Understanding Civic Engagement in the Smartphone Era: Corporate Sphere vs. Public Sphere*

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This paper analyzes the interplay between the government, civil groups, telecommunications corporations, and users in order to determine power negotiation among these major players, in particular between a corporate sphere and a public sphere in the process of the establishment of the Terminal Distribution Structure Improvement Act. It investigates whether Korean smartphone users have staged a collective, nationwide civic engagement against the Terminal Act or not. It discusses whether citizens equipped with the smartphone and relevant digital platforms (e.g., Twitter and KaKao Talk) are able to take part in civic movements, and its implications in conjunction with the corporate sphere. Civic movement organizations had been striving to protect the customers from powerful capital and the government; however, civic engagement has not been substantial. Our findings for mobile communication for gathering and discussing the Terminal Act proved that civic movements did not entail active participation in public engagement. Increasing corporate sphere has played a key role in curbing civic engagement.

Keywords: *smartphone, civic engagement, Terminal Act, corporate sphere*

Introduction

Since the late 1990s, mobile technologies, now primarily smartphones, have become some of the most significant technologies for people's daily activities. Mobile technologies have greatly contributed to the growth of new digital economy and culture in many countries. Due to the significance of the smartphone, several countries around the world have developed a mobile handset subsidy program. It has been important for both the government and mobile telecommunications corporations to introduce the mobile handset subsidy program, in particular, in the early stage of the mobile era, and again now during the smartphone era, because they plan to promote the adoption of new technologies.[1]

In the mobile communication service industry, a mobile handset subsidy has been used as a key marketing strategy to attract consumers and to increase market penetration (Kim et al. 2004). Taking Europe as an example, Gruber (1999, p. 533) points out, "subsidizing handsets for a new subscriber is essentially a means of lowering the cost of the subscriber's entry to the mobile phone market." Kim et al. (2004, p. 24) also argue that "the new entrants in the mobile communication service market have made their top priority attracting new customers as well as luring subscribers away from other carriers. For them, the mobile handset subsidy can easily become a direct method of competition." In a bid to lock customers into long-term contracts, for example, America's preeminent wireless carriers have had a history of subsidizing the phones that the masses want. As of May 2014, a brand new iPhone is $599 or more, but with subsidies, American customers can buy it for $199 (Murph 2014).

As in many other countries, Korea has provided mobile handset subsidies since 1997 when mobile communication carriers offered subsidies with an obligatory contractual subscription period.[2] As expected, the handset

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[1] A mobile handset subsidy offered by mobile communication carriers can be defined as a monetary value, which is given to a customer during the subscription process. The amount of the handset subsidy is the difference between the mobile communication carrier's purchase price of a handset from a manufacturer and the sale price of the handset to a customer.

[2] When PCS carriers launched commercial PCS services in October 1997, the subsidy was approximately $160 with an obligatory subscription period of 12 months. At the time, the cost of a typical mobile handset was about $440. In early 1998, the subsidy skyrocketed to $250 with an obligatory subscription period of 30 months (Kim et al. 2004). Later in spring 2004 the government allowed subsidies for WCDMA technology with a cap of 40% of the cost of the terminal device, and for PDA phones a maximum of 25% (Tallberg et al. 2007; OECD 2013).

subsidy helped underpin the rapid expansion of the number of mobile communication subscribers and the domestic mobile handset manufacturing industry. Unlike other countries, Korea has also developed handset subsidy programs for resolving the digital divide between handset-haves and handset have-nots; therefore, the handset subsidy program in the Korean context has fulfilled not only as commercial but also political purposes.

However, the current Park Geun-hye government (2013-2018) has introduced a new approach to the mobile subsidy system, because it has wanted to control subsidies since October 2014. The government believed that handset subsidies had not been fairly actualized, nor resolved the digital divide; therefore, citizens did not benefit from the subsidy. The Park government pushed through with the enactment of the Terminal Distribution Structure Improvement Act (hereafter the Terminal Act) in an effort to normalize the terminal distribution market and to reduce damages incurred by consumers due to the overheated competition over non-transparent, discriminatory price discounts. The relevant bill planned to prohibit discriminatory price discounts to ensure equity for all consumers and required phone businesses to make the structure of price discounts transparent by serving a public notice on the conditions for price discounts in Korea (National Council of Consumer Organizations 2014). The Terminal Act has not actualized the original plan due to severe opposition, in particular from Samsung, which has consequently ignited several critical debates and civil engagements due to its importance in the era of smartphones and social media.

This paper analyzes the interplay between the government, civil groups—certain type of organizations whose official purpose is to enhance community affairs, including public affairs, through volunteer work by the members—, telecommunications corporations, and users in order to determine power negotiation among these major players, in particular between a corporate sphere and a public sphere in the process of the establishment of the Terminal Act. It does not directly examine the relationship between smartphone use and civic engagement in that the smartphone as a social media platform has been utilized in the political mobilization of citizens. Instead it investigates whether Korean mobile users (now mainly smartphone users) have staged a collective, nationwide civic engagement against the Terminal Act or not. It especially discusses whether citizens equipped with the smartphone and relevant digital platforms (e.g., Twitter and KaKao Talk) are able to take part in civic movements or not, and

its implications in conjunction with the corporate sphere.[3] It finally addresses the opportunities and challenges for the theory and practice of civic engagement in the public life occasioned by the rise of the smartphone in the Korean context.

