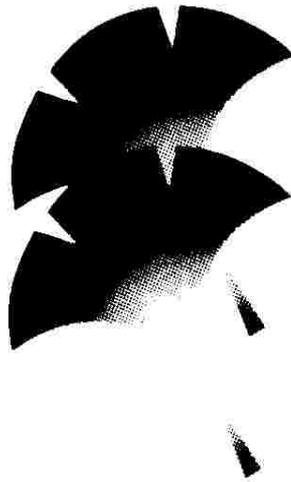


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**Citizens' groups in Japan
and the Internet**

Working Paper 03/2

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1. Introduction

The Internet, like other new technologies, will undoubtedly affect civil society and the workings of activists, citizens' groups, and the political process as a whole. But how radical will this impact be, and precisely how will the Internet change the way citizens' groups act?

The early expectation that the Internet will “level the playing field” and lead to “more democracy” by enabling more actors to enter the political process at lower costs still needs empirical confirmation. Recent research has pointed to the unequal access to new technologies, the so-called digital divide (Norris 2001), and its potential to even increase the gap between politically active and less active groups. As the conditions for Internet access in Japan are relatively even for all, but access to political influence is not, this is a good test case to ascertain whether an active use of the Internet can “level the playing field.”

This study aims to find out, first, how citizens' groups in Japan use the Internet, and second, whether this Internet use makes them more effective. In particular, links are sought between certain features of Internet use and success factors.

In order to find such links, a number of citizens' groups working on several different issues are selected. After defining categories for Internet features and categories for success, values

for each group must be found on an appropriate scale. These values are then compared using quantitative methods to find any associations between variables and to test hypotheses derived from previous studies. But since in many cases it is impossible to determine “exact” values, a careful discussion of the findings is essential.

These results are expected to show whether and how the use of the Internet, and certain features of the Internet, can affect the success of groups, perhaps even differentiating between certain types of groups. This will not only help judge the validity of assumptions regarding the Internet and its “leveling the playing field” potential, but also provide strategies and recommendations for citizens’ groups on efficient ways to use the Internet.

2. Research design

The cases researched for this study include nearly 150 citizens groups active in Japan between 2001 and 2003 in one or more of eight issues: foreigners, human rights, textbooks, whaling, women’s issues, dam construction, abduction, and peace movement. The term “citizens groups” is used rather than “NGO” (Non-Governmental Organization). Most of the groups would fit into the general understanding of an NGO, but this is by no means a clear term. Originally, the term denoted certain international non-profit groups engaged in development and humanitarian

work that were listed by the UN as reliable cooperation partners. The term has come to be used in a much broader sense, either as international humanitarian non-profit organizations (also called INGOs, International Non-Governmental Organizations), or even broader as almost any non-profit group working for “a good cause” and not directly related to a government or association such as unions, churches, or parties. The “citizens’ groups” in this study include this latter type of NGO, and many have the formal status of a non-profit organization (NPO). Others are legally foundations or other types of organizations, largely because the legal status of NPO is relatively new in Japan. However, they also include groups without such a legal status but which are non-profit and arguably groups of citizens concerned about a certain issue – which may be as broad as the “environment” or as narrow as “opposing a certain building project that will destroy the environment.” Some see themselves as “NGOs,” while others prefer the name of “network.”¹ The degree of organization varies greatly, but all groups have at least a name and some sort of bylaws. They cover the whole range of the political spectrum, although fewer groups on the political right than on the left could be included. From a methodological standpoint “good” or “bad”

¹ As Robin LeBlanc pointed out at an ASCJ panel in Tokyo in June 2003, many activists prefer this term because they want to avoid giving an “establishment” image.

should not make a difference (Castells 1997: 3), but some other factors such as personal connections may also vary between these poles, which may later have to be considered in the analysis.

The groups are selected for their involvement in one of the issues mentioned above, and were studied for several months per issue, between Summer 2001 and Summer 2003. Thus, the data for all groups in the same issue are from roughly the same time, while the research period for different issues can be somewhat further apart. The issues are not purely local (in which case direct communication might be easier than Internet) and ideally involve a decision or other measurable outcome during the period of research. The groups involved are all based in Japan but can be local chapters of international organizations. Various research tools – including website analysis, interviews, and surveys – were used to determine the values for the independent and dependent variables to be studied.

The data thus found are first used to describe the status quo of Internet use among citizens' groups in Japan. Several hypotheses regarding assumed associations between Internet use (independent variables) and the success of the groups (dependent variables) are then tested.

Independent variables: Use of the Internet

The categories to describe Internet usage are based on and further

developed from categories described by Taylor, Kent, and White (2001) for website analysis, mostly for apparently larger activist organizations. Each of the categories includes a number of variables, some of which (e.g. image maps, chatrooms) are rarely used by smaller activist groups and can probably be excluded in future. Some further categories have been added that cannot be deduced from website analysis but require surveys and interviews. Accordingly, the number of missing values in these categories is high. The first category – Use of Internet: general – includes several subcategories, like e-mail use, ease in finding, and homepage. The other categories are: Size and Effort, Ease of Interface, Usefulness of Information, Conservation of Visitors, Generation of Return Visits, Dialogic Loop. Ordinal scales for these were calculated from a number of variables (between three and seven). An additional scale, total Internet use, combines all these categories.

Dependent variables: Success factors

Once the values for Internet usage are determined, the next task is to establish the values for the “success” of each group. It is useful to split this, like the independent variables, into several categories, considering both success factors for the individual group and those for the issue for which they have been campaigning.

Success of the group

First, success factors for the group are considered. Since the outcome of the contested issue depends on many other factors as well, the success factors most directly related to each group are various forms of feedback and the visibility of the group e.g. on the Internet and in print media, and the shift of that visibility over time. Feedback factors include the number of hits on a group's website, the increase in contacts made by e-mail, and the general satisfaction of the group with their Internet presence. The values used for these variables are largely dependent on survey data and personal judgement or even very subjective impressions of the group members, and the number of missing values is often relatively high. These difficulties in the coding of the values itself must of course be considered when interpreting the data.

Visibility is somewhat easier to measure by counting references to the name of the group in various media. In most cases, the official name of each group was used in an Internet search engine (Google) at the time of research and in a newspaper database (DNA for Business) for two longer periods, one during the research and one several years earlier, most in 1998. In some cases the search term had to be slightly modified to produce more adequate results, especially when the official name was a very general term that would yield disproportionately many unrelated hits.

Success of the issue

In addition to the individual success of each group, values were defined for the success in each of the issues the groups were campaigning on. These values are the same for each group involved in the issue as long as they were on the same side of a controversy. In some issues, groups were campaigning against each other, and then naturally different values were established for both sides. Other issues were “good causes” (e.g., human rights) or campaigns against the government without any citizen opponents (e.g., dams), so that the same values are valid for all groups involved.

For defining the success in each issue, Forsythe’s (2000: 174) list of success factors makes a helpful distinction between the first step of “getting the issue on the agenda” and various practical achievements. Based on Forsythe, the following factors have been used in this study.

- A. Getting the issue on the agenda for discussion.
- B. Success in promoting serious discussion: “issue” mentioned in longer or more scientific articles.
- C. Success in shifting public opinion.
- D. Success in achieving procedural or institutional change.
- E. Success in achieving substantive policy change that eliminates the problem.
- F. Other factors, such as recognition or criticism by

governments.

To determine the visibility of the issue (factors A and B), appropriate keywords for each issue were used in a database for a newspaper (DNA for Business)² for factor A, and for journal articles including scientific journals (Magazineplus) for factor B. In both cases, the increase or decrease of references to these keywords over 5 years was calculated. These numbers of references in themselves are not useful to compare the success of the groups, especially since only one newspaper was used for factor A, and this may be biased toward certain issues. However, since the comparison is only made on the difference over time, the actual number of references is not relevant.

Public opinion polls were used to judge factor C – the success in shifting public opinion – and literature research and the consultation of experts helped to define values for the other factors.

All values were recorded on a scale from one (negative) to four (high success): “Negative” means a deterioration of the situation or loss of successes already gained (e.g., a decrease in references), “medium” a situation with no discernable impact or success, i.e., even if there were slight improvements in the matter they were

² The number of newspaper references quoted in this article always refer to this database, i.e., Asahi articles only. Figures for journal articles include only those covered

not more than a continuation of previous developments and could not possibly be traced to any campaign. Where comparable figures are available, e.g., with respect to references in newspapers, this usually corresponds to an unchanged situation or increases by up to about 10%. “Some success” describes clear improvements, which are however not very impressive, or a combination of such improvements with less success on other accounts. The conditions for the label “high success” included, for example, in the category of media visibility that the coverage had at least doubled, and that it was not very low or limited.

