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## Social Movements as Agents of Innovation: Citizen Journalism in South Korea

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Legitimacy and Efficiency of Political Systems

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**Social Movements as Agents of Innovation:  
Citizen Journalism in South Korea**

Thomas Kern and Sang-Hui Nam

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## **Social Movements as Agents of Innovation: Citizen Journalism in South Korea**

### **Abstract**

This article aims to further develop the field of innovation studies by exploring the emergence of citizen journalism in South Korea's social movement sector. To achieve this aim, the framework of innovation theory has been extended to innovations in social fields beyond technology and the economy. Our findings show that the emergence of citizen journalism resulted from brokerage activities among journalists, labor and unification activists, and progressive intellectuals. Despite different cultural visions and structural interests, these groups succeeded in building coalitions and constituted a sociocultural milieu which promoted reciprocal learning by allowing actors to realize new ideas and to exchange experiences. The empirical part of the study is based on a social network analysis of social movement groups and alternative media organizations active in South Korea between 1995 and 2002.

**Keywords:** Innovation, citizen journalism, social movement, civil sphere, social network, democratization

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## **Zusammenfassung**

### **Soziale Bewegungen als Träger von Innovationen: Bürgerjournalismus in Südkorea**

Der vorliegende Beitrag beschäftigt sich aus innovationstheoretischer Perspektive mit der Entstehung des so genannten „Bürgerjournalismus“ im sozialen Bewegungssektor in Südkorea. Während sich der Mainstream der sozialwissenschaftlichen Innovationsforschung auf technische und ökonomische Neuerungen konzentriert, versteht sich diese Studie als theoretischer und empirischer Beitrag zur Erweiterung des Forschungsfeldes auf andere gesellschaftliche Bereiche. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung zeigen, dass sich die Entstehung des Bürgerjournalismus zu einem großen Teil durch Austauschprozesse zwischen progressiven Journalisten, Aktivisten der Arbeiter- und Wiedervereinigungsbewegung sowie progressiven Intellektuellen erklären lässt. Trotz unterschiedlicher kultureller Vorstellungen und gesellschaftlicher Interessen bildete sich zwischen diesen Gruppen ein sozio-kulturelles Milieu, das Lernprozesse förderte, indem die Akteure neue Ideen ausprobieren und sich über ihre Erfahrungen austauschen konnten. Der empirische Teil der Studie stützt sich auf eine soziale Netzwerkanalyse von Bewegungsgruppen und alternativen Medienorganisationen in Südkorea zwischen 1995 und 2002.

# **Social Movements as Agents of Innovation: Citizen Journalism in South Korea**

**Thomas Kern and Sang-hui Nam**

## **Article Outline**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Innovations in the Social Movement Sector
- 3 Historical and Institutional Framework
- 4 Citizen Journalism as Innovation
- 5 Conclusions

## **1 Introduction**

Innovations are essential for societal development. However, their status in sociological theory is still ambiguous. Although most sociologists assert that innovation, creativity, and learning encompass all areas of social life (Joas 1996; Eder 1999; Miller 2002), the overwhelming majority of studies on innovation are restricted to the management and development of new products and technologies (Weyer 1997; Dierkes and Hoffman 1993; Dosi 1982; Nelson and Winter 1977). In other social spheres, innovations are rarely treated as a research issue and there are only a few empirical studies (Aderhold and John 2005; Sirianni and Friedland 2001; Gillwald 2000).

This article attempts to expand our knowledge of innovations by exploring the role of innovative collective action in the civil sphere.<sup>1</sup> The focus is on the social movement sector (SMS): According to Alexander (1996), social movements translate problems from particular social fields, such as the economy, politics, science, and the family, into the public sphere. As this task "requires that the leaders of social movements exercise creativity and imagination" (Alexander 2006: 231), the success or failure of social movements greatly depends on their ability to bring about *new* meanings and practices.

The ambition of a social movement [...] must be to reposition particular demands, to shift them from particular institutions to a position inside civil society itself. Insofar as movement intellectuals succeed in this task, social movements strike up a conversation with society and draw their members' attention to a more generalized understanding of their cause. When this happens, the social problem and group managing it enter firmly into public life. (Alexander 1996: 228)

Alexander (2006) illustrates the dynamics of public discourses with several case studies. However, *how* social movements create new meanings and practices requires further elaboration.<sup>2</sup> The following study approaches this question using the example of so-called citizen journalism in South Korea. In recent years, Korean citizen journalism has challenged serious structural deficits of the South Korean mass media and has played an important role in broadening the accessibility of the civil sphere for social movement groups and other actors. Most definitions characterize the practice of citizen journalism as "the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging, and relevant information that a democracy requires" (Bowman and Willis 2003: 9).

This study tries to shed light on the development of the idea and practice of citizen journalism in South Korea. The questions are as follows: Which actors have participated in the development of citizen journalism? What was their motivation? What was the result of their interaction? These questions will be answered in three steps. First, a theoretical framework for the study of social innovations will be elaborated. In the second step, the historical and institutional conditions for the development of citizen journalism in South Korea will be examined. In the third step, this study will focus on the interaction of different agents and concepts, which have led to different innovative practices in citizen journalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander (1998: 8) defines the civil sphere as a "field in which actors are constructed or symbolically represented, as independent and self-motivating persons individually responsible for their actions, yet who feel themselves at the same time bound by collective solidarity to all other individuals who compose this sphere."

<sup>2</sup> Although most social movement scholars agree that innovations are an important push factor for the emergence of protest waves, most studies are limited to the invention and diffusion of tactical protest repertoires (Tilly 2006; McAdam et al. 2001; Koopmans, 1993; Tarrow, 1989; McAdam, 1983). As a result, ideational elements and framing activities are often neglected (Snow and Benford, 1992: 143).

## 2 Innovations in the Social Movement Sector

Schumpeter contributed much to the theory of innovation. Yet his research reveals two weaknesses. First, he focused too much on the role of the individual entrepreneur. In contrast, recent studies emphasize the importance of social networks. The innovator is considered to be an individual or collective actor who brings different actors from different fields together in order to realize his or her idea. The second weakness of Schumpeter's work is derived from the restriction to economic innovations. Weber introduced the concept of charisma in order to explain the occurrence of creativity in other social fields as well. However, recent theories of collective learning stress that creativity depends not only on personal charisma but also on the arguments and persuasiveness of the innovator. Based on this framework, it is possible to investigate innovations in all areas of social life.

### 2.1 Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation

Recent innovation theories are still greatly influenced by Schumpeter's concept of "creative destruction" (2005: 134-142). According to this concept, innovations are a disrupting force in the economic system and an important requirement for economic growth and expansion: "What we, unscientifically, call economic progress means essentially putting productive resources to uses hitherto untried in practice, and withdrawing them from the uses they have served so far" (Schumpeter 1928: 378). He defined "innovation" as "a new combination of means of production" (Schumpeter 1934: 74). Its characteristic feature is "simply the doing of new things or the doing of things that are already being done in a new way" (Schumpeter 1947: 151). Economic theory typically assumes that marginal productivity, that is, the additional return produced by one more unit of an input, decreases with growing factor input. However, Schumpeter claims that innovations destroy the old curve of the production function and replace it with a new one that realizes, in every respect, higher returns — although, in the long term, decreasing returns as well — than the old curve (Schumpeter 1964: 95). With respect to our study, Schumpeter's distinction between *innovation* and *invention* is of importance. Although inventions often lead to innovations, they are not necessarily connected. The inventor produces ideas, while the innovator "gets things done" (Schumpeter 1947: 152). In other words, innovations may occur without scientific or technological progress, and inventions might never be of any importance for economic (or other) practice.

The fact that Greek science had probably produced all that is necessary in order to construct a steam engine did not help the Greeks or Romans to build a steam engine; the fact that Leibniz suggested the idea of the Suez Canal exerted no influence whatever on economic history for two hundred years. (Schumpeter 1947: 152)

According to Schumpeter, the production of ideas is by no means related to the production of innovations. Inventions are a matter of intellect, whereas innovations result from "will"



(Schumpeter 1928: 379). Although the analytical distinction between invention and innovation seems to make sense, a large number of studies have shown that the transition from invention to economic practice is not as clear-cut as Schumpeter suggests. Innovations are often the product of complicated negotiations, adjustments, and compromises between various groups with different interests at stake (Weyer 1989; Grundmann 2000). In many cases, the original invention (idea) is changed or improved during the process of innovation, for example, by recursive feedback loops between the suppliers and users of a product (Asdonk, Bredeweg and Kowol 1991; Kowol and Krohn 2000).

