

National D.Va Association: Fun Feminism Through Discourses

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Abstract

With the help of digital media, political participation is not as rigid and serious as it has been; people can create memes, fans gather under their affection and shared social aim, and reality shows featuring political candidates are made. As culture embracing such political activities develop, it is important to study this trend in order to understand the potential of digital media as tool for fun politics. One example of more recent fun online activism is the National D.Va Association, a feminist group standing up for women, especially female gamers, in South Korea. While feminism has originally been associated with discourses, such as their language considered as private discourse in contrast to politics referred to as public discourse, the National D.Va Association is a good example of creatives ways to use discourses in their political activities. Through their activities, it is evident that the Association use discourses to make their activities playful; they make parodies of existing phrases from *Overwatch*, giving new symbolic meanings; they also plan events like game tournament that give opportunities for women to speak in their fields of interest, not only in playing, but also commentating and organizing technical support; and they create new kinds of discourse through hashtags, which is given meaning and significance as the Association's followers spread the hashtags with their own stories added. Such activities are influenced by the culture of creating discourse in Korean online communities; making new terms that becomes a trend has been practiced for long time, and such practice could also be found in misogyny and feminist movement. The Association inherits such cultural characteristic and adds playfulness to it, as it can be seen from its satirical debate and comments towards malicious critics it receives, making their fight more visible and thus teaching women how to speak up. This paper aims to highlight the potential of politics becoming more playful through digital media, as well as the significance of discourses in current feminism. Also, the paper adds cultural diversity to the study of feminism and digital culture. Nonetheless, the paper also calls for further research in both the National D.Va Association and any other similar activism, for more conclusive answer to how far playful politics can evolve.

Key Words: Feminism, online activism, fun politics, discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

Development of digital media has been altering the form of political involvement. From online forums for political discussion to petition pages on government websites, more people can get involved in politics more easily than in the past. It is not hard to see official accounts of political figures and even representatives of governmental branches on social networking services like Facebook and Twitter. Yet, it is not only the accessibility that has increased with availability of, and therefore the culture created around, digital media; politics have also become fun and playful activity. Liesbet van Zoonen, for an instance, makes an analogy between a reality show that allows audience participation, *Pop Idol*, and *The American Candidate*, another reality soap that involves audiences' votes on political candidates, the participants of the show (2004, 40). Nowadays, individuals make their own fun contents with political and social relevance using digital platform, like the waves of memes created after the famous “binders full of women” phrase by Mitt Romney; both visual memes and hashtag were created and spread on social networking websites like Twitter (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). Following the trend of such fun politics will allow better understanding of micropolitics through digital media, and thus predict the potential growth of media culture.

Among some fun politics that are recently taking place, receiving some attention from broader audience, is National D.Va Association in South Korea, an activism started by a fan community of *Overwatch*—a multiplayer online first-person shooter game, created in U.S.A.. The movement is not only gaining support from people within South Korea, female *Overwatch* players, or feminists, but is also recognized as a positive influence of *Overwatch* by Jeff Kaplan, the director of the game (Bratt). The group consist of people who like D.Va, a Korean character from the Blizzard game *Overwatch* (2016); the group's goal is to create a world where a person like D.Va —an ex competitive game player and mech pilot— can really appear in the future (National D.Va Association¹). This movement is interesting in that it not only adds variety to playful policial activities, but also focuses greatly on creation of and play with discourse. This holds quite a significance in relation to feminism, as feminism has always been associated with discourse; from the long history of women's voice being treated as private discourse, leading to their exclusion from public sphere, to the power discourse that derives from such exclusion (Elshtain, 1982, 603). And as Lazar points out, in the society where issues of gender, power, and ideology became more complex, better understanding of discourse that sustains and breaks gender hierarchy is needed; the National D.Va Association, with its new playful use of discourse, may provide an example.

¹ The Tumblr site for National D.Va Association with English description of the activities and aims of the association: <https://national-dva-association.tumblr.com/>

This paper, therefore, aims to answer the following question: How does the National D.Va Association show potential of feminism to further develop as fun politics, through its adjustment to the culture of creating discourses? Through answering the question, I will investigate the importance of discourse, from traditional debate of power discourse, to more newly appreciated trend of creating memes, in online activism. Also, the paper will emphasize the possibilities of online feminism—and possibly other political activities as well—to become more fun. Furthermore, as this paper turns away from the past studies that only focused on Western culture, feminism, and activism, it adds cultural diversity to the digital culture study both internationally and within South Korea; relevant studies on digital culture in Korea has long been limited to K-pop and K-drama, the so-called ‘Hallyu’, the Korean wave (Lee, 2016, 98-100). Nevertheless, the paper has some limitations as well, due to the lack of time and resources, and the innate characteristic of the corpus. It might be the Korean digital culture which significantly emphasize discourse that made such widely practiced fun feminism as the National D.Va Association possible. Moreover, as on-going event and phenomena, further study in both the National D.Va Association and Korean online feminism is needed to make more conclusive evaluation of the flow of fun politics.

In the following chapter, past studies on related topics will be discussed for background information. Brief introduction on the National D.Va Association will be given first, which will then be followed by contextual details on feminist movement in South Korea, explaining how such movement came to exist. Then, studies that were conducted on feminism and discourse will be discussed, which will provide the foundation of the discourse study related to feminism. Finally, I will look into what kind of fun politics have already been studied, such as fan activism and online feminism actions. Afterwards, in chapter 3, I will explain how discourse analysis will be used to answer the given question.

Then, in chapter 4, the analysis of the use of discourse in the Association’s activities will take place, in order to see how it uses discourse as playful yet politically significant element. First, three activities of the Association will be analyzed based on how language is used for fun politics; the phrases and symbols used in their merchandise, the meaning and values that their *Overwatch* tournament holds, and the relay storytelling using hashtag. In latter section, the analysis focuses on the cultural influence on such language usage by studying the importance of playing with discourse in online feminism prior to the Association. The role of language in both feminist and anti-feminist activities online will be introduced as contextual information, and another example of activity by the Association will be used as an example: verbal debate and rebuttal on malicious comments it receives through satirical language.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, reading analysis of the past studies on fan activism, feminism and discourse, and fun politics will take place. I will first introduce the National D.Va Association, the corpus of my study. It will accompany information of the history and contemporary situation of South Korean feminism for better understanding of why such feminist activity came to exist, as well as an example of online feminism that came prior to the Association. Then, texts regarding feminism and discourse analysis will be discussed to highlight the close relation between language and feminist movement, to further aid understanding of Korean online feminism and to support the study of language and symbolic meanings around the National D.Va Association. Finally, I will broaden the context by looking at other types of fun politics; these include fan activism, television shows on politics, and other online activities on political/social issues.

