



Article

The Rise of Cyber Cronies

Frederick Iguban Rey¹, and Angela Marie S. Rey²

¹The Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas, and ²Polytechnic University of the Philippines

Correspondence: firey@ust.edu.ph

Abstract

Shortly after the Internet platform became stable, the blogosphere was politicized, weaponized, and the cyber cronies were deployed for a war of all against all (Hobbes, 1968).

Specifically, this study investigates first, how information communications technology (ICT) such as the internet and social media has shaped political campaigning. Second, it proposes an assumption relative to the adoption and usage of Internet technology, which is influenced by the distinctive characteristics of different political contexts. The study seeks to address certain knowledge gaps regarding the influence of these technologies on the development of contemporary local campaigns.

Since the impact of Internet technology in the formation of public opinion becomes critical in the entire democratic discourse, it becomes urgent to document the evolving landscape of Philippine political communication.

Through qualitative data, the research provides significant insights into the effects of Internet technology on the dynamics of political campaigning. Twenty- (21) interviews were conducted in the province of Aklan and eight (8) were conducted in the City of Manila. The coded and sorted data assisted the researcher in the composition of the final report through the generation of related themes.

Keywords: *Blogosphere, cyber cronies, cyber expansionism, cyber warriors, virtual vigilantes*

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Introduction

This paper explores the increased politicization, weaponization, and eventual “*war of all against all*” (Hobbes, 1968) in the blogosphere, focusing on the Philippines. It examines two main areas: the impact of the Internet revolution on political communication and the diverse implementation of Internet technology based on political environments. Norris (2001) asserts that democratizing the blogosphere creates a new arena for electoral campaigns, enhancing communication pluralism and citizen participation within political parties, thus strengthening representative government. Increased political participation in cyberspace is heavily influenced by cyber cronyism.

Cyber cronyism refers to the practice of political messaging aimed at mobilizing support for a political party, philosophy, or individual, often at the expense of competitors. In this paper, cronyism broadly encompasses close associates, friends, and supporters of a candidate, based on personal relationships rather than qualifications or public interest. This practice undermines the principles of competence and integrity, favoring loyalty and personal intimacies.

The use of cronyism in this research somehow differs from how it is commonly perceived. Scholars suggest that cronyism bears with it the notion of profound economic consequences (Diwan et al. 2019; Hutchcroft 1998; Pei 2016). It often describes how capitalists gain financially lucrative rents from politicians either legally or illegally, implying a power balance in favor of the political actor (Mendoza et. al. 2022).

Historically, the quality of democratic representation in the Philippines has been questioned due to clientelism, nepotism, fraud, and violence, which reinforce elitist electoral politics (Teehankee, 2002). These issues hinder fair representation and maintain the dominance of political elites. Since the beginning of Philippine democracy, politics has been shaped by clientelist relationships with American colonial sponsors, where local leaders exchanged support and loyalty for patronage, including government positions (Grossholtz, 1964; Tancangco, 1988; Paredes, 1989 in Teehankee, 2002). The American colonial strategy involved indirect administration through trusted local clients, emphasizing their ability to enforce American policies rather than fostering open electoral competition or addressing social issues.

However, the world, including the Philippines (Fujiwara et al., 2023), is experiencing a significant shift in electoral campaigning with the adoption of new technologies. Traditionally reliant on rallies, print media, and door-to-door canvassing, political campaigns now leverage the internet and social media.

Candidates use digital strategies to engage a broader and more diverse audience through social platforms and online interactions.

The rise of social media has reshaped global electoral landscapes, prompting candidates to manifest online presence. The ability of social media to reach broad audiences and enhance candidate images has shifted campaigns. However, a social media strategy alone may not secure a presidential win; its growing importance reflects its integral role in modern electoral campaigns (Arugay, 2022).

