XI – Conclusion

Much of the research about journalism is concerned with the elements of creating and spreading a narrative, with concepts like “framing,” “agenda setting” and “news diffusion” providing a means to analyze and understand the processes that are components of the news process. For example, if the framing of a news story relies on officials of the government or of powerful corporations, the story is likely to be significantly different from where the framing focuses on the perspective of the victim of some abuse by government or corporate entities. Similarly, students or workers are likely to have a different perspective of a conflict from that of an investment banker or real estate tycoon. The broad range of online posts about the Cheonan incident provided a diversity of information and views that enriches the news environment. (Touri, 2009, 177)

In South Korea, there is ready access to posting on the Internet and responding to others views. (Im, et al., 2011, 606-607). In the Cheonan incident, netizens were active offering their critiques of the summary report the government released. (Kim, 2011, 101) A blogger with a background in reading blueprints made his views known about the illegitimacy of the claims by the South Korean government that the part of the torpedo they produced and the diagram they presented to demonstrate the torpedo’s North Korean origins were from the same torpedo. (Creighton, 2010a)

With academic scientists evaluating the South Korean government's scientific claims and finding them faulty, (Lee & Suh, 2010; Cyranoski, 2010) with NGO's studying the investigation claims and writing analyses which they then send to the UN Security Council members by e-mail, these are the signs that there is an important process at play.

What had formerly been a process with static components is being transformed into a process where the components are now dynamic and changing. (Im et al: 608-609)

Traditionally the news event is framed by the journalist and his or her editor. That narrative is then spread by the news channels of that media. The narrative was traditionally static. When the Internet and the netizens are part of the news process, this is no longer the case. (Zhou and Moy, 2007:82-83; Im et al.: 608-609) And the growing power and capability of communication processes and of how the news is reported and disseminated (diffused) has an effect on how policy is created and how it is implemented. (Gilboa, 202: 736-7,743; Touri, 2009: 174)

Those responsible for making policy can be influenced by the news, by distortions spread as the news or by a more accurate framing of the news which the net and netizens at times can make possible.

If it is clear that there are conflicting narratives at the roots of a conflict, the effort to determine the accurate narrative can help lead to a resolution or at least a calming of the conflict.

The widespread discussion of diverse views of the Cheonan conflict helped to support the effort by Ambassador Heller to realize that he wasn't to act as a judge, but he would try to determine an understanding of the conflict, of the issues that were in contention. The widespread public discussion in this situation helped to clarify the issues and what was in contention, and hence led to a policy at the Security Council of hearing all sides of the issue, much as the member states of the UN had urged Ban Ki-moon to do when he was being welcomed to the UN.

In this case study of the Cheonan incident, my earlier question of whether it was possible for South Korean netizens to have an impact on what happened at the UN was answered in the affirmative. And the South Korean netizens were supported by other netizens from around the world. This is an important example of the UN, of the Security Council,

functioning in a way to help to calm a conflict. And the widespread public discussion online of the conflict was, I argue, a helpful support for this process.

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## Notes:

1. About letters to UN Security Council, records at the UN show that the practice of sending such correspondence to the Security Council dates back to 1946. This is the date when the symbol S/NC/ was introduced as the symbol for "Communications received from private individuals and non-governmental bodies relating to matters of which the Security Council is seized." The Security Council has the practice of periodically

publishing a list of the documents it receives, the name and organization of the sender, and the date they are received. The Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council states that the list is to be circulated to all representatives on the Security Council. A copy of any communication on the list is to be given to any nation on the Security Council that requests it. There are over 450 such lists indicated in the UN records. As each list can contain several or a large number of documents the Security Council has received, the number of such documents is likely to be in the thousands. Under Rule 39 of the Council procedures, the Security Council may invite any person it deems competent for the purpose to supply it with information on a given subject. Thus the two procedures in the Security Council's provisional rules give it the basis to find assistance on issues it is considering from others outside the Council and to consider the contribution as part of its deliberation.