The social agent of innovation is by definition the *entrepreneur*. This sounds like a very individualistic conception. However, at least in the first German edition of *The Theory of Economic Development* (1911), Schumpeter maintains that "the entrepreneur can only be successful if he can get other people to assist him in carrying out new combinations" (Swedberg 2002: 234). In other words, Schumpeter acknowledges the importance of social relations: The entrepreneur may have the initial vision, but in order to realize it, he or she needs the support of others. This is where *networks* come into play. Most scholars agree that the innovation regimes of modern societies are shaped by social networks (Powell 1990; Weyer 1997; Rammert 1997; Burt 2004). The advantage of network arrangements results from their ability to disseminate and interpret new information. In order to explain the role of an entrepreneur from the perspective of social network analysis, Burt (2001) introduces the concept of "structural holes." He describes them as weak links between two or more separate groups.

People on either side of a structural hole circulate in different flows of information. Structural holes are thus an opportunity to broker the flow of information between people, and control the projects that bring together people from opposite sides of the hole. (Burt 2001: 35)

In this sense, the entrepreneur is "a person who adds value by brokering the connection between others" (Burt 2001: 36).

In terms of the argument, networks rich in the entrepreneurial opportunities of structural holes are entrepreneurial networks, and entrepreneurs are people skilled in building the interpersonal bridges that span structural holes. They monitor information more effectively than bureaucratic control. They move information faster, and to more people, than memos. They are more responsive than a bureaucracy, easily shifting network time and energy from one solution to another. (Burt 2001: 36)

Schumpeter (1934: 66) delineates at least five activities constituting the genuine economic function of the entrepreneur: (1) introducing new goods, (2) developing new methods of production, (3) opening new markets, (4) exploiting new sources of raw materials, and (5) carrying out the new organization of any industry. The personality of the entrepreneur is characterized by two important features. At first, he or she recognizes an innovation's potential applications, regardless of whether he or she is the discoverer or inventor. Second, he

or she "must be able to overcome the psychological and social resistances which stand in the way of doing new things" (Sweezy 1943: 94). These characteristics distinguish the entrepreneur from the manager who runs a company according to traditional principles. Although, in many cases, the social role of the entrepreneur and the manager are integrated into one, Schumpeter insists on their analytical distinctiveness.

Whilst differences in aptitude for the routine work of "static" management only result in differences of success in doing what everyone does, differences in this particular aptitude [i.e., *dealing with resistances and risks*; emphasis added by the authors] result in only some being able to do this particular thing at all. To overcome these difficulties incident to change of practice is the function characteristic of the entrepreneur. (Schumpeter 1928: 380)

The motivation for realizing innovations is primarily driven by "the dream and the will to found a private kingdom," "the will to conquer," and "the joy of creating" (Schumpeter 1934: 93). By introducing new practices or products, the entrepreneur obtains at least a temporary advantage over competitors. Schumpeter claims that the profit of the entrepreneur is the primary source of industrial fortunes and usually leads back to "successful acts of innovations" (1928: 380). However, as followers imitate and even improve the original innovation, these reproductions and improvements slowly decrease the entrepreneur's advantage, reduce the gains, and possibly create new motivation for further innovations.

Based on Schumpeter's work, current theories of innovation deal, for the most part, with *technological* and *economic change*. Yet there are many examples of important innovations outside the field of the economy: new forms of political participation, new social security systems, new religious practices, new scientific paradigms, new forms of sport, new environmental laws, new political ideologies, new art styles, etc. How can we apply Schumpeter's innovation theory to these phenomena? In order to answer this question we have to move from economic to sociological theory.

## 2.2 Institutional Fields and Programs

From the perspective of sociological differentiation theory, the economy is one among other social subsystems. Modern society consists of relatively autonomous institutional fields, such as politics, religion, science, the family, art, education, and the economy, which "treat one another equally in spite of unequal functions" (Schluchter 1981: 73).<sup>3</sup> Each subsystem is characterized by a specific code (worldview),<sup>4</sup> which corresponds to a particular institu-

<sup>3</sup> The following discussion is based on a non-functionalist approach from sociological differentiation theory that has been further developed over the past decades by, for example, Schluchter (1981), Eisenstadt (1990), Alexander (1992), Schimank (1996), Mayntz (1997), Schwinn (2001), and Kern (2007b).

<sup>4</sup> The recent literature on differentiation theory suggests that Weber's term "worldview" largely corresponds to Luhmann's concept of "codes" (Schimank and Volkmann, 1999: 17-18; Schimank, 1988, 1996; Schluchter, 1979; Schwinn 2001).

tional setting. In this way, each subsystem provides a cultural and normative framework that guides the material and spiritual wants of individuals and collectives: Actors strive for profit in the economic field, for knowledge in the field of science, for power in the political field, and for blessings in the religious field (Schwinn 2001: 154-207). Accordingly, the institutional fields of society constitute the main social environment for innovations. While the different codes supply orientation and motivation, institutional settings provide opportunities and constraints (Schimank 1988).

In Weber's theory of modern capitalism, Schumpeter's entrepreneur appears as the "moving spirit" (*leitender Geist*) of modern society, whom Weber regards as a counterweight against increasing bureaucratization (Weber 1988: 334; Swedberg 2002). Weber considers the entrepreneur to be a charismatic personality who creates social change "by virtue of his own will" (*kraft konkretem Gestaltungswillen*) (1978: 243). Compared to the bureaucrat, who acts according to orders, the entrepreneur is characterized by "passionate devotion to a purpose" (*leidenschaftliche Hingabe an eine Sache*) (Weber 1988: 545). In this respect, Weber's and Schumpeter's conceptions seem to be similar. However, virtuosity and charismatic leadership are not restricted to the field of the economy; according to Weber, they are also to be found in other social subsystems such as politics, religion, science, and art (Schwinn 2001).

Weber's theory of "charismatic innovation" has not been left unchallenged, as he restricts the concept to "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 1978: 241). For example, Joas criticizes this approach because it "focuses not on the powers of persuasion of a leader but solely on the latter's personal charisma" (1996: 49). He maintains, in contrast, that modern democratic societies are constantly changing and innovations are nearly an everyday occurrence. Accordingly, Weber's theory of charismatic innovation has to be integrated into a broader framework of collective learning: Innovators do not introduce change arbitrarily by virtue of their personal charisma. Rather, they "creatively articulate a collectively preformed meaning" (Joas 1996: 48). Consequently, creativity does not stem from quasi-extrasocial sources (such as "revelations") (Swedberg 2002). Instead, it is situated *in* the social arrangements of actor constellations, norms, and values, which have to be taken into account carefully.

According to this thinking, the innovative individual thus deviates cognitively or normatively from the collective's received notions but uses arguments in an attempt to win support for his view of the world. The collective can either reject the arguments or embrace them. What is decisive is that here a discursive relation is posited between innovator and collective. (Joas 1996: 48)

This leads us back to the subsystems of society. In the process of institutionalization, the particular codes of the subsystems are translated into concrete *programs*, such as political ideologies, scientific theories, economic investment programs, and religious denominations

(Luhmann 1996: 37; 1998). Programs regulate the way a particular code of an institutional field has to be applied. For example, scientific theories and methodologies indicate the circumstances for deciding what must or must not be accepted as "true" scientific knowledge. In other words, programs contain assumptions about how the world is made, which problems are relevant, and which methods and standards are appropriate for their solution. The innovation theorist Dosi (1982), for example, considers technical solutions as part of a technological program (paradigm) that restricts the range of possible alternatives and paths of technological developments.

Managers, scientists, and engineers use technological programs as a "model and a pattern of solution of *selected* technological problems based on *selected* principles derived from natural sciences and on *selected* material technologies" (Dosi 1982: 152). From an innovation theoretical point of view, such programs have five important functions (Abel 2000: 166-169): First, they guide the organization and coordination of collective actions. Second, by emphasizing particular values, programs give orientation to individual and collective actions. Third, the difference between programs and empirical reality, at the same time, raises problems and stimulates the development of creative solutions. Fourth, by distinguishing between "desirable" and "undesirable" actions, programs provide internal and external legitimacy. Fifth, programs stimulate the formation of collective identities ("communities of practice") by drawing boundaries between members and non-members.

As long as individuals or collectivities act within the boundaries of a particular program, social processes are largely predictable and calculable. For example, the decisions of democratic political systems are usually based on the programs of the ruling parties. As these programs change only gradually, the range of political innovations is limited. Therefore, the outcomes of political decisions are rather incremental and a concomitant phenomenon of continual social change (Braun-Thürmann 2005: 44). In contrast, radical innovations are characterized by the rise of *new* programs that have the potential to shake up the institutional setting of a subsystem. For example, the program of political ecology did not easily fit into the classical spectrum of left-right politics. Consequently, the rise of the Green Party confused the landscape of party politics in Germany in the 1980s by opening up new opportunities for coalitions and conflicts. Since then, the ideas of political ecology have gradually penetrated into the programs of other established parties. In this way, the idea of political ecology has not only affected the political system but has also brought about changes throughout society.

Institutional fields such as the economy, politics, science, arts, or religion provide the cultural and institutional framework for the development of innovations. Despite his or her deviation from conventional norms and understandings, the innovator reformulates and applies the code of a social subsystem *in a new way*. However, as the development of new programs often provokes resistance and conflict, most innovations are incremental (Burt 2005: 167-223). Whether innovations turn out to be incremental or radical depends on cultural and institutional opportunity structures as well as the ability of an innovator to organize collective action.

