

## **Reaching Our Young Citizens: Comparing Model of Japanese and Indonesian Civic Participation in the Online Sphere**

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### **Abstract**

The expansion of online media as a public sphere for youth political participation created an ephemeral scholarly conversation. Online media offers the opportunity for the youth to involve in politics as good citizens by following the novel civic style in the web sphere, developing new platform in communication style, and engaging in online community. Indonesian and Japanese models on civic engagement in the web sphere will enrich the Asian perspectives from the established theoretical framework in the western standpoint.

Japan and Indonesia are two compatible counterparts to contrast the Asian case study. Both countries are relatively new in democracy, experiencing massive changes in the governments, political parties, penetration of technologies, and youth lifestyle. Both countries experience the similar struggles to understand the digital citizenship among young people. This research will answer the big question on how and to what extend the young citizens actively involved in political participation via media online.

There are two prominent theories as the platform to configure the comparison of young citizenship model in Japan and Indonesia. First, the researcher will use the framework of Dutiful and Self Actualized Citizenship (AC-DC). Each type of citizenship develop distinguish characteristics in terms of civic style and communication logics. There are four competences in each model, such as knowledge, expression, public skills, and action skills. Secondly, this study will find the pattern of online media usage for the youth political and civic participation and to archive the youth civic engagements as an appreciation towards democratic growth in the relatively progressive Asian country.

**Keywords:** participation, youth, politic, online, civic style, communication

The expansion of online media as a public sphere for youth political participation created an ephemeral scholarly conversation. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2011) argue that young people as the transitional generation become the dominant publics and users in the online civic engagement (p. 772). Even though, others, such as Andrew Flanagin and Miriam Metzger argue that ironically young people is the most skeptic demographic group on the issue of democracy include politics and civic participation (p. 17). In the same time, online media offers the opportunity for the youth to involve in politics as good citizens by following their novel civic style in the web sphere, developing new platform of communication style, and engaging in online community (Woolley, Limperos, and Oliver, 2010, p. 631). Therefore, the research area to explore the civic engagement of young people from various geographical and cultural contexts would be an appealing discourse. However, the non-western context on youth civic engagement especially in the growing democratic country with high population is still very limited. The big question on the ongoing theoretical framework according to Lance Bennett (2008) is “What kind of democratic experiences would we choose for future generations?” (p. 20) should be addressed through different circumstances. The theory-driven framework in the western countries offers a useful starting point in thinking about the scenario of the convergent technology and political practices to bring vibrant civic experiences to young people (p. 25). Indonesian and Japanese models on civic engagement in the web sphere will enrich the perspectives from the established theoretical framework. Therefore, this research will contrast the Japanese and Indonesian youth civic engagement in the Web sphere.

Indonesia as the reference topic in this research will bring vibrant perspectives on how the young people from democratic Asian low middle-income country participate in the civic sphere through online media. More than 41 million Indonesian used Facebook or 16,68% of Indonesian population are on Facebook (Jakarta Globe 2010). The Jakarta Globe (2010) also mentions that Indonesian Twitter users are also in the biggest six in the world. According Abdul Wahid Situmorang (2013), young people in Indonesia actively involved in the online social activism and establishment of political party via Face book (p. 8). They also participated in the mass gathering of political campaign and online networking. According to the research of Merlyna Lim (2012), Islamic online blogs also actively involved in the establishment of online global community on Islamic issue, social movement, and public

opinion related to Muslim brotherhood in the world (p. 129). Indonesian young people actively involved in the political discussion, express their opinion related to citizenship activity, join the political or social movements via Social Networking Sites (SNS) for example: Facebook, Twitter, Kaskus (Kasak Kusuk), and also the online forum such as Jakarta Post Forum, Detik Forum, etc. However, researches that comprehensively mapping the youth citizenship activity through online participation is still very limited.

