

# How Politicians Use the Internet: The Case of Japanese Diet Members

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## Abstract

This paper examines how politicians communicate with their constituencies via the Internet and what factors explain the diversification of their communication styles, focusing on the websites and blogs used by Japanese Diet members. It is argued that the Internet is an all-new style of communication, both in terms of its capabilities and limits, and the frame of reference in which Richard Fenno analyzed U.S. House members' 'home style' can be applied to the analysis of this new style of communication. Next, the paper analyzes the websites operated by legislators. First, a sample of the websites operated by the Diet members is observed in order to propose a hypothetical classification of websites by paying attention to the style of self-presentation and the existence of interactive contents. Second, the data obtained from the survey of the Diet members was used to explain the factor that determined the diversification of their websites. In conclusion, the average educational level in each district that influences the legislators' perception of their constituencies, the House to which they belong, and their age is relevant to the existence of interactive contents on their websites.

## 1 Introduction

The development of information and communication technologies (ICT) has increased the importance of the use of the Internet in politics. Politicians in Japan, as well as those in other democracies, launch their websites and/or blogs and advertise their personalities and policies. As of May 2005, the websites of 449 (out of 480) members of the House of Representatives and 186 (out of 247) members of the House of Councilors were included in the Yahoo! Japan directories. When we surf these

websites, we find that the websites are diversified and reflect the character of each politician. More importantly, the fact that the members have launched their own websites, even though Japan's Public Office Election Law does not favor election campaigning via the Internet,<sup>1</sup> suggests that they use their websites not only for campaigning but also for their daily activities, particularly for communicating with their constituencies.

The purpose of this article is to explain how politicians use the Internet. This is done by describing and analyzing the diversities and determinants of their websites (and blogs), focusing on Japanese Diet members. The websites of the Diet members are viewed as a channel of communication between the Diet members and their constituencies. Fenno (1978) provides a suitable frame of reference for analyzing the legislators' daily activities and communication with their constituencies. The frame of reference used in his study is thus employed in this paper.

The outline of this paper is as follows. The next section will be devoted to the discussion of the properties of the Internet as a medium of communication. The properties of the Internet inevitably affect the styles in which politicians communicate with their constituencies via the Internet. I will explain how the Internet is distinguished from other media including personal, face-to-face communication. Following that, I will propose a framework for analyzing the websites operated by the Diet members. It will be argued that the framework developed by Fenno for his study on U.S. House members' activities in their districts, which he termed as 'home style,' is also useful for studying the *on-line* 'home style.' Next, I will summarize previous literatures and claim that most of them failed to take into account certain important aspects of communication via the Internet. However, before analyzing the factors that explain legislators' on-line home style, some examples of their websites will be examined in order to propose a hypothetical classification of websites. Finally, I will address the factors that determine the contents of the websites operated by the Diet members, particularly whether or not they use interactive contents, using the results of

the survey of the Diet members conducted in 2002.

## **2 Properties of the Internet as a medium of communication**

Murai Jun, who is considered to be ‘the father of the Internet’ in Japan, argues that the Internet is a computer network that connects all the computers in the world, which has characteristics that distinguish it from other media (Murai, 1995: 2–11). First, the Internet is a widespread network: as early as 1995, it was already connected to about a hundred million computers, and the number of connected computers has increased exponentially. Second, the Internet has three important features—interactivity, equality, and day-to-dayness. Unlike other forms of mass media such as newspapers, radio, or television, the Internet allows everyone to casually express their opinions. In this respect, personal communication is not widespread but is interactive, equal, and conducted on a daily basis. Other forms of mass media, on the other hand, are widespread but they are neither interactive nor equal and communication via these media does not take place on a daily basis. In contrast, the Internet is a medium of communication that is widespread, interactive, equal, and involves communication on a daily basis. This implies that it is an all-new medium of communication.

Despite this advantage, the Internet has its limitations. One of these is the existence of a digital divide—this refers to the problem of unfair accessibility to the Internet. The Communication Usage Trend Survey conducted in 2004 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications estimated that 62.3 per cent of the population used the Internet through personal computers or mobile phones (Sōmushō, 2005: 26). Although the number of users is increasing, more than one-third of the population still does not have access to the Internet.