### 2.3 The Program of Citizen Journalism

The concept of innovation is closely related to social changes in one or more institutional fields of society. Our study focuses on the *social movement sector*<sup>5</sup> (SMS) of South Korea and the development of citizen journalism. Alexander (2006) recently pointed out that the programs of social movements<sup>6</sup> are derived from an abstract idea of an *ideal community*. For example, the women's movement aims for a society without patriarchy; the civil rights movement, at a society without racism; the labor movement, at a society without social classes. These programs, which constitute the ideational core of a social movement, "not only punctuate and encode reality but also function as modes of attribution and articulation" (Snow and Benford 1992: 145). Since they imply "both new ways of interpreting a situation as well as novel means of dealing with or confronting it" (Snow and Benford 1992: 146), their emergence has to be regarded as a key to innovation in the SMS.

In this sense, the idea of *citizen journalism* aims broadly at enhancing the sensitivity of the mass media to the needs and problems of ordinary citizens. It aims for a society without distorted public discourses. Since it gained a foothold in South Korea at the end of the 1990s, it has revolutionized the SMS, initiated large waves of protest, and exerted an enormous influence on the development of the political system and the mass media. Since 2005, citizen reporters have had a protected legal status as Internet journalists. For these reasons, the SMS of South Korea is not only an interesting case, but also belongs to the group of worldwide pioneers in the development and diffusion of citizen journalism.

The roots of citizen journalism lie in the program of *civic journalism*, which developed as a reform movement among journalists in the United States. Facing the readership crises of the US newspaper industry in the late 1970s, some newspaper executives, journalists, and intellectuals tried to improve the relationship between the press and the public by developing new ways of listening to citizens (Rosen and Merritt 1995; Rosen 1999; Platon and Deuze 2003). They perceived the readership crisis as the consequence of a deeper problem in the relationship between the newspapers and the local communities of their audiences. People did not seem to be very interested in local public affairs because they believed that they were not able to bring about change. Consequently, many progressive journalists demanded that newspapers should refocus the "news coverage on policy issues" and refrain "from scandal coverage, while creating new public places for citizens to meet and discuss issues" (Sirianni and Friedland 2001: 194).

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<sup>5</sup> The SMS includes all social movement organizations within a society (Zald and McCarthy, 1977: 1220).

<sup>6</sup> Instead of "programs," social movement scholars usually speak of "master frames" (Snow and Benford, 1992; Gerhards and Rucht, 1992). The concept of frame "refers to an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the world out here by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action within one's present or past environment. In Goffman's words, frames allow individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label events within their life span or the world at large" (Snow and Benford, 1992: 137).

The first so-called public or civic journalists acted as advocates for ordinary citizens. They organized public meetings and put specific problems of the local community on the agenda. The citizens contributed to the news process as interview partners and members of focus groups or by raising their voice at public meetings. The reporters tried to learn from the community and to move local issues to the center of news coverage (Sirianni and Friedland 2001: 217). However, the process of news production was still under the control of professional journalists and editors.

Towards the end of the 1990s, more and more intellectuals and social movement activists entered the field of media activism and developed the idea of "citizen journalism," where ordinary people play "an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information" (Bowman and Willis 2003: 9). The activists of the so-called independent media movement criticized the unequal distribution of power and influence between the established mass media and their audience and demanded a higher degree of participation by ordinary citizens (Kidd 2003; Platon and Deuze 2003). The new program turned out to be very successful. Its rapid development was closely related to new opportunities owing to the diffusion of the Internet and the invention of open publishing. The Internet provided new communication features that helped to close the gap between the professionalized mass media and the audience. Moreover, it offered new opportunities for public communication and participation (Sawhney and Lee 2005).

Briefly, the first program of media activism ("civic journalism") had been largely dominated by professional journalists. In the second program ("citizen journalism"), intellectuals and social movement activists from other fields of society took over. Despite ideological differences, the cultural vision of both programs was very similar: They shared the diagnosis that the increasing concentration of ownership in mass media and the growing influence of "popular journalism" (Deuze 2005) are a serious threat to democracy. Furthermore, they agreed that the solution to this problem is largely based on a broader inclusion of citizens in the news process.

So far, the new concept of citizen journalism has spread to many countries. As an alternative program, it challenges the dominance of established mass media. However, there is no common understanding of the concept, except that ordinary citizens actively participate in the process of news production, and the range of practices is broad. They vary depending on whether professional journalists are involved; whether citizens are mobilized for social engagement; whether public forums, focus groups, or questionnaires are used; and whether solutions are sought (Kim 2006). In order to understand the various forms of citizen journalism, it is necessary to closely examine its emergence and development. As the following section 3 shows, the variety of practices is apparently a result of different media structures, pending problems, and the sociocultural environment. In section 4, the focus moves from the historical and institutional framework to the agents of innovation. The following questions will be answered: Who were the agents of innovation? What was their motivation? What kinds of practices resulted from their activities?

### 3 Historical and Institutional Framework

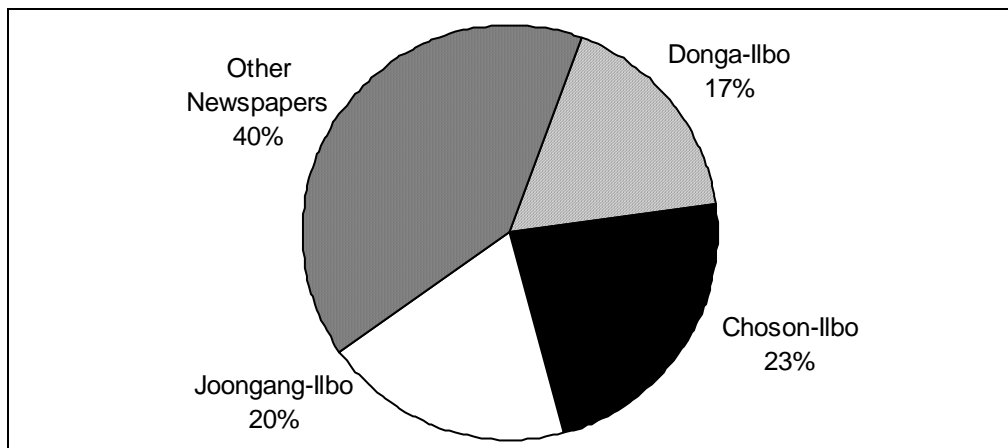
#### 3.1 Situation of the Mass Media

In South Korea, the programs of civic and citizen journalism are closely related in the history of the democratic media movement. However, compared to the United States, the situation of the mass media is completely different. Although the South Korean democracy experienced a rapid consolidation after the end of the military dictatorship in 1987, the state continued to repress the labor and unification movements.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the mass media were highly concentrated and still dominated by newspapers and broadcasting stations which had been collaborating closely with the military regime for decades. Accordingly, after the transition to democracy, the autonomy of the public sphere was a much more central issue in civil society campaigns in South Korea than, for example, in the United States or other Western countries. Three conditions have been particularly important for the development of citizen journalism in South Korea: (1) the high concentration of the newspaper market, (2) the Asian financial crisis, and (3) the rapid diffusion of Internet broadband technology towards the end of the 1990s. First, the *high concentration* of the mass media is widely regarded as a legacy of more than two decades of military rule. In order to enhance control over the mass media, the regime restricted the number of newspapers. Moreover, access to the market was reserved for loyal companies, and the newspapers were supervised by a censorship agency (Peters 2004). After democratization, access restrictions and censorship were abolished. Yet the South Korean newspaper market has not fully recovered from the authoritarian past. Figure 1 shows that the market is still dominated by three large conservative newspapers with nationwide distribution: *Chosun-Ilbo*, *Donga-Ilbo*, and *Joongang-Ilbo*. Consequently, the political left regularly complains about restricted access to the public sphere.

Second, after the limitations on access to the newspaper market had been lifted, the number of newspapers and other media expanded dramatically.<sup>8</sup> From 1990 to 1995, the number of media workers increased from 31,000 to 41,000, by approximately 25 percent. The number of newspaper employees increased from 18,700 to 22,100, by 15 percent. However, the Asian financial crisis, which began in 1997/1998, ended this growth. Between 1995 and 2000, the number of media workers dropped to 36,000, by 12 percent. The number of newspaper employees fell to 14,700, below the figure from 1990. In addition, approximately 34 percent of journalist positions were cut. From 1996 to 2006, the newspaper subscription rate dropped from 69 to 40 percent of households. From 2000 to 2006, the number of newspaper employees was further reduced to 12,700, a decline of approximately 14 percent. Consequently, the number of professional journalists looking for new jobs or new business opportunities after the Asian financial crisis was considerable.