2. PSPD Report that was Sent to Security Council was posted online in three parts:

<http://www.peoplepower21.org/Peace/584228>

<http://www.peoplepower21.org/Peace/584287>

<http://www.peoplepower21.org/Peace/584296>

3. The press conference was held on July 9 at the Tokyo Foreign Correspondents Club. The program was titled "Lee and Suh: Inconsistencies in the Cheonan Report". <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2010/07/10/news/scholars-doubt-cheonan-finding/#.WX973SmQwdc>. See also, (Cyranoski, 2010), (Lee, S., & Suh, J. J. 2010).

4. The Russian team proposed a different theory for how the Cheonan sank. They had observed that the ship's propeller had become entangled in a fishing net and subsequently that a possible cause of the sinking could have been that the ship had hit the antennae of a mine which then exploded. "Russian Navy Team's Analysis of the Cheonan Incident," (*Hankyoreh*, 2010b). The Russian Experts document is titled "Data from the Russian Naval Expert Group's Investigation into the Cause of the South Korean Naval Vessel Cheonan's Sinking." See also "Russia's Cheonan Investigation Suspects that Sinking Cheonan Ship was Caused by a Mine," (*Hankyoreh*, 2010a).

5. Media Stakeout: Informal comments to the Media by the President of the Security Council and the Permanent Representative of Mexico, H. E. Mr. Claude Heller on the Cheonan incident (the sinking of the ship from the Republic of Korea) and on Kyrgyzstan. [Webcast: Archived Video – 5 minutes] <http://webcast.un.org/ramgen/ondemand/stakeout/2010/so100614pm3.rm>

6. Video of North Korean Ambassador Press Conference <http://webcast.un.org/ramgen/ondemand/pressconference/2010/pc100615am.rm>

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# **Doing Democracy**

## **Reflections on the 10 Year Anniversary of the Publication of “The Net and Netizens”**

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This is a period marked by serious political dissatisfaction around the world. There is the promise of democratic societies, but the promise too often is far removed from the reality of people's lives. Yet there is the widespread yearning for a better world, for a society where democracy is practiced, not merely pretended. In this situation the question is raised: “What does democracy look like? How does it function? Are there any operational models to observe and learn from?”

Fortunately, there is a model to be examined, a practice to be investigated. Ten years ago, on July 6, 1993, a student, Michael Hauben,<sup>1</sup> posted a paper on the Net. The title of the paper was “Common Sense: The Net and Netizens.” The first sentences were:

Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. You are a Netizen (Net Citizen), and you exist as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net gives you. You consider everyone as your compatriot. You physically live in one country but you are in contact with much of the world via the global computer network. Virtually you live next door to every other single netizen in the world. Geographical separation is replaced by existence in the same virtual space.

It was a long paper so it was posted in three separate parts: Preface,<sup>2</sup> Paper.<sup>3</sup> Appendix.<sup>4</sup>

The paper introduced a concept, which has since spread around the world, both online and off (see also *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*<sup>5</sup>). This concept can provide a practical operational framework to explore a model for democracy. Describing how he hoped to focus the paper, Hauben wrote:

The Net and Netizens: A Revitalization of People Power, a Strengthening of People Power. Bottom Up is the Principle of this paper.

The interesting aspect of “The Net and Netizens” is that it identifies and describes the important role of the online user in creating the new social treasure that had come to be known as the Net. The net.citizen, or netizen, as Hauben writes, was the active agent in creating something new, the democratic online content and form of the 1993 network of networks. The netizen contributed information and viewpoints that made it possible to consider an issue or problem and come to a reasoned judgment or decision. Netizens would help other netizens if they deemed it worthwhile.

The initiative that was being developed was from the netizens themselves. Examples included a mailing list by a person in Ireland summarizing the weekly news and sending it out to over 1000 people around the world who wanted to stay current with Irish news; Usenet newsgroups like misc.news.southasia and soc.culture.india which made it possible for people from an area to continue contact with what was happening; a mailing list to watch the prices of gas in California to warn against price gouging. There were many other examples that Hauben provided which he had learned from his research online.