Since accessing the Internet requires some degree of education and financial resources, various socioeconomic factors influence people’s choice of using the Internet. The result of the abovementioned survey showed that gender, age, educational background,

and income affect this choice. In particular, it was found that a young, highly-educated male earning a high income is more likely to use the Internet (Sōmushō, 2005: 115). More importantly, the proliferation of the Internet among individual users does not necessarily bridge the digital divide. According to the survey, the number of Internet users has increased from 2001 to 2004, but the digital divide in Japan has not reduced.

### **3 Home style revisited**

#### **3.1 Diet members' home style**

Before analyzing the on-line communication style, this section will summarize Fenno's argument on U.S. House members' activities. Fenno (1978) conducted participant observations for eight years, monitored 18 congressmen in their districts, and examined the manner in which they perceived their constituencies. He found that their home style was a combination of allocation of resources to expand their support basis, presentation of self—the manner in which they present themselves to others, and an explanation of their own activities in Washington.

Fenno also explained the manner in which the House members chose their own home style. He argued that they tended to consider four nested constituencies in proportion to the intensity of support offered to them—geographic constituency, reelection constituency, primary constituency, and personal constituency. He also argued that they responded to different constituencies in the same manner that different constituencies would respond to them. Career backgrounds and personal preferences of legislators may also exert an influence on their home style. Less senior members, who are in the 'expansionist stage,' are more likely to spend a greater amount of time in their districts in order to expand their support base, while more senior members, who are in the 'protectionist stage,' are more likely to spend a greater amount of time in Washington.

### 3.2 Literature

Numerous studies have been conducted on the websites operated by U.S. House members. For example, Alder, Gent and Overmeyer (1998) examined the factors that influence legislators' choice of launching their own websites and providing casework-related contents on them. Niven and Zilber (1999) displayed an interest in legislators' explanations of their activities in Washington. Gulati (2004) examined their presentation style, particularly their image as projected by their websites. These works have identified the diversification of House members' home style on their websites through focusing on one or more dimensions of the websites and have analyzed the factors contributing to this diversification. Davis (1999), Owen, Davis and Strickler (1999), and Messmer, Carreiro and Metivier-Carreiro (2000) examined congressmen's home style on their websites, but did not consider the factors contributing to the diversification of these websites.

The abovementioned works can be grouped into two categories. The works grouped into the first category equate legislators' home style on their websites with their usual, *off-line* home style. In other words, these works examined the legislators' home style reflected on their websites, instead of conducting laborious and expensive participant observations. This category includes the works conducted by Niven and Zilber (2001) and Gulati (2002). On the other hand, the works grouped into the second category are those concerned with the peculiarity of the Internet as a communication channel. The manner in which a person presents himself or herself to others in other environments is, admittedly, reflected in that other environment, and thus, one's usual *off-line* home style is reflected in his or her *on-line* home style. Nonetheless, I would suggest that the peculiarity of the Internet as a communication channel affects a legislator's behavior and hence should not be neglected. In other words, new styles of communication can be observed.

There are fewer works available on the websites of Japanese Diet members. Okamoto (2001) studied the websites of the candidates for the 2000 House of Representatives

election and showed that when compared with proportional representation (PR) candidates, those running for single-seat districts were more likely to set up campaign websites. Yamamoto (2003) analyzed why Japanese Diet members set up their websites and concluded that urbanization, electoral competitiveness, and IT-related pledges have an influence on their decision. Okamoto (2003) analyzed the Diet members' home style and showed that the type of candidacy at the previous election and the characteristics of one's district affect the degree of 'sophisticated-ness,' which consists of interactivity and site delivery, of each website. Tkach-Kawasaki (2003) analyzed the websites of political parties and argued that, despite the regulation on campaigning via the Internet, Japanese political parties, particularly the opposition parties, exploited the Internet in the 2000 and 2001 national elections.