Issues selected and their success values

Textbook issue³

The visibility of the issue surrounding a “new history textbook” written by the group “Tsukurukai” (keywords used: *kyōkasho* 教科書 and *mondai* 問題) was extremely high both in the popular press and academic articles. For factor A, the number of references rose from 385 to 634 between 1998 and 2002, but with a peak in 2001 at 1914, making the increase between 1998 and 2002 far less impressive. For factor B the number rose more steadily from 27 to 94. In this respect, both sides were very

by the Magazineplus database.

³ For an overview of this issue, see Ducke (2002) or Beal, Nozaki and Yang (2002).

successful in getting attention.

Opinion polls show that in 2000, 51% of Japanese thought that the “last war” (the war against China and the Pacific War) was a war of aggression (Saaler 2003: n15). While the majority view was that history textbooks are an internal matter, more Japanese thought in November 2001 that the contents of the controversial Tsukurukai history textbook should be changed than that they are correct (*The Korea Times* 21.11.2001: 7). This seems to indicate some success of the opponents of the textbook. On the other hand, opinion polls about pride and patriotic feeling show only a very slight increase in patriotic feelings and the perceived need for patriotic education between December 2000 and December 2002 (almost unchanged at about 75% since 1991) (*Gekkan Seron Chōsa* May 2003: 40–43), and a further drop in various factors of pride in Japan and Japaneseness (*Gekkan Seron Chōsa* May 2003: 34–37), together at best indicating medium success for the supporters of the textbook.

The practical policy outcome was a success for the opponents of the new textbooks: The book was not adopted in any public school, and only in 12 private and special schools with peculiar selection methods, and so gained a share of under 0.05%, in spite of having aimed at 10% (*Embassy of Japan in Korea* 12.09.2001, Internet). For the proponents of the book, that is clearly a negative outcome. For opponents, the fact that the book is practically not

used signifies some success, although they could not prevent the ministry, Monbukagakushō, from approving the book in the first place, albeit with 137 corrections demanded by the ministry officials (Beal, Nozaki and Yang 2001: 180). The group Tsukurukai, which authored the book, has already announced “revenge” in the next round. On the other hand, there has been a trend to select conservative textbooks even if it was not the Tsukurukai book. In a way, the proponents of the book achieved to some extent their aim to promote a more nationalistic view of history (Yoshizawa 2001). This aspect is included in the consideration of “institutional change,” leading to a somewhat positive value for the proponents but negative outcome for the opponents of the book.

In terms of procedural or institutional change, the textbook affair has increased the trend toward more openness in the ministry’s approval process. For example, the screened manuscripts and official comments of the 2003 screening were afterwards exhibited publicly (Asahi Shinbun 09.04.2003: 15). At the same time, a report by Monbukagakushō for new education directives emphasized traits like “patriotic mind,” “public spirit” (Asahi Shinbun 15.11.2002: 1). The issue of institutional change remains unclear for both sides. Additional factors include the considerable recognition and visibility the Tsukurukai and their views gained abroad, as foreign media covered the affair and

foreign governments formally complained about the book, including a parliamentary resolution in the Republic of Korea (Sekai 01.09.2001). Opponents, on the other hand, received support from academic networks like the Historical Science Society of Japan, who joined the protest (Miyachi, Nakamura and Kotani 2001), and from numerous international NGOs.

The values (from 1 = negative to 4 = high success) used were for opponents of the textbook: A (getting the issue on the agenda) – 2, B (promoting serious discussion) – 4, C (opinion polls) – 3, D (institutional change) – 2, E (substantive policy change) – 3, F (other success) – 3, and for supporters of the textbook: A – 2, B – 4, C – 2, D – 2, E – 1, F – 3.

Whaling issue

The debate about Japan's whaling policy during the meeting of the International Whaling Committee (IWC) in Shimonoseki, Japan, in 2001, was also a controversial issue, with citizens' groups campaigning not only against the Japanese government but also against each other. The government's own aggressive pro-whaling stance becomes clear from its presentation of results, marking the voting behavior of other states only as "correct" (in line with Japan) or "wrong," irrespective of the actual question (MOFA 01.07.2003). References to the whaling issue (keywords: *hoge* 捕鯨 and *mondai* 問題) showed a high increase at 65

compared to 20 in 1998 (A) and 7 compared to 2 (B).

Recent opinion polls on whaling suggest that between 47% and 75% support commercial whaling (see *IFAW* 20.03.2002, Greimel 2002, and the clearly biased *Gekkan Seron Chōsa* August 2002 showing 72% support), while one of the pro-whaling groups (クジラ保護連絡協議会) quotes a 1999 Mori poll on its homepage showing only 10% support and 14% opposition to whaling (with the rest “neither” or “depending on the situation”: indecisive responses at over 70% greatly reducing the expressiveness of the poll). Although these polls are not easily comparable, they indicate that the opponents of whaling did not gain much public support, while the pro-whaling faction may have been somewhat successful in appealing to the Japanese public. The practical decisions taken at the IWC meeting represent a small victory for the anti-whaling groups: the Japanese government’s proposal was rejected – in spite of alleged efforts to buy votes – as has happened before (Saito 2002). These decisions also mean that whaling will remain unprofitable for Japan because whale meat may not be sold to China. This may in the long run affect subsidies and policies and indicates a certain success in procedural change.

Some additional success can be noted in terms of the recognition by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MOFA. The ministry criticized media and NGOs for their stance, thus

indicating that the government felt some effect of the groups' activism (MOFA 30.11.2001). At least since the 1980s, the official Japanese position on whaling has been somewhat affected by the public discourse and the need to avoid a negative image resulting from a hardline stance (Flowers 2003).

The values adopted for the success of anti-whaling groups were: A – 4, B – 4, C – 2, D – 3, E – 2, F – 3; for pro-whaling groups: A – 4, B – 4, C – 3, D – 1, E – 1.

Abduction issue

The issue of Japanese nationals who were abducted to North Korea in the 1970s and early 1980s gained momentum in recent years and came into the spotlight through the political events of 2001, including a visit by Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō to North Korea. Accordingly, the number of articles mentioning the issue (keywords: *rachi* 拉致 and *kitachōsen* 北朝鮮) soared from 129 in 1998 to 2423 in 2002. Journal articles increased from 26 (mostly in *Sapio* and similar journals) to 554 and appeared in a broader range of general magazines, although still few of them were academic. Opinion polls also show that the abduction issue became the highest priority issue regarding relations with North Korea: 83% of Japanese found this an important issue in October 2002 (*Gekkan Seron Chōsa* April 2003: 53).

The groups considered here support the families of the

abductees (and other disappeared people who were allegedly abducted). They were extremely successful both in actually getting several of the abducted persons back to Japan and keeping them there against the original bilateral agreement with North Korea (and perhaps their own wish), and in getting public and official support in Japan and abroad, publicity, and media attention. The group representing the families claims that the media were against them (*Japan Today* 05.02.2003) and that MOFA and especially Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko did not sufficiently support them (Nishioka 2003), but in fact they were assisted by MOFA and the government in establishing contacts with US politicians. According to their own accounts, these talks were more successful than they had expected (*MOFA* 14.03.2003, *Japan Today* 10.03.2003). The main demand of the activists during the research period was that North Korean family members of the abductees, particularly their children who were born in North Korea, should be “returned” to Japan. Eventually, even US President George W. Bush supported this cause (*Whitehouse.gov* 23.05.2003), adding international recognition to the immense domestic support. Criticism by the North Korean News Agency, KCNA (*Japan Today* 12.03.2003), also demonstrates the important role of the group; Forsythe notes that such government reactions indicate that a group must have had some effect (Forsythe 2000: 177). The groups were extremely

successful in spite of a limited membership base: a major rally with many prominent speakers was attended by only 5000 people (*Japan Today* 08.05.2003). However, they received support from right wing groups and from a number of politicians. This must be taken into account when looking at the impact of the Internet, since personal contacts are likely to be more decisive in this issue.⁴ The values used for these groups are A – 4, B – 4, C – 4, D – 4, E – 3.

Peace issue

For the peace movement engaged in protests against the war in Iraq, the keywords war and peace (*sensō* 戦争 and *heiwa* 平和) were used, which found not just the obvious vast increase in articles on the war but filtered those showing more awareness for the peace movements' motivations. Articles including these keywords increased to 2,816 in the first half of 2003 from 2,445 in the whole year of 2001 (with slightly less in 2002). Journal articles also increased to 112 in the first six months of 2003 (versus 173 in 2001).