Civic Engagement in the Smartphone Era

The rapid growth of new media has attracted the general public because of its potential for civic and political participation. Citizen-advocates in many countries are embracing new tools to advocate for causes about which they care. In the networked 21st century, civic engagement is in fairly wide use; however, "civic engagement mainly refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future" (Adler and Goggin 2005, pp. 236-7). Civic engagement also encompasses a range of specific activities, and systematic and effective participations in political issues are critical;

> "civic engagement has become defined as the one-on-one experience of working in a soup kitchen, cleaning trash from a local river, or tutoring a child once a week. What is missing is an awareness of the connection between the individual, isolated problems these actions are intended to address and the larger world of public policy; a sense that these problems might be addressed more systematically and (at times) more effectively through other forms of civic engagement (from joining a community group to voting); the belief that politics matters" (Carpini 2000, p. 346).

Public participation in the new media era can be arranged in two major forms: one focuses on "the occupation of physical locations of key symbolic value" supported by new media, which has been shown in several rallies and protests, and the other emphasizes the ways in which new media have "provided an invaluable tool for connecting and mobilizing citizens to

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[3] Social inclusion and exclusion "refer to the extent that "individuals, families, and communities can fully participate in society and control their own destinies, taking into account a variety of factors related to economic resources, employment, housing, culture, and civic engagement" (Warschauer 2002). It is a matter not only of an adequate share of resources, but also of "participation in the determination of both individual and collective life chances" (Stewart 2000, p. 9). In this regard, "digital inclusion emphasizes policy intervention to reduce digital inequalities and to foster participation of all citizens to the information society" (Verdegem 2011, p. 31).

become active" in civic movements. The explosion of online petitions is a good example of where the Internet has enhanced opportunities for political engagement (Kaldor and Selchow 2013, cited in Sloam 2014, pp. 219-20). Civic sharing is also central to "the recent quickening of citizens' participation, enabling the dramatic sifting through of ideas in real time, whereby the most resonant ideas rapidly rise to the surface," and these two forms of political engagement can operate in tandem (Banaji et al. 2009, cited in Sloam 2014, pp. 219-20).

What is significant is the increasing role of new media for the advancement of the public sphere, which has been one of the major roles of media. As Habermas (1989, p. xi) argued, the public sphere in modern society transformed into a discourse in which "state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people." The public sphere would require "media for information and communication and access by all citizens" (Fuchs 2014, p. 60). Therefore, it is expected that "the logic of the public sphere is independent of economic and political power" (Habermas 1989, p. 36).

In fact, grassroots advocacy actions that influence how officials vote— such as when a constituent contacts them via email, Twitter, or Facebook, signs a petition, or attends a rally—are having lopsided impacts, relative to other forms of advocacy. While public participation in traditional political institutions, including voting during key elections, has significantly declined over the past several decades, citizens utilize new media, including social media, to engage in democracy (Sloam 2014; Fuchs 2014). Thus, the rise of new media has heralded new hopes about the media's role in an open and active civil society, regardless of some concerns (Campbell and Kwak 2012). As Yochai Benkler (2006, p. 272) points out, the Internet "allows all citizens to change their relationship to the public sphere. They no longer need be consumers and passive spectators. They can become creators and primary subjects. It is in this sense that the Internet democratizes."

In recent years, the smartphone has been potentially empowering people to make their voices heard at all levels of government. Mobile engagement is enhancing this type of impact by making actions taken easier to share on social media, driving virality (Ory and Stoddart 2014). With the rapid growth of mobile technologies, therefore, several previous studies (Gordon 2007; Ok 2011; Campbell & Kwak 2012; Wei 2014) argue that informational uses of the mobile phone are associated with increased involvement of citizens in civic and political life in tandem with the public sphere. Using Twitter and multimedia messages, as well as telephony, mobile phone users contribute to

media's coverage, while discussing public affairs themselves.

As the smartphone has evolved, some scholars consider its technological potential as a new technological structure which allows "a plurality of unfiltered voices" (van Dijck 2012, p. 163). Smartphone users with high levels of interest in political issues and high use of SNSs are more actively involved with political communication. Those with high levels of political opinion and knowledge are more likely to participate in public discussions such as expression, information search and behavioral participation (Lee et al. 2012, cited in Park, E.A. 2014).

Several theoreticians (Campbell and Kwak 2010; Kwak et al. 2011; Lee et al. 2014) especially point to the positive association between informational use of mobile telephony and public engagement. Based on their empirical study, Lee et al. (2014) conclude that understanding the civic role of mobile telephony in the most networked country (Korea) may provide compelling directions for other countries where mobile telephony is widely being diffused, while their democracies are yet to be full-blown. Ok (2011, p. 328) also points out that Korean youth Internet culture includes the increasing mobilization of young people for public participation;

> "Korean youth have brought a new mode of political communication. They have demonstrated savvy use of diverse communication channels in making their voices heard, which is clearly distinguished from the monolithic and centralized mode of the dominant media. While online space provides the main channel for obtaining and sharing information as well as for forming public opinion, mobile phones have played a key role in mobilizing and coordinating actions on the spot as well as recording/live broadcasting events in progress."

This development may also affect the approach of public participation because citizens possess ubiquitous access to social media on the smartphone.