Kushin (2009), Towner (2013), Gil de Zuñiga et al. (2014), Yang & Dehart (2016), and Ibrahim (2016) argue that the number of people engaging in politics online is increasing. Social media becomes a channel where people can engage in political activities (Obar, Zube, and Lampe, 2012) (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012), (Metzger, et al., 2015), (Yang and DeHart, 2016), (Lutz, 2016). Social media has become a channel where they can engage in political activities that they cannot do offline. Online forums have become a new avenue for people to participate actively in politics. The online political environment has become a new sphere wherein people can engage in politics by posting grievances, disagreements, arguments, etc.

Yang and DeHart (2016) found that social media's popularity created new opportunities for political participation. Many politically interested U.S. internet users shared views, joined groups, forwarded content, followed political figures, posted comments, and published blogs on political and economic topics. It indicates increased online engagement.

The online fora as a tool for political engagement to participate in and shape society is becoming a new trend (Metzger et al. 2015). The internet is seen as a new space for discourse, which is inclusive and encourages interactivity among all citizens (Vesnic-Alujevic 2012). The citizens have used social media as a tool for awareness and fulfillment of the goals for society. The online platform became a new space for political interactivity.

Online political participation is for creating and sharing ideas on the internet, driven by purpose (Lutz 2016). In a study conducted by Soriano (2014), she showed that the internet provided an avenue to open discussions about the LGBTQ community, wherein the online forum enabled an active discussion concerning queer ideologies.

Thus, the internet became a pathway for expressing and discussing issues and ideas. It is also supported by a study of Obar, Zube, and Lampe (2012). The respondents of their study believed that social media enabled them to accomplish their advocacies and goals with the help of specific online activities.

Scholars agree that the Internet facilitates connectivity and democratization among societies (Salman and Saad, 2015), especially the once invisible and voiceless populations such as the youth (Abduab, Mohamad, and Muda, 2016), women, and people experiencing poverty.

Virtual space is viewed as a promise not only to present the prospect of building social connections but also to provide an opportunity for people to obtain diverse political knowledge and information, which could highly promote political support (Salman and Saad, 2015).

However, it is worth mentioning that while cyberspace fosters political engagement, the wars taking place in the blogosphere deter individuals from actively participating in politics. The antagonistic tendency of cyberspace has the potential to decrease offline political participation.

It is suggested that this technological revolution may have decreased or even robbed the press of its previous status on the political battlefield.

Since these cyber cronies have the illusion that they occupy space and own an identity that is distant from the old rules of engagement and social ethics, the enthusiasm or fury of a cyber-attack may be far more devastating or adoring than that of a professional media practitioner, whose actions should be regulated by the code of professional conduct.

Ordinary citizens acquired a terrain where classic propaganda strategies were tested and implemented using the new media. Ideologies are now being deliberately promoted online by known yet unknown space occupants reaching the audience with speed and breadth that embodies all the gifts of the old media: the mastery of language of the journalist, the universality of radio, and the shock and awe of television that easily appeals to emotion rather than reason.

Fink and Črnič (2014) argue that the current standing of politics has a substantial influence on interactive technology, which has expanded through digital modes of participation and beyond the face-to-face communication in early democracies. In this historical milieu, it has become apparent that the interaction of politicians and the public is mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs) or mainly by the Internet (Aichholzer & Allhutter, 2011).

The blogosphere almost unrestrictedly allowed politicians and political parties to campaign for their advocacies. In essence, the use of new media in political campaigns has become the norm for politicians due to its accessibility and perceived credibility in social networking sites (Faraon, Stenberg, & Kaipainen, 2014).

The gradual shift from traditional media to new media paves the way for the future growth of mass politics and the power of digital space in the political terrain.

With new media on the rise, Hurwitz (in Aichholzer & Allhutter, 2011) argues that the Internet becomes a center of power, creating new forms of online political participation such as newsletters, ePetitioning, and eParticipation. The new form of power acquired by the masses to participate in the political sphere through the internet platform necessitates the rise of cyber cronies and the emergence of virtual combatants, all striving to expand their dominance in the blogosphere.