2.1. Feminism in Korea and the National D.Va Association



Figure 1.1

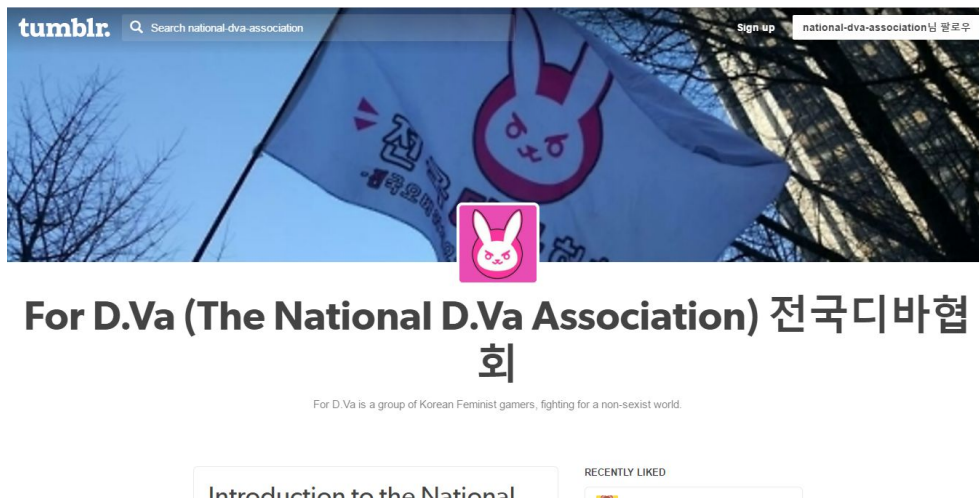


Figure 1.2

I would first like to introduce the National D.Va Association, a recent wave in Korean fan activism. It is a group of feminist gamers, whose goal can be seen from its slogan “Feminism

for future female”. The future female refers to not only the women in future South Korea, but more importantly D.Va, or Hana Song, a character from Blizzard Entertainment’s game *Overwatch* and the mascot that the Association is related with; the similarity between Figure 1.1, the official image that D.Va uses within the game, and Figure 1.2, the logo of the Association seen from its Tumblr page show the affection towards D.Va as fan. A Korean herself, D.Va, in 2060—the year that the story of *Overwatch* takes place—, has accomplished works that are highly unlikely for women living in current South Korea to achieve; within the world of *Overwatch*, she was formerly a competitive *StarCraft* player and a world champion in that league, and now fights as a Mech Pilot in one of the units in Korean army. These can be seen as mere ideal—or even far-fetched— fictional settings when considering the current treatment that women receive in those fields, especially in South Korea. E-sports still have an invisible door for female professional gamers to enter, reinforcing the stereotype that games are still men’s entertainment, and Korean army not only has few rooma for female soldiers, but also treats them unfairly (BBC 2016, para. 2; Jung, Lee, 2007, para.1). In other words, South Korea is suffering a gender inequality in many areas, that no such female hero can be born.

Such inequality may have roots in the Confucianism, which the Choson, or Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) was based on (Lee 1995, para. 4, 5, 7). But regardless of its vague startline, the problem is that the inequality is still thriving; aside from the glass ceiling and cases of sexual harrassments, this can be seen from how women are unprotected by society both socially and legally, like the recent case of sexual assault at workplace Han-Sem² shows. Adversities that women experience in South Korea continues, not only in the real life, but also in online spaces. Other than the daily harassing messages that women received via social networking and game chats, one of the bigger issues regarding online sexual harassment and violence is the ‘Soronet’ and hidden cams. Soronet is the biggest illegal Korean pornography site, where hidden cam videos and revenge pornos were uploaded; the fact that it took 17 years to force the site to close³ only made women more angry, as they questioned whether the government and law enforcement even had the intention to actively investigate the matter (Park, Lee, 2016). There were some cases where women who found out that they were in these videos commit suicide, and the hidden cam videos raised alarm that there could be hidden cameras in any public bathroom (2016, para. 1, 2). And perhaps the biggest wave in contemporary Korean feminist movement occurred because of the murder at Gangnam Station, where a woman was murdered in public bathroom⁴.

² It is a case where serial sexual assaults and harassment against a female intern were committed by co-workers. While repeated attempts to deny the crime is problematic, the attitude of public became an issue, as people are debating over whether she is a gold digger trying to sue an innocent man for money rather than focusing on the fact that she was assaulted (Park, 2017).

³ Some say that the time it took for the police to track down the site and arrest the owner itself is negligence of female rights; similar sexist online accounts, which provided profiles of men who took parts in illegal prostitution, sexual harrassments and offence, were tracked down and punished within two months (Park, Lee 2016).

⁴ Despite the culprit’s statement that he was waiting specifically for a woman, letting six other men who entered before the victim go, and that his motive was frustration for being ignored by other women previously at a bar, he

While the incident itself is a real case, its influence spread online as well; such recent growth in misogynic crimes and reaction towards them set a fire in online protest and open conversations about sexual violence on Social Network Services, bringing feminism closer to general public (Lee, 2016, para. 147, 148).

Na-Young Lee argues that stories of such inequalities, harassments, and violence are finally being told only now because the victims are digital natives, which explains why such experiences are often written in online spaces (2016, 152). She explains the term ‘digital native’ as people who were born between 1977 and 1997, the children of those who participated in Democratization movement in 1970-80’s. According to her, digital native grew up in the society where progressive feminist movement already took place once, and in smaller family rather than traditional large family, thus experiencing old sexism—part of what is considered as Confucianist tradition— less; this, in turn, created bigger disjunction between gender inequality in real life, which seem rather invisible, and that in online communities, which remains lucid. They use online platform to spread the problem, build intellects as a group, and form a bond that exceeds the boundary between online and real world (Lee, 2016, 171). Examples of such efforts can be seen daily through social networking sites, where people recommend feminist books, warn others when there has been an incident in certain area, and share experiences and sympathies in case of tragic incident like Gangnam station murder (Lee, 2016, 152).

Although their activities are not limited to online spaces, National D.Va Association can be considered as such movement led by the digital natives, as its activities resemble recent online feminist movements. Through social networking platform Twitter, it retweets tweets that the Association and its followers may be interested, making the information flow as much as possible. This action alone help people on the platform be educated about feminist efforts, spreads the awareness of problems that women are facing in current South Korea, and even shows cooperation between other activists and groups on Twitter. Also, as to not contain the group’s purpose only within Twitter or South Korea, there is a Tumblr site explaining the Association, its plans and activities both in Korean and English. Further analysis of the activities that the Association does will follow in later section.

