

ISSA Proceedings 2014 - A Strategic Maneuvering Analysis Of The Japan's First Internet Election In 2013

Abstract: In 2013, Japan experienced its first Internet election campaign in history. This essay attempts to analyze political moves in the campaign within the framework of strategic maneuvering developed by Frans H. van Eemeren. Different approaches were found between major and minor parties. An opposition party increased its seats with the effective use of the Internet. With the analysis, the authors hope to indicate the future direction of the Internet election of Japan.

Keywords: Internet Election Campaign, Japanese Political Parties, Strategic Maneuvering

1. Introduction

This essay is aimed at clarifying the strategic maneuvers provided by the ruling coalition parties and by a minor one in the 2013 Japanese Upper House election from the pragma-dialectical perspective. In the year's summer Japan experienced its first Internet election campaign in history, which was designed to provide a new form of argumentation. Until then, the previous versions of Public Offices Election Act had restricted the use of web tools in elections. But with blogs and social networking services (SNS), such as Facebook, LINE and Twitter permeating as convenient communication media among individuals, the prohibition of online election campaign became apparently obsolete.

Originally, the election Act had limited the amount of printed materials available for each candidate to call for support in consideration for fairness of public relations chance. Thus the original purpose of this restriction was designed for fairness against the freedom of expression. Needless to say, it is significant to reconcile both values. There is no wonder that the Internet campaigning on one hand would contribute to the freedom of expression with its accessibility, but on the other hand would raise the necessity to carefully design rules to deter false information or fallacious argument from erupting to confuse the electorate. The

less restrictive the rule becomes, the more rhetorical argument would be. In such a case argumentative moves likely derail from the rules of critical discussion in “the pragma-dialectical” sense (Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004).

In the tension between fairness and freedom of expression, how strategically did political parties and candidates maneuver their argumentative moves? How did the new Internet platform help to deter fallacious arguments or suppress sound arguments? In answer to these questions, this essay attempts to analyze political moves in the campaign within the framework of strategic maneuvering developed by Frans H. van Eemeren (Eemeren, 2010). Specifically, it intends to do the following: (1) examining argumentative approaches by the involved parties, and (2) evaluating the reconstructed argumentative moves with theoretically possible moves.

2. Context

In 2010, moves toward lifting of restrictions on the Internet use for election faded out on the verge of realization in the midst of political confusion on the resignation of then Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama (Motomiya, 2012). The former bill at that time had not included currently available online tools such as Facebook, LINE, Twitter, blogs, and the like (Kiyohara and Maeshima, 2013). In 2012, the movement for Internet election campaigns rekindled over online and real forums joined by citizens, intellectuals, and politicians with the next general election upcoming. Yet, this move was in the process of finalization when the Lower House election was held in December 2012. Under the conventional election rule, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) led by Shinzo Abe came back to power. As soon as being chosen Prime Minister in the Diet, Abe revealed his intention to liberalize the use of the Internet (‘Netto-senkyo’ rainen-no, 2012). Not only the LDP but also other parties agreed with the idea of opening online campaigning.

Eventually, on April 19, 2013, Public Offices Election Act was revised to liberalize the Internet election campaigning. But there were still some restrictions as only parties and candidates were allowed to send emails to enlist voters’ support for fear of impersonation, while there was no limitation on campaigns to blackball election candidates (Kiyohara and Maeshima, 2013). In this new framework, the official campaign season of the Upper House election began on July 4 and ended one day before the election day, July 21. For the 17 days, different approaches were found between major and minor parties. For example, the ruling coalition

parties the LDP and New Komeito held different views on various issues, such as revision of the Constitution. But they jointly devised an agreeable standpoint. On the other hand, one of the opposition parties, the Japan Communist Party began with target audience and topics. Among these approaches were there some tactics which made contributions to the election winning, although the use of the Internet seemingly did not raise the voting rate, which was 52.61%, dropped 5.31% from the previous election, the 3rd lowest under the postwar political system (Saninsen tohyoritsu 52.61%, 2013). Besides, only 10.2% referred to online information on the election according to an exit survey conducted by Kyodo News (Netto-senkyo yukensha hiyayaka, 2013).

The National Diet of Japan is bicameral, consisting of the Upper House and the Lower House. It is the Lower House that is superior in designation of Prime Minister who is authorized to appoint Cabinet ministers. The total number of the seats in the Upper House is 242, half of which become at stake in the voting every three years. In summer 2013 held was an Upper House election in which the 121 seats close to the expiration of six-year term were contested. Seven months earlier, the LDP and New Komeito had beaten the then-dominant Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) by a wide margin, forming a coalition government. With this momentum, the ruling coalition parties aimed to increase their seats to dislodge the DPJ again from the dominant position in the Upper House. In fact, the LDP gained 65 seats up from pre-election 34, and New Komeito gained 11 seats on target. The joint parties won the majority with the total 135 seats including uncontested 59 seats (Saninsen 2013 tokusyu, 2013), thus dominating both Houses.