Based on this insight, some suggest that mobile devices increase citizens' engagement in social media. As Wei (2014, pp. 3-4) points out, "thanks to its converged functionalities, the mobile phone enables individuals to be engaged citizens." With the examples of the Chinese SARS outbreak and the Southeast Asian tsunami, Gordon (2007) also explored the influence of the mobile phone on the public sphere and concluded that mobile phone usage is contributing to the public sphere. The smartphone, as the platform of Twitter and instant mobile messengers, such as WhatsApp, WeChat, and KaKao Talk in many countries, presumably provides a democratic, user-friendly, and

personal communication tool for people. Citizens and non-profit-organizations in the smartphone era have organized civic movements—referring to the smartphone has enhanced opportunities for political engagement—to voice their opinions about government policies.

Citizens' engagement in the smartphone era suggests that the smartphone becomes a symbolic and material resource for people's public sphere. As mobile technologies have become some of the most important in the early 21st century, smartphones have become significant in conjunction with the public sphere, because "the accelerating diffusion of smartphones and tablets among the people causes an increased mobility and ubiquitous access to social media. Popular social media platforms (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) offer mobile applications, which enable individuals to easily publish their ideas or to follow contributions of other users" (Stieglitz and Brockman 2013, p. 1735).

Of course, the role of the smartphone in facilitating civic engagement has been controversial, because it does not always provide a positive relationship between technology and civic movements. "The principle of publicity activated by the people was taken over by state powers and commercial forces, which took control over communication flows, thus influencing people's social behavior and political preference" (Dijck 2012, p. 163). Therefore, it is premature to admit that smartphones and Twitter have emerged as a new public sphere. Those who are familiar with these new technologies and functions and the urban middle class participate in political communication; however, the majority of smartphone users are not interested in any forms of political participation other than searching for information (Lee et al. 2012). In addition, smartphone users using only basic functions were not very active in political communication (Kum and Cho 2010, cited in Park, E.A. 2014). This implies that the smartphone era may not guarantee quality participation in public affairs, which even intensifies the participation gap within smartphone users.

Methodology

This article uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods for major sources of the discussion. On the one hand, it employs a historical analysis approach. It investigates the recent development of the 'Terminal Distribution Structure Improvement Act,' known as 'Dantongbup' in Korean, providing empirical evidence to demonstrate whether citizens show an

increasing role in civic engagement in the smartphone era. On the other hand, it uses survey research assessing people's consciousness of Dantongbup-related issues. The survey did not directly ask about the handset subsidy itself, but people's consciousness towards several key issues relevant to Dantongbup. Through our examination of the Dantongbup-related issues in light of historical contingencies alongside empirical research, we hope to illuminate some of the underexamined complexities inherent in the conception, development, implementation, and reception of smartphone issues in the Korean context.

In terms of the survey process, trained interviewers of a marketing research firm (Hyundai Research Institute in Korea) conducted the survey research between December 8 and December 29 of 2014. A total of 1,000 mobile users through a random sampling were interviewed nationwide, other than *Jeju* Island. Respondents aged 19 or older were selected, because they could be independent mobile phone subscribers who started their own subscription to the mobile service, not subsidized by their parents, although many college students were still supported by their parents. In terms of age, participants were divided into five different groups, from ages 19-29 years (18.1%), 30-39 (19.1%), 40-49 (21.2%), 50-59 (19.7%), and over 60 (21.9%). The mean age was 45.45. Of the sample, 49.5% were male and 50.5% female. In terms of their political leanings, 46.5% were centrist, while conservatives (including very conservative, 3.5%) consisted of 32.8% and liberal (including very progressive 0.8%) made up 20.7%.[4]

The Corporate Sphere Distorted the Terminal Act

The current Terminal Act was rooted in the 2012 presidential election. At the time, Park Geun-hye as the presidential candidate proposed this policy agenda. During the presidential election campaign, Park promised to abolish mobile phone subscription fees as part of an effort to ease financial burdens on households (*Yonhap News* 2013). Park even promised 'a half-price of

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[4] Other major categories are as follows. By highest level of education, 5% finished elementary school, 9.5% were middle school graduates, 47.4% were high school graduates, and 36.7% had graduated college (1.6% finished graduate school). By occupation, management/professional/office workers consisted of 23.5%, followed by housewives (20.4%), self-employers, including small-business owners (18.9%), and service workers (16.8%). Blue-collar workers and simple labor force also made up 7.7%. For the rest, agriculture/fishing/forestry (2.2%), students (6.7%), retirement/no jobs (3.7%), and others (0.1%), followed.

telecommunications expense,' and in order to fulfill her promises, the Korean government has developed several policy measures. Consequently, the current ruling party initiated the Terminal Act in May 2013.[5]

Admitting that policy initiatives are crucial in resolving the digital divide in the smartphone era, at least partially, if not entirely, the Korean government has made a few major policies, all developed since 2013. More specifically, the Ministry of Science, ICT, and Future Planning and the Korea Communications Commission (KCC) actualized three major digital inclusion policies in order to provide smartphones to everyone; 1) the government allowed mobile virtual network operators (MVNOs) to sell their mobile phone services through the country's state-run postal service provider starting in September 2014, in a bid to help lower mobile rates and households' communication bills;[6] 2) the government planned to prod local mobile operators to phase out sign-up fees for mobile phone services by 2015; and 3) the establishment of the Terminal Distribution Structure Improvement Act (*Yonhap News* 2014a). Among these, the Terminal Act has been the most significant due to its potential monetary impact on the smartphone subscribers.