### **3.3 New perception of constituencies**

Legislators' perceptions of their constituencies play a central role in determining their home style (Fenno, 1978), and other scholars following Fenno have regarded this to be a key explanatory variable. It is thus reasonable to focus on how the Diet members perceive their constituencies. However, it is not reasonable to adopt Fenno's frame of reference of the perception of constituencies without modifying it for the purpose of investigating the Diet members' *on-line* communication style. Since one of the peculiarities of the Internet is that its users are unevenly distributed in proportion to their socioeconomic backgrounds, the distribution of Internet users can also play an important role in the perception of constituencies. This type of perception can be observed in the comment made by Katō Kōichi, a member of the House of Representatives and the leader of one of the factions of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). In November 2000, he rebelled against the Mori government and the ruling factions of the LDP. As soon as he rebelled, numerous people visited his website and posted words of encouragement on an electronic bulletin board. Eventually, his rebellion ended up in failure. He later referred to his failure and said, 'Opinions coming through my website tend to look ahead. It is quite difficult to keep a balance between the opinions of these acute critics and the reality' (Katō, 2002). Yamasaki

Taku, who is one of the most influential politicians in the LDP and an ally of Katō, also commented that intellectuals in urban cities had influenced Katō's reckless rebellion (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*; November 24, 2000).

These two narratives suggest that when perceiving their constituencies, politicians distinguish between people who use the Internet and those who do not. Thus, we need to incorporate into our study this perception of constituencies, i.e., the distinction between two constituencies based on the use of the Internet. Since the ability to use the Internet is termed cyber literacy, this paper proposes that the constituency of Internet users be known as the 'cyber constituency.'

## **4 Cases—House members representing Ibaraki**

### **4.1 Method**

This section considers examples of the websites (and blogs) used by 13 Diet members representing the Ibaraki prefecture—four members of the House of Councilors, seven members of the House of Representatives from single-seat districts, and two members of the House of Representatives from the PR block. These websites were observed in order to determine the diversity of legislators' home styles on their websites.<sup>2</sup> Ibaraki prefecture is located in the northeast of Tokyo and is included in the Greater Tokyo Metropolitan Area (*Shutoken*). The southern Ibaraki region has been developed as a commutable region of Tokyo, while the northern region has been developed as an industrial zone. Northern Ibaraki also includes farmlands. Due to this socioeconomic diversification, legislators representing Ibaraki have been considered as examples in this paper. The names and website addresses of each member are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Diet members representing Ibaraki  
(Before the 2005 general election)**

Name	District	Party	Term	Personal websites
<b>Members of the House of Councilors (<i>Sangiin</i>)</b>				
Kanō Yasu	At large	LDP	3rd	<a href="http://www1.odn.ne.jp/aac64460/KanouYasuHomemain.htm">http://www1.odn.ne.jp/aac64460/KanouYasuHomemain.htm</a>
Kobayashi Moto	At large	DPJ	2nd	<a href="http://www5.plala.or.jp/kobayashimoto/">http://www5.plala.or.jp/kobayashimoto/</a>
Okada Hiroshi	At large	LDP	2nd	<a href="http://www.okada-hiroshi.com">http://www.okada-hiroshi.com</a>
Gunji Akira	At large	DPJ	2nd	<a href="http://www.gunji-akira.com">http://www.gunji-akira.com</a>
<b>Members of the House of Representatives (<i>Shugiin</i>)</b>				
Akagi Norihiro	1st	LDP	5th	<a href="http://www.akagiorihiko.com">http://www.akagiorihiko.com</a>
Nukaga Fukushirō	2nd	LDP	7th	<a href="http://www.nukaga-fukushiro.jp">http://www.nukaga-fukushiro.jp</a>
Hanashi Yasuhiro	3rd	LDP	1st	<a href="http://www.hanashiyasuhiro.com">http://www.hanashiyasuhiro.com</a>
Kajiyama Hiroshi	4th	LDP	2nd	<a href="http://www.kajiyama-office.com">http://www.kajiyama-office.com</a>
Ōhata Akihiro	5th	DPJ	5th	<a href="http://www.oohata.com">http://www.oohata.com</a>
Niwa Yūya	6th	LDP	9th	<a href="http://www.niwayuya.com">http://www.niwayuya.com</a>
Nagaoka Yōji	7th	LDP	2nd	<a href="http://www.y-nagaoka.jp">http://www.y-nagaoka.jp</a>
Koizumi Toshiaki <sup>a</sup>	PR	DPJ	2nd	<a href="http://www.koizumi.gr.jp/">http://www.koizumi.gr.jp/</a>
Ishii Keiichi	PR	Kōmeitō	4th	<a href="http://www.alles.or.jp/~ishii229/">http://www.alles.or.jp/~ishii229/</a>

a: Koizumi contested from both Ibaraki third district and PR block.