Behind the ruling's victorious campaigns, minor candidates targeted a particular group of voters who were discontent with the major parties' mitigation approach. In the Tokyo constituency of five seats, two fresh candidates beat incumbents. One was former actor Taro Yamamoto, ranked the 4rth, who was the only new independent elected in the nation-wide. The other in the Tokyo district was the 3rd ranked victory of Yoshiko Kira young female candidate from the Communist Party, which became the party's first seat of the district in the past 12 years. Including Kira's seat, the Communist Party as a whole nearly doubled its seats from 6 to 11 (Saninsen 2013 tokusyu, 2013). These two first-time candidates, independent Yamamoto and Communist Kira newly attracted a support base in their election campaigns especially with effective Internet strategic maneuvers.

3. Theory

The institutional point of political communication is to contribute to democracy in general. Deliberation is a conventionally diversified genre of interactional activity in which the participants are motivated to critically examine the acceptability of a standpoint. Communicative activity types as the genre of deliberation in the domain of political argumentation provide wide varieties of opportunities for “collective decision-making for the public good” (Zarefsky, 2009, p. 115). Specifically, election should serve to deepen our knowledge and discussion about social issues in order to eventually make a public decision through a legitimate resolution process of different opinions.

Domains of communicative activity: political communication

Genres of communicative activity: deliberation

Communicative activity types [Concrete speech events]:

- Presidential debate [1960 Nixon-Kennedy television debate],
- General debate in parliament,
- Prime Minister's question time,
- *Election campaign [2013 Election Campaign for Upper House of Japan]*

(Eemeren, 2010, p. 139; *Italics added*)

In the principle of popular representation, however, the critical testing procedure of standpoints becomes complex since in many types of speech events interaction between protagonists and antagonists are exposed to the public through various media. Thus with the Internet use, the intertextuality of argumentative moves becomes even more complex because reconstruction of argumentative moves fragmented over the Internet media is painstaking. On the other hand, the difficulty of reconstructing argumentation simultaneously proves worthy of pragma-dialectical approach because the election otherwise would be considered dependently from the rhetorical perspective in the narrow sense and thus lack the institutional point to serve democracy. Also, it should be noted that there is a limitation on this study as critics' reconstruction of arguments is not fully reflected by the reality of what has happened, but instead focuses on the argumentative aspects.

Therefore, challenging is application of the pragma-dialectical approach to the Internet election campaign. The Internet tools provide nonverbal message such as audio/visual information so that online verbal information can be extensive in meaning. It is difficult to convert all nonverbal arguments into verbal ones for

pragma-dialectical analysis. That is why it is difficult to reconstruct Internet-based argumentative moves in a verbal diagram, or logic tree which suffices to cover the condition of analysis. To counter possible criticism of picky reconstruction, there are two justifications. First, it is significant to extract verbal messages to form a corresponding logic tree for the purpose of synchronically and diachronically checking consistency of arguments. This verbal analysis would pressure discussants from excessively pursuing effectiveness so that they are expected to be fair in the online platform. The other is that pragma-dialectical analysis functions as critical theory. Its evaluation compares reconstructed argumentation either with the normative rules for critical discussion or with rhetorical techniques for effective persuasion (Eemeren, 2010). As far as pragma-dialectical analysis serves to find points of derailment from any of the critical rules in a way that the findings otherwise would be unnoticed, such a research project is worthy of academic attention even though the reconstruction is not sufficiently expositive for the broad discourse.

On this point, it should be noted that any actual speech act cannot be perfectly free from fallaciousness if normative discussion rules are rigidly applied in a dialectical sense. Therefore, it is important for the rules to “specify in which cases the performance of certain speech acts contribute to the resolution of the difference of opinion” (Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, p. 135) with the assumption that there are some cases the principle of argumentation cannot be applied to. Ideally, a pragma-dialectical analysis should serve to improve a derailed case toward the normative rules of critical discussion, although it falls short by nature. In this sense, “to improve” does not mean absolute solution, but instead the concept of reasonableness in pragma-dialectical approach is expected to realize a better one. Also, it is necessary to understand the quality of fallaciousness not as ‘all or nothing’ in terms of its presence, but as linear in terms of its significance. In short, the tolerability of fallaciousness in pragma-dialectical evaluation depends on context or activity type. It is thus possible that the same type of move could be admissible in a commercial domain but could be fallacious in a legal one. This is exactly what strategic maneuvering approach should take into consideration.