Japan, in the other hand, will also bring different backdrop of research's justifications. The development of civil society and citizenship in Japan has grown from the virtually unknown concept to a massive debate between academia (Imata, 1999, p. 23). According to Karel Van Wolferen in *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (1991, p. 12), the concept of civic participation via offline in Japan has been a rigorous discussion since the period of citizens' movements and protest in 1960s and early 1970s (See also Frank Schwartz in *The Civil Society in Japan Reconsidered* 2002, p. 195). Masayuki Deguchi (1999, p. 11) and also supported by Shinichi Yoshida (1999, p. 7), they both argue that the development of civic participation since the traditional concept of "deru ugi wa utareru" (The nails that sticks out, gets hammered or those who fight against the authority will be in danger), or "okami" (the people who are above to point at the government) to contemporary concept of citizenship by reaching the young Japanese and informing the "softer" and "lighter" political message through Youtube and SNS (Kazuaki, 2008, p. 1). According to Kenneth Farral, the changing of value between "kanson minpi" (respect the authority) to postmodern approach of reaching the young citizens also change the communication style from only offline and one way communication to online approach and interactive communication (2012, p. 426). The government and political parties try to reach the young voters by following their civic and communication style. The population of young people in the online media has grown rapidly from 2.3 million users to 7.1 million users in two years (Kazuaki, 2008, p. 1). This massive growth and changes, according to Schellong (2008), push the government to go online through various tools in Japan such as Juki Net as the Basic Resident Registers Network System, SNS, and other Government 2.0 platforms. Even political parties such as Liberal Democratic Party, New Party Nippon, and Social Democratic Party went online by uploading their own Youtube Channel (Kazuaki, 2008), websites, and interacted with citizens through discussion forum in Mixi (Alabaster, 2008), 2Chan (Matsumura, 2008), and Alexa (Farral, 2012). Not to mention, the government or political party has effort in the worldwide social media such as Facebook

and Twitter to increase young citizens' participation in online media. Japan and Indonesia are two compatible counterparts to contrast the Asian case study and to develop the theory driven framework based on Western democratization. Both countries are relatively new in democracy, experiencing massive changes in the governments, political parties, penetration of technologies, and youth lifestyle. Both countries experience the similar struggles to understand the digital citizenship among young people. Hopefully, the study will open an understanding on the big question of how and to what extent the young citizens actively involved in civic engagement and political participation via online media. The study is also aimed to find the pattern of online media usage for the youth political and civic participation and to archive the youth civic engagements as an appreciation towards the democratic growth in the relatively progressive Asian countries.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Youth and Civil Society**

The theoretical development of the political participation concept, especially in its relation with public participation in citizenship activity has changed historically: from the concept of civil society which is stated by Robert Putnam (1993), the social capital, until the construction of “democracy which works”, started from the civil environment and organization adapt with the communication media (p. 6). The theoretical explanation is divided into three parts: started with the theoretical study about the development of youth organization from its history until the current contemporary form; goes to the discussion about the participation relation of these youngsters with the online generation; ended by the discussion about the form of citizenship which is related with lifestyle and ways of communication which have been changed from time to time. This is the theoretical studies.

Citizen participation concept is developed from the concept of civil society with its own definition and function. In his book, *Making Democracy Work, Civic Tradition in Modern Italy*, Robert Putnam (1993) brings the discussion to the intellectuals by asking and criticizing this concept of civil society. Civil society itself is the cornerstone for the construction of democracy as a result of the network of active local citizens (Mouritsen, 2003, p. 650). The interaction of these active citizens could produce social capital, which would help the formation of civil community. Many researches on this formulation have been done in many countries and give wide social contribution e.g. the influence of civil organization in national

and local election. One of the examples is the case study about the Turkish and Moroccan ethnic in Netherlands (Van Londen, Phalet, and Hagendoorn 2007). Community of civil society could lead its member to make social and political movement with wider range, more than its own group e.g. the study about the political and social engagement in Afro-American civil organization in USA which could reach the public interests outside the group (McKenzie, 2007). Research for the concept development of civil society which was brought by Putnam (1993) is continuously developed up to the analysis about the social capital contribution in the area of politics and democracy.

The social capital is an important part in civil society as a result of the political participation, the quality of government administration, the development of economy, productivity of population, and the responsive character of the government and social community. This community could escalate the interpersonal communication and the connectivity area for the civil society. Putnam (1993) emphasizes that connectivity area is shaped in the recreational sphere (15). There are indeed many critics about how this kind of community has a tendency to focus on social activity, makes it not political enough. In the other side, there are also many experts and researchers who mention the informal groups who are able to build trust and community, until the formation of the norm and habit provide bigger possibility for the formation of local network and public sphere (Habermas in Calhoun, 1999, p. 4). The example is the bourgeois salon which results to social deliberation up to the modern organizations such as YMCA, Sierra Club, National Rifle Association, and Taking IT Global (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011, p. 772). All of these organizations are pioneered by the members of civil society who are separated from the government and support the formation of supportive governance.