#### 4.2 Hypothetical classification of home style on the Internet

I classify these 13 Diet members' home styles on their websites based on two criteria. These criteria and classifications are not definitive but hypothetical.

The first criterion concerns the members' style of self-presentation that reflects his or her off-line home style. Some of the members emphasize their close association with their constituencies on their websites, and others emphasize their policies and activities in Tokyo. Kajiyama's website exemplifies the former. His explanation for

his activities mostly focuses on his activities in the district. These legislators emphasize that they are ardently working for their constituencies and that they are also committed to casework. On the contrary, Kano's website exemplifies the latter. She expatiates on her activities in Tokyo, particularly in the Diet, but rarely reports her activities in the district.

The second criterion concerns a Diet member's style of self-presentation that reflects the peculiarity of the Internet as a communication channel. As discussed earlier, one of the most important attributes of communication via the Internet is its interactivity. Some of the members appear to have a keen interest in using interactivity to communicate with their constituencies, and others appear to be reluctant to do so. Akagi appears to be a good example of the latter. He does not even provide his e-mail address on his website.

## **5 Determinants of the websites operated by the Diet members**

This section uses the data obtained from the Survey of Diet members' Use of the Internet, conducted by Professor Inoguchi Takashi and the author. The questionnaires were mailed to the Diet offices of all legislators on June 13 and 14, 2002. Stamped return envelopes were enclosed with the questionnaires. Of all the legislators, only 175 (24 per cent) responded.

### **5.1 Contents of websites**

The home styles observed on the websites operated by the Diet members vary. However, the websites are not characterized by all the contents displayed therein. In the survey, the Diet members were asked to report the contents of their websites; the result is summarized in Table 2. The result shows that the contents of their websites can be categorized into two types. The first type is what almost every legislator (more than 90 per cent) adopts, and the second is what only some legislators adopt. For example, almost all the Diet members post their profiles on their websites. On the

contrary, less than one-sixth of the Diet members recruit their personal staff via the Internet. The following analysis pertains to the latter.

**Table 2: Contents of the websites operated by the Diet members**

Items	Ratio (%)
Policy Appeal	90.9
Profile	98.8
Explanation of Legislative Activities	93.9
Explanation of Other Activities	90.3
Call for Donations	19.4
Links	65.5
Recruiting	15.8
BBS	26.1
Mail Form	52.1

‘Which of the following contents, if any, does your website have?’

Source: E-legislators Survey

It is worth noting that the items grouped into the latter half of the above table, with the exception of links, represent interactive contents. This is related to the hypothetical classification discussed earlier. Essentially, it is the display of interactive contents on the website that characterizes the Diet members’ home style.

## **5.2 Factors for legislators’ using interactive contents**

What are the factors that influence the choice of using interactive contents? According to Fenno (1978), legislators’ perception of constituencies, in addition to their personal preferences and electoral backgrounds, determines their home style. The following analysis tests the effects of these factors.

### **5.2.1 Hypotheses**

Mayhew described U.S. congressmen as ‘single-minded seekers of reelection’

(Mayhew, 1974: 5). Fenno (1973) also admitted that reelection is one of the most important aims of legislators. According to their arguments, the people who are expected to visit the websites operated by the Diet members are their electorates since websites offer a good channel to communicate with and provide service to people. Since party mobilization is declining in Japan, as well as in other industrial democracies (Wattenberg, 2000), it has become significantly more crucial for the Diet members to attract independent voters, and traditional supporters, via the Internet. In addition, interactive contents provide useful clues to the Diet members to communicate with them.

As already discussed, Internet users are unevenly distributed depending on socioeconomic backgrounds like age, occupation, education, etc. The aggregated socioeconomic statistics of each district are thus employed in the following analysis.