Frequent opinion polls on the issue came to very mixed results, showing no clear trend and certainly no discernible effect of the

⁴ For more information on the domestic political links of the groups, including support by later LDP Secretary General Abe Shinzō, see, for example, *Japan Today* 10.03.2003, 11.04.2003; McNeill and Hipin 2003, *Sukuukai* 04.04.2003.

big peace demonstrations staged by the activists, but at least public opinion was largely in agreement with the activists.⁵ The success of the groups regarding the practical outcome was rather low, but it can be argued that the government's slowness to take action was related to public protests and an effort to avoid further criticism. This can be rated as a certain success of the groups in terms of procedural change. In terms of substantive policies, however, the protest efforts were not successful, as they were not able to prevent either the war or Japan's general support. The values A – 4, B – 3, C – 2, D – 3, E – 1 were used.

Women's issues

For women's issues, several different combinations of keywords (including *danjo* 男女, *byōdō* 平等 and *mondai* 問題) were used. All of them found a considerable number of references to the issue (in the range of about 100 newspaper articles per year) but with a decrease or at best a very slight increase both in newspapers and general and academic journals over the course of four years.

Various opinion polls also demonstrate a low awareness of the

⁵ Some opinion polls available on the Internet include *Tokyo Shinbun* 11.02.2003; *Mainichi Shinbun* 03.03.2003; *Japan Today* 17.03.2003; *Asahi.com* 22.03.2003, 30.03.2003; *Yomiuri Online* 25.03.2003, as well as *Committee to conduct a survey of Diet members regarding an attack on Iraq* 07.10.2002 and 13.03.2003.

issue, and thus of support for the activists' cause. In a government poll on "human rights," for example, women are mentioned by only 25% as a group to which the concept of human rights should be applied, although this is a higher level than for foreigners, burakumin and people who are HIV positive (*Gekkan Seron Chōsa* July 2003: 17; see also Fig. 1). The attitudes regarding women's lives have barely changed over the past years. Slight shifts towards favoring a less restricted lifestyle (for example that married women should not focus their life only on husband and children but may also think of themselves) are accompanied by a still extremely high and in many areas even increasing perception that men receive a (much more) favorable treatment in most ways of life. Assuming that inequality is not increasing further, this may indicate an increased awareness of such inequality, which would be a certain success for the activists. Combined with the barely changed attitudes towards women, however, no significant success of groups working on women's issues can be concluded from the opinion polls (*Gekkan Seron Chōsa* December 2002).

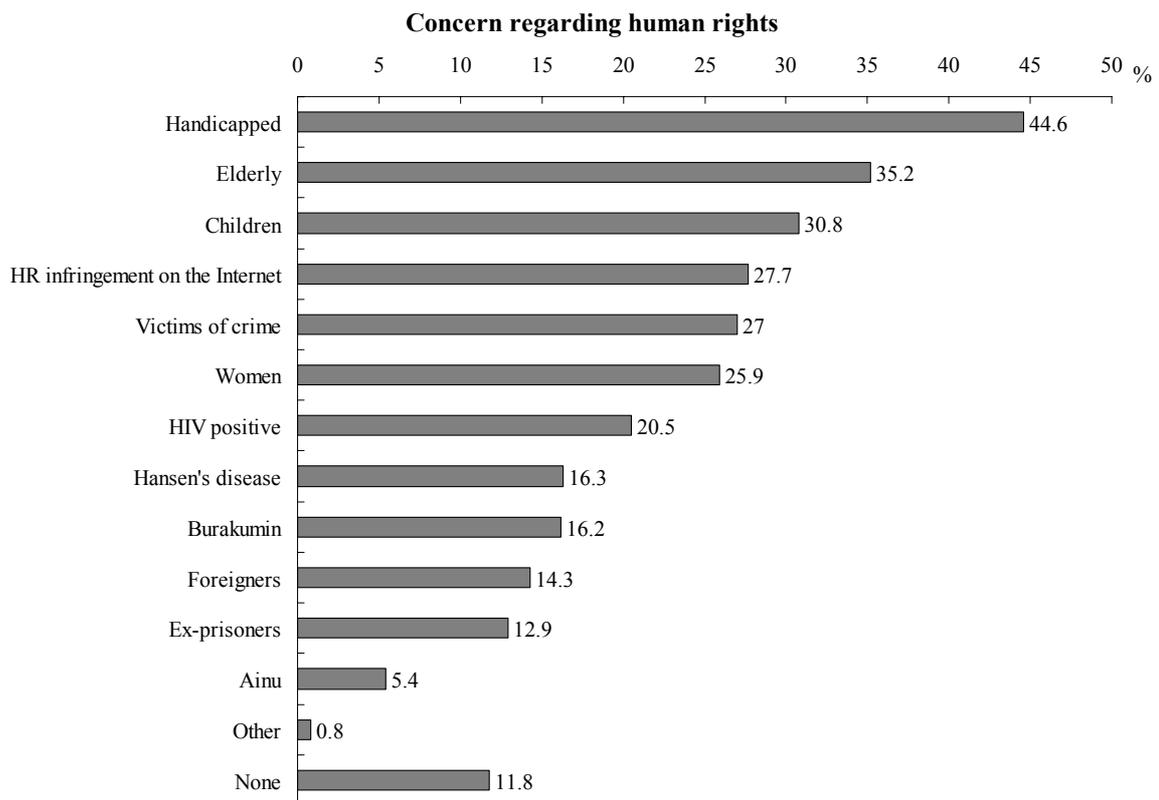


Fig. 1: Opinion poll on human rights issues (multiple answers, total = 289.4%). Source: *Gekkan Seron Chōsa* July 2003: 17.

The practical situation of women also shows almost no improvement in spite of some new anti-discrimination laws. According to a UN report, female participation rates in the labor force are still low, as are the accession rates to universities, while women bear a larger burden of housework even if both partners work (UNIDOC 13.09.2002). A revealing indicator is the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) calculated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for ranking countries in terms of gender equality, including factors such as political participation.

A UNDP report laconically states: “Some developing countries do even better than industrialized countries on the GEM. Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados are ahead of the United Kingdom and Ireland. Cuba and Costa Rica are ahead of France and Israel. China and Mexico are ahead of Japan” (UNDP 1998: 33). Japan’s GEM in 2001 (in the 2003 report) ranked 44th, compared to 32nd a year before and 38th in the 1998 report. The similar Gender Disparity Index (GDI) remained unchanged at 13th place between the 1998 and the 2003 report. Both are much lower than Japan’s Human Development Index, which ranks the development of the country as a whole. This means that the situation of women has not only not improved but that their empowerment – involvement in political processes and decision making – has even decreased in recent years despite a brief, positive trend (UNDP 1998, 2003, The Cabinet Office 2003).

One specific issue that many of the groups covered here are working on is the issue of trafficking of women to Japan. Japan is harshly criticized internationally for its laws facilitating trafficking, and if the Japanese groups had started the campaign, this would be a sign of success for them. But in fact most Japanese activism is following the international trend, and efforts to make this an issue in Japan as well do not seem to be very successful yet.

The values used here are: A – 1, B – 1, C – 2, D – 2, E – 1.

Dam issue⁶

A number of the groups researched are involved in opposition to dam building projects in Japan. The issue (keywords *damu* ダム, *mondai* 問題 and *kawa* 川) is often mentioned in newspaper articles, with a clear increase to 722 articles in 2002. Attention in academic articles also increased from 8 articles in 1998 to 28 in 2002, but since most of the articles were part of a series in just one journal, this increase can only be rated as “some success.”

Opinion polls can only be found for very few of the dam projects, but they indicate clear majorities opposing the dams (*Asahi.com Mytown: Nagano* 08.07.2002; *Kumamoto Nichinichi shinbun* 09.12.2001). In terms of the practical results of the groups opposing dam projects, a number of dam building projects have been at least temporarily stopped. Since about 10% of dam projects in Japan are abandoned, absolute success rates for the opponents appear high, although the government has taken some legal steps to reduce the influence of residents and local politicians on the process. This issue is relatively long-standing, and opposition to dams exists longer than the Internet. This makes it less likely that strong links between Internet usage and success in the issue can be found. The values used for the “success in the

⁶ I am indebted to Daniel Aldrich for sharing his knowledge about the dam opposition movements with me.

issue” variables are A – 3, B – 3, C – 4, D – 2, E – 4.

