Chapter 61
Scandal Politics and Political Scandals in the Era of Digital Interactive Media

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on scandal politics and political scandals in the era of digital interactive media. Scandals are the part of symbolic power struggles. Media is one of the main actors of these struggles. In fact, political scandals have a constructive function in democracies because they help releasing corruptions. After scandals, the public get the opportunity to discuss on the legitimacy of political-legal institutions and political system. However, this discussion is not possible in the conditions of scandal politics. This study is interested in scandal politics and political scandals in the era of digital interactive media. It evaluates the maintaining role of traditional media in the era of digital media, and the potentials of digital interactive media to utilize the constructive functions of political scandals in democracies. The cases of WikiLeaks and Ashley Madison affair are used to evaluate the scandal politics and political scandals in the era of digital interactive media.

INTRODUCTION

This study aims at clarifying the relationship between scandals and media in the era of digital interactive media in terms of scandal politics and political scandals. This study explains the difference between scandal politics and political scandals in terms of the presence or the absence of critical public discussion. The presence of critical public discussion on the legitimacy of political system after the release of a corruption is considered as essential for making political scandals functional in democratic system. This study separates the media power on political scandals as before and after the use of digital interactive media. It has critical points about the optimistic views on the role of digital interactive media on political participation and its role as an alternative media to challenge the dominancy of scandal politics.

This study examines authoritarian responses in democratic countries towards digital interactive media. However, this study does not deny the challenges in communication and information processes realized by the development of digital media. It tries to find these challenges and understand the main characteristic of political scandals and scandal politics in the age of digital interactive media.

Scandal politics is a concept related to the power of information in politics. Participative democracy supports the access to information by the public and the active participation of citizens to political processes by the way of public discussions. Scandal politics does not comply with the participative democracy consisting of critical public debate about public issues even if it is essential for the revision of political system. However, in scandal politics, scandals are the important parts of political power struggles. Media companies characterize scandal politics using scandals for both making profit and using these struggles as a part of reputation wars. Symbolic power is useful for manipulating people's opinion in order to get their vote in elections or eliminate political rivals. Media has an important role in this manipulation process. In terms of scandal politics, media holds the power of producing information and forming opinion. Moreover, media elites corporate with power elites in this process.

Scandal wars among politicians is a part of politics. Politicians search for information about the corruptions of their rivals useful to attack or counter-attack to them. Journalists and whistle-blowers are main information sources for mainstream media. Blackmailing is a part of political struggles in the conditions of scandal politics. These struggles cause to the loss of political importance of information promoting public debate. Thus, disinformation increases and trust to media dissolves. Details and stories about corruptions are used as profitable commodities by media. In this system, the link between scandals and the unethical character of corruptions disappears. Corruptions as sensational events take the attention of audiences temporarily instead of being a part of long term public discussion as a main problem of political systems.

With the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), digital interactive media is regarded as an alternative space and channel to challenge the dominancy of scandal politics. People tend to use new and alternative media channels (Castells, 2009). There is a respectable literature on the role of Internet, social media and multimedia systems for the establishment of a new critical public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001; van Dijk, 2006; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013). It is claimed that Internet has various information sources, and transforms the rules of traditional media and traditional journalism. It promotes investigative and participative ways for releasing information. Corruptions are becoming more and more visible by means of Internet and social media such as blogs, microblogs, wikis, or interactive online forums. In the last decade, new digital interactive media channels are used during the protests against governments accused by corruption (Rahimi, 2011). These new communication technologies are thought as a new potential to develop participative politics including critical public discussion.

This study firstly explains interconnection among political scandals, scandal politics and media. This part underlines the importance of scandals as a catalyst for public discussion focusing on the legitimacy of political institutions. Secondly, it dwells on the main characteristic of traditional media in relation to political scandals. Thirdly, it explains the role of digital interactive media in scandals, and scandal politics in digital era. This last part tries to clarify following issues: the maintaining role of traditional media in the era of digital interactive media; obstacles for digital interactive media; and changes in the nature of scandals in this new media era. The arguments of this study are discussed in terms of the cases of WikiLeaks and Ashley Madison affair affected the character of scandals in the last decade.

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