Of course, the Association is not the only online feminist movement. There are multiple group efforts to bring the matter to the surface, as it can be seen from many SNS accounts and websites dedicated to feminism. One of the bigger groups is called Megalia⁵, a group that has

was considered simply as a schizophrenia patient (Lee 2016). This raised anger and complaints from public, mostly women who argued that this was a femicide, not a random murder.

⁵ The name Megalia is mixture of MERS Gallery, a forum that was created as reaction to the MERS CoV epidemic, and the book *Egalia’s Daughter* by Gerd Brantenberg, which mirrors patriarchy. The reason why MERS Gallery was used partially for its name is because of the feminist turn the gallery took due to two different cases of MERS infection: a man was considered as carrier of the virus was allowed to leave the country for business trip, his

been branded as radical due to their tactic of mirroring, which takes misogyny and inequalities that Korean women encounter in daily life and reverse the sex of assailant and victim. Megalia's mirroring tactics can still be found online, actively used on social networks like Twitter, even when the site has closed down. It is indeed known for its use of extreme languages, but Yun argues that it is different the language of disgust and hate used by other websites that use similar forms of hateful language; she states that Megalians took a necessary step further in Korean feminism, spreading their argument that it is okay for women to not limit their feminism into reasoning with men, but to do what they want to without being afraid of getting branded (Yun, 2015, 13-20). Megalia indeed had great impact to Korean society, both online and offline; aside from the influence it had on current online feminism, the term itself became synonym for feminism, mostly in demeaning way; it is common to see when someone's opinion reflect feminist idea, people immediately ask whether they are "메갈" or Megal, an abbreviation of Megalia (Kim, 2016, para. 36).

I have explained what the National D.Va Association is, and in which context such activism rose from. In later analysis, the characteristics and activities of the Association will be further studied, to see how it inherited the characteristics, tactics, and social standing within online spaces of the earlier and more traditional feminist movement like Megalia, and yet developed its own characteristic as fan activism that still tries to show their affection towards D.Va just as much as they try to tackle the social issues. For now, let us look continue to look at feminism and the role of discourse in feminist movements.

2.2. Feminism and discourse

Sheila Rowbotham says, "Language conveys a certain power. It is one of the instruments of domination... The language of theory -removed language- only express a reality experienced by the oppressors. It speaks only for their world, from their point of view. Ultimately a revolutionary movement has to break the hold of the dominant group over theory, it has to structure its own connections. Language is part of the political and ideological power of rulers.... We can't just occupy existing words. We have to change the meanings of words even before we take them over" (1973, 32-33). In her view where language holds a power, women has long been silenced, and this history have been studied extensively; the history goes all the way to the era of Plato, where women were silenced for their language were considered meaningless noise and deprived of philosophic quest for knowledge, and even when Luther argued for liberation of

responsibility as a father and husband to support the family being the major reason, while two women who returned from their trip were immediately quarantined for being considered as carrier; it turned out that the man was actually infected and the women not, but the forum was full of people dismissing only the women as thoughtless and careless people travelling in the urgent circumstances of public health; this caused some people from the forum to feel the need to change the double-standards, and thus, the inequality (Yun, 2015, 8-9).

human speech through breaking the traditional notion of meaningful public and private discourse, women spoke “...in the voice of Christianity and housewifery” (Elshtain, 1982, 606-608).

Although women’s rights have improved since then and there are still many efforts to fix the inequality of the society, feminism discourse study continues in different conditions than before. Among many reasons is the new sexism as backlash to the feminism (Lazar, 2007, 141). This argument is supported by the case of how Megalia is branded as evil for breaking the expectation of women and feminist, although not mentioned by Lazar directly. Branding feminism, thus inserting negative meaning to feminism is rather common; in the article by Charlotte Proudman, there is an example of Rush Limbaugh’s view of feminism as “Feminism was created to force popular culture to accept ugly women.”, and the new term “Feminazi” is also explained (Proudman, 2015).

The meaning making, however, is not limited to usage against feminism; activists try to use memes to make feminism more accessible online, as shown in the case with Binders Full of Women, which will further be explained in the next section (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). With contemporary society, especially taking the difference of online space from real world into account, discourse study on online feminism should continue.

Furthermore, the power of language is still valued, as in the case with Megalia; their language is supposed to be not just violent, but strives to become free of the constraints that were put on women in the name of “being feminine” (Yun, 2015, 13). It could be said that they share the ideology of Thomas Hobbes, who strongly believed in the power of language, to the point that he argued that people should learn to speak language that is “...drained of terms of public moral evaluation - duty, justice, right, equality, liberty, legitimacy, resistance- and deprived of terms of private moral sentiment and emotion - affection, responsibility, love, mercy, compassion, decency, kindness.” (Elshtain, 1982, 610) Megalia’s use of language could coincide with the radical feminists approach in that they believe in the violence of the words, emphasizing the importance of language even in the contemporary feminism in South Korea.

As discussed in texts above, language carries an important weight in feminist movement, like it does to any other social practices. Its correlation to digital platform, where everything spreads fast and far, should be studied further as a form of culture of creating meaning. It is the aim of this paper to look into such practices of creating new language and meaning done by the National D.Va Association, as well as those done to the Association, and how those activities can also involve playfulness.

2.3. Fun politics

One similarity between the ‘fun politics’ that have been studied is that broad audience can easily participate in entertainment for political goals, which can be seen as an influence of participatory culture. Participatory culture is not an alien term anymore, as there are many studies, such as that of Henry Jenkins, that delve into how consumers reproduce what they consume, empowering audience; it is, as Jenkins describes, a culture that allows easy access to artistic and civic engagement, encouraging people to make such contribution. (2006, 3).

This culture is embraced in many ways in contemporary society, and one example of those is the fans, or fandom; fans, according to Brough and Shresthova in their article, are individuals who not only consume popular culture, but often find their identities within and through it (2012, para. 2.1). When these individuals are connected, they make a fandom, in which they share their interests and tastes, and build a sense of collectivity. Earlier conceptions on fan activities were limited to consuming and reproducing popular culture, such as writing fanfiction, roleplaying, and organizing fan group activities; in other words, fandom and media were not primarily created for political purposes. (Brough and Shresthova, 2012, para. 2.2, 2.3).

Fan activism, a term used by Jenkins as early as in 1992, is another way for the audience to be active consumers. It primarily focused on rather personal and cultural issues, such as fans lobbying for specific content outcomes, show cancellations, and asserting their opinions on representation of certain gender or race (Brough and Shresthova, 2012, para. 2.1). The term at first proved to be quite controversial, as activism is supposed to be intentional effort to bring political and/or social change; some scholars argued that the aims of fan activism were narrowly focused on popular culture that they were consuming, thus dismissing it as not political enough to be considered as activism (2012, para. 2.2; Jenkins, 2012, para. 1.3, 1.4). Like the earlier conceptions on fan activities, the potential of fan activism was dismissed in the early stage of the study.