In Benjamin Burroughs' (2013) study on the 2012 U.S. presidential elections, Obama's trolling emerged as a form of political participation in which individuals shared trolling messages while distancing themselves from the content. It is facilitated by the anonymity of trolls, allowing them to express opinions without repercussion, as Hardaker (2013) noted. Trolls often use pseudonyms, which may differ from their real identities (Klempka & Stimson, 2013), to share views they would avoid in real life due to fear of backlash (Karppi, 2013). This anonymity, coupled with self-awareness loss and de-individuation, fosters a sense of freedom (Leaver, 2013). However, trolling has been shown to decrease traditional political participation. It provides an easier alternative to engagement and serves as a medium for political grievances that do not reflect real-life political activity (Sindorf, 2013; Holmes, 2013). Generally, trolling is seen as disruptive behavior where users express anger and contempt online that they do not display in face-to-face interactions (Barab et al., 2002).

The Internet, being less regulated, is prone to unchecked information, with trolls spreading widespread misinformation that breeds distrust in government and media (Caplan & Reed, 2016). This false information erodes political trust, negatively impacting political participation (Aro, 2016). Political leaders often become targets of trolling, facing intense ridicule and having their public perceptions manipulated. For example, in Kerala, leaders are harassed by troll groups like Troll Malayalam and International Chalu Union (Sarada, 2016).

Computer-Mediated Political Communication

The technological revolution, especially in computer technology, has enabled citizens to create and share information previously reserved for professional media practitioners, allowing them to express their ideological preferences (Fuchs, 2014). Manuel Castells and Gustavo Cardoso (2005) noted that a structural transformation has occurred globally over the past two decades, driven by a new technological paradigm based on information and communication technologies from the 1970s. This global shift has introduced new forms of exchange, human interaction, and cultural experiences, leading to a reconfiguration of social institutions (Castells & Cardoso, 2005).

As ICT advancements have transformed local and global politics, computing has made the production and reception of images, ideologies, and realities universally accessible. This technology has compressed space and breached social barriers, creating a new political landscape where nations, parties, and politicians engage in cyberspace. This digital realm has given rise to cyber cronies and allowed various societal sectors to voice diverse concerns and advocate for their causes online.

The potential enhancements the Internet brings to political campaigning and elections are manifested in three main areas (Vedel, 2003). Firstly, it provides citizens with vast amounts of data, enabling them to become better informed and engaged in democracy. Secondly, candidates and parties can build relationships and mobilize supporters more effectively and efficiently. Thirdly, it facilitates broad public debate on numerous issues, allowing direct input into campaign agendas. ICT development for political communication hinges on the need for citizens to have complete information to participate in democratic deliberation (Dahl, 1989). The Internet reduces publishing costs, increasing access to comprehensive information, thus supporting transparency and accountability in decision-making. It offers new channels for information and expression, promoting a greater pluralism of viewpoints and making citizens more independent of traditional media. The Internet connects people with common interests, forming new political and social forces (Melucci, 1996). ICTs enhance communication and coordination among like-minded individuals, allowing them to influence decision-makers and public opinion. However, online political engagement often involves those with higher education and social status (Norris, 2003). Despite this, the Internet fosters connected and proactive civic behavior, potentially giving rise to a 'fifth estate' of online activists (Dutton, 2009).

Consequently, individuals establish online alliances to support their candidates or the beliefs they champion. The emergence of various online alliances has resulted in cooperation and polarization of individuals and groups with the same or divergent viewpoints. Additionally, establishing these alliances and polarizations leads to a novel kind of political engagement and has given rise to a distinct breed of political cronies operating within cyberspace.