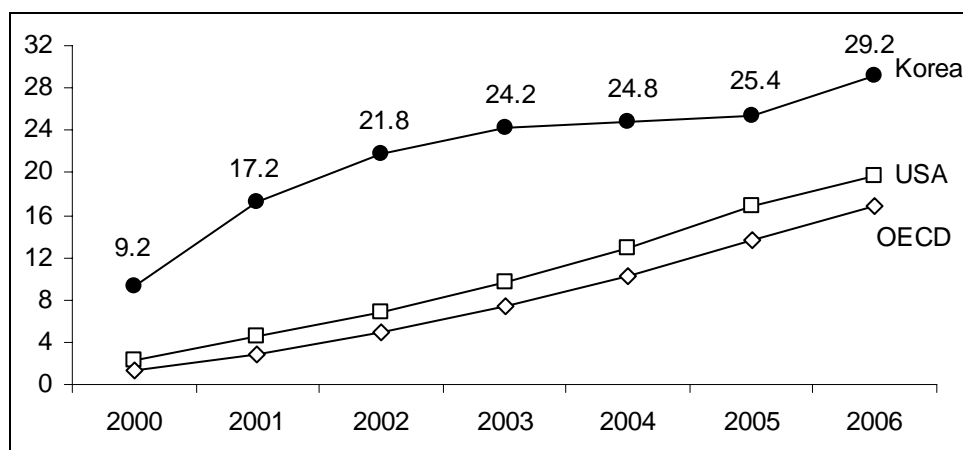
<sup>7</sup> According to Cho (2000: 281), many "moderate" civic groups emerged after the June Uprising of 1987. However, "radical" civic groups were still subject to political repression (Kern 2007a).

<sup>8</sup> The statistical figures are taken from the Homepage of the Korean Press Foundation, available at: [www.kpf.or.kr/eng/html/media/facts\\_2005.php](http://www.kpf.or.kr/eng/html/media/facts_2005.php), accessed on Oct. 31, 2007.

**Figure 1: Concentration of the Nationwide Newspaper Market (circulation, 2005)**

Source: *Hanguk sinmun bangsong yeongam* [Korea Media Yearbook] (2006), Seoul: Korea Press Foundation.

A third condition for the innovation of citizen journalism was the rapid diffusion of Internet broadband technology. In 1998, the Kim Dae-jung government put the establishment of a highly efficient broadband infrastructure on the top of its agenda. Today, as a result, the level of broadband penetration in South Korea is considerably higher than in the United States or the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (see Figure 2). Broadband technology has two features which are particularly favorable for the development of citizen journalism. First, compared to conventional printing or broadcasting technologies, it dramatically reduces the costs of access to the public sphere. It does not take much money, time, or knowledge to operate a public website or a blog. Second, the bilateral communication features of broadband Internet technology (point-to-point, point-to-multipoint, and peer-to-peer) are not only superior to the unilateral features of the conventional mass media but also correspond with the participative ideals of citizen journalism (Sawhney and Lee 2005: 398-401; Luhmann 1996: 11).

**Figure 2: Broadband Penetration (per 100 persons)**

Source: OECD (2007).

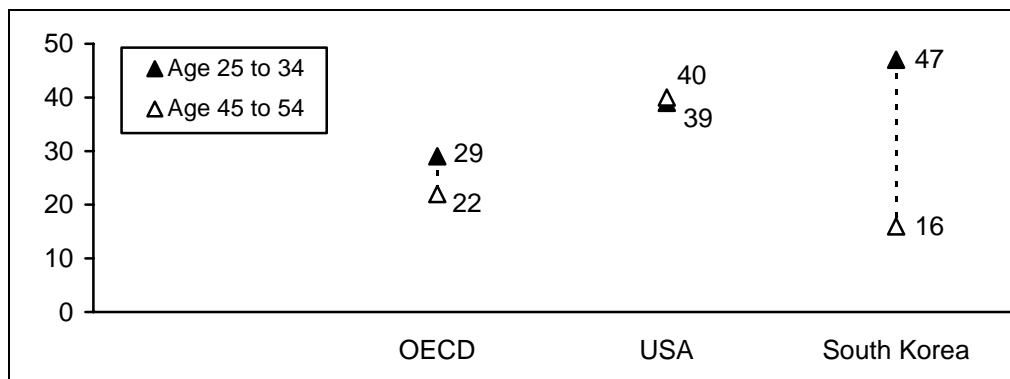


### 3.2 Expansion of the Education System

Citizen journalism developed within a changing cultural environment. In particular, the expansion of higher education in the 1980s and 1990s formed the cultural opportunity structure for the emergence of the new practice. Since the end of the Korean War, the South Korean education system has demonstrated impressive growth. The driving force behind this rapid expansion of education was, to a large degree, the so-called “education fever” (Seth 2002). Most Koreans firmly believe that education is the key to upward mobility. Consequently, Korean families invested (and still invest) enormous resources of time and money in the instruction of their children. Particularly in the 1980s, the focus of private and public education efforts increasingly moved to the universities.

Between 1980 and 1990, the advancement rates from high school to university increased from 28 to 33 percent.<sup>9</sup> The number of students climbed from 0.6 to 1.5 million, and the number of universities from 85 to 107. In the 1990s, the growth of the higher education system further accelerated: In 2000, the share of high school graduates who entered university had more than doubled, to 68 percent. The number of students increased to more than 3.4 million, and the number of universities to 161. A comparison with the United States and the OECD impressively illustrates the effect of South Korean higher education policy (see Figure 3). In 2003, 47 percent of the 25- to 34-year-olds had completed higher education. This figure exceeds the respective share of the 45- to 54-year-olds by nearly three times.

**Figure 3: Graduation from a University (percentage of age group, 2003)**



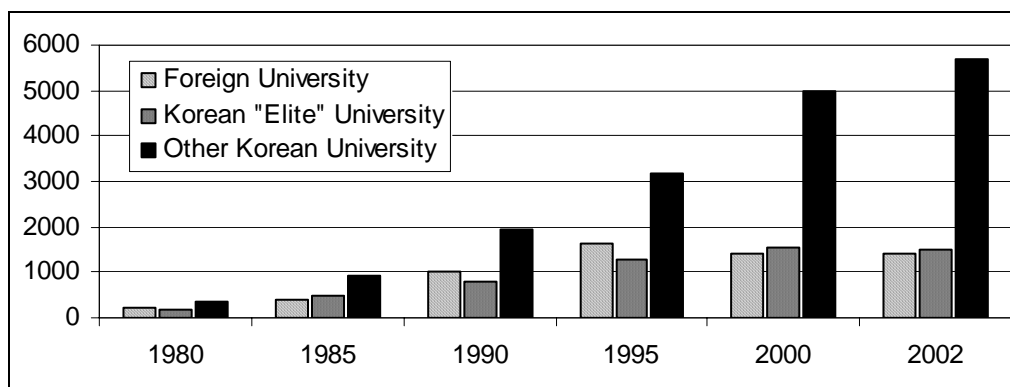
Source: OECD (2005: 37).

The Korean education system is characterized by a distinct elitism. The occupational opportunities for students who graduate from the few famous universities in Seoul are excellent. The career opportunities for graduates from American or European universities are even better. These two groups occupy almost all top positions in politics, the economy, education,

<sup>9</sup> The statistical figures are taken from the “Korea National Center for Education Statistics & Information” database at the Ministry of Education (available at: [std.kedi.re.kr/index.jsp](http://std.kedi.re.kr/index.jsp), accessed on October 28, 2007) and the “Foreign Doctor’s Degree Granted” database at the Korea Research Foundation (available at: [www.krf.or.kr](http://www.krf.or.kr), accessed on October 28, 2007).

and science (Dormels 2005; Kern 2005b). In comparison, the prospects of graduates from other universities—especially those from the provinces—are not nearly as good. As a consequence, the expansion of the education system has led to the formation of a highly educated elite, whose cultural capital is less recognized. Figure 4 compares the number of Korean doctoral graduates from foreign universities, "elite" universities (Seoul National University, Yonsei University, and Korea University), and the other domestic universities. It shows that the number of graduates with a doctoral degree from domestic non-"elite" universities has increased enormously. These individuals constitute a new academic elite with comparatively limited career prospects.

**Figure 4: South Korean Doctoral Graduates (1980–2002)**



Source: Korea National Center for Education Statistics & Information, available at: [std.kedi.re.kr/index.jsp](http://std.kedi.re.kr/index.jsp), accessed on Oct. 28, 2007 (see footnote 10).

What happened to those who had only limited access to leading social positions in spite of their high educational qualification? On the one hand, educated young people looked for new opportunities to obtain recognition of their cultural capital outside established institutions. On the other hand, after democratization, the civil sphere constituted a new social space with relatively low entry barriers. Against this background, we must assume that the growth of civil society and the development of citizen journalism in South Korea are in part connected to the rise of the new educated middle class. The most important skill they needed to enter the civil sphere was specific academic competence: writing, logical thinking, persuading, discussing, etc.<sup>10</sup> In particular, the development of the Internet opened up new possibilities for them to participate in public life. In cyberspace, people do not have to disclose their familial, educational, sexual, regional, or economic background. On the basis of their activities, many writers gained great recognition from online communities. In some cases, success in cyberspace was even a "door opener" for careers in established cultural institutions.