Nevertheless, more contemporary view on fan activism argues otherwise, asserting that fan activism should be seen as political action, and thus broadening the possibilities of fan activities. Kligler-Vilenchik et al. describe that fan activities themselves resemble democratic politics in that they not only look into the texts individually but bring in group discussions, and defines fan activism as a fan activity that embodies further politics (2012, para 1.2; van Zoonen, 63). Also, fan activism has developed from the movements that only concerned specific media works, to those that make statements not only concerning broader parts of society, but raising both cultural and political awareness as well. For example, Brough and Shresthova mention fan activism that involved homophile movement and female rights fundraising, and Jenkins wrote an article that focuses on a large scale fan activism, the Harry Potter Alliance, which participates in

various areas from book donation for communities to sending aids to victims of natural disasters (2012, para. 2.4; Jenkins, 2012). After all, as Brough and Shresthova points out, boundaries between cultural and political concerns, in contemporary societies, are porous (2012).

It may not be so surprising that such activism is influenced by Internet, like many other activities nowadays have been; it is already established argument by many scholars that fandom activities have been heavily influenced by increased accessibility to Internet. Fandom itself emphasize collective identity as a whole, and the Internet, and further, social media, made individuals' interactions easier; Bennett calls this change as "...development, and fragmentation, of networks and communities" (2014, 7). Bennett especially emphasizes how communication within fandom became instant and direct, and how this allows information to travel quicker through social network than more traditional methods (2012, para. 3.1). Her example, which is repeatedly mentioned in Lee's article, is Twitter's hashtags, a form of communication that fuels mobilization around certain trends and interests (2016, 118). Thus, contemporary fandoms are already connected to each other through Internet and social media, forming a loose but readily connected community with their own particular identity as a group.

Moreover, while more traditional definition of political participation meant directly interacting with associations and nation-states themselves, often regarding issues like electoral processes, Brough and Shresthova argue that more informal and culturally concerned approach to politics should be considered as political participation (2012). After all, digital protest, activism that involves digital media to influence local or even broader communities, has already been going on, as it can be seen through activities such as forum debates and online petitions (Edwards, Howard, and Joyce, 2013, 4). Earl and Kimport note the two major correlations between activism and Internet usage; first, media, especially visual media and Internet to spread such media, has informed and educated people what protest actually is; and second, it became easier for people to find those who share similar ideals, and thus stand for the same cause (2009, 221).

An example of digital culture on Internet shaping the new possibilities for political participation is creating and consuming memes; especially in the case like the Binders Full of Women. Created after Mitt Romney's speech, the phrase has brought a massive trend in creating visual parody of funny pictures making fun of his insensitive words (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, 330). While satire is not a new concept, the digital technology enabled people to easily produce multimodal messages, while the digital culture of creating and consuming memes, as well as social platforms as a place where memes can spread exponentially, shows that fun politics are becoming more common for the public; getting involved in politics in light and playful way like this is more naturally accepted as part of the digital culture (331). Jenkins also note that "activists, fans, and parodists of all stripes are using the popular graphics software package,

Photoshop, to appropriate and manipulate images to make a political statement”, giving some examples in fields other than feminism (2006, 233). Another example of common online activity being used as a tool for playful political expression discussed in Rentschler and Thrift’s paper, is the mock reviews on *Amazon.com* (336-341). Such creative ways of using what would otherwise be considered petty, everyday online activities can be turned into political participation show that the boundaries of political participation nowadays continue to become broader with what digital platforms and technology can afford us to do.

While online activism, fan-initiated or not, can be seen as playful activities taking serious turn, politic itself can also be altered into something audience can enjoy; in this case, Liesbet van Zoonen’s notion of fan democracy come in (2004). Van Zoonen first clarifies that despite television programs like *Big Brother* and *The American Candidate*, which involve audience voting system similar to that of *Pop Idol* or *American Idol*, many people argue that politic is in different sphere from entertainment; she quotes their comments, describing how shows like those diminishes and degrades politics (40-41). Such idea that politics and fun cannot go along may have come from Habermas’s definition of politics and public sphere, that “...the idea of a public sphere is that of a body of "private persons" assembled to discuss matters of "public concern" or "common interest.”” (Fraser, 1992, 112). According to this, politics is everything that women has been excluded from; the public sphere, and the ‘serious’ public discourse.

Van Zoonen, however, links fandom to politics, drawing similarities between the two; first, both fandoms and political constituencies have an idol, a figure of affection, whose ideologies or values are shared by followers, and gain fame and support through performance; and as a group, they all encourage exchange of knowledge, participation in discussions and various activities; finally, both fans and political constituencies are involved in their activities emotionally, mainly through affection (2004, 39). Through such similarities, van Zoonen argues that entertaining politics is not as repulsive as some politicians consider it to be; in fact, these similarities are not recent changes, thus it should not be as alien as they make it sound like (49). Together with the examples of recent playful political activities, her argument emphasize the need to keep studying the fun politics to fully understand both media entertainment and their influence on politics.

The articles mentioned in chapter 2 gave contextual information on the National D.Va Association, feminism and discourse, and fun politics. I first gave brief introduction on the Association, the corpus of this paper, and some explanation on the background, such as history and culture regarding the misogyny crisis and feminist movement. Then, I looked at the feminism in the perspective of discourse study; on how women were first excluded from the ‘public discourse’, their language considered as private, and how that, through many efforts,

have been changing over time. The need for different approach on discourse and feminism due to changing society and its structure and values becoming more complex, was also mentioned in this section. Finally, past studies on fun politics were discussed. Fan activism is a one of the well-known types of playful politics, becoming an introduction to politics for younger generation. Internet and technology also allow people to participate in political expression through easy and fun activities, like creating and spreading memes and mock reviews. Also, a perspective that flips the general idea that politics and entertainment exist in different spheres, has been introduced, linking fandom and political constituencies. In the following chapter, I will introduce the method for this research, discourse analysis, and briefly explain the structure of the analysis.

3. Method

This paper aims to investigate how the National D.Va Association demonstrates further possibility of feminism to develop as fun politics, through its adjustment to the culture of creating discourses. In order to answer the research question, it is not only necessary to know about the National D.Va Association itself, but also how the culture of discourse has affected the usage of language in South Korea, especially in past feminism. In order to do so, critical discourse analysis will be used to study both the corpus itself and the context around it.