**Hypothesis 1:** *An increase in the anticipated number of Internet users in a district encourages a Diet member to adopt interactive contents.*

Electoral competitiveness is also assumed to explain the home styles adopted by the Diet members. Members having a safe seat are assumed to be less likely to adopt interactive contents because they do not need to do so as far as their reelection is concerned. Electoral competitiveness is measured by the electoral margin at the previous election. Similarly, it is assumed that representatives are more likely to adopt interactive contents than councilors because the former are assumed to be more conscious of elections. Representatives are elected every four years, and they constantly face the risk of the dissolution of the House. Councilors, on the other hand, can ensure their seat for six years once elected. For the same reason, it is also assumed that members elected by a majority of votes are more likely to use interactive contents than those elected by the PR system.

**Hypothesis 2:** *Diet members representing competitive districts are more likely to*

*adopt interactive contents than those with safe seats; members of the House of Representatives are more likely to adopt interactive contents than those of the House of Councilors; Diet members elected by a majority of votes are more likely to adopt interactive contents than those elected by the PR system.*

Further, the career backgrounds and personal preferences of the Diet members are also assumed to affect their home style. A member who usually uses the Internet and evaluates its usefulness is assumed to be more likely to adopt interactive contents, irrespective of his or her perception of constituencies. An educational background is also assumed to influence home style; however, this paper does not consider educational background as an independent variable because most of the Diet members in Japan are college graduates and have the same educational backgrounds. In addition, less senior legislators who are in the ‘expansionist stage’ (Fenno, 1978) are also assumed to pursue their interactive potential because these contents help them to expand their support base.

**Hypothesis 3:** *A legislator who usually uses the Internet and evaluates its usefulness is more likely to adopt interactive contents; less senior members are more likely to adopt interactive contents.*

Finally, party affiliation is adopted as an explanatory variable. Although this paper does not have any specific hypothesis regarding the effect of party affiliation, it is natural to consider that party affiliation might influence the behavior of the legislators.

**Hypothesis 4:** *Party affiliation of a legislator affects his or her choice to adopt interactive contents.*

The above hypotheses and their accompanying analyses have much in common with the hypotheses presented by Okamoto (2003). However, all the analyses in this paper

have been carried out individually, with good reason. The dependent variable considered by Okamoto (2003) is the sophistication of the websites, which encompasses their interactivity and site delivery. However, Okamoto (2003) did not provide any reason for incorporating these two dimensions in the one-dimensional scale of sophistication. This paper recognizes the importance of the dimension of site delivery, and it appears that these two dimensions measure different aspects of the websites. Moreover, in my opinion, different factors are relevant to the levels of interactivity and site delivery since the measurements of site delivery include the existence of expensive contents such as pages in English, movies, or Macromedia Flash movies. Therefore, this paper focuses on interactive contents.

### ***5.2.2 Analysis***

Two models are adopted in this section. The first model includes only the Diet members elected by a majority of votes and the competitiveness of the election. The second model includes all the legislators but does not adopt the competitiveness of the election as an independent variable because it is relevant only in the case of legislators who are elected by a majority of votes.

Since the dependent variable is binary, the binary logit model (Long, 1997) is employed in this paper. Some aggregated statistics as well as statistics on proliferation of the Internet are used to measure the subjective number of Internet users in each district—in other words, how did the Diet members perceive their cyber/non-cyber constituencies? The results are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 3: Logit analysis on the existence of interactive contents (Model 1)**