<sup>10</sup> This discussion is related to Bourdieu's (1983) concept of "Habitus."

### 3.3 The Democratic Media Movement

The history of the South Korean democratic media movement stretches back to the early 1980s.<sup>11</sup> After the coup d'état in May 1980, the military regime passed the Basic Law of the Press. Under the Basic Law, freedom of the press was strongly constrained; dissident journalists could be fired easily, and the establishment of a new newspaper or broadcasting station was very difficult. The existing media companies enjoyed their monopoly and remained loyal to the military regime. Under these circumstances, some dissident journalists who had been fired from regime-loyal newspapers organized a civic group with the name Council for Democratic Press Movement (CDPM)<sup>12</sup> in December 1984. In September 1986, the CDPM founded the bulletin *Mal*.<sup>13</sup> *Mal* challenged the repressive press policy by publishing the "reporting guide." The military regime sent the "reporting guide" to all media companies every day as a kind of pre-censorship. The investigative reports of the *Mal* bulletin strengthened the critical attitude of the Korean population against the regime-loyal mass media. Thus, *Mal* significantly contributed to the fall of the military regime in June 1987.

After 1987, the political conditions for the freedom of expression improved rapidly: the Basic Law of the Press was abolished (July 1987), and the mass media, including newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting stations, were regulated by the Act Concerning the Registration of Periodicals and the Broadcasting Act. With the removal of market barriers, many provincial newspapers were founded. Taking advantage of the new opportunities, the CDPM supported the establishment of the progressive daily *Hankyoreh* (May 1988) as an alternative to the conservative mainstream press.<sup>14</sup> The Korea Federation of Press Union (KFPU)<sup>15</sup> was established in November 1988. In 1989, the KFPU organized lay-offs in order to strengthen independent editing rights.

In the 1990s, the democratic media movement changed profoundly. First, many new social movement organizations were founded to promote the political liberalization of society. In contrast to the democracy movement of the 1980s, which broadly demanded democratization, social justice, and unification, the new groups rapidly began to specialize in single issues such as environmentalism, feminism, and labor activism.<sup>16</sup> The democratic media movement also followed this strategy and began to give priority to specific media issues, such as the structural deficits of the press market. Although the political barriers to the es-

<sup>11</sup> The basic issue of the democratic media movement is the freedom of expression, information, and communication. Activists try to strengthen the independence of the public sphere by influencing the contents and practices of mainstream media, advocating changes and reforms in media policy, building alternative media, and empowering audiences to be more critical of the mainstream media (Carroll and Hackett 2006: 88-89).

<sup>12</sup> The CDPM was renamed the Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media (CCDM) in 1998, available at: [www.ccdm.or.kr](http://www.ccdm.or.kr).

<sup>13</sup> The Korean word "Mal" means "speech" or "statement."

<sup>14</sup> The daily *Hankyoreh* received its start-up capital of five billion Korean won from 27,223 stockholders, mostly ordinary citizens.

<sup>15</sup> The KFPU was renamed the National Union of Mediaworkers in 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Most scholars agree that the SMS of South Korea has been, to some degree, transformed by the emergence of so-called "new social movements" since the transition to democracy (Chung 2005; Shin 2006; Cho 2006).

tablishment of media companies had been removed, the newspaper market, as mentioned above, was still dominated by three major newspaper companies. In the past, these (and other) newspapers had repeatedly provoked public outrage with questionable management practices and frequent intrusions by the newspaper owners upon editorial rights. Furthermore, the campaigns of the media activists addressed the allegedly strong conservative, anti-communist, and neoliberal bias of the mainstream press.

Second, with the introduction of the online Bulletin Board System (BBS) in the early 1990s, the democratic media movement entered a new field of contention. In the beginning, progressive students and intellectuals regarded the new communication system as "a space of liberation."<sup>17</sup> Existing laws were not able to regulate the new information medium. As a result, Internet media enjoyed much more freedom than the established offline media. In the mid-1990s, the now democratic but still authoritarian state became increasingly aware of the impact of the new media on the public sphere. At this time, the National Security Law (NSL) and other related laws were broadly used as tools for the control of online media.<sup>18</sup> In addition, several laws (i.e., the Electronic Communication Business Law and the Korean Communication Decency Act) that especially targeted the Internet media were revised and implemented. As the government tried to introduce a "content rating" and a "real name" system for the Internet, an increasing number of Internet activists participated in protest actions against these measures. The media activists were not professional journalists in a narrow sense, but rather writers, amateur reporters, or students who understood themselves as *citizen journalists*.

## 4 Citizen Journalism as Innovation

Schumpeter (1934: 74) considers the implementation of "new combinations" to be the basic task of the innovator. However, the result of an innovation process often deviates significantly from the initial motivations and ideas. In order to explain the emergence of citizen journalism in South Korea, three questions have to be answered: Who were the agents of innovation? What was their motivation? What kinds of practices resulted from their activities? These questions will be discussed on the basis of a social network analysis and a cluster analysis of social movement groups and alternative media organizations.

### 4.1 Social Agents

This section deals with the leading agents of the democratic media movement, who introduced citizen journalism into South Korean society. The empirical analysis is based on a wide

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<sup>17</sup> This citation derives from an interview with a media activist (March 14, 2007). She has been involved in the *Minjung* movement for a decade.

<sup>18</sup> For decades, dissidents and intellectuals have perceived the NSL as a major threat to freedom of expression in all fields of society including the mass media.

spectrum of data sources about social movements since 1987: (1) The volume *Korean Civil Society and NGOs 1987–2002* (2004) by the *NGOtimes* contains an extensive chronological overview of 15 years of protest actions in South Korea. (2) The "Cyber NGO Resource Center,"<sup>19</sup> an online database attached to the Democracy and Social Movement Institute of the Sung-Kong-Hoe University in Seoul, also provides a chronological and categorical overview of the democracy movement. Original documents are often attached to the listed information. (3) The online "Database Search System related with Democracy Movement,"<sup>20</sup> which is attached to the Korea Democracy Foundation, contains a wide range of historical material about movement groups and protest campaigns, including written documents (statements, transcripts of speeches, newsletters, etc.). (4) Two series of "The White Paper Against Censorship" (1997; 2000) by the Civil Union Against Censorship were also examined.

After checking the sources, the data for social network analysis were selected and arranged according to following criteria. First, great attention was paid to collective actions that put specific issues of democratic media activism at their center,<sup>21</sup> for example, collective actions against censorship or for democratic media reforms. Another important campaign addressed the coverage of the conservative daily *Chosun-Ilbo* in 1999/2000. Second, the forms of collective actions included a wide range of strategies from building coalitions to campaigns, statements, press conferences, and street demonstrations. In many cases, collective actions were closely related to the foundation of umbrella organizations or coalitions.<sup>22</sup> Based on both criteria ("democratic media issue" and "membership in coalition"), seven key coalitions were selected for a social network analysis (see Table 1). The selected data cover the years between 1995 and 2002. This was the crucial period for the development of citizen journalism in South Korea.

**Table 1: Selected Protest Coalitions of the Democratic Media Movement**

Event	Name of the Coalition	Number of Groups	Date of Protest
1	Solidarity for Progressive Information and Communication	15	08.1995
2	Civil Union against Censorship	23	07.1996
3	LaborMedia Committee	21	11.1997
4	People's Coalition for Media Reform	47	08.1998
5	Collaboration Action Group against Information and Communication Censorship	30	07.2000
6	Citizens' Coalition against <i>Chosun-Ilbo</i>	41	09.2000
7	Joint Committee against Government Internet Censorship	53	07.2002

Source: Authors' elaboration.

<sup>19</sup> The data are available at: [www.demos.or.kr](http://www.demos.or.kr), accessed on October 28, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> The data are available at: [http://db.kdemocracy.or.kr/kh/ams\\_hk\\_02.jsp](http://db.kdemocracy.or.kr/kh/ams_hk_02.jsp), accessed on October 28, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the collective actions against the *National Security Law* were excluded from the data because the coalition against this law covers almost all civic groups from all social fields. We must assume that the Anti-NSL Network had no discriminating effect on the development of the democratic media movement.

<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the action of a coalition or umbrella organization was counted as a collective action on the part of all member groups (see also Diani 2004).

