Student Participation in Social Media on Political Issues Concerning Candidates in 2016 Philippine Presidential Election

Loyd P. Alcasid, Ivanie B. Villacampa, Anthony L. Awa

College of Arts and Sciences, Misamis University, Ozamiz City, 7200, Philippines
Corresponding author: Anthony L. Awa, email: tony.awa@gmail.com

Abstract

Political candidates create their own social media sites to organize people and gain support and votes. The biggest consumers of social media are the youth. The participation of students in social media therefore has an impact on the outcome of an election. This study aimed to determine the student participation in social media on issues concerning candidates in 2016 Philippine Presidential Election. Survey method using questionnaire was adopted in this study. Two-hundred college students of Misamis University in Ozamiz City, Philippines were randomly selected as respondents. Facebook was the most preferred social media for political issues, followed by YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, respectively. Social media showed that Rodrigo Duterte appeared to be the preferred presidential candidate of students for the 2016 Philippines presidential election. Student participation in social media on issues relating to presidential candidates was relatively less. The results of this study may shed light on trends on social media use and behavior of voters that may impact the election process and outcome.

Keywords: impact, outcome, trends, votes, youth
Introduction

The term “media” embraces a wide range of mechanisms that seek to communicate information, ideas and opinions to general public (Joyce, 2010). Social media is the latest platform to convey messages, express opinions, and establish connections and reconnections (Lustre, 2015). Social media competes with traditional media like print (newspapers and magazines) and broadcast (radio and television). In the Philippines, internet have changed the lifestyle of the Filipino people because they rely primarily on the internet as the medium of communication and information. For millennials, social media is the lifeline of information (Buenaobra, 2016). At present, there are 49 million active monthly users of Facebook in the Philippines which is close to half of the population of the country (Lustre, 2015). As observed, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have attracted millions of Filipinos who are hooked to and have become dependent on these networking sites.

Social media sites have become increasingly popular means for self-expression, communication, and influence, particularly in relation to political activity (Pablo et al., 2014). These sites have been mobilized as a tool to disseminate opinion, encourage others to vote, publicize one’s voting decisions, and even predict election outcomes. Politics at this time has entered the social media. Aspirant candidates especially in national position also use social media to organize people and gain support and votes. Candidates are creating their own social media accounts and use social media to connect with voters, engage with them in real time, and organize their supporters (Ames, 2014). Jejomar Binay, Miriam Defensor Santiago, Rodrigo Duterte, Grace Poe, and Mar Roxas who were 2016 Philippine presidential candidates used social media in their campaign (Dangla, 2016; Gavilan, 2016).

The biggest consumers of social media belong to 15 to 24 years old age bracket (Joyce, 2010). The Filipino youth could have a great impact to the result of the 2016 Elections because 40% of the 53 billion registered voters are youth aged 18 to 30 years old. From traditional ways of campaigning, politicians have used the social media where
millions of Filipinos are actively sharing information and making conversations. The ability to reach such a huge population and potential voters become attractive for politicians for their desire to win. However, according to Professor Chester Cabalza of the University of the Philippines, social media can make or break the chances of politicians because people react, explaining how social media can influence the chances of a candidate in winning the 2016 presidential election (Lustre, 2015).

The participation of students in social media may have an impact to the outcome of an election taking into account that the youth make up the vast number of social media users. This study aimed to determine the student participation in social media on issues concerning candidates in the 2016 Philippine Presidential Election. Specifically, this study aimed to determine the number of social media accounts and the social media sites the students have, their preferred social media sites for political issues, and presidential preference. Another specific objective was to describe student participation in social media as to their responses, social media activities they are involved and the frequency of their involvement. The results of this study may shed light on trends of social media use and behavior of voters that may impact the election process and outcome.