The members of civil society who have included in civil organizations, whether they are recreational, non-formal, or have been developed into political organization, could develop better democracy. This civil society makes communities and public areas which consist of organization/institution models that support or even oppose the government (Mouritsen, 2003, p. 655). These local organizations could give contribution to society, or as stated by Putnam (in Mouritsen, p. 654), *liberta commune* or “*liberty as common good*”. The contribution could increase the element of freedom in the democratization process. Besides, the civil organizations could also increase the interaction of society, which result to the

escalation of political competence, egalitarian perspective, the ability to compromise, and concern to the political figures from each member of the organization. At last, many researchers have characterized the organization which is claimed by Putnam could function as civil community (p. 5). The characteristic of such organization are its tendency of volunteerism spirit, its focus on local issues that is based on its concern of society, which then evolves to the national issues (McKenzi, 2007 and Mouritsen, 2003). The last characteristic is the tendency of communitarian style which is free from the will to conflict with the status quo. Thus, this kind of civil organization would be *supportive element* in local and national governance and democratization, especially in its relation with the formation of network, deployment of issue and opinion, and also social movement (Van Helsum, 2005). Resistance and rebellion could only rise if there is strong oppression that force them to fight the government back (Mouffe, 2009). There are other characteristics of this civil organization from the demographic of the member i.e. the members have energy for work productivity, responsive to the issues, and active in social movement. These characteristic is possessed by they who are in productive age and still in their learning and observing process: the population of society which is called as youngster.

#### Civic and Communication Style

The concept of citizenship in the context of communication science is highly correlated with the lifestyle of civil society and their ways of communication. Lance Bennett (2008) have already developed the concept of citizenship related to the communication and the political style of the youngsters (p. 7). The division of citizenship into Dutiful Citizenship (DC) and Self Actualized Citizenship (AC) is also highly related with the conventional and contemporary concept of civil society (Ward, 2011). These charts would deeply explain the difference between DC and AC in the categorization of political style ala civil society and their communication logic.

The studies of citizenship in the field of communication requires some competences in the category of political participation (Bennet, Wells, and Freelon, 2011, p. 839):

1. Knowledge to become effective citizen. This competence is part of the cognitive field and close to the paradigm of DC which is related with the possession of information about history, constitution, the pioneers, war, the process of democratization and governance, candidate in the election, up to certain stance in specific political issues.

2. Skill for expression as a part of affective field e.g. discourse, cooperation, negotiation, persuasive ability, and the mastery of communication tools such as the ability to write articles as a form of expressing own self in the wider public context.
3. Join network and group skill as a part of psychomotor area i.e. how to organize political event, how to make a meeting, how to make consensus in a group, ability to lead, experience in community dynamics, and the comprehension about organization role.
4. Take action skill as a part of psychomotor area. In this phase, the organization/individual already reach the participation and engagement level e.g. voting, develop positive intention toward election, understand how to affiliate and support certain political party or social movement, know how to fund a campaign, and even become the one who is elected, join the protest in street, or make political graffiti.

## **Methodology**

The research will answer a key question on how the young people in Japan and Indonesia involve in the civic activity through web sphere. Through this big question, the sub questions will be:

- a. To what extend the young people in Japan and Indonesia involve in civic action through web sphere?

The research will examine the youth participation in terms of:

- 1) Cognitive process (such as to gain information and knowledge about politics, social movements, political figures, etc)
  - 2) Affective factor (to obtain the skill of expression, such as enjoying/producing/spreading a creative content production, joining the political online group, supporting their favorite political figures, communicating about their interest in politics, etc).
  - 3) Psychomotor (to take action, such as organizing events/political organization, choosing to vote, joining fund raising, etc)
- b. How is the pattern of Citizenship model from the young people in online sphere?
    - 1) Is it included in the indicator of Self-Actualized Citizenship (AC)? Will it develop to Dutiful Citizenship (DC)?

- 2) How is the comparison of indicators in civic style and the communication logics between DC and AC? How is the online commitment manifested in offline commitment?

The research will use a qualitative approach through Focus Group Discussion. The researcher will conduct sets of discussion with youth organizations in Japan and Indonesia. FGD can bring up a collective data in terms of similarity or diversity of habits, opinion, and experiences. The researcher will use the network from universities to conduct some FGD sessions in the youth organizations facilitated by these universities. The targeted universities in Indonesia are in the city of Yogyakarta and Jakarta. The targeted universities in Japan are in the prefecture of Kyoto, Osaka, and Okayama. These universities are selected based on their active participation in local and national political events, the active usage of online media, and researchers' networking. Secondly, FGD session will be held by gathering participants from youth organization outside campus. These organizations are chosen based on their active involvement in the community, researcher's network or previous cooperation, and the members' activity in online sphere. The research has been conducted both in Indonesia and Japan, to compare the political participation of the young people in social media.