Regardless of the controversies, the KCC implemented the Terminal Act in October 2014, and the move prohibits mobile carriers from giving large subsidies only to customers who subscribe to expensive plans. Before the Act went into effect, some retailers were offering the latest devices, priced at around $800, almost for free. The law is having a considerable and disproportionate impact on gadget lovers (Ogura 2014). The government also monitors so-called guerrilla subsidies offered by mobile carriers on the Internet for certain hours on specific dates (*Joongang Daily* 2014).[7] The government argued that the majority of consumers were in need of protection. It therefore tightened regulations on discounts (Ogura 2014). It continues to crack down on illegal subsidies in order to make sure the

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[5] The shift from what Koreans called feature phones (with physical keys) to those of touch-sensitive smartphones has been evident. Korea had 56.8 million mobile subscriptions at the end of October 2014. The number of smartphone users spiked to exceed 40.1 million by the end of October 2014, consisting of 70.6% of total mobile phone users, up from around 1.6% of total mobile phone users in December 2009 (Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning 2014).

[6] MVNOs borrow networks from existing mobile carriers at wholesale prices, thus offering their services at cheaper rates (20-30% cheaper than existing ones) compared to existing mobile operators.

[7] Consequently, phone terminal prices varied depending on the date or even hour when a customer bought one or the store or sales clerk from which/whom one was bought. It was hard for consumers to get accurate information on terminal prices.

subsidy ceiling works effectively.

The KCC, which was in charge of this clause, originally passed the above-mentioned new mobile act that included the separate-disclosure requirement in August 2014. However, it met with harsh opposition from Samsung that argued about leakage of marketing secrets in the process. This led to delays for the final screening process which was scheduled on September 12, 2014. Samsung Electronics strongly opposed the subsidy-disclosure requirement. As expected, Samsung's argument was a commercial one, saying the Act could adversely affect their global competitiveness by revealing confidential business information (*Joongang Daily* 2014). Samsung stressed the need to protect its confidential information in revealing the subsidy process. "The separate disclosure requirement was about making the source of subsidy clear, telling apart the assistance from the mobile carrier and incentives from the manufacturer when the business operator discloses the overall subsidy. For example, if a customer who purchased a Galaxy S5 has received a total subsidy of 300,000 won, the business operator would have to mark exactly how much came from the manufacturer (e.g. 150,000 won) and how much from the mobile carrier (e.g. the other 150,000 won)" (*Whowired* 2014). From the start, the Terminal Act was distorted because the government gave a big favor to Samsung Electronics—the largest mobile gadget maker.[8]

The government originally argued that the authority to investigate and regulate manufacturers was essential. However, later it said that it is willing to listen to the voice of manufacturers and may make some changes. After meeting with Samsung several times, Kim Joo-han, head of the Telecommunications Policy Bureau of the Ministry of Science, ICT & Future Planning, said, "we are trying to get four kinds of data from manufacturers, and trade secrets cannot be disclosed according to the Information Disclosure Act. Even if the parliamentary inspection of the administration requested that such data be submitted, no trade secret has been disclosed so far, and we have no intention to disclose it, period" (Kwon 2013). The Ministry stated that it may accept some of their opinions after discussions with the manufacturers.

Consequently, "the core clause of the new mobile act which called for separate disclosure of subsidies disappeared, while the government opted for

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[8] Due to severe oppositions from several parts of society, as a main clause of the Act, the government did adjust the subsidy ceiling between 250,000 won (comparable to $241) and 350,000 won every six months. By law, smartphone retailers can add 15% to the maximum subsidy.

other alternatives, namely the business sector's voluntary implementation of separate subsidies or reverting back to the existing integrated disclosure" (*Whowired* 2014). The Terminal Act, therefore, symbolizes the reflection of the corporate sphere because the process is substantially influenced by market forces (Dijck 2012). Samsung has successfully negotiated with the government so that it changes the contour of the Terminal Act, which clearly proves the massive power of the domestic-based transnational corporation—the most powerful private corporation in Korea.

Although the government planned to resolve the problem of fairness by providing transparent market conditions, the involvement of the corporate sphere, emphasizing maximum profit for the private sector with a potentially democratic personal communication tool in the name of the national economy, has resulted in the change of the government initiative. In other words, the increasing corporate domination of public affairs in the realm of economy has continued to increase and the corporate sphere threats new technologies' democratic potential (Dahlberg 2005). The current Park government has sided with corporations, which is not surprising. The Terminal Act aims to ban certain discounts by cellphone carriers and correct price distortions (Ogura 2014); however, the consequences are not what the government expected. The result of the new Act has been mixed. The introduction of the Terminal Act has greatly influenced the domestic mobile market, because the sales of mobile phones and unlocked foreign imports have rapidly increased.[9]

Civic Voices, Civic Consciousness, and the Terminal Act

The Terminal Act would be beneficial for consumers because it might provide pricing and subsidy transparency, while lowering the cost of the