**Materials and Methods**

This study is descriptive in design and survey was the method used. The primary tool of this research was a questionnaire that had undergone internal validity through Cronbach’s alpha test. For external validity of the tool, the questionnaire was initially tried to 20 of the 200 respondents who were voting college students in Misamis University of the second semester of the calendar year 2015-2016. The respondents were randomly selected from the target group. The Raosoft online calculator was used to compute for the sample size with 5% margin of error. The data gathering was conducted from January to February 2016.
The questionnaire has four sections with Section 1 determining the number of the social media accounts of the students and the social media sites they have been using. Section 2 inquired the students what social media site(s) they have been using to participate on issues concerning the presidential candidates of the 2016 Philippine presidential election. Section 3 asked about the presidential preference of the students. Section 4a consists of set questions that asked about the responses of the students for a particular social media scenario, whether they would like, comment, share, and/or ignore the scenario. Section 4b consists also of set questions that asked the students about their social media activities and how frequent they have been involved in those social activities. The frequency of involvement was described as all the time (when involved always), very often (when involved almost all the time), sometimes (when involved occasionally, rather than all the time), rarely (when involved very seldom), and never (when not involved). The responses were sorted in frequent distribution and percentage for analysis. Informed consent was secured from the students before the survey. They were informed of the anonymity of their identity and that their responses were only to be used for research purposes. All target students agreed to participate in the study.

Results and Discussion

Number of social media accounts

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of respondents in percentage with regard to the number of social media accounts they are using. The greatest percentage of the students has only one social media account. A considerable percentage of them have two social media accounts. Only few have no account. As social media sites continue to grow in popularity, most college students use this mechanism as their key window to get the information they need and spend many hours checking social media sites (Wang et al., 2011). Educational use of social networking technology as a supplementary tool has been generating positive feedbacks from students as they develop strong feelings of social connectedness (Hung & Yuen, 2010). College students
rely on the Internet generally and social media sites specifically to connect with others. The study of Knight-McCord et al. (2016) showed that students are most likely to use social networking sites that enable them to post pictures and videos. They are least likely to use social media sites that enable them to develop a professional network or post media content into organized categories.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of respondents with regard to the number of social media account they are using.

Social media sites

Facebook (FB) dominates the social media account of the students (Figure 2). The Instagram is also used by about one-third of the Facebook users, followed by Twitter with slight difference in number. YouTube is used by almost the same number of students using Twitter. Few use the Tumblr and other social media sites. Each social media site has its unique features and popularity.

The study of Smith (2014) showed FB as one of the more popular social media applications with over 1.26 billion users worldwide. Wang et al. (2011) reported that students spend roughly 100 minutes per day on FB. College students are also the majority of FB users as shown in the study of Duggan and Brenner (2013). Facebook is
considered as the leading social networking site among college students (Ezumah, 2013; Rainie et al., 2013) that facilitates social connections with each other (Ainin et al., 2015). The use of FB mediates the social competence-college adjustment tie (Yang and Brown, 2015).

![Bar chart showing number of student users of social media sites.]

**Figure 2. Number of student users of social media sites.**

On the other hand, Instagram (IG) is the fastest growing social network site (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). IG is an online, mobile phone photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social network service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, and then share them on other platforms (Frommer, 2010). The findings of Lee et al. (2015) showed that social interaction, archiving, self-expression, escapism, and peeking are the primary social and psychological motives for IG users. Sheldon and Bryant (2016) also showed that the main reasons for using the IG are surveillance, documentation, coolness, and creativity.

Twitter as a microblogging service founded in 2006 commands more than 41 million users as of 2009 and is growing fast (Kwak et al., 2010). Twitter users tweet about any topic within the 140-character limit and follow others to receive their tweets. McKinney et al. (2012)
showed that the attitude toward being open about sharing information about oneself was significantly related to frequency of using Twitter to provide self-focused updates.

YouTube is one of the social media sites that has also become the new gateway for the expression for today’s college generation (Knight-McCord et al., 2016). This site was launched in 2005 as a video-sharing website and has become an emblem of participatory culture (Shifman, 2012). It is unparalleled as a platform for hosting and sharing video content, and can be easily integrated with other social media platforms. It provides a powerful analytics tool for all users for easy tracking of the amount of views receive, which videos generate the greatest engagement, and which countries/demographics contribute most to one’s view count. Tumblr is also one of the most popular microblogging platforms that has gained momentum recently. It has more rich content than other microblogging platforms, and it contains hybrid characteristics of social networking, traditional blogosphere, and social media (Chang et al., 2014).