	Fund-raising	Recruiting	BBS	Mail Form	
<i>Constituency-related Factors</i>					
Internet Users (%) <sup>a</sup>	-0.138 *	-0.056	0.034	0.003	
	(2.28)	(0.88)	(0.69)	(0.05)	
Income per Capita (JPY) <sup>a</sup>	-0.001	-0.002	-0.000	-0.001	
	(0.51)	(1.05)	(0.11)	(0.79)	
Service Sector Workers (%) <sup>a</sup>	0.008	-0.003	0.045	0.000	
	(0.21)	(0.09)	(1.27)	(0.00)	
University Entrance (%) <sup>a</sup>	0.134 +	0.131 +	0.033	0.035	
	(1.94)	(1.91)	(0.60)	(0.71)	
Elderly Population (%) <sup>a</sup>	-0.012	-0.349 +	0.133	-0.068	
	(0.06)	(1.74)	(0.89)	(0.50)	
<i>Personal Factors</i>					
Age (by 10 Years)	-0.094 +	-0.060	0.007	-0.089 *	
	(1.95)	(1.32)	(0.21)	(2.52)	
Evaluation on the Internet <sup>b</sup>	-0.037	-0.150	-0.311	0.538	
	(0.07)	(0.28)	(0.65)	(1.21)	
Seniority <sup>c</sup>	0.028	-0.155	0.135	0.052	
	(0.14)	(0.69)	(0.90)	(0.33)	
Councilor <sup>d</sup>	-2.668 +	-2.660 +	-0.079	0.913	
	(2.11)	(1.88)	(0.10)	(1.23)	
Electoral Margin (%)	0.370	-0.235	0.038	0.129	
	(0.58)	(0.25)	(0.06)	(0.20)	
<i>Party<sup>e</sup></i>					
Democratic Party	0.301	-0.400	-0.136	-1.052 +	
	(0.38)	(0.53)	(0.20)	(1.75)	
New Kōmeitō			1.368	-1.146	
			(0.92)	(0.88)	
Liberal Party		2.914	0.553	-0.351	
		(1.62)	(0.39)	(0.25)	
Other Parties or Independent	-0.143	-0.323	1.033	-1.804 +	
	(0.10)	(0.23)	(1.01)	(1.67)	
Constant	3.674	10.016	-9.248	5.249	
	(0.36)	(1.01)	(1.07)	(0.71)	
Observations	88	91	95	95	

The absolute value of *z* statistics is given in parentheses.

+ significant at the 10% level; \* significant at the 5% level

a: Prefecture-level aggregated data

b: 'How do you evaluate the Internet in the course of your legislative work?'—5-point scale

c: Seniority: the number of terms served by a Diet member

d: Councilor: equals unity if a Diet member is a member of the House of Councilors

e: Party: Liberal Democratic Party is set to be a base category

**Table 4: Logit analysis on the existence of interactive contents (Model 2)**

	Fund-raising	Recruiting	BBS	Mail Form
<i>Constituency-related Factors</i>				
Internet Users (%) <sup>a</sup>	-0.099 *	-0.022	0.066	-0.001
	(2.05)	(0.41)	(1.62)	(0.02)
Income per Capita (JPY) <sup>a</sup>	-0.001	0.001	-0.001	0.000
	(0.60)	(0.50)	(0.85)	(0.26)
Service Sector Workers (%) <sup>a</sup>	0.024	-0.002	0.040	0.007
	(0.70)	(0.08)	(1.46)	(0.33)
University Entrance (%) <sup>a</sup>	0.113 *	0.044	0.063	0.050
	(2.23)	(0.76)	(1.50)	(1.32)
Elderly Population (%) <sup>a</sup>	-0.071	-0.169	0.170	0.068
	(0.46)	(1.17)	(1.51)	(0.71)
<i>Personal Factors</i>				
Age (by 10 Years)	-0.097 **	-0.009	0.016	-0.043 *
	(2.97)	(0.30)	(0.72)	(2.13)
Evaluation on the Internet <sup>b</sup>	-0.483	0.056	-0.006	0.296
	(1.16)	(0.13)	(0.02)	(0.99)
Seniority <sup>c</sup>	0.052	-0.382 +	0.016	-0.025
	(0.32)	(1.84)	(0.14)	(0.22)
Councilor <sup>d</sup>	-0.998	-3.049 **	-0.432	0.112
	(1.52)	(2.61)	(0.84)	(0.25)
Elected by PR <sup>e</sup>	0.775	-1.004	-0.507	0.121
	(1.23)	(1.43)	(1.03)	(0.29)
<i>Party<sup>f</sup></i>				
Democratic Party	0.054	-0.086	0.390	-0.261
	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.72)	(0.60)
New Kōmeitō	-0.918		2.376 **	0.030
	(0.86)		(2.88)	(0.04)
Liberal Party	-0.417	1.920 +	1.460	-0.339
	(0.33)	(1.67)	(1.64)	(0.43)
Communist Party			1.387 +	-0.321
			(1.67)	(0.44)
Social Democratic Party			1.218	-0.178
			(1.30)	(0.21)
Other Parties or Independent	-0.174	-0.650	1.528	-1.326
	(0.14)	(0.50)	(1.64)	(1.43)
Constant	4.681	0.525	-11.106 +	-2.990
	(0.55)	(0.07)	(1.75)	(0.57)
Observations	143	129	164	164

The absolute value of z statistics is given in parentheses.