Foreigners

All groups classified as working on “foreigner issues” in this study are citizens groups in some way trying to *help* foreigners (as opposed to campaigning to reduce the number of foreigners in Japan, etc). The term therefore does not include the meaning of “problems caused by foreigners.” Media coverage was however measured with the broad keywords *gaikokujin* 外国人 and *mondai* 問題, and increased slightly to 871 newspaper articles in 2002. Journal articles increased even more (to 85), especially as several in the 1998 sample (43) had dealt with foreigners in other countries. Public opinion regarding foreigners shows somewhat diverse trends, but generally a deterioration rather than an improvement: While a majority agree with giving local voting rights to long-term foreign residents (most of them nth-generation Koreans) (*Mainichi Shinbun* 01.10.2002), more people in recent than in previous polls think that foreigners do not need the same rights, and that a disadvantageous treatment of foreigners is unavoidable (*Gekkan Seron Chōsa* July 2003: 68–71). Foreigners appear near the bottom of a list of groups whose human rights should be safeguarded, at 14.3% of multiple responses just ahead of ex-prisoners, but far behind groups like the handicapped, elderly, and children (*Gekkan Seron Chōsa* July 2003: 17; see Fig.

1). Practical improvements of the situation have been rare, except for the regular fingerprinting of foreign residents (including the Korean minority), which was finally abolished after a 20-year movement (Nakamura 2002).

The following values are assumed for the groups working on “foreigner issues”: A – 3, B – 4, C – 1, D – 2, E – 2. Slightly different values were used for a group involved in “Tamachan” actions.⁷

Human rights

The issue of human rights (keywords *jinken* 人權 and *mondai* 問題) has seen a great increase in attention in general and in academic journals (from 129 to 421 references between 1998 and 2002), with some new journals devoted to human rights or similar issues. Some of them deal with the abduction issue (see above), and do not necessarily have the same outlook as most of the human rights groups researched here. References in newspapers interestingly saw a slight decrease to 1,410 articles in 2002.

Opinion polls show that human rights still do not have a high priority compared to conformity with norms: In a government survey, a large majority agrees that “all that talk about human

⁷ As a publicity stunt, a municipality awarded a local resident’s card to a bearded seal, “Tamachan,” that had appeared in a river. Foreigners then demanded the same, as they usually cannot get a resident’s card.

rights has the effect that many people do not consider the trouble they cause for others by demanding their rights.” The agreement with this statement rose steadily until 1997 but dropped somewhat in 2003, indicating a slight success for the human rights movement (*Gekkan Seron Chōsa* July 2003: 14). The overall success of the groups seems low, however. Human rights standards in Japan as reported by Amnesty International (*Amnesty International Homepage* 2003) have not significantly improved over the last years in spite of some new legislation; executions, torture and ill-treatment of prisoners, and deportation of asylum seekers are still common. For example, only 11 people were recognized as refugees in 2003. The UN and UNDP reports mentioned above also support this conclusion.

The values used for these groups are: A – 1, B – 4, C – 3, D – 2, E – 1.

3. Preliminary results

Official statistics as well as user surveys (Sōmushō 29.08.2003, *The World Internet Project Japan* 2002) show that the Internet and e-mail are fairly widespread in Japan and that penetration rates are steadily increasing. The collected data illustrate these trends: by far the majority of the groups use e-mail regularly (more than 80%) and have their own homepages (83%).

Information about most of those groups that have no homepage of

their own can at least be found elsewhere on the World Wide Web. For most of the groups, the presence on the Internet is no major investment but is pursued almost as a matter of course. On the other hand, the data also give an impression of the status quo regarding certain features and usages of the Internet that are not covered in most statistics. For example, a majority of the groups studied did not respond to simple requests sent by e-mail to an address available on the Internet. Many of the interactive features of the Internet are still only rarely used on the citizens' groups websites. Very few groups offer Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) on their homepages, and none of the groups covered here had a chat feature. And even a though high Internet access rate via mobile phones is one of the key features of the Japanese Internet landscape (Sōmushō 29.08.2003), very few of the groups offer a website accessible via mobile phone. The following graphics give an overview of some of the most relevant findings regarding factual Internet use by the Japanese citizens' groups researched in this study.

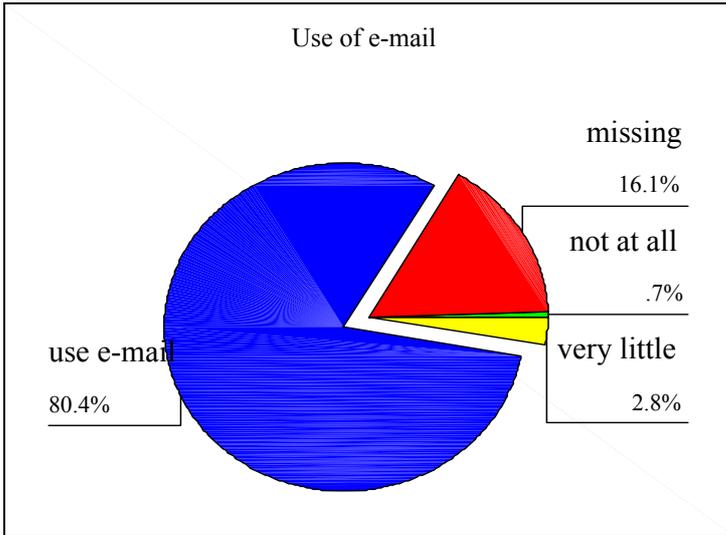


Fig. 2: Missing values are included since it can be assumed that a higher percentage of the groups where no data could be obtained do not use e-mail at all. Presumably the groups that do not use e-mail at all do not exceed a few percent, however. N=143.

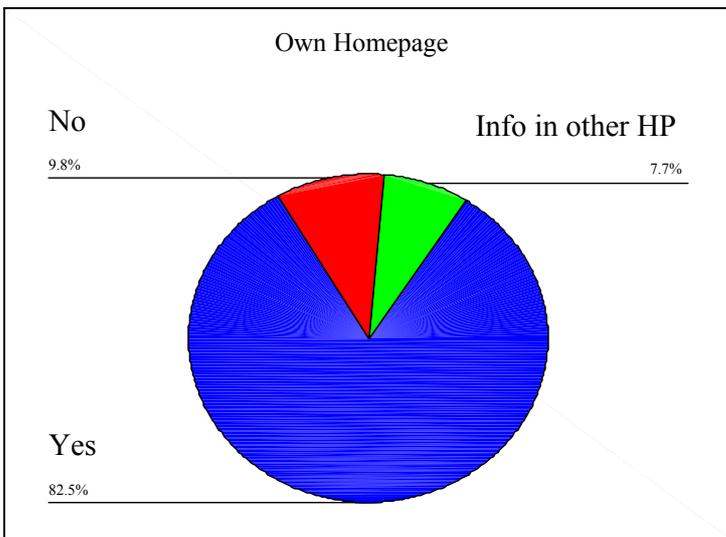


Fig. 3: Most groups have their own homepage, and nearly half of the remaining groups are mentioned on other sites (NGO directories or local government sites) with some contact information. N=143.

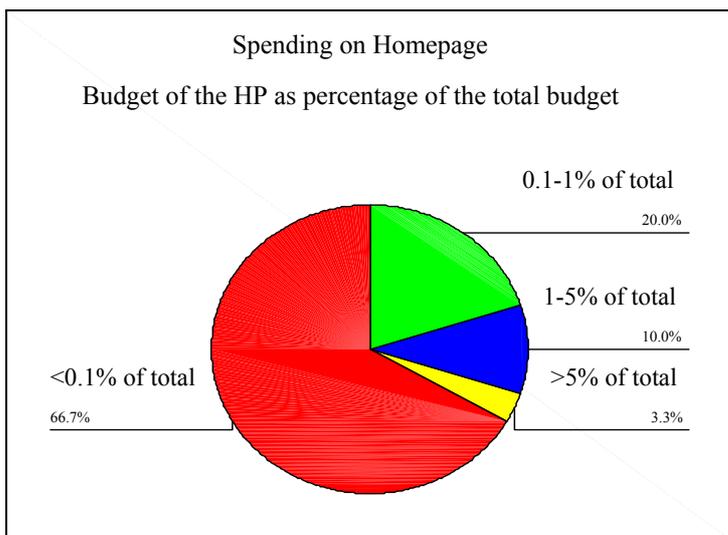


Fig. 4: Most groups spend a very small part of their budget on their Internet presence, often just the cost of having an e-mail account that comes with some web space. Often they have no budget planning or strategies for the homepage. N=32.