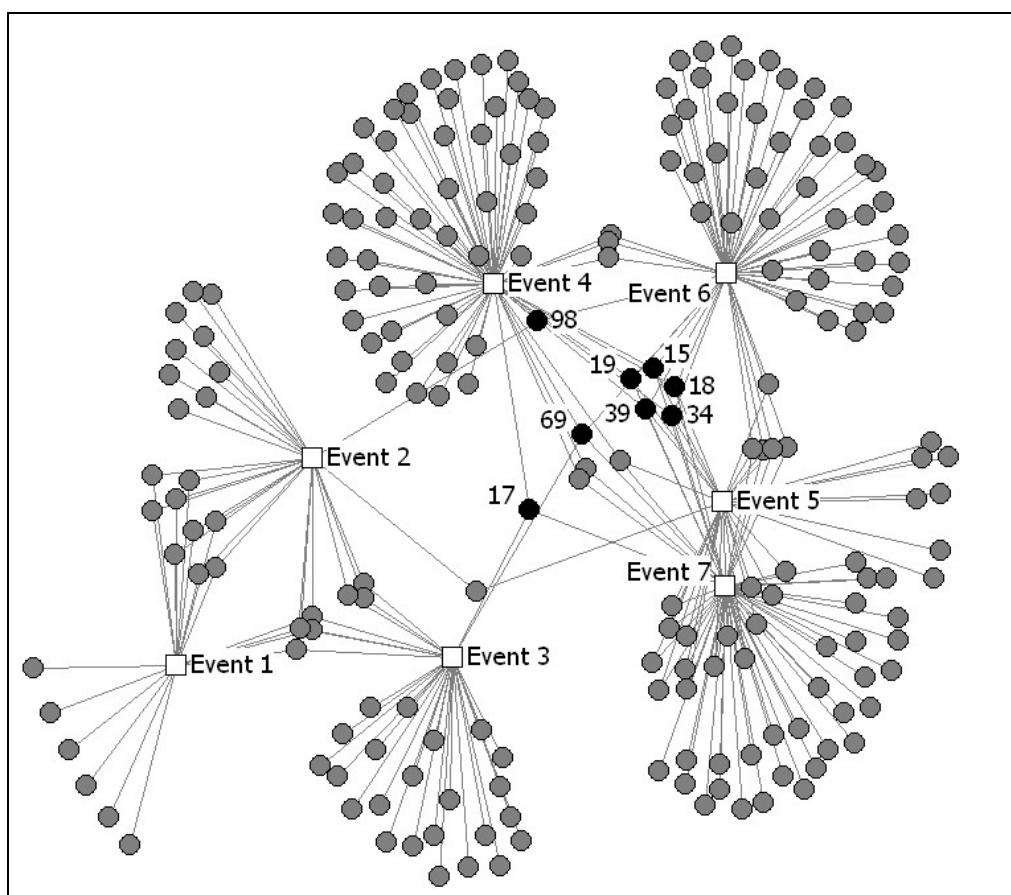
The total number of member groups is 155 (without multiple memberships). According to their issue priority, these organizations have been divided into eleven subgroups: non-profit online service providers (13 groups), online communities (17 groups), multi-issue organizations (9 groups), human rights movement (28 groups), labor movement (16 groups), culture reform movement (24 groups), press reform movement (21 groups), unification movement (12 groups), environmental movement (4 groups), women's movement (6 groups), and academic movement (9 groups).

Based on these groups, a social network analysis was applied. Figure 5 displays the cooperation pattern of the democratic media movement in the form of a two-mode affiliation network (groups by coalitions/events). It shows that there are apparently two network clusters: The first cluster consists of events 1, 2, and 3. The second cluster consists of events 4, 5, 6, and 7. Both clusters are weakly connected. This structure is presumably the result of the transition from narrowband to broadband technology in 1997/98. In the narrowband era, the democratic media movement was largely dominated by non-profit online service providers and labor movement groups. After the introduction of broadband technology, many democratic media groups changed their names, uniting or dividing, in order to adjust to the new technological (and legal) environment. Furthermore, in this stage of development, new collective actors entered the field. Progressive intellectuals and journalists, in particular, gained importance. However, the early users and activists of the narrowband era exerted a strong influence on later forms of citizen journalism in South Korea.

The success of an innovation depends largely on an entrepreneur's ability to close structural holes by bringing people with different backgrounds together. For the purpose of this analysis, a group or organization was considered a "broker" when it linked (two or more) "distinct groups without having prior allegiance to either" (Gould and Fernandez 1989: 93; 1994).<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, every instance where one actor was located on the direct path between two others (from different subgroups) had to be taken into account as a brokerage event (Gould and Fernandez 1994). For example, Group A was considered a broker when it mediated between Group B and Group C. The basic algorithm of this method has been elaborated by Gould and Fernandez (1989; see also Hanneman and Riddle 2005). As a result, it turned out that eight organizations played leading roles as brokers in the democratic media network (see Table 2). Figure 5 displays the position of these eight groups, which cover altogether 62 percent of all brokerage activities. Taking a closer look at the subgroups, there are three important streams of democratic media activism in South Korea: progressive journalists, labor and unification activists, and progressive intellectuals. Thus, they have played a leading role in the development of citizen journalism.

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<sup>23</sup> Tarrow defines brokerage in a similar way, "as the linking of two or more previously unconnected social actors by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites" (2005: 190).

**Figure 5: Affiliation Network of the Democratic Media Movement (1995–2002)\***

\* Leading Brokers of the Democratic Media Network: Node 15 = Cultural Action, 17 = Minbyun Democratic Lawyers, 18 = Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media, 19 = National Alliance for Democracy and Reunification of Korea, 34 = Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, 39 = Jinbonet, 69 = National Association of Professors for a Democratic Society, 98 = Korea Progressive Academy Council.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

**Table 2: Leading Brokers of the Media Movement (1995–2002)**

Organization	Brokerage Score	Sociocultural Background
Citizens Coalition for Democratic Media	3,174	Progressive Journalists
National Alliance for Democracy and Reunification of Korea	4,184	Labor and Unification Activists
Korean Confederation of Trade Unions	4,360	
Jinbonet	4,480	
Minbyun Democratic Lawyers	3,150	Progressive Intellectuals
Korea Progressive Academy Council	3,326	
Cultural Action	3,382	
National Association of Professors for a Democratic Society	6,438	

Source: Authors' elaboration.

(1) As mentioned above, progressive journalists represent the first important stream of democratic media activism. The Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media (CCDM)<sup>24</sup> is a leading organization of progressive journalists. After the transition to democracy, the civic group strengthened its main activities to monitor the established mass media and promoted media education.<sup>25</sup> In 1999, its monthly magazine *Mal* was involved in a lawsuit with the mainstream daily *Chosun-Ilbo* because progressive reporters had criticized the biased articles of the leading conservative paper. This was the beginning of a heated Internet campaign against the *Chosun-Ilbo*, which culminated in the publication of a critical statement, "*Chosun-Ilbo—Accuse Me*," signed by approximately 1,700 intellectuals and activists, in the daily *Hankyoreh* in July 2000.<sup>26</sup> In January 2000, the CCDM responded proactively to the growing importance of the Internet and formed a special group that organized seminars on the theory and practice of online journalism. The participants included civic activists who were interested in establishing their own homepage or bulletin board, professional journalists who lived in the provinces and who were trying to learn online techniques in order to improve their economic situation, and students looking for job opportunities as online journalists or reporters. In other words, many members of the CCDM actively contributed to the establishment of a knowledge infrastructure for and the rapid diffusion of citizen journalism.

(2) Labor and unification organizations represent the second stream of democratic media activism. The historical and ideological roots of these organizations lie in the *Minjung* democracy movement of the 1980s. In brief, the Korean word "Minjung" describes the economically, politically, and culturally excluded parts of Korean society (Han 1978; Suh 1981; Wells 1995; Kern 2005a). In the 1980s, the *Minjung* movement struggled against the repression of workers and peasants, and demanded democracy, economic justice, and unification. Although the movement declined after the transition to democracy, progressive activists and organizations still play an important role in the South Korean SMS. The National Alliance for Democracy and Reunification of Korea (NADRK) is a leading organization of former *Minjung* activists. In the 1990s, the NADRK supported the unification struggle of the student movement, which used the Internet to coordinate its collective protests. When state agencies took measures to enhance control over the Internet, the former *Minjung* activists—including the NADRK—initiated the first protest campaigns. In winter 1996/97, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) used the Internet for the first time in order to mobilize interna-

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<sup>24</sup> See footnote 13.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Oh Yeon-ho, who was employed as a journalist at the monthly magazine *Mal*, gave a seminar with the title "Making Journalists" from Oct. 1998 to Feb. 2000. Under the motto "every citizen is a journalist," he taught ordinary citizens to become journalists. Afterwards, he established South Korea's most successful Internet newspaper to date, *Ohmynews* (Kim and Hamilton 2006; Oh 2004a). When *Ohmynews* was established, approximately 150 participants had already been educated as "citizen journalists" in his seminar. We must assume that Oh Yeon-ho strongly relied on the support of these seminar participants, especially in the early days of *Ohmynews*.

<sup>26</sup> The signature campaign referred to Emile Zola's famous letter *J'accuse* in the Dreyfuss Affair (*Hankyoreh*, November 29, 1999).



tional support for a general strike. The KCTU was supported by former *Minjung* activists as well. Encouraged by the success of the campaign, the Internet activists established the independent Internet service network Jinbonet in 1998.<sup>27</sup> Jinbonet provided free Internet support for civic groups and protection from state censorship and collaborated in many campaigns.