Discourse analysis, according to James Paul Gee, is "...the study of relationship between form and function in language" (2004, 19). Adding to that, by referring to critical discourse analysis, it moves further from just the language, but also focuses on how such relationship correlates with specific social practice. It is useful in that critical discourse analysis can be used to study the social relationships involving power; Bacchi adds to this argument by emphasizing the need to focus more on agency of political subjects when doing discourse analysis (Gee, 2004, 19; Bacchi, 2005, 198).

There will be two different discourse analysis used in this paper, a dual problematic thinking offered by Potter et al.; the study will be divided into categories of "discourse uses people" and "people use discourse" (1990, 213–14). This is also related to two different traditions of discourse analysis, "... a social psychological focus on patterns of speech (discourse analysis), and a political theoretical focus on the ways in which issues are given a particular meaning within a specific social setting (analysis of discourses)" (Bacchi, 2005, 199). The reason for using both approaches is because rise of activism like feminism, followed by that of the National D.Va Association, and why they are systemed to be like they are, are not in a singular line, but more complex relation; the context interlaced to these should also be studied along with

the activism itself. It is as Stephen Ball says: “Meanings thus arise not from language, but from institutional practices, from power relations, from social positions”; we should look at the Association and the practices of certain language around it (1990. 17-18).

In the first section of analysis, uses of discourse related to activities that the National D.Va Association participates in will be analyzed. The relation between how the Association and people supporting it use—either intentionally or unintentionally— symbols, words, and phrases, and how their activities encourages playful feminism will be discussed. There are total three activities, and therefore types of usage, that will be studied: giving new meaning to already existing *Overwatch* discourse through parody and consumption of those, the ability and opportunity to speak at the *Overwatch* competition, and creation of new discourse through hashtags. For this section, the Association’s posting on different platforms will be the main source of analysis materials. This analysis will fit the “people use discourses” analysis according to Potter et al. (1990, 213–14).

In the latter part, the analysis will focus more on how such usages of discourse originate from prevalent culture, bridging the ‘fun politics’ to feminism, and to the National D.Va Association in particular; this will be the “discourse uses people” part of the discourse analysis (Potter et al., 1990, 213–14). The contextual information will be dealt regarding how online feminism in South Korea has been fights against, and with, different terms. Then, another example of the Association’s activity, spontaneous debate and rebuttal with people against its aim, will be analyzed to see how it inherits such culture and yet make into satirical fun for its Twitter followers. The source of the analysis will are few terms actively used in Korean culture—originally created and spread from from online forums—, an interview with the head of the National D.Va Association, and, again, the Association’s posting.

4. The National D.Va Association as fan initiated ‘fun’ feminism

To remind and further describe the activities by the National D.Va Association, let us go back to the introduction of the group. Its first official appearance was at the protest in front of the National Assembly, where people gathered for the impeachment of the ex-president. During continuous protest started a strange trend of people flying flags of somewhat irrelevant group name; ‘Rhino Beetle Research Association’ is perhaps the first to start this trend (Ha, 2016). The meaning behind the trend was not only to draw attention and laughter to the protest, but also to convince that anyone, not only political parties and other groups closely associated with political/social interest, should be able to join the protest. Although the National D.Va Association did exist before that, it is after it took part in this protest that it started attracting

people and planning out some official activities (Ha, 2017, para. 26). Ji-Young Kim, the head of the Association, said in her interview that in short-term, this Association was to fill in the absence of any group that fights against sexual harassment within games and misogyny (Para. 26).

Since then, the National D.Va Association has been developing as a structured group. Basically, according to the earlier tweets made by the Association's official Twitter account, it does not take anything to be a part of the Association; similar to other fan activism like Nerdfighter, one is already a part of the group if he or she shares interest and wants to be a part, making it a taste community (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2016). This coincide with the characteristic of social network services that the Association often utilize: Twitter. By following the official account, not only can massive number of people get news from the Association, it already creates a sense of identity as both an individual and a group. Retweeting the tweets by the Association is another way of working as part of the group, contributing to the spread of messages. However, there is another level of participation in this group. Too many people were interested in joining the Association, and as fan-initiated group, there was a limit to how many people can actually get together for offline meetings; therefore, the managers of the association created different seasons for activities, and people who would like to join have to apply before the start of each season.

As feminist group, the Association has varieties of activities. It has regular book meetings and film nights for offline members to participate, and takes part in events with other feminist groups. What this paper focus, however, is the following activities that are open to all of its supporters: creating and selling merchandise, holding game competition, and using Twitter to actively and spontaneously fight against misogyny; these activities are what shows the potential of the National D.Va Association using discourses to develop their fun activism that encompasses online feminism and fan activism. By looking at the words, symbolic meanings, and discourses around the Association, this paper will investigate how it stands in between fan activism and online feminism, promoting a new mixture of the two to further develop fun politics.

In the first section, the activities of the Association will be analyzed according to how language is used for fun politics. The phrases and symbols used in their merchandise, the meaning and values that their *Overwatch* tournament holds, and the relay storytelling using hashtag will be discussed. Afterwards, the analysis focuses on the cultural background of language usage. Brief explanation of important role of language in both feminist and anti-feminist activities online, is followed by how the Association inherits the culture and embracing it its own way; engaging in verbal debates and rebuttal for satire and to motivate others to speak up as well.

4.1 The National D.Va Association and use of discourse

The National D.Va Association participates in various activities to achieve their goal, but as stated in the interview with the head of the association, it intends to have fun. While fan activism indeed involves fun, the Association crosses the boundary of their taste community as *Overwatch* fandom, and encompasses other feminists as a part of the ‘fun’ feminism of online feminism.

The most evident use of discourse is the creation of merchandise. The idea of selling merchandise came up as the Association’s idea of fundraising, as there is limit for the fan-initiated group to secure financial mean for its activities. With the help of Tumbbug, a site where anyone can start a fundraising plan, the Association sold items that held symbolic meanings for both *Overwatch* fans and feminists.

A. 전디협 스티커 세트



Figure 2.1 Sticker set sold during fundraiser

As it can be seen from Figure 2.1, the merchandise they sold have characteristics of D.Va, which would increase the chance of fans buying such goods. In other words, at the surface, the Association used the discourse of D.Va, of *Overwatch*. Of course, there are more layers of discourse to these merchandise. Some of the phrases here have heavy feminist characteristic; for instance, the black sticker says “Hell-Femi Gamer”, a phrase often used by

followers of the Association; the pink sticker in the bottom says “I’m just good [at playing game], not good for a woman”, which serves as an answer to one of the sexist phrase that female gamers often encounter. Together with symbols representing D.Va, one can say that the Association is not using D.Va and feminist discourse separately, but as a new discourse; D.Va became not only a subject of fan affection, but also a symbol for feminism.