A majority of groups does not answer e-mail requests directed to an e-mail address provided on the homepage or otherwise publicly available, even if the request apparently comes from a potential supporter. Few offer a Bulletin Board System (BBS), and even fewer a website for mobile phone users (see Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of groups offering certain Internet services:

	No	Yes
Prompt response to a simple e-mail question	55%	45%
Bulletin Board System (BBS)	82%	18%
Website for mobile phone users	88%	12%

Hypothesis testing

A number of hypotheses derived from the general theory and first impressions of the data were explored and tested. Some of them are very general assumptions about a connection between Internet usage and success, while others look at single aspects of Internet usage in more detail. A selection of the findings is presented here. With all the results, it is necessary to note that the number of cases is not very high, and many of the variables are ordinary rather than metric values and “soft” in the sense that they are based on surveys, interviews, and the judgement of people in the group, or observation on “high – low” scales. Other scales are combined from several variables, which in most cases are not weighted. Some variables, such as the “easy to find” variable, are not entirely independent variables. On the one hand, a group can make efforts at promoting their page, including having it listed in directories, ask other groups to include a link, join web rings, etc., on the other hand, it is already a sign of success and of being well-known if many sites set links to the page; this may happen without much effort by the group. The latter is relevant only for some groups in the sample, and the variable has here been used as an independent variable, but distortions because of this double role are possible. In addition, a tighter time frame for the whole research would be convenient, but as many “issues” are limited to

certain times, this is not possible in this research design. The data are comparable because all cases relate Internet use only at the time of the respective issue (a few weeks or months for each issue) with the success during the same time.

Because of such methodological problems, only in cases where the data revealed very strong correlations between the independent and dependent variables were hypotheses accepted. Even then, further confirmation and a discussion of the results is necessary. Of course, a causal relationship cannot be assumed even if there is a rather strong association between the independent and dependent variables; but this can be a starting point for further discussion.

1. More Internet presence corresponds to more success

The first hypothesis is that a higher “total use of Internet,” i.e. a higher value on the combined scale of Internet usage variables, corresponds to more success, i.e., higher values on the combined scale for different success factors (effect 2). This is one important precondition for the “leveling the playing field” theory: Easy access to the Internet can only empower marginalized groups if use of the Internet does indeed positively affect performance. Another precondition is of course that this easy access is available and used and that it includes all relevant features.

Fig. 5 shows a boxplot diagram of the data, with all cases

grouped in five categories of Internet use. Those on the right side have more Internet features or use the Internet more actively than those further to the left. The number of cases in each category is noted in the line directly below the graph (“N =”). For each category, the range of observed success values is given as a vertical line, the median⁸ as a horizontal line. The box represents only those 50% of the cases that are closest to the median (i.e. excluding the upper and lower quartile).⁹ The graph does indicate a tendency as predicted by the hypothesis.

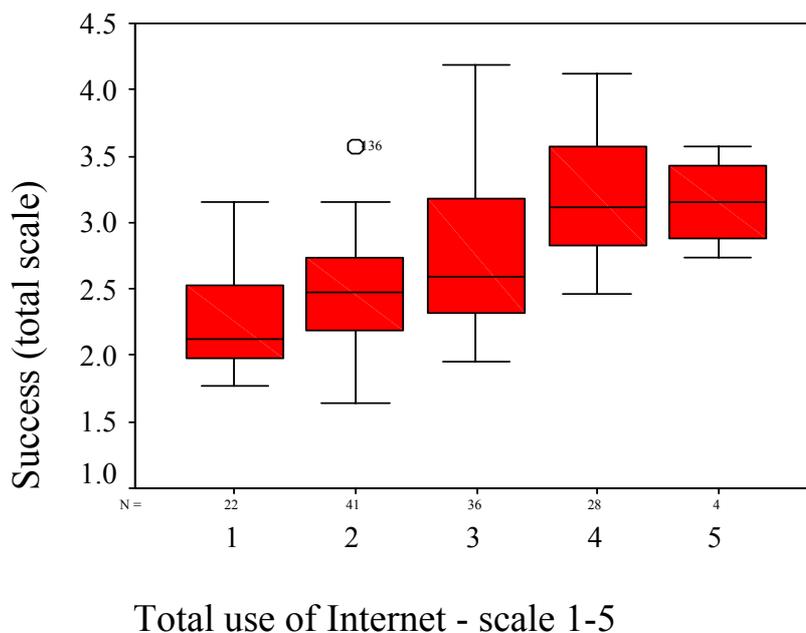


Fig. 5: Relation between use of Internet and success of the group.

⁸ The median (not the mean!) is the value appearing in the middle if the batch is ordered from lowest to highest values.

⁹ Cases that are apart from the median by more than three times the box width are considered outliers and marked separately. They are not considered for measuring the maximum and minimum values and thus for the vertical line indicating the total range of values.

Clearly, the mean values for the cases depicted on the right are higher than those on the left, and the statistical significance of this difference can be confirmed. A statistical test (ANOVA) analyses whether there is a significant relationship between the two variables.¹⁰ In this case, a high significance with $p < 0.001$ was found (i.e. less than a 0.1% chance that the difference in the means observed in the graph is not significant but just a coincidence).¹¹

The above comparison of the two combined scales is somewhat problematic because it combines many different values. Some of them are more obviously related than others, and closer attention to individual factors is necessary to find out which sorts of Internet use are related to which success factors. The following two hypotheses will give an example.

2. Homepage and visibility

As having a homepage should increase the visibility of a group, two hypotheses are considered here: 1. Groups that have a homepage are more often mentioned elsewhere on the Internet

¹⁰ For some of the ANOVAs mentioned here, tests on normal distribution were not quite satisfactory. In these cases, this is mentioned in the text.

¹¹ “p” gives the probability of making a mistake by rejecting the null hypothesis, i.e. the hypothesis claiming just the opposite of the hypothesis researched. In this case, the null hypothesis is that any connection between “Internet use” and “success” is purely coincidental. It is more than 99.9% safe to reject this null-hypothesis; only in 0.1% of

than groups without a homepage. 2. Groups that have a homepage are more often mentioned in the print media (newspapers).

The data (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7) do indeed show a clear difference in both kinds of visibility depending on whether a group has a homepage or not.

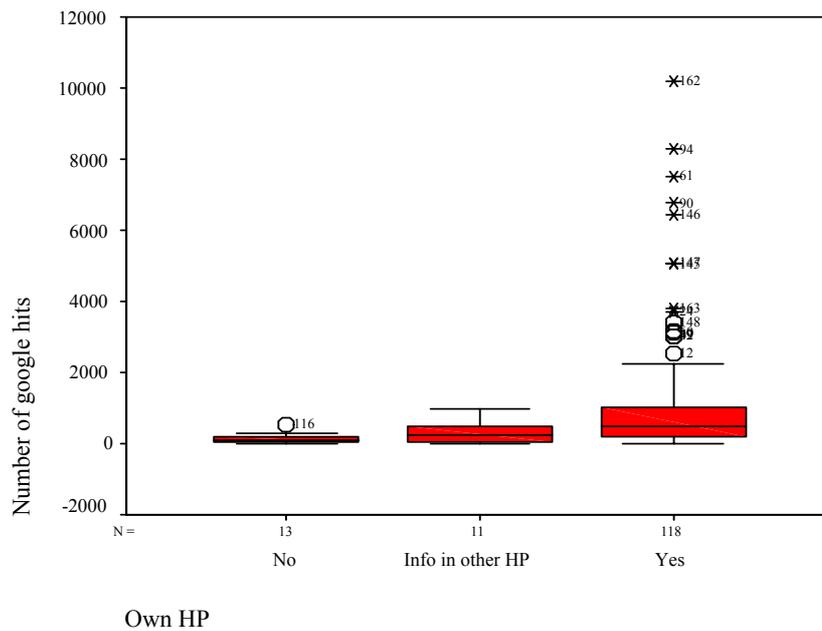


Fig. 6.: Number of Google hits by homepage status.

comparable situations would it be mistaken.