(3) The National Association of Professors for a Democratic Society, Cultural Action, the Korea Progressive Academy Council, and the Minbyun Democratic Lawyers represent the third stream of the democratic media movement. These four organizations consist of progressive intellectuals from the fields of science, education, art, and law. Usually, intellectuals are highly interested in the autonomy of the public sphere (Bourdieu 1991, 1997). However, in the 1990s, public life in South Korea was still dominated by authoritarian thinking, conformism, and moralism. Using the opportunities provided by the Internet, many progressive intellectuals established online communities, Web forums, and bulletin boards where they shared information, initiated free political debates, or published articles. The above-mentioned new academic elite played an active role in this process. In 1997, intellectuals and citizens launched an Internet election campaign to support progressive presidential candidate Kim Dae-jung. In 1997 and 1998, many online newsgroups parodied political actors and made fun of sexual taboos. They opposed the widespread moralism and did not hesitate to criticize the social establishment with "bad" language. "Parody" was their protection and excuse. In addition, many intellectuals also supported the campaign against the conservative daily *Chosun-Ilbo* in 1999/2000. The critical attitude of progressive intellectuals toward established elites strongly shaped the cultural image of democratic media activism in South Korea.

## 4.2 Concepts

This social network analysis has shown that journalists, labor and unification activists, and progressive intellectuals represent the dominant streams of the democratic media movement. They were strongly engaged in the emergence and development of citizen journalism in the sense that they placed their issues on the agenda, transferred ordinary people's voices to the public sphere, and demanded the protection of human rights. By means of their own experiences and practices as media activists, freelancers, reporters, columnists, or commentators, they shaped the contents and forms of citizen journalism. According to their different socio-cultural backgrounds, they had different ideas about how to realize the new practice of citizen journalism. Their concepts varied according to three basic dimensions (see Table 3): (1) the purpose of citizen journalism, (2) the production model, and (3) the economic orientation.

The first dimension deals with the *purposes* of civic journalism: What is it good for? Some activists regarded citizen journalism as an instrument for creating "civic consciousness" and building online communities in order to promote public discussions and intellectual debates (community building). As these projects aimed to enhance and mobilize online as well as

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<sup>27</sup> The Korean word "Jinbo" means "progress."

offline participation, they were often closely related to the SMS. The other activists—mostly professional journalists—considered citizen journalism to be a tool for gathering and disseminating news (news coverage). They established independent Internet newspapers in order to strengthen media pluralism and to counteract the high concentration of the mass media. Although they often cooperated with other civic organizations and social movement groups, they were usually embedded in the institutional realm of the mass media.

**Table 3: Three Dimensions of Citizen Journalism**

Dimension	Categories
Purpose	(1) Community Building (2) News Coverage
Production Model	(1) Professionals (2) Non-Professionals (3) Mixed
Economic Orientation	(1) Profit (2) Non-Profit

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The second dimension concerns the *production model*: How do activists create and distribute content? Most journalists regarded objectivity and professionalism as an indispensable condition for trustworthy news coverage (professionals). They cooperated closely with ordinary citizens, but insisted on their role as gatekeepers between the citizens and the mass media. Other groups opposed the separation of the two spheres. They promoted a concept that gave activists and citizens control over the publishing process (non-professionals). In the meantime, the third group tried to unite both concepts, for example, by instructing ordinary citizens about how to gather journalistic information in a "professional" way or by introducing review procedures in order to raise the quality of non-professional contributions to online newspapers or communities (mixed).

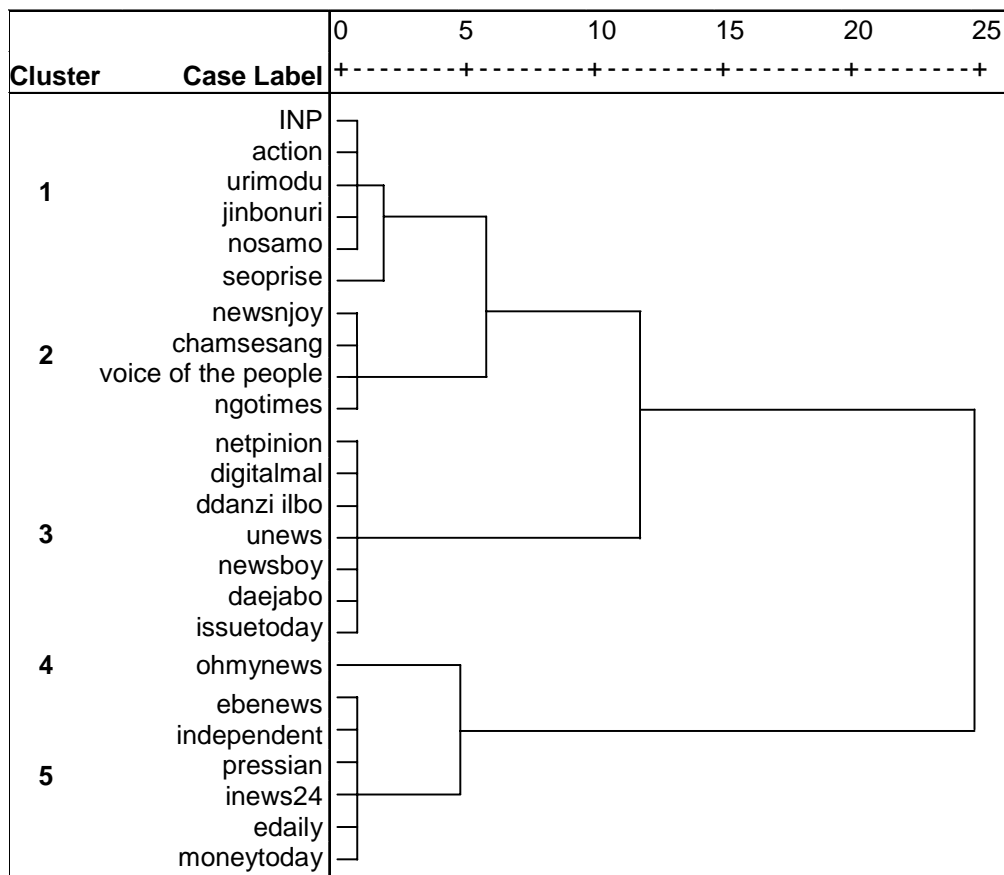
The third dimension deals with the *economic orientation* of the projects. The crucial question is "Who pays the bills?" The founders of many Internet newspapers and online communities considered citizen journalism a new business model (profit). They hoped to make money by attracting advertisements (such as *YouTube* or *MySpace*). However, most of them were not successful. Others refused to display advertisements on principle (non-profit). In this case, they either had to budget carefully or to rely on the support of labor unions, large civic organizations, or political parties, which were able to sponsor comprehensive Internet newspapers on a regular basis.

### 4.3 Practices

The above-mentioned dimensions theoretically allow twelve "new combinations" (Schumpeter 1934: 74). However, in the empirical case of South Korea, only a few of them turned

out to be practical. In order to obtain a more detailed understanding of the different concepts, the 24 most important online projects of the initial stage of citizen journalism, between 1999 and 2002, were examined.<sup>28</sup> This selection includes almost all the important citizen journalism projects of this period. In the first step, based on expert interviews and an analysis of websites and Korean research literature, each project was categorized into three dimensions (see Table 3). In the next step, a cluster analysis was applied in order to identify the different types of citizen journalism. Figure 6 displays a range of between two and six possible clusters with different concepts and practices. The within-group homogeneity and the between-group heterogeneity were relatively high in five clusters. In Figure 7, the five clusters are arranged with respect to the three dimensions mentioned above: The vertical axis represents the "economic orientation" (*profit vs. non-profit*), the horizontal axis the "production model" (*professional vs. non-professional*), and the diagonal axis shows the "purpose" of citizen journalism (*community building vs. news coverage*).