+ significant at the 10% level; \* significant at the 5% level; \*\* significant at the 1% level

a: Prefecture-level aggregated data

b: 'How do you evaluate the Internet in the course of your legislative work?'—5-point scale

c: Seniority: the number of terms a Diet member has served

d: Councilor: equals unity if a Diet member is a member of the House of Councilors

e: Elected by PR: equals unity if a legislator is elected by the PR system

f: Party: Liberal Democratic Party is set to be a base category

### **5.2.3 Results**

#### *Hypothesis 1*

The university entrance ratio in each district is proved to be relevant to the existence of fund-raising-related contents. Table 4 shows that for a standard deviation increase in the university entrance ratio, the odds of using fund-raising-related contents are 1.81 times greater, making all other variables constant. The result also shows that the effect of the Internet user ratio on the existence of fund-raising-related contents is statistically significant. However, the direction of the effect is contrary to what was expected.

#### *Hypothesis 2*

The result shows that the effect of being a councilor is statistically significant. Table 3 shows that being a representative makes the odds of using fund-raising-related contents 14.4 times greater. Table 4 shows that being a member of the House of Representatives makes the odds of using recruiting-related contents 21.1 times greater. On the other hand, the electoral margin and electoral system do not have a statistically significant effect.

#### *Hypothesis 3*

Age has a statistically significant effect. Being 10 years older decreases the odds of adopting fund-raising-related contents by a factor of 0.91 and decreases the odds of adopting the mail form by a factor of 0.96. The evaluation on the Internet by a legislator does not have a statistically significant effect.

#### *Hypothesis 4*

The members of New Komeito are likely to adopt the bulletin board system (BBS). I was unable to find a convincing explanation for this result; however, one possible explanation for it is that the New Kōmeitō might be considering the introduction of a BBS on legislators' personal websites as a part of the party's policy. Belonging to other parties does not have a statistically significant effect on the legislators' choice

unless a 10 percent criterion is accepted.

## **6 Conclusion**

This paper examined how the Diet members communicate with their constituencies via the Internet and what factors explain the diversification of their communication styles. Richard Fenno's frame of reference was used to address these problems. Considering the attributes of the Internet—the digital divide—it was suggested that the frame of reference be adjusted using the idea of cyber constituency. A sample of the websites operated by legislators was observed and a hypothetical classification of websites was proposed, focusing on the style of self-presentation and interactive contents. The data obtained from the survey of the Diet members was used to explain the factors that determine the diversification of the websites operated by legislators, and it was concluded that the average educational level in each district that influences the legislators' perception of their constituencies, the House to which they belong, and their age is relevant to the existence of interactive contents on their websites.

One limitation of this paper may be that I could not prove that the Diet members are in fact involved in operating their websites. Yiannakis (1984) argued that 'member-initiated communications provide the best available assurance that members will reach all of their constituents with the images of themselves that they wish to portray, images that are probably analogous to the home styles identified by Fenno (1978).' However, it is still not clear that websites are indeed 'member-initiated.' From this perspective, we still have to identify the people who are involved in creating or updating websites through interviews of legislators and Diet secretaries.

Another limitation of this paper might be that it did not argue the manner in which on-line home styles can be compared to off-line home styles. Future studies will encompass both on-line and off-line communications.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> During the official campaign period, candidates can operate their websites but cannot update them. Although a panel of experts, led by Professor Kabashima Ikuo, recommended in 2002 that campaigning via the Internet should be authorized ([www.soumu.go.jp/singi\\_it\\_senkyo.html](http://www.soumu.go.jp/singi_it_senkyo.html)), the government has been reluctant to revise the law. For details, see Tkach-Kawasaki (2003) and Ōtake (2004).

<sup>2</sup> The author accessed these websites on 30 September 2005.

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