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Social Mythicization of Anonymous Pundits – The Case of South Korean Blogger Minerva

Since its popularization in Korea, the Internet has been widely hailed as an open and equal media space where authorities of legacy institutions lose their advantage while new kinds of online gurus gain ground as experts. Bloggers, discussion forum participants and other online writers who demonstrate proficiency in specific knowledge have often been lauded as prominent examples of such trends. However, sometimes it may not be the quality of their knowledge but the intersecting interests of various social agents that promote an Internet pundit to be recognized as an expert, potentially misleading people to wrong decisions. In 2009, a hugely popular Internet pundit under the pseudonym “Minerva” was arrested for posting pessimistic economic prophecies in popular discussion forums which allegedly caused severe turmoil in Korea. This study lays out the process of how various social agents mythicized an anonymous Internet pundit to become a national idol and threat and simultaneously over a short period of time, and subsequently dismissed the whole incident. Based on related Internet forum postings and press columns among other data, the narrative timeline of the incident is analyzed to map the changing patterns of how “Minerva” is framed. The focus of the analysis is the active interaction among the agents such as Minerva’s Internet advocates, the press and the government. Further implications for building a healthier discourse environment will be discussed.