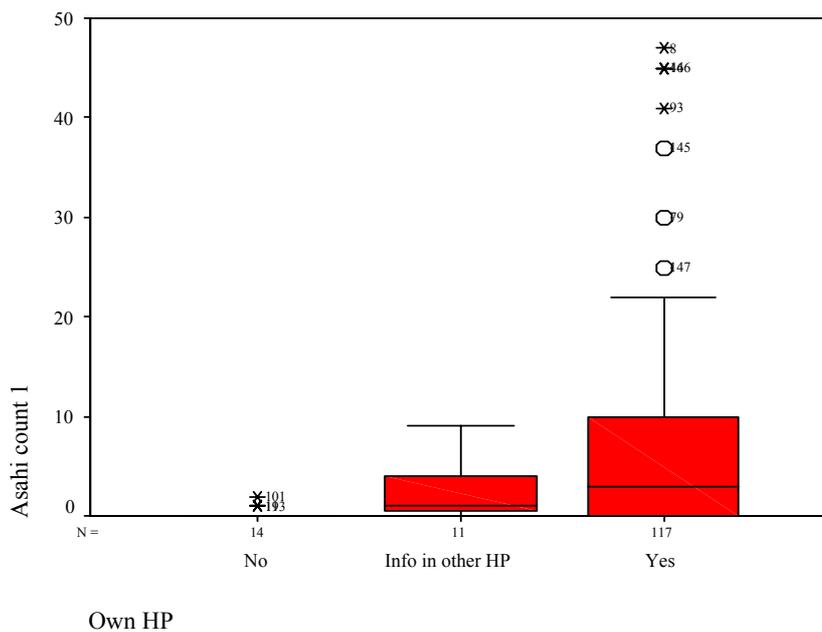


Fig. 7: Number of newspaper references (in one year) by homepage status. NB: Several outlying higher values for “yes” are cut off.

However, while the difference observed between “Yes” and the other values in Fig. 6 is highly significant ($p < 0.001$)¹² according to a T-test, it is not significant at all for Fig. 7. This illustrates that Internet features – here the most basic difference between having a homepage and not having one – often affect some success factors more than others. Visibility on the Internet itself is certainly a success, especially for a small group, but having a homepage does not seem to affect the group’s visibility in a more traditional medium such as a newspaper.

¹² As the many outliers suggest, the “yes” group lacks a normal distribution; but the sample is rather large, and in any case the connection between a homepage and

3. *Digital Divide*

Another testable hypothesis follows from the more skeptical view of the Internet's potential as a social equalizer. The concept of the "digital divide" means that even if a more active Internet presence should be able to increase a group's success, it is likely that those groups that would need such a boost most are the last to use the Internet. Thus, the most advantaged groups would reap the additional success of an active Internet usage, while the disadvantaged groups fall ever more behind, and the gap even widens.

Since some of the groups in this sample are specifically placed in the "women's" issue, and some other groups in the foreigner and human rights issues are also dealing with women's issues, the sample can rather easily be split into two groups depending on the involvement with women's issues. Groups predominantly made up of women who may mainly work on another issue but are organized *as women* are also included in this. This combination of women's groups and women's issues means that more staff and volunteers in this category are women. Assuming that women are likely to be a marginalized group and relatively excluded from access to new technologies like the Internet, one "digital divide" hypothesis can then be: If a group deals with women's issues at

Google hits seems rather self-evident.

all, then its “total use of the Internet” should be lower than in other groups.

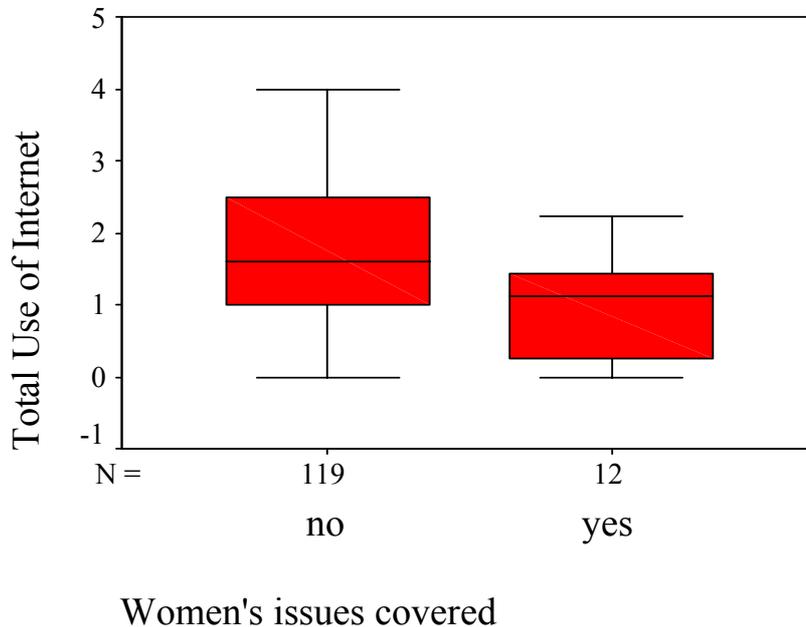


Fig. 8: Use of the Internet, depending on involvement in women’s issues.

The boxplot in Fig. 8 shows a very clear difference in Internet use between the women’s groups and the other groups, and a T-test shows this difference to be statistically significant, but at $p=0.031$ only barely so. Considering the very small sample, with just 12 groups categorized as “women’s groups,” this issue certainly requires further exploration to consolidate the findings. Evidence from interviews does however support the notion that women’s groups tend to use the Internet less than many others: members of some of the groups mentioned that many of their supporters and of the women they are trying to help do not have

access to computers. Most do however have mobile phones with e-mail and Internet access. Accordingly, much of their Internet use is still limited to e-mails, and they are likely to shift their emphasis to homepages for mobile phones in the future.

4. Certain features of Internet use

A number of hypotheses were tested regarding certain features of Internet use. The most interesting results concerned the ease with which a homepage can be found, and the total effort put into the Internet presence.

One hypothesis is that the easier it is to find a group's homepage, the higher should be the feedback the group receives, both from members and potential supporters. The value for being "easy to find" was combined from results from search engines and Internet directories, using the official name of the group, and direct links from other sites. If a sympathizer had heard the name of the group, he or she might remember enough to feed it to a search engine, or just look in an Internet directory and recognize the name, or click on an unknown name if it appeared in the appropriate directory. A higher value is given to more links and references, but of course some factors cannot be considered in this rating. Some names for example are either so long and complicated that finding the group in a search engine from memory is unlikely, or they consist of only such common words

that thousands of unrelated results come up. Usually, the values arrived at by these methods did however describe fairly accurately how easy it was to find a group's homepage.

The “easy to find” category was used to test whether there is an association between this value and the value for feedback, the visibility value, and the combined value for success.

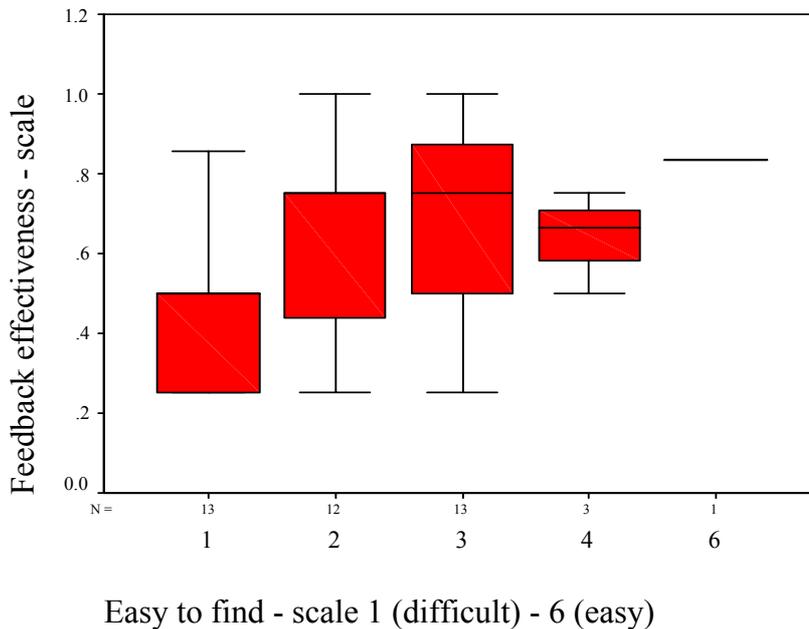


Fig. 9: Feedback depending on the ease with which a group's homepage can be found.

Although the graph seems to indicate an association between the “easy to find” variable and the variable for feedback, a statistical analysis is problematic due to the small sample and uneven distribution, and tests can only find a low significance of this association (T-test: $p=0.035$).

The feedback value is partly defined by responses from group

members (often intuitive judgements rather than hard figures) and figures for the number of hits on a website as noted on the site's counter. In these cases hits increase when members and staff regularly view the page, or when a group has come into the spotlight for a while (e.g., Tsukurukai or PeaceWindsJapan).