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[9] According to G Market, which has been one of the largest Korean online auction and shopping mall websites, the total sales of foreign mobile phones have jumped, in particular, during the first several weeks of October, 2014. Sellers are drawing consumers with lower prices as some market players noticed changes that the Act had brought into the domestic market previously dubbed as the graveyard for imported smartphones (Kim, J.S. 2014). This means that domestic handset makers experienced a serious decrease in selling their mobile phones. In October 2014, Korea signed 50,700 cellphone contracts a day, down 24% from the previous month. New legislation is blamed for the sharp drop. However, the profit of domestic telecom service providers has substantially increased since the execution of the Act, primarily because these service providers are able to reduce their marketing cost. In fact, KT experienced a huge increase in profit—as much as 135.3% during the first quarter of 2015—from the previous same quarter (*Chosun Ilbo* 2015).

smartphone subscription. However, the seemingly beneficial Terminal Act has faced serious backlashes primarily due to its favorable treatment of Samsung. It has provoked a series of protests and anti-government sentiments. Oppositions to the Terminal Act came from several civic groups, consumer organizations, and the citizens. Although their reasons for the opposition vary, they commonly express their disagreement to the Terminal Act. They have blamed the Terminal Act for pushing up prices and causing confusion among people wanting to buy new phones (*Yonhap News* 2014b). Many citizens have also developed civic engagement movements in order to repeal the Terminal Act.

Most of all, civic movement organizations demanded revision of the Terminal Act, partially because the original plan had been discarded due to Samsung's strong lobby. People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, which is one of the largest civic groups organized several rallies to ask for the revision of the Terminal Act, abolishment of the sign-up fees, and reinstatement of the subsidy-disclosure requirement (Kim, T.J. 2014). People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (2015) issued a report on 'The Terminal Act-100 Days' on January 15, 2015 and stated that "the Terminal Act is a failure" because "customers are still suffering from the highest prices of devices and the monthly plans." This implies that the Terminal Act did not achieve what it intended to do, mainly because the government had to change the original clause due to several and systematic oppositions from Samsung. The power relationships between the government and corporations, in particular, large conglomerates has not been new, but the role of Samsung Electronics has increased its corporate power in the midst of global competition in the realm of the smartphone sector.

Several consumer organizations, including the National Council of Consumer Organizations and Consumer Watch have also opposed the Terminal Act. For example, the National Council of Consumer Organizations (2014) strongly urged that a new law be enacted to normalize phone terminal prices and spread terminals with diverse range of prices by improving the current distribution structure, which had been distorted by the practice of non-transparent, discriminatory price discounts. Consumer Watch also organized several meetings and rallies, as well as petitions in order to ask the government to rescind or revise the Terminal Act (Picture 1).

These civic groups and consumer organizations have organized several town hall meetings and picket rallies, while several parts of society, including a political party (Justice Party), Korea Mobile Distributors Association, and others, take similar actions, although their voices are not identical.

Source.—*Joongang Daily* Newspaper (October 10, 2014).

Pic. 1.—Petition Organized by Consumer Watch to Rescind the Terminal Act

Of course, these civic groups and associations utilize social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and KaKao Talk to announce these activities while encouraging people to participate in the civic movements (*Joongang Daily* 2014). Several hundred thousand citizens have expressed their pros and cons on the Terminal Act on Twitter with the hashtag #Dantongbup (The Terminal Act) since the government started to initiate the Act, but mostly their opposition to the Act. In fact, the number of tweets was only eight in January 2014; however, it soared to more than 4,200 in October, 2014 when the Terminal Act went into effect (Figure 1). Including retweets, the numbers were much higher, which means that many smartphone users used their cutting-edge devices to share their opinions. Facebook has also become another major social media for many citizens who wanted to express their opinions.

However, the role of civic groups and citizens showed their limitation, because they did not take serious actions. For example, the online petition on Agora, which targeted 20,000 signatures, failed.[10] The petition started on October 1; however, it did not meet the goal, falling short with a total of 18,000 signatures. As our survey results later also prove, people did not participate much in civic movements, although they were interested in the issues and shared opinions via social media.

The lack of civic participation is partially because of the increasing role of the corporate sphere. As Scammell (2000) points out, citizens as

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[10] Agora is a platform of the Daum portal site which is often used for discussing and exchanging opinions about particular social and political issues in Korea.
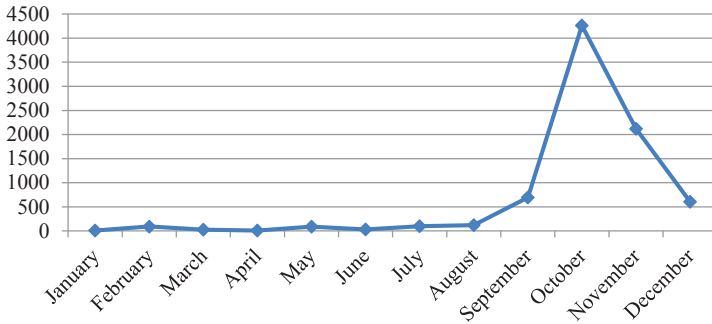
Fig. 1.—Dantongbup (The Terminal Act) on Twitter in 2014

consumers–if they are socially conscious and think of themselves as citizens when making purchasing decisions–are no longer only active within a model of consumerism. They are aware of what they stand for, and they exercise their spending power in a socially responsible way. However, as mega corporations continue to leave behind the regulation of the nation state, the citizen-consumer increasingly becomes an important counterbalance (Ward and Vreese 2011), and, as usual, the corporate sphere is used to getting what it wants.