The National D.Va Association goes further into weaving the discourse of *Overwatch* and feminism together. The pink badge on the bottom says “You are feminist, charge!”, a parody of another *Overwatch* character, Ana’s line, “You are stronger now, charge!”⁶. Considering that Ana, an ex-soldier whose age is 60 in the game, can be considered as a character that adds diversity to limited scope of female characters in past games, adding feminist hint to her quote does not seem too far-fetched. Similarly, the main quote by D.Va “I play to win”, is often used to promote the Association; the slight change is that the Association prefers to say “We play to win” instead. ‘We’ can be interpreted in different ways. It could be female gamers who really play to win, opposed to beliefs that they cannot be as good as men in games, or that women can only play well by having other men help them. It could also be the people of the National D.Va Association, who ‘play’ their games to win the war against misogyny. Regardless of the meaning they intended through this change, it still is an example of how the Association fuse existing language from games to hold feminist value, creating its own discourse using the game fans like.

⁶ There may be different translation possible, as it is English translated version of localized quote in Korean server. The official English version of this quote is “You’re powered up, get in there.”, a line Ana says when using her Nano Boost skill.



Figure 2.2 Screenshot of few tweets shared via Tumbldug

What is also interesting in the sales of merchandise is that people can easily spread the news that they supported the Association through purchase. The default message included in the tweet which can be shared via Tumbldug page as a proof of support, is “The National D.Va Association’s merchandise project for Hell-Femi gamers. I am (number)th supporter!”. Through this message, it becomes easy to show that one is part of, and therefore supports the Association; not only that, it is possible to check approximate number of people who shares the his or her ideals. The message thus enables supporters to build both an identity as a fan and a supporter, and a group identity as a part of massive group, the National D.Va Association; this is one of the characteristic of fan activism, as Bennett said, that fandoms can form a collective identity yet be fragmented—in this case, throughout various fields of interest in Twitter (2014, 7). In other words, the particular information in this message which people can share as a proof of fundraising allows supporters to form a bond, a playful way of gathering members of the Association—who would otherwise be dispersed in various layers of participation and fields of interest— together.

Another use of discourse is in the game competition held by the Association, *Go Women Go*, one of the biggest event it organized. It is a tournament for only for female and genderqueer

players, and even the staffs and the commentators are women only. Play with words can also be seen from the Korean version of title “Here goes woman!” when directly translated; this is another parody of *Overwatch* hero Reinhardt’s quote, as Korean version of the quote is “Here goes hammer!”⁷. Considering how Reinhardt charge and knock down enemies when he shouts that line, the title may have the same wish women will one day tackle the discrimination they face every time they play *Overwatch*. Nonetheless, wordplay is not its only characteristic.

More importantly, *Go Women Go* allowed women to speak more in public in the fields of their interest; like bringing private discourse into public, it helped bringing out the suppressed voice to more open space. While the need for women only game tournaments are drawing some attention, this event was special in that even the commentators were all women. *All for Ladies*, an official women only *Overwatch* held by Eyedenity Entertainment⁸ in September 2017, for example, allowed 96 amateur participants to enter the competition. It is the most recent women’s game competition in South Korea, yet two of the three commentators were men; the fact that there are only few well-known women game commentators and casters is also problematic, but this could have been a place where new women commentators make their debut. Considering that the competition allowed women to take over jobs that were mostly done by men, *Go Women Go* gave more physical space for women to speak in their field of interest, not only through the game, but also on commentating.

Furthermore, the National D.Va Association also use a tactic to create a meme-like discourse. The most recent example of this is the hashtag #팩타_나도게이머다, which can be translated into FeGTA: I am also a gamer. This hashtag, related to the FeGTA—(Female Gamers Take Action)—a conference for feminist gamers and game developers, started a relay of storytelling by female gamers.

⁷ This is another direct translation of localized quote. The official English version of the quote is “Hammer down!”.

⁸ It is one of the well-known game company in South Korea and a part of Actoz Soft Co., Ltd.