These problems raise some concern about the relationship displayed in Fig. 9, but Fig. 10 and Fig. 11 relate the same variable to the group's visibility and success, and the statistical significance of these associations, with more valid cases and less problems regarding the validity of the statistical tests, is higher. In both cases, ANOVA tests find a high significance with $p < 0.001$ ($F = 6.289$ for the association with visibility, 8.393 with success).

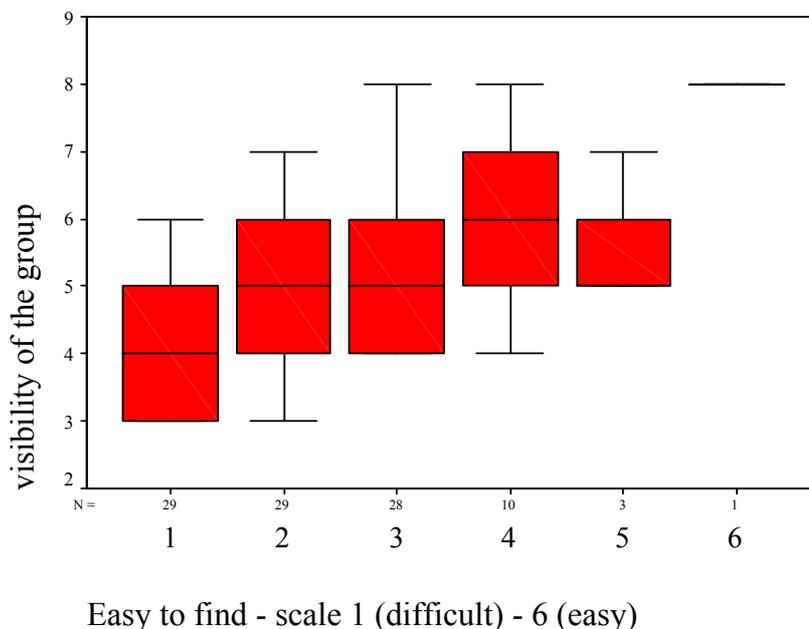


Fig. 10: Visibility (in Internet and print media) depending on the ease with which a group's homepage can be found.

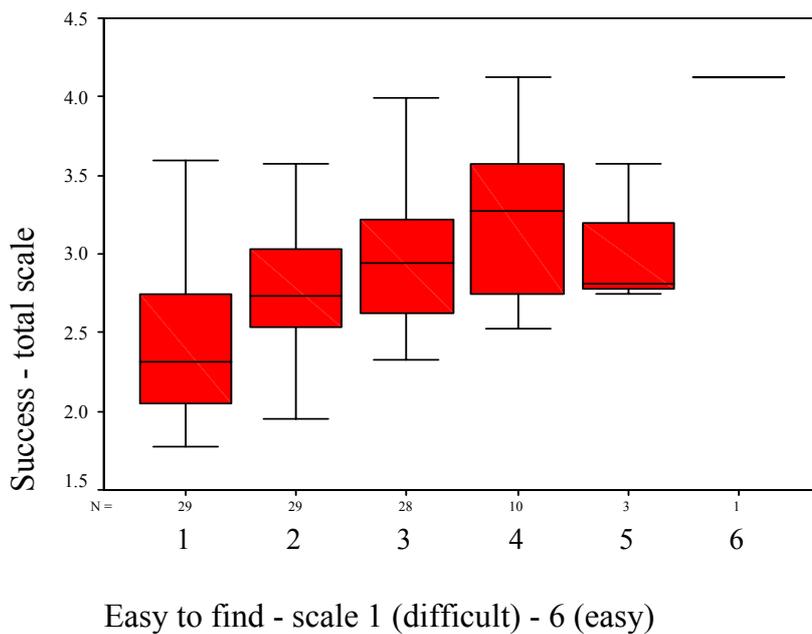


Fig. 11: Success depending on the ease with which a group's homepage can be found.

As mentioned above, the link between success and the ease in finding a homepage can work in both directions. In fact, the group that was easiest to find and at the same time most visible in the media was for the right-wing Tsukurukai textbook writers, which was at the center of a political storm and thus famous. It is obvious that many other pages linked to this page not because the Tsukurukai took steps to promote their website but *because* of its existing visibility. Still, this is a rather unusual case, and even if some groups that were very visible in the first place (and therefore easy to find) are taken out, this correlation remains significant.

Many of the other groups that were particularly easy to find are

not so big, successful, or visible that they would be expected to be easy to find on the Internet. They included the Japan Scientists' Association, and the Consumers' Association, followed by some sub-organizations of internationally active NGOs like Save the Children Japan and WWF Japan, but also less known groups involved in the peace movement, such as Network Chikyūmura or Min'iren (Japan Federation of Democratic Medical Institutions). The groups scoring high on the "easy to find" scale are involved in many different issues (notably except for women's issues), and very different types of organizations with different aims (including politically left and right groups). The data give no obvious indication of what other factors could be involved in the observed relationship. It seems therefore very likely that there is indeed a causal relationship between the easiness of finding a homepage on the Internet and the respective group's success.

A related hypotheses concerning a link between the "easy to find" variable and the success in the issue a group is pursuing was also tested but could not be confirmed.

For an overview of relevant areas of Internet usage, Taylor, Kent and White's (2001) categories for websites were tested on their associations with success factors. These categories group Internet usage variables into five broad areas ranging from technical basics and content-related issues to advanced dialogical options that have been most praised for their democratic potential. The

categories include Ease of Interface, Usefulness of Information, Conservation of Visitors, Generation of Return Visits, and Dialogic Loop.

Among the most significant association of these with success was the Ease of Interface variable (see Fig. 12). The graph shows that groups with a user-friendly homepage offering, for example, a search function, sitemap, or just a navigation bar, were on average more successful than others. An interesting finding is that the difference between homepages that had a navigation bar – a rather simple and common tool – and those that had none was found to be statistically significant (T-test: $p=0.001$).

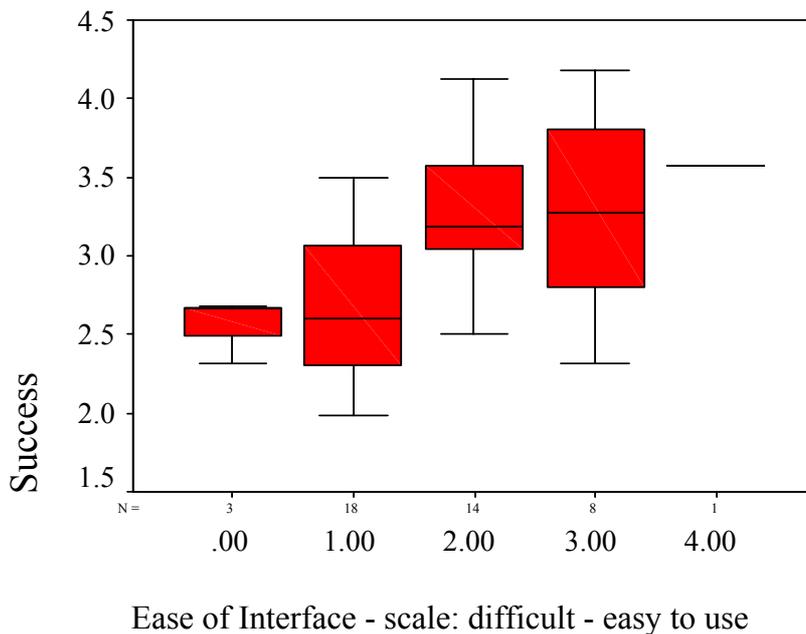


Fig. 12: Success in relation to user-friendly interface (Ease of Interface).

This observed difference between the categories is indeed

highly significant, as an ANOVA test confirms (with $F=13.208$ and $p<0.001$).