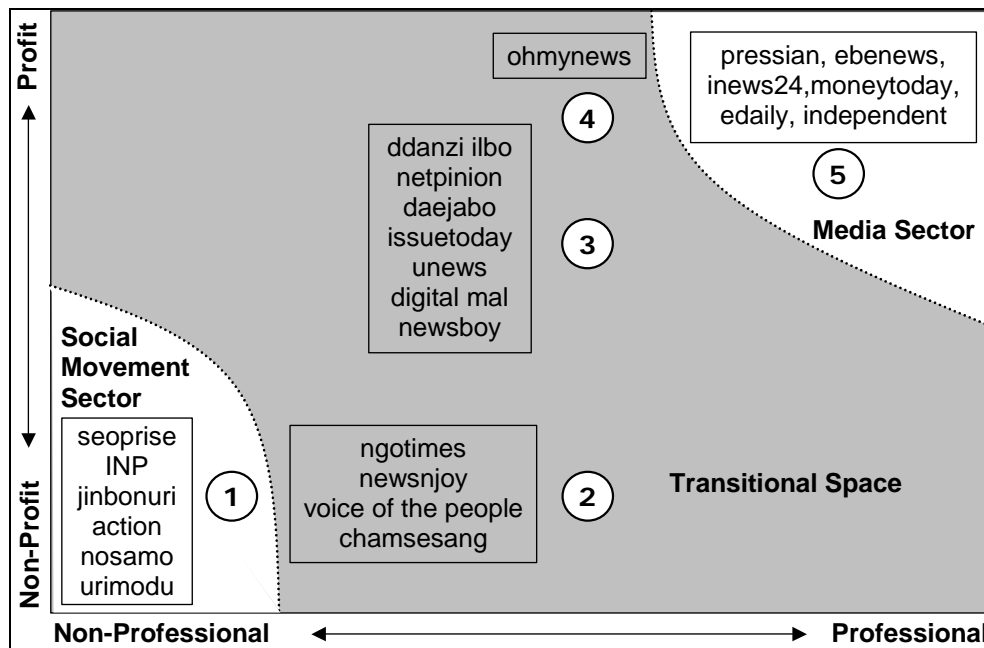
**Figure 6: Hierarchical Cluster Analysis of 24 Citizen Journalism Projects (1999–2002)**



Source: Authors' elaboration. The analysis was conducted with binary coded variables (method = Ward, distance measure = variance).

<sup>28</sup> Oh (2004b) offers a comprehensive overview of the different projects of civic journalism. For this paper's analysis, this overview was supplemented with further important initiatives according to expert interviews and our own investigations.

Figure 7: Five Concepts of Online Journalism



Source: Authors' elaboration.

**Cluster 1** contains alternative media projects with a high non-profit and non-professional orientation. With the exception of *Seoprise*, all groups have refused to display commercial advertisements. The focus has been on interpersonal exchange, social mobilization, and political debate. The projects have been mostly dominated by progressive intellectuals. For example, in 1999, the open-publishing watchblog *Urimodu* was established by young academics in order to observe the conservative daily *Chosun-Ilbo*. *Urimodu* was a model for many following projects, in which citizens critically followed the coverage of established mass media agencies. Furthermore, *Urimodu*, *Nosamo*, and *Seoprise* emerged several times as the leading actors in large political campaigns.

**Cluster 2** contains comprehensive Internet newspapers, which are closely related to labor unions or other civic organizations. The *NGOtimes* was originally founded by a leading civic organization<sup>29</sup> as an offline bulletin. It was dedicated to the development of the moderate civil sector. In contrast, *Newsnjoy* represents the conservative Christian wing. *Chamsesang*<sup>30</sup> was founded as an Internet newspaper of the labor movement-related media network *Jinbonet*. As these examples show, there are wide political differences between the Internet newspapers. Furthermore, both the *NGOtimes* and *Newsnjoy* display banner advertisements, while *Chamsesang* opposes this practice. In all cases, however, the projects rely heavily on the support of civic or labor organizations. They also place strong emphasis on the establishment of a collective identity.

<sup>29</sup> The founding organization of the *NGOtimes* was the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice.

<sup>30</sup> The Korean word "Chamsesang" means "true world."

**Cluster 3** also contains Internet newspapers with a strong community character. Unlike the projects of Cluster 2, those of Cluster 3 have mainly been established by progressive intellectuals. They usually offer space for parodies, comments, and discussions, and most of them rely on the contributions of citizen reporters. The parody newspaper *Ddanzi-Ilbo* emerged as the first commercially successful Internet newspaper in July 1998. *Daejabo* was founded in January 1999. In the beginning, it was closely related to *Urimodu* (Cluster 1). The very successful and influential alternative media project *Seoprise* (Cluster 1) branched off from *Daejabo* in 2002. Although the projects of Cluster 3 are trying to make a profit, they are usually not very successful.

**Cluster 4** contains one unique case from our sample. *Ohmynews* is a comprehensive Internet newspaper, based, to a large degree, on the contributions of citizen reporters. It tries to unite the ideas of civic participation with a professional business concept. On the one hand, as a progressive newspaper, *Ohmynews* receives the support of many civic organizations, such as the CCDM and movement activists, who contribute content and articles. On the other hand, it tries to make a profit by competing with established offline newspapers. In our interviews with citizen reporters, we found that the business orientation of the organization often leads to conflict with the community orientation of the contributors. However, it seems to work because the founder of *Ohmynews* maintains close relations with civic groups as well as professional journalists. From one side he receives contributions and articles, and from the other side, professional recognition.

**Cluster 5** consists of Internet newspapers that have been established by professional journalists. Although they have benefited from the growing popularity of alternative media projects, most are not committed to the idea of citizen journalism. Their orientation is unmistakably commercial, and they work according to professional journalistic standards. In this respect, there is not much difference between them and established offline newspapers. Consequently, their innovation potential is very limited. However, one exception is *Pressian*, the founders of which were involved in the press union movement of the 1980s. Therefore, *Pressian* maintains close relations with many civic groups, but it is committed to the idea of civic rather than citizen journalism. It offers only a little space for citizen reporters.

## 5 Conclusions

As the growing concentration and "tabloidization" of the mass media are not only a Korean but also a global phenomenon, many scholars welcome the growing influence of alternative media projects as an important innovation contributing to the "civil repair" (Alexander 2001: 375) of an increasingly distorted public discourse (Chang 2005; Bowman and Willis 2003; McCaughy and Ayers 2003). In South Korea, the program of citizen journalism has played an important role in broadening the access of ordinary people and activists to the civil sphere. As a new practice, it bears great potential for strengthening the democratic culture.

However, a large body of literature often interprets the development of citizen journalism (directly or indirectly) as a mere consequence of technological "progress" or as a response to the structural deficits of the mass media. In other words, many authors explain the success of citizen journalism with the immediateness and interactivity of the Internet, communicative opportunities, and structural strains in the system of mass media. In the meantime, they neglect the creative processes that led to the invention of the new practices. In contrast, our study has shown that the development of citizen journalism can be fully explained neither by the technological opportunities provided by the Internet nor by the structural strains in the system of mass media. In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the innovation process, much attention should be paid to the interaction between social agents ("entrepreneurs") and their cultural visions. By moving the focus to the *process* of innovation, it is possible to gain a new perspective on the creativity of social actors (Joas 1996).

Our findings indicate that "the linking of two or more previously unconnected social actors" (Tarrow 2005: 190) or sites is a key to the social definition and construction of new practices and ideas. "Structural holes" (Burt 2005, 2004) between groups and collective identities provide opportunities for social entrepreneurs from different fields. Against this background, the "boundary relations" (Alexander 2001: 374-375) of the social subsystems should be considered a powerful source of innovation. In South Korea, the development of citizen journalism depended greatly on social brokerage between the social movement sector, the intellectual field, and the mass media. In all three cases, the leading social agents of citizen journalism occupied positions on the periphery of their institutional fields. First, despite the transition to democracy, in the SMS, the highly ideologized labor and unification movements were still subject to strong political repression (Kern 2007a). Second, despite the expansion of the education system, graduates from domestic non-"elite" universities had comparatively limited career prospects. Third, despite liberalization, progressive journalists had to cope with a media market dominated by conservative media companies.

Although they had different cultural visions and structural interests, the three groups mentioned above succeeded in building coalitions across the boundaries of their institutional fields. In the "transitional space" between the SMS and the system of mass media, they created a sociocultural milieu which promoted reciprocal learning through trying, watching, and exchanging ideas and experiences (see Figure 7). By combining resources from the mass media, the education system, and the social movement sector, the three groups gained enough influence to realize the innovation of citizen journalism in society.

In the meantime, citizen journalism has become an integral part of the SMS and the overall civil sphere of South Korea. Yet citizen journalism is more than just a new "protest repertoire" (Tilly 2006); it has considerably changed the program and the identity of the democratic media movement. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the movement was largely dominated by dissident journalists and the idea of civic journalism. Not only did the new concept of citizen journalism extend the programmatic horizon of the movement by questioning the

boundary between professional journalists and ordinary citizens, but also new actors, such as progressive intellectuals and labor and unification activists, entered the stage. Although the ideas of civic journalism remain, the new program of citizen journalism goes further. Moreover, the impact of citizen journalism has not been restricted to the SMS. It has also exerted an enormous influence on the media landscape. Alternative Internet media have established themselves as opinion leaders and powerful actors in the South Korean public sphere. In the presidential and parliamentary elections (2002 and 2004, respectively), alternative Internet media significantly contributed to landslide victories of progressive candidates. Since then, most conventional media agencies have provided space for open publishing and user-created content.

Currently, citizen journalism in South Korea seems to be becoming increasingly institutionalized. The Internet newspapers close to the SMS have joined the Korean Internet Journalist Association (KIJA), which protects the rights and interests of citizen journalists. Meanwhile, the Internet newspapers close to the commercial media market have organized the Korean Internet Newspaper Association (KINA). As we can see, citizen journalism is continuously changing. Whether further disruptive innovations are to be expected is still an open question. Our analysis has described only the beginnings; further developments remain to be seen.

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