Cyber cronyism, popularly known as "trolling," is a relatively new phenomenon that effectively reorganizes the components of the political machine. It is the act of generating and disseminating political messages, specifically made to generate support for a political party, political ideology, or a politician to the detriment of its opponents (Morissey, 2010). It has become a substantial feature of social networking politics in the Philippines, which can affect an extensive social base. Cyber

cronyism, in fact, played a vital role in the Philippine general elections of 2016 (Williams, 2017).

Trolling involves posting emotionally charged messages in online communities to provoke specific reactions (Sanfilippon, Yang, & Fichman, 2017). Politically, trolling aims to garner support for causes or individuals (Sarada, 2016). Benjamin Burrough (2013) noted that during the U.S. 2012 Presidential Elections, Obama trolling emerged as a form of political participation, enabling individuals to share messages while distancing themselves from the ideas expressed (Klempka & Stimson, 2013; Karppi, 2013). Hardaker (2013) argued that trolling thrives on perceived anonymity, driven by self-awareness loss and de-individuation, which foster a sense of freedom (Leaver, 2013).

The rise of computer technology and cyberspace has transformed the global landscape by providing unprecedented access to diverse ideologies and political realities. It has allowed various societal segments to communicate their concerns online, with politicians increasingly using digital platforms for advocacy and campaigning.

Colin Seymour-Ure (1977) notes that political organizations adapt communication to dominant media, resulting in varying degrees of change. Lees-Marshment (2011) highlights societal pressures, like consumerization, on politics. Norris (2003) categorizes the evolution of political communication into three eras: the pre-modern era (localized and stable), the modern era (centralized and professionalized with television), and the postmodern era (market-oriented and digital). This shift led to hypermedia campaigns, exemplified by Howard Dean's use of Meetup.com (Lipsitz & Panagopoulos, 2012), Segolene Royal's Segosphere (Vedel & Koc-Michalska, 2009), and Barack Obama's use of social networks and MyBO (Harfoush, 2008). These examples demonstrate the integration of digital communication in modern political strategies, despite the influence of 24/7 mass media.

In Europe (Council of Europe, 2017), political campaign regulations vary, especially regarding mass media and political advertising. The UK prohibits TV political advertising but has spending limits, public funding, and disclosure rules. France, Denmark, Portugal, Switzerland, and Belgium also ban TV political advertising, but differ in other regulations. Italy and Poland allow TV advertising with spending limits and disclosure rules. Portugal has a EUR 3M limit, Belgium has a EUR 1M limit. Though it bans TV ads, France has strict spending regulations, including public funding and disclosure. Denmark and Ireland lack TV advertising and direct funding, but they enforce spending disclosure. These variations reflect differing

approaches to balancing regulation, transparency, and media access in the electoral process.

Nevertheless, this digital sphere has facilitated the formation of online alliances, resulting in ideological polarization and the emergence of a novel form of political engagement. Cyber cronyism reshapes the political landscape by strategically distributing emotionally charged messages to elicit support for political entities or causes.

This new form of participation, exemplified by the 2016 and 2022 general elections in the Philippines, demonstrates the significant influence that online discourse can have on conventional political processes. Understanding the implications of cyber cronyism is essential to comprehending the complex interplay between digital realms and political dynamics as technology evolves.

It is argued that, at the center of these cultural and technological interactions, political topography assumes a new contour but maintains its historical essence. Rush (1992) highlights that political communication transmits politically relevant information from one part of the political system to another, and between the social and political systems. Through communication mechanisms, the individual creates political understanding and ideological preferences. Undoubtedly, one can assume that there is a need for the political system to have control over the manufacture, disposal, and reception of the political agenda. Economic progress came with the expansion of communication and broadcast media, and their political by-product: the media personalities-turned-politicians who free-ride on the waves of market votes (Demetrio, 2014).