Disparity between Civic Consciousness and Civic Engagement

What is significant in tandem with citizens' protests and participations is that civic engagement was not active. Since Dantongbup was enacted in the middle of the soaring use of the smartphone, some civic movement organizations anticipated that new media might provide an invaluable tool for connecting and mobilizing citizens to become active in civic movement. However, citizens' movements, both online and offline, were not significant. Civic engagement can be actualized in several different forms, from petitions to attending rallies and public hearings. However, citizens' consciousness of the Terminal Act and their intention to participate in several civic activities were not equivalent.

   According to the survey, the majority of participants were interested in the Terminal Act. Among interviewees, 13.4% responded that they were highly interested in the issue, and 39.8% of them said they were interested. Therefore, about 53.2% of people expressed their interest in the Terminal Act

issue, while 21.5% of participants said they were not interested. About one out of four people (25.3%) said that they were indifferent. Many participants also believed that the Act influences their daily activities. When they were asked whether the Act influences their life or not, 53.4% said that it influences their life, while 30% expressed they were indifferent. Only 16.6% of them said that it does not influence their activities.

In regard to these two fundamental questions, the younger users (19-29) expressed the great interest in the Act and believed that it influenced their lives, while the elderly (over 60) said they were not interested in the issue, and it did not influence their lives much. As Adler and Goggin (2005) point out, while it is perhaps true that the younger subscribers are used to actively engaging in political activities, the elderly did not show their interest, not only because they are indifferent to civic movements, but also because the Terminal Act does not directly impact their daily lives. Since many elderly users subscribe to MVNOs or feature phones with no subsidies, their interest in the Act is naturally relatively lower.

By education and job categories, college graduates showed more interest than below high school graduates, while managers and professionals believed there was an influence of the smartphone-related issue on people's lives more than housewives and blue-collar workers. In terms of their political identities, liberals (59.8%) were more interested in the issue than conservatives (42.3%). Given people's awareness is the starting point of civic engagement, this result certainly explains that Koreans might not only hold an interest in the issue, but also take actions as informed citizens.

However, people's activities were different from their consciousness. Participants did become involved in the learning process or civic sharing, but not actively. Although the majority of participants expressed their interest in the issue, slightly over one third of them said that they read related newspaper articles and information, when they were asked "if they often read related articles and information" (both online and offline), while 27.3% said that they did not read them. 35.1% expressed that they were indifferent. Likewise, in response to the question of, "are you talking about the issues with people around young neighborhood or any meetings," less than one third of participants said yes, while more than 36% of them said no (Table 1). Given civic sharing is one of the basic civic engagements, in particular, in the era of the smartphone and/or social media, this result explains that people who share their interests and opinions with other people and those who do not share are evenly distributed.

More interestingly, respondents' involvements in traditional forms of

TABLE 1
People's Attitudes Toward the Smartphone-related Issues

(Unit: %)

	Not At All	Not Much	Average	Somewhat Likely	Highly Likely
Interest in the Terminal Issue	3.8	17.7	25.3	39.8	13.4
Influence on Daily Activities	4.1	12.5	30	35	18.4
Often Read Relevant Articles and Information	6.2	21.1	35.1	30.5	7.1
Talk about the Issue with People or at Meetings	9.4	27	32.1	27.3	4.2

political participation, including petitions, attending a public hearing, political meeting, rally, or speech are much lower than their interest. When we asked whether they actually participated in petitions, public hearings, and protests/gatherings, only 3.9% of interviewees said they participated in any of these civic activities, while 82.7% of them were not involved in any engagements. 13.4% said they were indifferent. In addition, 95.5% of them did not sign any petition during 2014, regardless of a yearlong tension with several ongoing petitions related to the Terminal Act. This result implies that, virtually, nobody attended public hearings and/or protests/gatherings because only 0.4% of them participated in the public hearing, and 0.5% of them participated in any protest/gathering.

Meanwhile, almost half of the participants believed that civic participation is needed (48.2%) during the policy-making process, while one out of five participants did not believe the necessity. Although 31.1% of them believed they were neutral in this regard, it is fairly easy for us to say that many people are ready to actively participate in important decision processes. However, their desire does not make them take any actions. In fact, when they were asked "whether they have any intention to participate in the policy-making process," only 13.9% said that they are willing to do so, while 57.5% of them expressed that they do not want to take part.

Several previous works (Campbell and Kwak 2010; Kwak et al. 2011; Lee et al. 2014) argued that the soaring use of social media has substantially helped civic movements in several places. However, this current empirical result demonstrates that the gap in people's willingness to be informed citizens and their actual attitudes showing mistrust toward civic

organizations and civic activities is substantial. Participants rarely developed any significant civic engagements related to the Terminal Act. The result arguably shows that the relationship between the smartphone as a new platform and civic engagement has no significant positive direction, unlike what a few previous works may have suggested. Korea has become one of the highest countries in terms of smartphone penetration rate. Though, the usage of the smartphone itself is not enough to automatically actualize a mature democracy (Yang and Oh 2011). The possibility of civic engagement with the smartphones is potentially increasing; however, civic groups and citizens need to develop a participatory decision-making process in the era of the smartphones.