### **Indonesia**

The participant of the FGD research is varied from student debating organization, student legislative organization, alumni of exchange program, and nationwide political youth organization. The geographical location of the FGD is between Jakarta and Yogyakarta. The researcher conducted 4 sessions in the city of Yogyakarta with 25 participants. While in Jakarta, the FGD was attended by 14 participants divided into 3 sessions. In total the participants in Indonesia were 39 people, who actively involved in youth organizations.

### **Japan**

The participant of the FGD research in Japan is varied from English Club Organization, foreign language teaching assistant, member of global exchange student organization, workers union within alumni of exchange students, civic youth campus organization, political study class, and sport members organization. The



geographical location of the FGD in Japan is within Osaka, Kyoto, and Okayama. The researcher conducted 4 sessions in Osaka with 11 participants, 1 session in Kyoto with 5 participants, and 1 session in Okayama with 4 participants. In total, the participants in Japan were 20 people who actively involved in youth organization, within or outside campus.

## Results

### Self Identification on Citizenship Participation online

Indonesian and Japanese young people indicated the self identification of political online participation. The researcher asked the participants to evaluate their own performance in the political online participation using the two binary pole of political type of participation. According to the principles of a framework in self identification, the result was developed based on the analysis of the focus group discussion (Figure 1 and 2). The framework consists of four major levels, i. e. silent majority, active, skeptical, and optimistic.

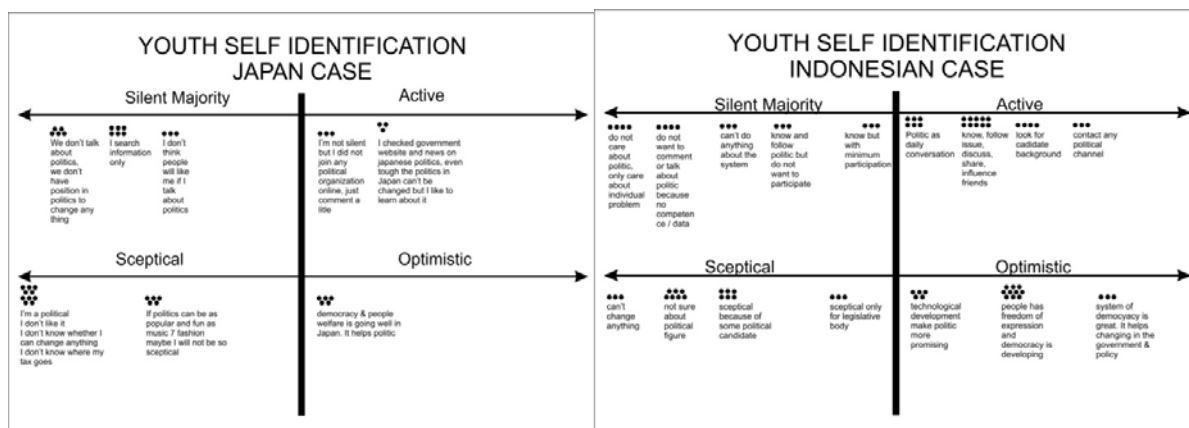


Fig 1: Self Identification Youth Political Participation Indonesia and Japan Silent Majority

Similarities between Indonesian and Japanese young people in identifying self performance of online political participants within the frame of silent majority are the idea of power to change. Young people from both countries experience similarity in their incapability and incompetence in changing the politics or system therefore they do not participate and prefer to be the silent majority. Indonesian participants: “I think I don’t have any power to change anything in Indonesian political system. To comment about politics, I need to analyze the system or constitution. I feel that I don’t have that competence.” Japanese participant: “I don’t think I have an important position in politics. Because there are so many steps before citizen’s request comes true in politics.”

The differences between young people in their political participation are the connection of politics with other people. Japanese young people consider that talking about politics with other Japanese online will not help them survive in the daily life. “But in my opinion, sharing political ideas are not generally common among young Japanese. Growing up, I have a feeling that many young people think being political does not help communicating with others or survive in society.” Meanwhile, Indonesian young people are used to talk about politics in daily basis or conversation. “I am usually silent in politics. However, I know what’s going on in the daily news about politics. I got the information from my friends posting on Facebook about politics. I thank them for that so I don’t need to read the news.”