The aspects of the strategic maneuvering in the election campaign as an activity type of political communication requires discussants to be reasonable and effective (Eemeren, 2010). In light of the institutional point of political

communication, being reasonable as a protagonist in an election campaign means that argumentation should be clear for the audience to critically examine for the public opinion forming and decision-making from the dialectical perspective. A candidate should clearly present the topical content and the supporting reasoning in a recognizably hierarchically ordered form so that a wide range of the audience can understand as well as critically look at the logical relation of standpoints and supporting materials. From the rhetorical point of view, a protagonist aims to be effective by exemplifying the arguments in an optimally plausible manner so that the candidate or the party can win trust and vote.

On the other hand, an antagonist in the campaign needs to be reasonable by making criticisms to relevantly test the protagonist's logical relation of standpoints and supporting materials so that argumentation to resolve a difference of opinion in a target topic will lead to a better course of action. Yet, in an election, the primary concern of candidates is to gain votes. From the rhetorical perspective, an antagonist aims to be effective to cast doubts on every aspect of the protagonist's standpoints and arguments as much as possible. Doing so might function to hurt the credibility of rival candidates and increase the possibility of one's own winning in the voting.

4. Analysis

This section is twofold. First, argumentative moves of the ruling coalition parties are reconstructed into a diagram and, second, those of the Japanese Communist Party one of the opposition parties are examined in the same manner but with more focus on its Internet use.

The coalition parties went by an orthodox approach. The LDP focused on economic policy, emphasizing positive impacts of an unprecedented economic package coined "Abenomics." In the manifesto of the LDP, the party leader Abe declares the following:

Last December we faced the challenge of "taking back Japan." It is a battle to take back Japan as "growing," "strongly recovering," and "protecting its territorial land, sea, air." For the first six months of the current government, the bold and unprecedented economic package "three arrows" drastically changed dark and gloomy atmosphere over Japan. [...] "Politics of decision" gradually made LDP's pledges certain to result. Yet there is much work to do in economy, education, reconstruction, livelihood, diplomacy and security. Rectifying "the

twisted Diet” will realize “political stabilization.” Therefore, we cannot lose. Japan has eventually woken to a new dawn. Let us regain our confidence and Japanese pride now. Let us join forces to renew Japan. (Sangiin senkyo koyaku 2013, 2013; translated by author)

New Komeito declares “Stability is hope” for the election (Saninsen jutten seisaku). It is stated in the party’s pledges that Japan needs political stabilization which could be achieved by rectifying the twisted Diet in which the Upper and Lower houses were controlled by opposing parties. The resolution will make the following possible:

- (1) to speedily resolve the problems facing Japan;
- (2) to powerfully promote the recovery of national powers, such as economic and diplomatic powers;
- (3) to improve people’s lives into comfortable and reliable ones, enabling each citizen to feel hopeful about the future. (Saninsen jutten seisaku, translated by author)

In general, it is an all-too-common attitude to insist that political stabilization is important to swiftly tackle urgent issues. Particularly in this argumentative move, however, political stabilization is depicted as equal to the resolution of the divided Diet, which is presented as the main cause of social problems. This abstraction functions to evade careful observation of actual problems of future Japan and major differences of the ruling bloc the LDP and New Komeito. In topical selection, New Komeito together with the LDP rhetorically established the standpoint that Japan should resolve the twisted Diet as the foundation on which they could base further argument without discussing significant issues in dialectical terms. Strategic avoidance of an important issue is apparent in the attitudes of major parties on the issue of social welfare.

The LDP, New Komeito and the DPJ’s pledges do not mention an increase in the financial burden of health care on senior citizens, a decrease in pension benefits, the raising of the pensionable age or other proposals that would be disadvantageous to elderly voters. (“Editorial: Parties failed” 2013)

Thus, they avoided offering difficult opinions to the elderly, the main electoral segment and, instead, simplified the cause of the problems as the coalition’s limited number of seats in the Upper House. If the main cause of any social

problems were the twisted Diet, then it would be the only solution that the LDP-New Komeito bloc wins the majority in the Upper House since the Lower was dominated by the joint parties. This would sound convincing when people felt highly frustrated with the previous government's inability to make a timely political decision. The following is a logic tree of the coalition parties' main standpoint.

Standpoint: *The twisted Diet should be rectified to stabilize politics.*

1. Argument: The twisted Diet is undesirable for its inability to make effective political decisions.
- 2.1 Unexpressed Premise: Japan needs speedy political decision-making to cope with difficult economic condition.
- 2.2 Argument: The coalition parties are capable of providing effective economic policies.
3. Unexpressed Premise: Economy which needs speedy political decision-making is the top priority now.