The key aspect, however, of this new form of democracy, was that the previously disenfranchised reader could now broadcast to others around the world news and views from a grassroots perspective. Previously, there had been central control of the mass media. Now the participant himself or herself, could provide information to the online world about an event or an area of knowledge. Netizens also had the ability to be citizen reporters, to offer a more wide ranging set of viewpoints and perspectives on issues or problems, a broader basis from which to form one’s own opinion, than hitherto had been possible.

Netizens could meet online, discuss issues and problems, and from



the process decide on the goal or direction to pursue. Hauben saw this process as a way of revitalizing society, as a way that those previously disenfranchised could gain power over both their society and over their personal lives.

In this operating model of democracy, there were no elections or representatives. Rather this embryo of democracy was focused on the active participation and contributions of the many in a manner not hitherto possible. Hauben described some of the broad ranging ages and occupations of the more than 10 million computer users who, by 1993, were connected around the world. At the time the computer networking connections were made possible by gateways between different networks, like the scientific and educational Internet, the academic BITNET, the technical research Unix UUCP and Usenet network, the Cleveland Freenet for community people, and other networks.

While the netizen was an active contributor to the developing social treasure, Hauben realized the need to make it possible for everyone to have access to this new communication paradigm to realize its potential. He writes:

This complete connection of the body of citizens of the world does not exist as of today, and it will definitely be a fight to make access to the Net open and available to all. However, in the future we might be seeing the possible expansion of what it means to be a social animal. Practically every single individual on the Net today is available to every other person on the Net.... International connection coexists on the same level with local connection. Also the computer networks allow a more advanced connection between the people who are communicating.

Although the path was difficult, Hauben also appreciated the importance of the goal. He writes:

Despite the problems, for people of the world, the Net provides a powerful way of peaceful assembly. Peaceful Assembly allows for people to take control over their lives, rather than control being in the hands of others. This power has to be honored and protected. Any medium or tool that helps people

to hold or gain power is something special and has to be protected.

The focus of democracy, as described in “The Net and Netizens,” is on the people themselves, and on their ability and achievements in determining the nature and development of their society. It is on support for the ever increasing contributions of more of the populace in the process.

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Notes:

1. <http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/>
  2. [http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/Common\\_Sense1.txt](http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/Common_Sense1.txt)
  3. [http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/Common\\_Sense2.txt](http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/Common_Sense2.txt)
  4. [http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/Common\\_Sense3.txt](http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/Common_Sense3.txt)
  5. Hauben, M., R. Hauben. (1997). *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. Los Alamitos: IEEE Computer Society Press, p. 3. Also available online in an earlier draft version, <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/>.
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[Editor’s Note: The following article appeared in the *Korean Herald* on July 18, 2007 and can be seen at:

<http://web.international.ucla.edu/asia/article/74171.>]

## **Netizens Celebrate a Decade of Activism: Michael Hauben’s Legacy Lives On, Ten Years After the Release of the Book *Netizen***

by Claire George

On a sunny afternoon last weekend in Manhattan a group of well-wishers met to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the print edition of

*Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* by the late Michael Hauben and his mother and co-author, Ronda Hauben.

*Netizens*, which first appeared online in January 1994 was one of the earliest books to examine the development of the internet as a social network. In it, Michael Hauben expressed his hope for the internet's use as an aid to global human cooperation.

At Saturday's gathering Michael's father Jay told listeners: "The lesson for me is to learn from Michael to have confidence in the wonders the net can produce. Whenever I read some chapter in 'Netizens,' I always have the same sensation. I want to participate more on the net. I still want to be a netizen." [See next article in this issue.]

Michael Hauben invented the term netizen by combining the words citizen and internet. He defined citizens of the net as people who, "understand the value of collective work and the communal aspects of public communications. These are the people who discuss and debate topics in a constructive manner, who e-mail answers to people and provide help to new-comers, who maintain public information repositories. They are not people who exploit the web for their own personal gain."