#### Active

The young people who consider themselves as active also varied for each country. In Indonesia, the variation of degree of participation is from politic in daily conversation to actively contact a political organization. However, the government or political party website is not popular among Indonesian participants. None of them indicate government website as a place for them to search for political information, neither the political party website. The Indonesian young people prefer the website or Twitter of political figures to follow their political movements. While in Japan, the young people consider themselves as active by knowing about politics but did not join any political organization. The most active one is the participants who search for information in the government or political party websites, which was a rare activity by Indonesian young people.

#### Skeptical

The young people in both countries still consider the reason of incapability to change anything in politic and their low understanding in political system makes them skeptical about politics. Japanese participant: “*I think I am skeptic. Because Japanese politics are not clear to citizen. I do not know what they are doing with taxes we pay.*” Indonesian participant: “*I am just so little in the world of politics. What can I change? I’m aware that by voting I can do something. But is it true by my one vote I can change anything?*” Other reason from Japanese is the boring politics makes them skeptical about politics “*I wish politics can be as fun as music or fashion that popular among Japanese young people. I think I am skeptical about politics since it is not easy to understand Japanese politics and the situation is quite*

boring” While Indonesian participant is more on the figure, not the system “*I can be optimistic about politic if the figure is promising. But if the figure in politics is dumb and try to deceive the society, I will be really skeptic about the future of Indonesian politics.*”

### Optimistic

The young people who consider themselves as optimistic citizens in both countries cherish the democracy and freedom of expression as a capital for political participation. The pressure on the item in both democracy is varied between both countries. Indonesian participant: “*I am happy with the democracy and freedom in my country. Especially with the technological development that allow me to spread political information and opinion. Indonesians are tolerance to understand the diversity in our political position.*” Indonesian youth see technology and peaceful democracy as a capital of their optimistic state of mind. While Japanese participant appreciate more on the welfare or prosperity of Japan as the capital for good politics, “*At least I appreciate how politicians still try to sustain the welfare of the people in Japan. Many people see the good side of politics when they have a proper life.*”

### Social Media Usage

Indonesian and Japanese young people indicated their civic and communication style in the framework of political participation. They include themselves in the question of to what extend the can identify their activities in the realm of self actualized citizenship (AC). The researcher asked the participants to evaluate their media usage and the activities within each media with the framework of civic and communication style (Figure 2). The framework consists of three major levels, i. e. cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.

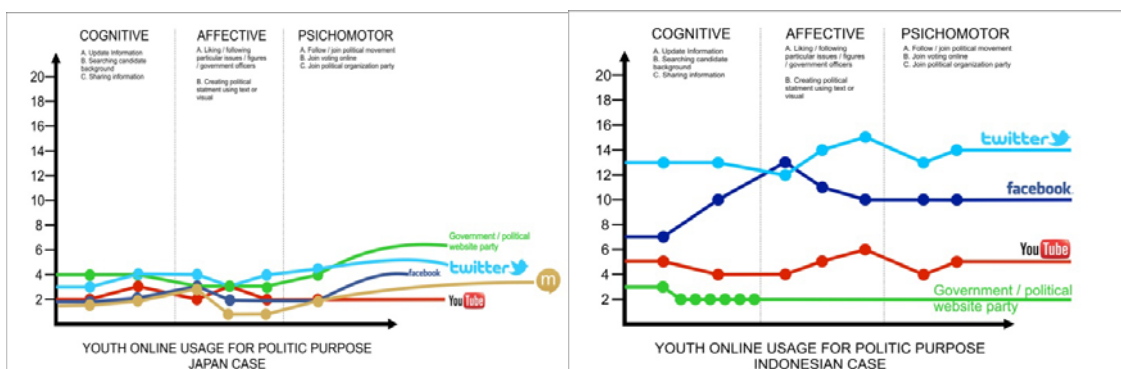


Fig 2: Social Media Usage Indonesian and Japanese

The young people in Indonesia have interest to participate in the Twitter media, Facebook, Youtube, and very low interest to check the government or political party website. In the other hand, the Japanese young people use government website as a source of information for their political participation. Additionally, Japanese use Twitter, Facebook, and Mixi for their participation, and very low on Youtube.

There are several level of a civic and communication for Indonesian young people.

- a. Cognitive: in the level of cognitive, Indonesian and Japanese young people tend to update information, searching candidate background, and sharing information.
- b. Affective: in the affective level, Indonesian and Japanese young people tend to liking or have preference to certain political figure and opinion, they also create or share fun image or political statement
- c. Psychomotor: in the level of psychomotor, Indonesian and Japanese young people admit that sometimes they join online voting, movement/petition, and political party/figure in online media.