The ruling coalition parties, the LDP and New Komeito, succeeded in rhetorically creating a common ground to appeal to the public although they had conflicting policies which should have been dialectically examined. The common ground was to rectify "the twisted Diet," in which the coalition parties had been dominant in the Lower House while not in the Upper House. To begin with, the word "twisted" has connotation that it needs to be fixed. In reality, the coalition parties emphasized the twisted condition as the main cause of the problems of Japanese society. In the coalition's manifestos, because of the twisted condition, Japan cannot implement even necessary policies at the right timing. Thus, the coalition parties aimed to make the public focus on the correction of the twisted Diet.

Presenting the issue of rectifying the twisted Diet at the higher level of abstraction is highly rhetorical. If one agreed with the abstracted issue, there was no other way but to vote for either the LDP or New Komeito as mentioned earlier. In the past seven months of the current coalition government since regaining power in the last Lower House election, the power-shared government provided bold and unprecedented economic package, which was favorably perceived in the general public.

From the dialectical perspective, the argumentation derailed from the Rule 10

(Eemeren, 2010). The argumentation abstracted the detailed issues into one simplified issue. According to the pragma-dialectical rules for critical discussion, this is fallacious because the argumentative formation is unclear for its institutional point of the election campaign.

Next, the Japanese Communist Party is focused. The Communist Party set off a total confrontation with the LDP. The Party's standpoint was that in this election the confrontation between the LDP and the Communist Party was the true confrontational axis (2013nen saninsenkkyo seisaku). This was the continuation of what the JCP had aggressively campaigned. Thus, the JCP had formed a revolutionary image. But the difference lied in the JCP's attitude. Yoshiko Kira, often referred to as young female in the media was a very symbolic candidate of the Japan Communist Party that targeted at the electorate who felt discontent with the dominant LDP's policies. The JCP developed a soft attitude by positioning Kira in the party's leading figure in order to grant adherence by the general public. The following is a logic tree of the JCP's main standpoint.

Standpoint: *The true confrontational axis is the battle between the LDP and the Japan Communist Party*

- 1.1 Reckless Abe's regime is dangerously fraying at the edges toward collapse.
 - 1.1.a The LDP's time has expired and its politics is getting rotten at base
 - 1.1.b The LDP's three distortions are "centering around the business community," "mindlessly following the United States" and "turning back the tide of history."
- 1.2 The Japan Communist Party is the only party that can remove these distortions with a scalpel.

As for audience adaption, the J-Communist Party focused on widely sympathetic issues. In this way, the J-communist Party adopted strategic maneuvers to be effective for vote-getting. The JCP could have committed to communist ideology that denied the current economic and social security system. Instead, the conforming Communist Party emphasized two issues. One is criticism against black companies. The other is anti-nuclear energy. These issues gained a great deal of attention in the Internet as well as traditional media. In her Facebook page, young communist Kira frequently updated her activities so that visitors can access new and previous information about her campaign (Yoshiko Kira Official Facebook). In this page where movies are viewable, it is easy to find candidate Kira's commitment to anti-nuclear and anti-black company activities. These two

issues are opposed to the LDP's economic policy, aimed to appeal to the young electorate who were not able to receive concrete benefit from the current economic policy. Naming of "black company" is intended to criticize a company that exploits the young people with low salary for long hours.

Dialectically, the argumentative fallaciousness did not exceed the tolerability in the context. In the first place, shedding the revolutionary image might function as diverting the public attention from the party's other policies. But consistently the JCP clarified its stance on 46 detailed topics covering the general policy areas in its webpage (2013nen saninsenkkyo seisaku) so that more concerned viewers can selectively access them.

5. Conclusion

Pragma-dialectical reconstruction of the argumentation is useful to clarify strategic maneuvers in the election argumentative discourse. The Internet use in the election can function as delineating detailed issues to serve the dialectical institutional point of critical policy examination, while it also provides rhetorical opportunities to create one's new image as in the case of the young communist Kira's fresh one.

Positive aspects of the Internet campaign include the creation of public space in which participants can get relevant information as well as expressing their opinions. In fact, citizens with strong awareness on a particular issue such as the Constitution amendment, energy policy, economic policy, social welfare, or the like can easily compare political parties' and candidates' opinion or stance on the issues. Citizens can be active in the virtual that is related to the reality through the voting.

However, there is much room of the Internet potential to be cultivated. It is the 3rd lowest voting rate in the postwar Upper House election that shows ineffectiveness in terms of the general public's consciousness-raising toward politics. With the technical use of the Internet, political parties and politicians can respond not only to the existing issues but also find possibly interest-attracting issues to bring more people to the public forum. Citizens are not just consumers of information, but can be participants of argumentative interaction. In this regard, the strategic maneuvering perspective is one of the keys to develop the better framework of the Internet election campaign for the future.

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