**Preferred social media sites for political issues**

Figure 3 shows the preference of the college students as to which social media site they used as avenue to know the political issues concerning presidential candidates. FB was the most preferred, followed by YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, respectively. Social media use for political participation has increased its frequency and magnitude which is a positive and significant predictor of political predispositions and communication behavior of the individual (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). The result of this study is similar to the findings of Fernandes et al. (2010) showing that students were using FB to facilitate dialog and civic political involvement for the 2008 presidential candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama. Their study particularly showed that discussions related to the political civic process, policy issues, campaign information, candidate issues, and acquisition of campaign products dominate across groups and election seasons. Similarly, Vitak et al. (2011) also showed that FB allowed users to share their political beliefs, support specific candidates, and interact with others on political issues.
during the US election in 2008. Facebook also was used in enhancing citizens’ political participation in Nigeria’s democracy during the 2011 presidential electioneering (Abubakar, 2012).

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram were the commonly used social networking sites as the first line of communication platforms in the political run-up to the 2016 Philippine presidential elections (Lustre, 2015). In particular, FB as one of the widely used social media was regarded as a modern political tool to help candidates become popular to the public and eventually be able to gain more votes during the election (Pariabras, 2013). Given these significant reasons, many politicians were investing on promotions in many social networking sites. Facebook paves the way for political electorates to give
information, communicate, influence users into their ideas, plans, opinions, platforms, and most importantly make these users vote for them in return. The 2016 presidential election in the Philippines has elevated President Rodrigo Roa Duterte to victory even with less political machinery because of the popular use of FB among the techno-savvy voters and the millennials.

Social media use can also promote protest for several reasons (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). In the 2012 presidential election in Mexico, YouTube was used as a social media tool to communicate their concerns and organize protests across the country (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2013). Students were uploading videos showing their protests that had hundreds of students shouting complaints against the candidate Enrique Peña Nieto who eventually became the president of Mexico.

Twitter has also become a pervasive tool in election campaigns (Jungherr, 2016). It has been a platform by candidates and the public to comment on and interact around making the public reactions to politics viewable. There have been claims that Barack Obama’s mobilization of Twitter during his 2008 and 2012 political campaign had greatly contributed to his victories (Smith, 2009; Rutledge, 2013). Twitter has played a significant role in influencing government decision making and shaping the relationships between governments, citizens, politicians, and other stakeholders (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, 2013). Twitter also was used to kill the propaganda during the Egyptian uprising (Else, 2012).

Instagram, as world’s most popular image-sharing network, was an indispensable tool in 2016 US presidential election (Patterson, 2016). Every major presidential candidate had an Instagram presence recognizing the importance of this social media site. In 2016 also, Davao City mayor Sara Duterte on her Instagram account posted a photo of herself with a shaved head. In the caption of the photo, Sara seemed to ask her father to run for president even if their camp would face lack of funds or the political machinery to wage a presidential campaign (Hegina, 2015). According to Stephen Smith, the digital director at Purple Strategies, a political consulting firm, it is relatively low cost to put together a quick little video snippet (Frumin, 2015).
Presidential preference

Figure 4 shows the respondents’ presidential preferences for 2016 election. Most students preferred Duterte for the presidency, followed by Poe, Roxas, Santiago, and Binay, respectively. The result is also paralleled to the outcome of the mock election held on March 10, 2016 at Misamis University. Duterte appeared to be the darling of social media (Laviña, 2013). He dominated the social media compared to the other presidential candidates having the most active and engaged followers on Facebook. The popularity of Duterte in social media had greatly contributed to his winning in the May 9, 2016 presidential election. Duterte’s victory with nearly 40 per cent of the vote, a solid plurality in a five-way race in which his competitors conceded and no major accusation of vote fraud were made (Thompson, 2016).

Figure 4. College students’ presidential preferences.
Participation in social media

Responses to social media. Table 1 shows the different responses of college students to social media scenario relating to the 2016 presidential election in the Philippines. Results showed that students tend to like, comment, or share the videos in social media showing the good deeds of their preferred candidates but almost three-fourth also of the respondents simply ignore the videos. A vast number of college students tend to ignore black propaganda in the social media against their preferred candidate or any edited pictures of the rival of their preferred candidate. Similarly, majority of the students tend to ignore any false accusation spreading on social media regarding the candidates.

In the 2016 Philippine presidential election, Miriam Defensor-Santiago and Grace Poe had the most number of Facebook likes (Dangla, 2016). Jejomar Binay came third, followed by Rodrigo Duterte. Mar Roxas came last. However, the number of page followers does not guarantee a candidate the attention he wants. Facebook Philippines named Duterte as the “Undisputed King of Facebook Conversations” after he garnered 64% of conversations talking about him, while Santiago came last even though she had the most page followers. The conversation or comment may be positive or negative regarding the candidate.