Some of the other factors produced less obvious results. In most of the following boxplots (Fig. 13– 16), a certain trend is observable:

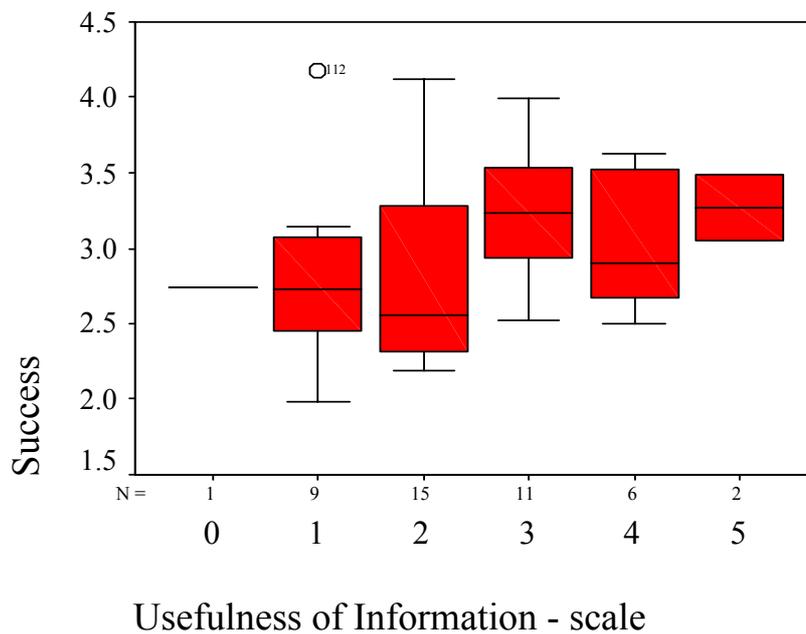


Fig. 13: Success value of groups in relation to the usefulness of the information given on their homepages: Can supporters, media and activists find relevant information on the group and on the issues, policy goals and action links?

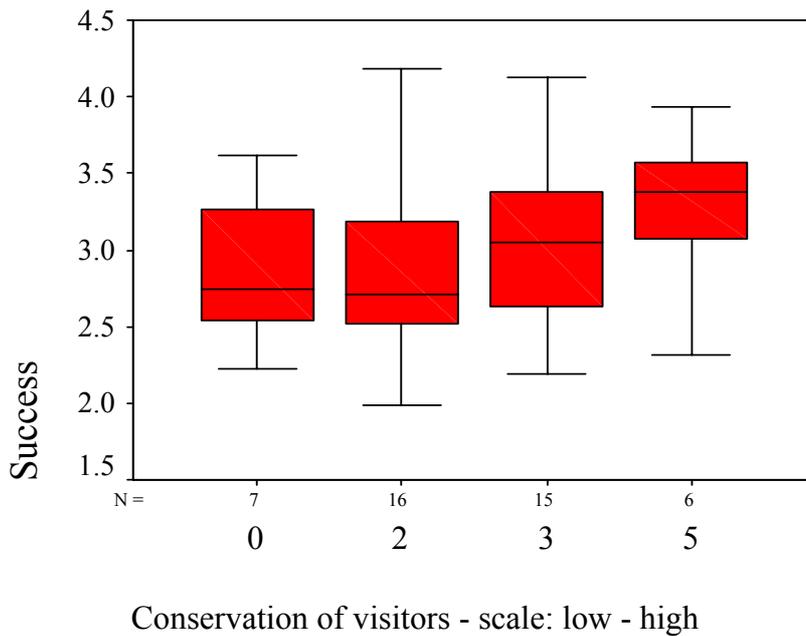


Fig. 14: Success value of groups in relation to the ability of their homepage to hold visitors: The conservation factor is high, for example, when the page loads fast and indicates the last update.

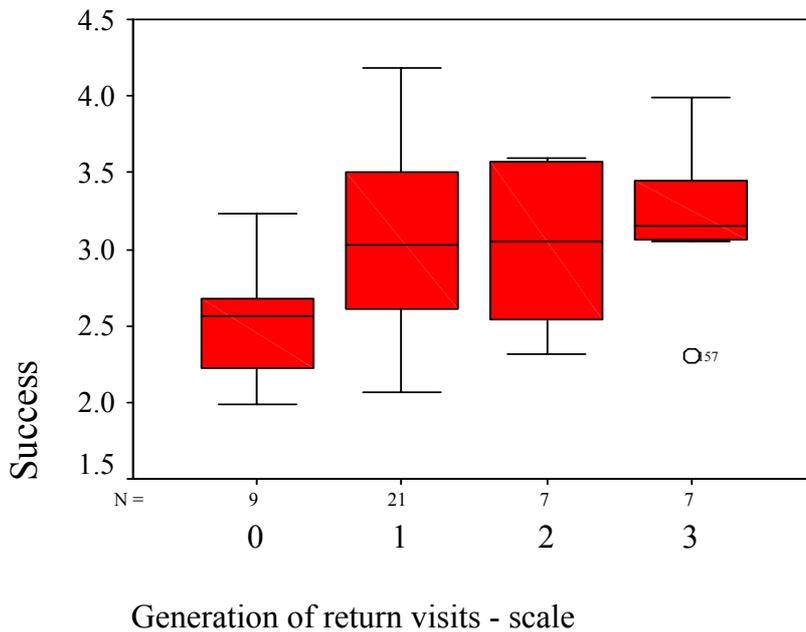


Fig. 15: Success value of groups in relation to their homepages' generation of return visits, e.g., with regular news forums or the option to register online for a newsletter.

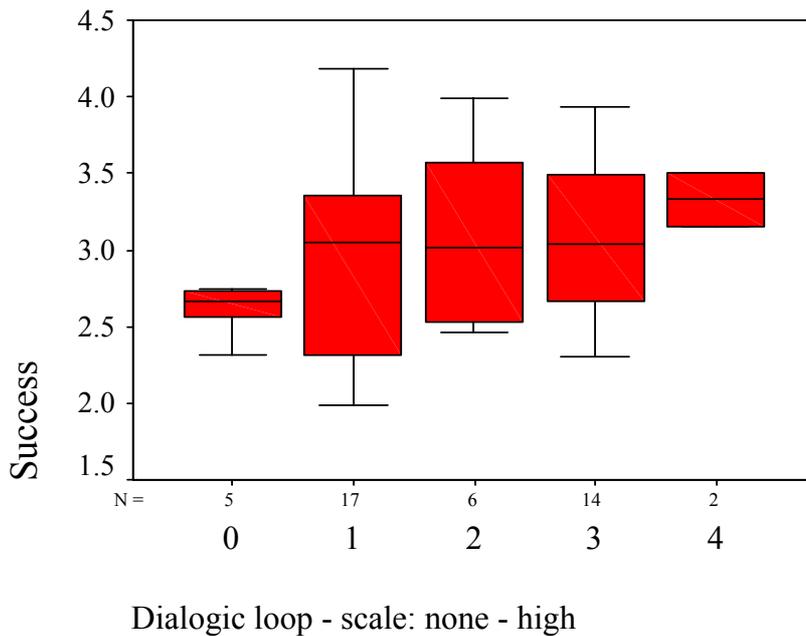


Fig. 16: Success value of groups in relation to dialogic features, including BBS or comment forms and replies to e-mails sent to the group.

For Fig. 13 and Fig. 14, i.e. Usefulness of Information and Conservation of Visitors, no statistical significance of the relationship between the variables can be found. For the Generation of Return Visits (Fig. 15), however, a high significance of the association is confirmed, with $F=6.668$ and $p<0.001$. Similarly, the association between success and Dialogic Loop appears highly significant, with $F=7.121$ and $p<0.001$. While this category does include bulletin board systems (BBS), comment forms and other interactive features (online donations, e-commerce) that require some technical expertise to set up, it is interesting to note that the simplest dialogic feature proved to be

highly significant: Groups that responded to a simple e-mail request were significantly more successful than others (T-test: $p=0.001$).¹³

Outlook

An initial examination of the data indicates that there are indeed areas of Internet use that correspond to certain types of success for the groups researched. Moreover, while it is clear that some of these features require technical skills or investments that some groups can more easily afford than others – which explains some of the associations found – other, simpler features are also found to be relevant. Examples mentioned here are the inclusion of a navigation bar in a homepage, and replying to e-mail requests. Both require only very limited technical skills and a certain amount of time; even very small groups with a few volunteers and low budgets can score high on these accounts. If there is a causal relationship, then this could support the hypothesis that the Internet levels the playing field. At least on these accounts, small groups could be as successful as larger or more powerful ones.

On the other hand, the data also hint at the existence of a digital divide, although this has not been explored in detail. Undoubtedly, the potential of the Internet is not yet used to its full extent. One

¹³ The test e-mail was in Japanese and could easily be answered by any volunteer in less

major factor that is potentially a very powerful tool in interviews and observation could not be meaningfully researched at all: Because almost everyone in Japan has a mobile phone (*keitai*), including many marginalized groups (like foreign workers or prostitutes, but also housewives, who are a large source of volunteer workers), offering information specifically geared to *keitai* users could greatly increase the reach of very small activist groups who do not otherwise advertise. Presumably, this would increase the feedback from supporters and their success in general. However, in the data used here, very few groups offered such services and sites: Mobile phone Internet connections play practically no role in the Internet strategies of activist groups. This may, however, change over the course of the next few years.

than five minutes.

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