## **Discussion**

The social capital is an intangible capital first, before it becomes tangible. Social capital starts with connectivity and interpersonal communication about issues or information related to government and politics. Even though, to start the connectivity, the informal and recreational media and style are needed to be used by the citizen (Mouritsen, 2003). Campus organization, community, and extracurricular /club activity may be a way to start the political conversation. This group of people may also interact in the online media, where the social capital is growing in the current fashion. Through online interaction, the response to government policy or political issue can be gained easily and citizen has access to connect with their community. Participants from Japan and Indonesia are skeptical in similar issue, which is the idea of power. As the social capital grows, the question of whether individual has power to change any regulation or policy is also growing. The notion of *“Should we involve in politics? Do we really have power to change anything in the government for the better life of our society?”* Or *“I don't think I have an important position in politics. Because there are so many steps before citizen's request comes true in politics”* are examples of how the narrative of “change or power to change” is important for the participants. As an example, from 59 participants in FGD from Japan and Indonesia, there are 27 notions of skepticism

caused by the participants' perception on their inability to change or believe to their incompetency to change system or regulation or condition. Therefore, it is important for any political party or public figure in both countries to bring the narrative of “man power” and “change” to convince the young people that their political participation can change something and they have a great power in politics. The importance of strengthening the social capital as a tangible power is needed to increase the optimism of the young people in Japan and Indonesia

The result of the research also indicates cultural differences such as the different of how easy politics become a part of daily conversation in each country. Participants from Indonesia can easily posted political message on their Facebook page, or twitting about their condemnation of a bad political figure. Other than that, Indonesian young people are easy to search for information through viral conversation rather than obtain the information in the official website of the political figure or party or even the government. However, their counterpart in Japan simulates different culture. Japanese is not used to daily conversation about politics online. This condition strengthen the previous researcher discussion on the development of civic participation of "*deru kugi wa utareru*" (The nails that sticks out, gets hammered or those who fight against the authority will be in danger), or is still applicable in contemporary citizenship in the point of civic lifestyle is still not used to publish their political opinion in the daily online discussion (Degucci, 1999 and Yoshida, 1996). They also choose the formal and official media to search for information such as government website and political party's website. This finding shows different culture and communication style. In term of social capital both cultural and communication styles will result to different quality of government, responsive character of citizen and government, and the shape of mobility for social community (Mouritsen, 2003). There will be a need for further quantitative research in both countries to determine the influence of degree of citizen participation to the quality of democracy and government.

The similarity on the participants' critique to their countries' politics regarding online political participation are the lack of information for politic, the low understanding of political logic for citizen, communication style, and political image by political figure. It is very important for Indonesian and Japanese government, political party, or figure to consider the public information to increase the well-informed citizen. Currently, both government in

Japan and Indonesia are in in the right direction in “softening” and “lightening” the message and channel of political issue through Youtube channel, Social Media. On the other hand, the government in Japan and Indonesia need to maintain the development of technology and the progress of social welfare as both of these factors are part of the flourishing factor for youth online political participation.

The limitation of research other than the language barriers to obtain the data, further research need to determine to what extend Japanese and Indonesia can be considered as comparable partners. The more researchers digested the data, the more differences the research can find. For example, obviously Japanese are seen as less active counterpart for Indonesian daily online political participation. Japanese are more closed to political conversation while Indonesian are more outspoken towards politics in online participation. Other than that, the activity of Japanese young people is still very low compare with Indonesia as counterpart. The interaction of these active citizens could produce social capital, which would help the formation of civil community. Many researches on this formulation have been done in many countries and give wide social contribution e.g. the influence of civil organization in national and local election. The research cannot reach that information; however, further research may produce the data for the needs of this curiosity.

### **Acknowledgement**

Thank you for Sumitomo Foundation who funded this research in 2014-2015 Research Grant to compare the youth political participants in Japan and Indonesia. Thank you as well to lecturers and students in the universities around Kansai Area and Okayama to let the researcher discuss this data with their important informants. Thank you for Mr. Koichi Ishizuka for the full support for Sumitomo. Thank you to students and participants in Yogyakarta and Jakarta who are willing to discuss this issue in FGD. Finally, for research assistant and interpreter: Bernadeta Agustina, Megya Rosetyana, Yohanita Rosdiana, big thanks to support this research.

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