The Corporate Sphere Dominates Over the Public Sphere

The rapid growth of smartphones was not able to develop civic engagement in contrast to the high expectations in the case of the Terminal Act. The smartphone as the platform of Twitter and instant mobile messengers, including KaKao Talk was expected to provide a democratic communication tool for the citizens. As Wei (2014) argues, smartphones possibly facilitate discourse engagement as mobile news portals and Twitter-like micro blogs provide alternative outlets for information dissemination and consumption. It therefore suggests that explanations for the role of citizens on the issue of the smartphone should offer nuanced recognition of the interplay between usage patterns and characteristics of the user. However, in the case of the Terminal Act, our study shows that the subscription of new mobile technologies does not guarantee the use of the smartphone in civic engagement.

There are several reasons why the smartphones could not advance civic engagement, such as the structural (e.g., the lack of Twitter use), the cultural (e.g., the symptom of organizational silence), and the social (e.g., relatively controversial social issues and the lack of cohesion to social democratization), as well as the corporate sphere. To begin with, the structural reason caused the paucity of political communication, which could be a major source of civic engagement. In the Korean context, the number of Twitter users is far fewer than in other countries. As of January 20, 2015 only 12.8% (6.4 million) people have Twitter accounts, and Korea ranks around 15th in the world. Given its advanced networked society, which has been known as the test-bed in new media, it is quite surprising to learn that Twitter is not popular. Even

so, the majority of Twitter users live in either Seoul or Busan metro areas—the two largest metros in Korea; therefore, it is not common to use Twitter to organize any petitions and rallies in other parts of the country. In other words, it is fair to say that the limited usage of Twitter on the smartphone cannot ascertain the role of smartphones in fostering political discourse, which might lead to civic movements.

Korea's unique social culture embedded in modern Korean society also became one of the major causes, because, organizational silence arguably plays a part. In the early 21st century, Korea had experienced several unforgettable moments, including the mad-cow disease (2008) incident,[11] the *Sewolho* (ferry) incident (295 people died because the ferry Sewol sank in Korea) in April 2014, and an atomic plant issue over the past several years. These social issues provoked a series of demonstrations, protests, and media coverage. Whenever the general population tried to change the situations all connected with the security of people's lives, their efforts did not make any tangible difference, which has made many Koreans indifferent to some social democratization issues, including the Terminal Act. In other words, many Koreans simply accept the situations instead of actively engaging in the change, because they have witnessed several failures (Oh 2014). The general people could not change the situation on the issues on the security of life, which were more important than those on social democratization; therefore, they did not seriously attempt to change the status quo in the case of the Terminal Act.

Regarding the Terminal Act, the smartphone certainly contributed to the spread of the information, resulting in the strong civic consciousness; however, people's willingness to act was relatively weak, because solidarity among people could not be developed. As Jeffrey Alexander (2006, pp. 402-3) points out, "in the civil sphere, actors are constructed, or symbolically represented, as independent and self-motivating individuals responsible for their own actions who feel themselves, at the same time, bound by collective solidarity to every other member of this sphere. The existence of such a civil sphere suggests great respect for individual capacities." However, the citizens could not develop solidary sphere in the midst of the failures of several social movements in the Korean context.

Meanwhile, the social caused the relatively less developed civic

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[11] The 2008 US beef protest in Korea was a series of protest demonstrations between May 2008 and about July 2008. The protest involved tens of thousands of people after the Korean government reversed a ban on US beef imports because mad cow disease was detected in US beef cattle.

movement. On the one hand, the controversy of the issue itself made the situation confusing, so the general public did not want to engage in the process, while they believed that the experts might be better in dealing with the issue, instead of civic engagement. Many corporations and government bodies, as well as corporation-friendly media also used social media and traditional media in order to provide their justifications and relevant data. Given that social media is not only for civic organizations and liberal parties but also for government bodies and corporations, this kind of consumerism-related issue is by nature controversial, which make people indifferent.

On the other hand, the civic movement in this case has not been related to any serious social democratization and/or social issues, including class inequality. In the Korean context, with several civic engagements as shown in the cases of mad-cow disease and the *Sewolho* accident, if the movements are directly connected to social security issues, people act strongly. In other words, the scrutiny of political implications of the movement in the case of the Terminal Act could not lead people to connect with any bigger political resistance (Kim 2001). The use of the smartphones and relevant apps for civic engagement in many parts of the world, including the Arab Spring movement in 2011 and the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, were remarkable, mainly because there were very serious social issues involved. However, when the issues are relatively less serious and controversial, the smartphones and social media cannot be very effective as tools and/or mediums for public sphere.

Finally, the civic engagement surrounding the Terminal Act suggests that when potential corporate revenues and images are involved, the corporate sphere dominates over the public sphere. Consumers as citizens possess potential power with their smartphones; however, they do not always actualize their power, while companies vehemently use their corporate power in several ways, including lobbying, advertising, and networks.

In fact, when the respondents were asked "which actors should play a major role in the Terminal Act-related issue," many participants responded that corporations should be the major player (47.1%), followed by the government (44.7%) and experts. People who said that civic movement groups (27.2%) and citizens (24%) should play major roles were relatively low, while the media took the last position, other than international agencies (Figure 2).