The transformation of communications technology reveals itself in the computer-mediated broadcasting called the social network. This new terrain in communication allows the user to explicitly present their political image and sentiments through a digital self in a public, yet private electronic network. In the world of cyber cronyism, one virtually has the absolute freedom to assault or extricate an ideology, a party, or a politician. Computer technology liberates one from social and political voicelessness.

The digital sphere has fostered online alliances, leading to ideological polarization and new forms of political engagement. Cyber cronyism reshapes politics by strategically using emotionally charged messages to support specific entities or causes. This influence is evident in the 2016 and 2022 Philippine elections, showing how online discourse affects traditional political processes.

Rush (1992) notes that political communication involves transmitting relevant information across systems, shaping political understanding and preferences. As

technology evolves, it redefines political topography while retaining its historical roots. Demetrio (2014) observes that economic progress has expanded media and introduced media personalities-turned-politicians who leverage market votes.

The rise of social networks has transformed communication, allowing users to present their political views through digital personas. Cyber cronyism offers freedom to critique or support ideologies, parties, or politicians, eliminating traditional social and political constraints. Computer technology liberates one from social and political voicelessness.

Kling (2000) notes that technology and social contexts mutually shape each other. Historically, politicians relied on eloquence, as Tacitus (1811) described, where orators wielded their speech as a powerful tool against enemies. With advances in civilization, written texts like pamphlets became key to political dialogue. Weber (1946) observes that while oratory remains important in modern politics, the printed world and media, especially journalism, television, and radio, have become crucial in shaping political influence and public perception.

Theoretical Framework

Media Ecology Theory, pioneered by Marshall McLuhan (1964) and expanded by Neil Postman (1985), examines how communication technologies shape society and politics. McLuhan's "*the medium is the message*" concept emphasizes that media's inherent characteristics influence how information is received and understood, challenging traditional views of communication. Postman's contributions have broadened the theory's relevance, applying it to contemporary media issues. This study uses the Media Ecology Framework to analyze the impact of Internet technology on political communication in the Philippines, highlighting how media and technology interact with socio-cultural and political environments to shape our understanding of reality.

Methodology

This research, focusing on interpreting phenomena in their natural settings (Denzin, 1998), used interviews to capture individual perceptions and experiences (Corbetta, 2003). Data was collected through interviews with elected officials, party officers, party bosses, and media specialists on online campaigning. Twenty-one interviews in Aklan and eight in Manila were analyzed through a seven-stage process: Data Collection, Note Taking, Coding, Memoing, Sorting, Writing, and Decoding. This process helped generate themes for the final report.

Results and Findings

This section narrates the role of internet technology and the adaptive capacity that rural and urban political actors assume concerning campaigning and political communication.

General Narrative of the Internet Revolution in the Philippines

The evolution of Internet technology from a communication tool to a political weapon has been evident since the rise of “cyber cronies” around the 2016 elections. Political parties and politicians now use cyberspace, employing cyber warriors to secure digital territories (Dodds, Kuus, & Sharp, 2013). Cyber imperialism represents the trend of expanding and controlling cyber territories, surpassing traditional forms of power. In this digital era, public opinion in cyberspace has become crucial for understanding and influencing political outcomes. Technology has shifted to become a highly politicized tool, with campaigns using data analytics, social media, and microtargeting to shape narratives and sway public opinion, thereby redefining political strategies.

This paper proposes that the evolution of Internet technology in the Philippines relative to political campaigning went through the following stages.

Stages of Internet Revolution in the Philippines

Interconnectivity

Before the advent of cellular technology, the storytelling society was suppressed, and interconnectivity, though culturally rooted, was long denied to the Filipinos. Nevertheless, with the abundance of this new micro technology, individual Filipinos were able to locate their own spaces and re-imagine their biographies. Out of this, the internet generation was built. We no longer tell our lives to ourselves.