Table 1. Students’ responses to social media scenario related to 2016 Philippine presidential election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media scenario</th>
<th>Response (%)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td>Share</td>
<td>Ignore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos about the good deeds of preferred Presidential Candidate</td>
<td>97 (48.5)</td>
<td>25 (12.5)</td>
<td>17 (8.5)</td>
<td>61 (30.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles and news black propaganda attacking the preferred candidate</td>
<td>5 (2.5)</td>
<td>14 (7)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>181 (90.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edited pictures of preferred candidate’s rival</td>
<td>46 (11.5)</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
<td>7 (3.5)</td>
<td>145 (72.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False accusations spreading on social media about the presidential candidates</td>
<td>31 (15.5)</td>
<td>14 (7)</td>
<td>8 (4)</td>
<td>147 (72)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Social media activities and frequency of involvement. Table 2 shows the frequency of student participation in social media on issues related to the 2016 Philippine presidential election. Results showed that many college students sometimes or rarely participated in social media on issues to the presidential election. Few students always read articles, watched and shared videos, participated in social forums, posting opinions that were related to the presidential election in 2016, or campaign or denounce candidates. Few students who participated very often in social media were devoting their time more on reading articles, watching videos of their preferred candidate, and getting aware of the news about the candidates. They also preferred pressing the reaction button in the social media account with less involvement in posting comments in the media forums and campaigning or denouncing candidates.

The 2016 presidential election was called by many as the first “social media” election owing to the massive use of social media sites by candidates in their campaigns and the series of presidential debates in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao organized by the Commission on Election in partnership with social media sites for online viewing (Buenaobra, 2016). With 41 million active Facebook users between the ages of 18 and 65 in the Philippines, netizens had very well swung the tide in the 2016 election. Despite the potent role of social media in the election, MU students still did not manifest their active participation into this online political activity. The social media behavior manifested by this group of voters may be attributed to the political situation in Ozamiz City or in nearby places in Misamis Occidental province. The localities are included in the police watchlist for being prone to election-related violence. Private armed group including the criminal group “Kuratong Beleleng” exists in Misamis Occidental which operates in Ozamiz and Tangub cities. Election-related killing was also documented in the province of Misamis Occidental (Lagsa, 2016; Deskman, 2016) and this politics-related violence may create fear among students to express their political opinions or comments in social media.
Table 2. Social media activities of students on issues related to 2016 Philippine presidential election and their frequency of involving into these activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media activities</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading articles in social media about presidential issues</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching videos of preferred presidential candidate in social media</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching videos of undesired presidential candidates</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in social media forums in the comment section</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing videos, articles of photos and issues relating to presidential candidates</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting opinions in social media account about issues relating to presidential candidates</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using social media account to campaign or denounce a certain presidential candidate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting aware in social media of the news about presidential candidates</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressing the reaction button if there is a news regarding a political candidate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The MU students may have possibly inhibited themselves from being identified with a particular candidate through the social media due to fear. This behavior is associated with the social theory of fear within the context of social and political change (Skoll, 2010). Societies have created a variety of mechanisms such as elections to facilitate change and eliminating injustice. However, this mechanism has its limitations.
The political culture of Mindanao, for instance in Misamis Occidental, sits within the broader Philippine context that is also racked by violence (Tidwell, 2016). Political elites mobilize fears of crime to advance their own agendas (Ramadan & Shantz, 2016). This explanation is only a possibility. Further research is interesting to carry out to determine the reasons of this social media trend shown by MU students to issues concerning politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Almost all students in Misamis University have only one social media account. Facebook dominates among the social media sites which they preferred for political issues. Rodrigo Duterte appeared to be their preferred presidential candidate for the 2016 Philippines presidential election. Student participation in social media on issues relating to presidential candidates was relatively less. They tend to only like, comment, or share the videos in social media showing the good deeds of their preferred candidates and simply ignored the negative entries. Few students devoted their time more on reading articles and watching videos of their preferred candidate, getting aware of the news about the candidates, and pressing the reaction button in the social media account with less involvement in posting comments in the media forums and campaigning or denouncing candidates. Further research is recommended to determine the reasons of the level of participation shown by MU students to issues concerning politics. It is also helpful to make the students aware of the possible positive and negative consequences of social media use on political issues.

Acknowledgment

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