The new word spread across the world and is now in common use in English, Korean, Japanese, Italian and other languages. Michael Hauben died in June 2001 at the age of 28 from injuries sustained in a car accident in 1999. But his legacy lives on in an idea that has become an inspiration for people who believe that the internet is a force for good.

Speaking to *The Korea Herald* from her home in New York, Ronda Hauben expressed her "delight" in the achievements of Korean netizens. She says that Koreans should be proud of the role played by "netizen scientists" in the affair of the stem cell researcher Hwang Woo-suk and cites Korea's contribution to the development of citizen journalism as being of particular importance.

"There are conservative forces in the U.S. trying to create another attack on the United Nations like the scandal they created around supposed corruption in the U.N. in the 'oil for food program.' I haven't seen this challenged in the U.S. press, but it was challenged by netizens in Korea," she said.

"There are many similar examples," Hauben continued, "I can only

read English accounts of what is happening, but even so when I look I see valuable examples of netizen activity.”

In her own life as a netizen journalist and featured writer for *OhMyNews International* Ronda Hauben covers the U.N. and U.N. related developments. She believes that U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon needs press coverage like that provided by progressive netizens in order to operate effectively.

“If only the conservative press such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Fox News* and so on, didn’t focus so much on supposed scandals that aren’t scandals, then he would not be trapped into responding to things that are being made into issues but aren’t the real issues,” she said.

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[Editor’s Note: The following was read on May 1, 2007 at a small gathering to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the print edition of the book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* written by Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben in the early 1990s and published in 1997. A version of that book is online at: <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/>]

## **Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and to the Wonderful World of the Net**

by Jay Hauben  
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Ten years ago on July 14, 1997, 40 people gathered in a bookstore near Columbia University in NYC to help launch the hard cover edition of the book, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. They came to a book reading party with the authors, Michael and Ronda and a representative of the IEEE Computer Society Press, the publisher.

The amazing thing they heard and to which some there objected was how solid was the democratic foundation of the newly emerging Internet

and how pervasive might be the changes facilitated by the Net. Michael had written of his vision of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century where each netizen could be an active global citizen thanks to the connectivity the net makes possible. He saw that a large part of the necessary infrastructure was in place and a more democratic world is becoming possible. He read from his chapter Exploring NYC's online Community: A Snapshot of NYC.general. The reading stimulated a vigorous and contentious discussion with some welcoming the Internet and others disbelieving that the net would be a positive force for greater democracy.

Now we are here today ten years later. Perhaps the discussion can continue as we look again at the concept of and the book *Netizens*. Ronda and Michael gathered in the book solid historical evidence and contemporary practice for their thesis that something big was happening which would take a mighty fight to defend but which could profoundly change the media, politics, social life and even economics. Big things have happened: e-mail, World Wide Web, citizen journalism, Google searches and blogging to name a few. But except for e-mail and citizen journalism these were only the lessor part of what Michael foresaw. He was envisioning more profound human to human communication and intense discussions like those on Usenet. I wonder when more of Michael's vision will come.

My guess is that it might not be necessary to wait a few generations for more new big changes. Maybe they are beginning to happen and we don't see them. The cartoon at the beginning of *Netizens* shows what we are looking for might be so big we might not be looking in the right way to see it.

There is in the U.S. an election next year, 2008. In the last election the big surprise was Howard Dean and 400,000 "Deaniacs." What might the surprise be next year? Also, Ronda has worked to see an *OhmyNews* in the U.S. Might that ever happen?

I think the lesson for me is to learn from Michael to have confidence in the wonders the net can produce despite the hard fight they will take. Whenever I read some chapter in *Netizens*, I always have the same sensation. I want to participate more on the net. I still want to be a netizen.

Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and to the wonderful world of the net.

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The opinions expressed in articles are those of their authors and not necessarily the opinions of the *Amateur Computerist* newsletter. We welcome submissions from a spectrum of viewpoints.

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