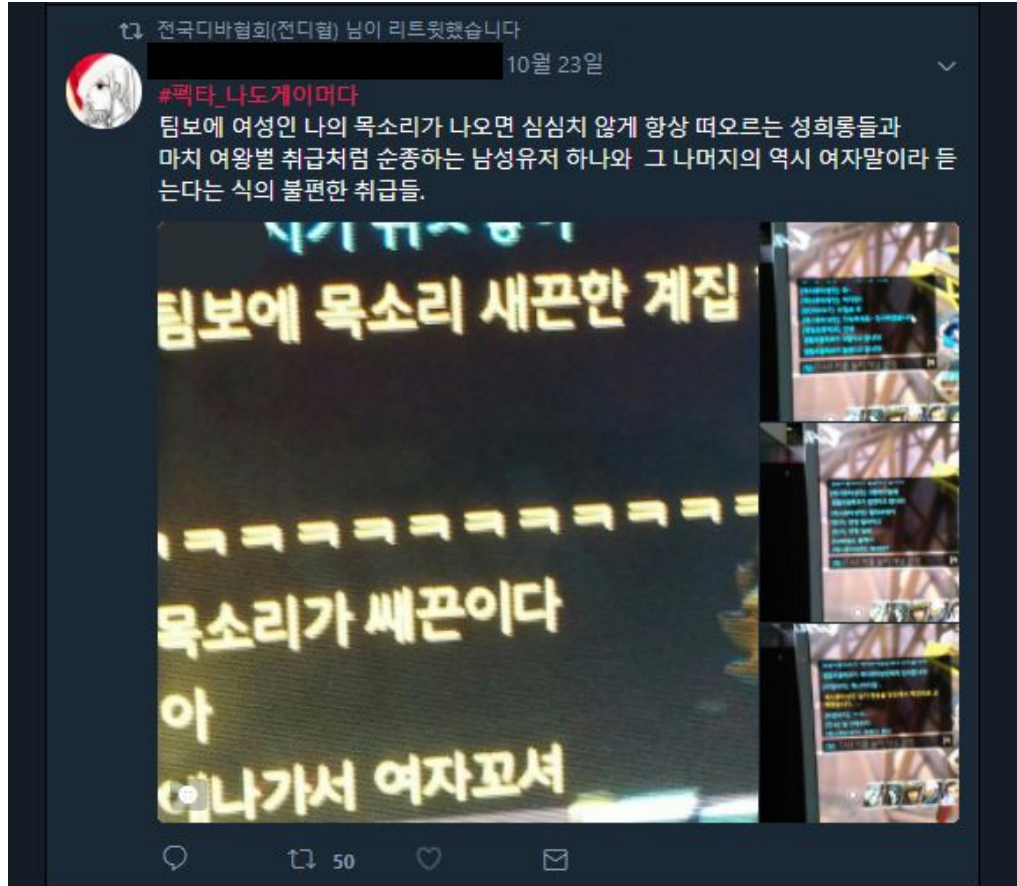


Figure 2.3. An example of people participating in #펙타_나도게이머다

As if it is a game of its own, people began sharing their experience getting sexually harassed when playing game. With cynical laughter in their accusation, this resembles the case of #BindersFullOfWomen in that the hashtag became a place where female gamers can easily join the political flow: “‘Binders Full of Women’ meme reveals a model of a feminist movement that adheres less to formal movement organisations and established social media protest strategies, embracing instead a model of ‘ironic activism’ where satire and dissent interlink in crowd-sourced expressions of feminist de’tournement” (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, 336). Although there is no actual meme involved, the hashtag successfully drew people together, retweeting others stories to more people aware of the matter. As it can be seen from this example, the Association also creates a discourse of its own to merge play and feminism.

Overall, these three examples show how the National D.V.a Association use discourse; to embed playfulness. First example of using in-game words and symbols displayed the Association’s interaction with *Overwatch* and D.V.a as a discourse. Then, the second example of enabling women to speak in their field through participating in what they like, game, in various ways. The last example shows how the association also creates its own discourse, allowing

women to easily join in the satirical fun of sharing their episodes of anger and frustration. Such use of discourse may appeal to both *Overwatch* fans, female gamers, or to even any women who receive information regarding the Association in general, as misogyny and sexual harassment happen not only in *Overwatch* or in online games. It is the element of having fun with language and the ability to speak up, that makes up different activities run by the Association.

4.2 Influence of current online feminism and digital culture

Now that we have looked at playful use of discourse in the National D.Va Association's activities, let us look the culture that made creative interactions around discourse possible. To do so, it is necessary to first take a step away from the National D.Va Association for a moment, and to look at how people used discourses to support and hinder feminism in Korean online spaces. This section explains how creation of language and meaning has been an artillery in this political fight. After the explanation, one more example of the Association's activity will be discussed in relation to the culture around online feminism.

Feminism in South Korea is not an entirely new; the movement itself has its own history, which will not be dealt in details in this paper. However, as explained earlier, feminism became one of the issues that draw continuous attention in online spaces recently, growing ever so loud and clear. The voices become louder after certain trigger, an actual incident that place. One of such cases is the Gangnam station murder, which people not only shared sympathy for the victim, but started a relay of women openly sharing related threats they received (Lee, 2016, 148). Another big wave of protest on SNS came when a female voice actor was fired from a game company for buying a t-shirt with feminist quote "Girls do not need a prince" and posting the picture on her Facebook; this caused outrage in feminists in general, but especially in female gamers, leading to boycott of games that the said company services. Such movement of collective sharing of personal experiences even led to exposing sexism, sexual harassments, and sex offenders in various parts of the society, including the literature society; during these confessions, famous Korean male poets and writers were accused, which led to either legal process and/or public apologies (Lee, 2016, 148).

As a reaction to such feminism, anti-feminism also became prevalent online, with its foremost example of creation of derogatory terms used to frame women. One may think of the term 'feminazi' in this case; in Korean culture, there are multiple terms with specified meanings. Started from a radical social platform Il-be⁹, most well-known term is "Kimchi-nyeo", a term combining the word Kimchi and a word for woman (Lee, 2016, 150). The term has been used for long time with broadest meaning, encompassing women who spend too much money on brand

⁹ The website resembles any other portal site with different forums. It is notorious for its radicalness, misogyny, and hate wording towards various groups of people.

items to those who go against public etiquette. Newer terms include “Mom-chung”, a term combining the word mom and a word for bug. This term is used to demean mothers who cannot take care of their children; there are several cases, such as mothers not stopping children from bothering others, to those who only take care of the children, causing inconvenience to others. No matter what term it is, these usages lead to one question: who is it to set the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable types of women and to brand them with such terms? Lee argues that such terms are used to shame women who do not fit the category of ‘good woman’, thus putting them under male control (2016, 150). This was same for feminists; as Megalia has been considered as the radical feminist, anyone speaking up for female rights would be branded as “Megal”, to the point that the term is used imprudently. It was as if “...social media have become a space of intense surveillance and punishment of feminist activism and activity” (Megarry, 2017, 9).

And as a reaction to such use of language came the mirroring tactic of Megalia. Words like “Hannam-Chung”, mixture of abbreviated word for Korean men and the word bug, was created. Recently, a term “Young Forty”—a term that meant to describe so-called liberal men in their forties— caused cynical laughter from women, for the desperate effort to beautify themselves (Lee, 2017, para. 5). While it may be muddy fight humiliating each other, the culture creation of words, ability to speak, and having satirical fun from it has already created before the National D.Va Association.

As a feminist group, the National D.Va Association too has been branded; accusations of it being “Megal” can be seen in many different sites where fandoms gather, including [오늘의 유머](#) [Today’s humor], [인벤](#) [Inven], and even Twitter¹⁰. Such clash may be considered inevitable, for what National D.Va Association is challenging is what the Association is situated within; sexist gamer community and Korean society. Nevertheless, the Association continues to aim for their goal, and to keep in mind to “...keep the playfulness and flexibility while trying to reflect as many voices as possible” (Lee, 2017, para. 8). The method that the Association chose for this is to actively fight against the threats, criticism, and scorns it receive through Twitter.

¹⁰ Following addresses lead to articles that argue National D.Va Association is part of Megalia in demeaning manner:

“전디협(전국디바협회)가 좀 이상합니다” [National D.Va Association is a bit weird]
todayhumor.co.kr/view.php?table=bestofbest&no=284423

“전디협이 왜 메갈이냐는 사람들 꽤 되는데” [There are quite many people asking why National D.Va Association is Megalia]
http://www.inven.co.kr/board/powerbbs.php?come_idx=4538&l=1311525