Participants do not trust civil organizations and these organizations' roles in smartphone-related issues. When they were asked whether they trust any civic movement organizations, 36.2% said that they trust them, but 17.7%
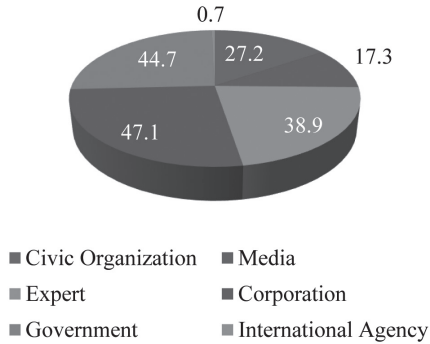
Fɪɢ. 2.—Which Actors Should Play a Major Role in Smartphone Issues? (Unit: %. Participants selected two actors)

responded that they do not trust them. 46.1% participants said they are indifferent. In contrast to this, when they were asked if they trust technical experts, 53.1% said that they trust them, while 13% of them said they do not trust them. These results show some participants do not trust civic movement groups or at least they are indifferent, which resulted in lower participation in several civic activities. Of course, we need to be very careful because the general people might consider the issue of the Terminal Act as part of the price policy which the corporations and the government mainly play, and therefore the general people are indifferent to the role of civic organizations.

However, when we regard the reaction of the general people to the government and corporations, we may argue that the corporate sphere works well because they play as a major stakeholder to persuade both the government and the citizens. Several telecommunications corporations, in particular, Samsung, indeed successfully developed their corporate strategies in distorting the Terminal Act to suit their business priority. During the enactment of the Act, Samsung Electronics' representatives met policy makers in the government and congressmen to persuade them. Samsung as the single most powerful chaebol in Korea executed multifaceted lobbies to the government, resulting in the change of the original plan for the company's sake (Kim 2014). Samsung as one of the largest consumers of the smartphone also actively used the smartphone and relevant social media to spread out its own corporate position.

As explained, in the smartphone and social media era, citizens might not only hold an interest in the social issue, but also take actions as informed citizens; however, their activities are not identical with their consciousness.

Many citizens also believe that corporations and government bureaucrats still can take care of the business. Consequently, citizens did not support civic organizations and/or media, while considering corporations as the most reliable source to deal with the Terminal Act issue. Although many civic movement groups developed their strategies, their lower status as a reliable civic entity could not effectively organize rallies and petitions. Needless to say, both organizational silence and the corporate sphere work towards the decreasing role of civic movement organizations.

In sum, as Habermas (1989) pointed out, the logic of the public sphere should be independent of economic and political power. However, in the case of the Terminal Act, the principle of publicity activated by the people was taken over by state powers forced by corporate power, which took control over communication flows, thus influencing people's social behavior and political preference. It does not imply that the smartphone as part of new media cannot take a role as the public sphere. Instead, it indicates that the successful civic engagement relies on the ways in which citizens demand "corporate responsibility to and dependence on democracy" (Scammell 2000), while asking the government to provide meaningful policy standards to resolve digital inclusion while fulfilling the fairness of the market.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed the relationship between the use of the smartphone and potential civic engagement in the case of the Terminal Act of 2014, which has been one of the most controversial issues during the year. It investigated whether the swift growth of smartphone use is positively associated with civic engagement, because a closer investigation of the Terminal Act might provide insight into more specific implications.

With the enactment of the Terminal Act, the Korean government planned to implement its digital inclusion policy. However, the Terminal Act provoked new critical issues, and therefore, several forms of civic movements occurred. Many civic movement organizations and citizens believed that the Terminal Act had been distorted because the government discarded the subsidy-disclosure requirement due to strong lobbying by Samsung Electronics. If it had actualized as planned, consumers would have accessed information about factory prices of smartphones and subsidies of mobile carriers and manufacturers, which would be very beneficial.

Diverse voices came out from several different actors, including

consumer groups, cellphone sale shop owners, and civic groups. Civic movement organizations had been striving to protect the customers from powerful capital and the government. Yet, it is not easy to assess their accomplishments, primarily because civic engagement has not been substantial. Although several civic organizations have tried to utilize the smartphone, the Internet and social networking sites, they did not gather people's participation; therefore, our findings for mobile communication for gathering and discussing the Terminal Act proved that civic movements did not entail active participation in public engagement. The information that was spread by the smartphone, including Twitter, may have contributed to "discourse within the public sphere and given a feeling of empowerment to the population" (Gordon 2007, p. 315). However, the case of the Terminal Act did not show any strong role of the smartphone in civic engagement. While there are several reasons for this relative week civic engagement, increasing corporate sphere has played a key role in curbing civic engagement.

We cannot deny the smartphone's opportunities for social and political participations. The smartphones and relevant platforms, including Twitter, as new tools of the public sphere certainly make sense in many cases. However, these mobile technologies cannot guarantee "a recalibration of an ideal public sphere, nor a dismissal of a polluted corporate sphere" (Dijck 2012, p. 172). When social issues are involved with the conflicts between the corporate sphere and the public sphere, it is not dicey to state that the corporate sphere takes over communication flows to influence citizens' political preferences. Mobile technologies have been considered as a new political culture that advances the idea of sharing, participation, and community connectivity; however, they do not automatically transform social norms for democratic activities.

Therefore, in order to actualize the nexus between the cutting-edge digital technology and a mature democracy, it needs to be accompanied not only with the citizen's will, but also digital culture (e.g. education on civic engagement), which is vital for enhancing mature citizenship in the smartphone era. While mobile technologies, including the smartphone, potentially mobilize citizens to become active in civic movements, it is eventually not technology but citizens to use, so without mature citizenship, citizens cannot work in actualizing their potential for democratic society when the corporate sphere plays a huge role in the smartphone era.

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