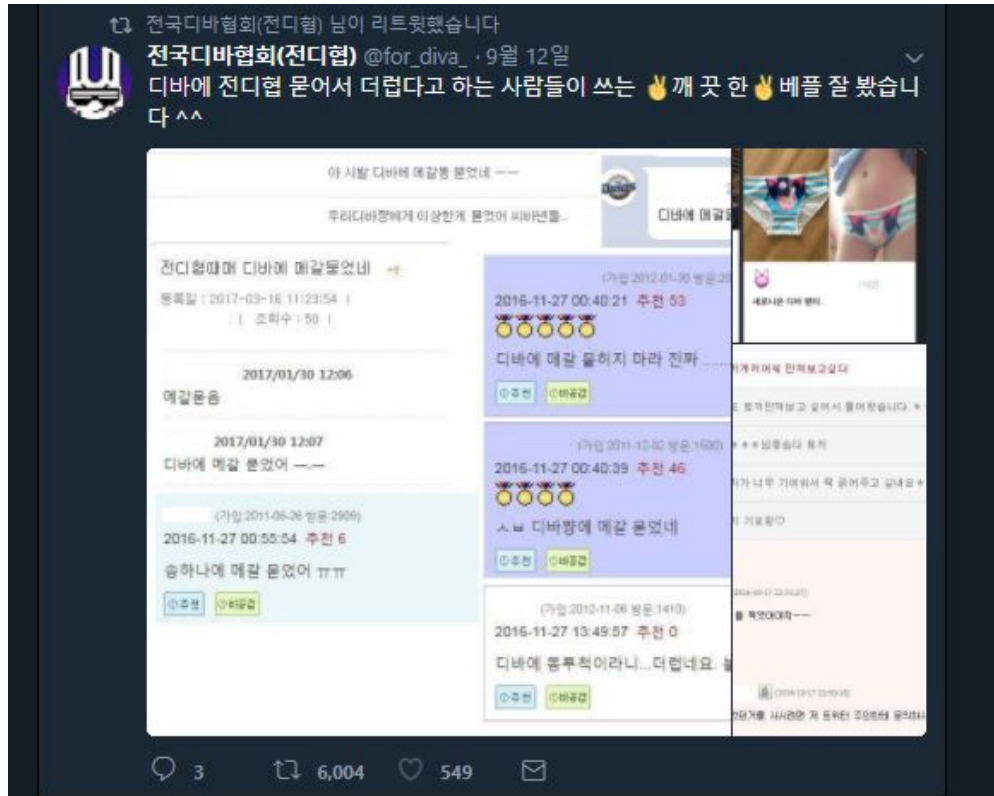


Figure 3.1 A screenshot of the Association's reaction



Figure 3.2 A screenshot of the Association's reaction

In Figure 3.1, the Association accuse people who disapprove the group as a counteraction. Even within the *Overwatch* fandom, there are anti-feminists, as the tweet explains, who say the National D.Va Association has disgraced D.Va. The tweet continues saying, “Look at their ‘graceful’ comments”, followed by sexually harassing comments under D.Va themed underwear merchandise. Figure 3.2 goes even further, retorting to a comment who laughs at lack of news from the Association saying “are people not interested anymore?”, with an advertisement of the group, reaching out for the supporters to “make some noise”; as it can be seen from the image, the tweet received over a thousand retweet, certainly creating some noise. Such responses from the Association creates spontaneous debate, but more importantly, satirical fun in spreading feminist awareness.

In such actions of verbally fighting against misogyny, the president of the Association emphasized the need to motivate people to speak up. She specifically says “If we don’t react and ignore [the scoffs and aggressive comments], we forget our language. We don’t know what and how to speak. We should speak up more in that case. We already have power, we just don’t know how to use them, but we are sure that we do, so we keep speak up like this any others will learn ‘So that is how to stand up against them’, which is why we think it is meaningful” (Lee, 2017, para. 16). Like the earlier example of *Go Women Go*, the Association focuses on teaching and giving chances for women to actually take parts in speaking up for their rights. Drawing from the long fight for bringing female voice, a private discourse, to public, the Association adds satirical fun to the process.

To summarize, this section briefly explained the culture of using language in the fights of feminist. As online feminism becomes more active, anti-feminism used language to take away its power, only to have groups of people use the exact tactic to counter the assault, starting a war of discourses. Creating new, more pleasant terms happen in different parts of the online spaces outside the warzone between feminism and antifeminism. Nevertheless, above examples show how much such culture influenced politics around feminism as well. And the National D.Va Association successfully embraced this culture to make feminism fun.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to investigate how the National D.Va Association shows potential of feminism to further develop as fun politics by absorbing the culture of discourse peculiar in South Korea. The study has values such as that it will revisit the importance of discourse in feminism but in a different approach, and also emphasize the possibilities of online feminism—and other areas of politics, if applicable—to become more fun, taking a step further

from past studies of fun politics, such as Liesbet van Zoonen's study of political TV shows for entertainment and, more recently, the study of #BindersFullOfWomen (2012; Rentschler & Thrift, 2015). As culture around online space, including social and political movement on such platforms, will continue to flourish, the study on how politics will become more playful will be important in understanding the trend. Also, it presented an issue outside of the Western society, adding cultural diversity into the study of feminism and digital culture.

In the first part of the analysis, I have looked at how the Association, and also the people engaging in its activities, make use of discourse in three different ways. First, uses of existing phrases and symbols from *Overwatch* to embody feminist meaning was discussed, as well as how such discourse spread using automated phrase, yet creating another usage of words. Then, the game competition, *Go Women Go*, held by the Association, was analyzed, not only by the use of words, but rather, how it enables women to speak in various ways; not only through playing games, but also in producing the game competition; this brings back the power discourse from the traditional feminism discussion. Moreover, the Association's hashtag activities were also studied in relation to how it creates new phrases that become a discourse as people spread the hashtags, adding their own stories to the word used.

Afterwards, the paper focused more on the context, looking at how the discourse has been an important part of Korean culture, especially regarding feminism. Few words were used as examples of how misogyny took forms of branding and thus controlling women's behavior, and how feminist reacted to it by mirroring the method, coming up with their own terms and verbal methods to fight back. In order to investigate how the Association has absorbed the culture and changed it into their fun politic, another activity was used as an example: the satirical debate and rebuttal of comments it receive While the activity may seem like muddy fight often seen online, it has its value in that the Association provides cynical fun, like that of the memes from #BindersFullOfWomen, and encourages people watching the debate to speak up against the misogyny they face in its own playful way (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, 336; Lee, 2017, para. 16)

The analysis has its limitation that it might be the Korean digital culture which emphasize discourse that made such widely practiced fun feminism possible; continuous search for similar activism, either one that is already going on or what may happen in the future, is necessary to create concrete timeline of the trend in fun feminism. Also, as on-going event and phenomena, further study in both the National D.Va Association and Korean online feminism is needed to make more conclusive evaluation of the flow of fun politics. Regardless of the limitation, the National D.Va Association is one step further in the field of both fun politics and online feminism, which also represent a part of Korea online culture. Future study will add depth in study of feminism and digital culture, as well as the study on the relation between feminism and discourse.

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