Democratization

Once global connectivity was achieved, individuals were empowered to actively participate in both transnational and local issues, allowing openness to various personalities, worldviews, and horizons at minimal cost. Citizens were allowed to express their sentiments; thus, various centers of knowledge and opinions were allowed to confront each other without considering creed, race, gender, or other variables once used to discriminate. Family members working abroad, many of whom are active political players in the province, not only participate in the dialogue but also seek to influence their friends and dependents on the choice of candidates.

Politicization

Shortly after the platform became stable and reliable, the blogosphere was politicized. Cyberspace has become a venue for promoting a political agenda. As the new media, cyberspace has become the pathway for transmitting what seems real. The blogosphere has become the information superhighway where truth can be manufactured quickly.

Weaponization

Cyberspace is now used to attack nations, parties, politicians, and ordinary citizens. Consequently, cybercrime units are established by nation states to secure the public, maintain the integrity and security of government installations from cyber-attacks, track down cyber mercenaries, and patrol the dark web. Politicians and political parties rapidly adopt ICTs, making cyberspace a new political battlefield. Nations, parties, politicians, and citizens are now engaged in an interactive mechanism of mass dialogue with very little code of conduct or sense of honor governing such frenzy.

Deployment of Cyber Cronies

It has been argued that there is a difference between the actual power holder and the potential power wielder. Thus, the same applies in the potential or actual deployment of warriors in cyberspace.

The ongoing global war (WWIII) exists in the remote and invisible domain of the blogosphere. In this generation, cyber warriors fight ideological wars online through cyber terrorism, cyber territorial expansionism, and online interventions in human and state affairs such as politics, religion, economics, and other institutions. On a global scale, rapid formation of alliances and ideological realignments are taking place for a war that is to take place in the domain of extraterrestrial. Once connected to the network, the public and private spheres of human life will be opened to colonization by the cyber overlord.

Adoption and Usage of Internet Technology: The Effects of Internet Technology on the Dynamics of Political Campaigning

Within the intricate fabric of Aklan's political environment, using electronic-mediated campaign techniques is currently in its embryonic phase. This occurrence echoes the province's deep-rooted affinity for tradition. Considering these developing

circumstances, local parties have planned to establish an online presence, adopting an innovative approach by allocating resources towards developing a database (Flores, 2016). The database is designed to appeal to contemporary communicators who utilize cellular phones and engage in text messaging throughout the year over various frequencies. Mobile devices significantly facilitate communication and interaction between political candidates and the public during the electoral season (Gelito, 2016; Igoy, 2016). They serve as crucial tools for engagement, acting as beacons of connectivity (Gelito, 2016:13; Igoy, 2016).

However, during this ongoing digital transformation, the potential of Internet technology to facilitate voter mobilization is often underestimated, since it is viewed as a limited platform incapable of effectively coordinating large-scale efforts.

The landscape of technology adoption within local leadership reveals two notable factors. Firstly, the current set of local leaders appears to lag in technological familiarity, as observed by Ibarreta (2016). This gap in technological acumen likely plays a role in shaping the campaign strategies employed. Secondly, the perceived absence of a personal touch associated with the Internet's interface is highlighted by Cawaling (2016) and JMiraflones (2016). This sentiment speaks of the inherent challenge of creating a personalized connection through digital platforms.

The backdrop of the 2016 national elections further underscores this dynamic. Opposition candidates harnessed technology extensively, a facet emphasized by Ibarreta (2016) and J. Miraflones (2016). On the other hand, candidates from the administration favored a conventional campaign strategy, which can be attributed to the abundance of local leaders who share the same views as the current administration (Ibarreta, 2016; J. Miraflones, 2016:10; Neron, 2016).

In the province of Aklan, where internet connectivity is widely acknowledged to be limited, individuals hold divergent viewpoints regarding the impact of technology on the political sphere. In an interview, Igoy, Tejada, MMiraflones, JMiraflones, Neron, Torres, and Quimpo contend that the restricted availability of Internet connectivity could impede the dissemination of political narratives by aspiring candidates.

However, Marquez, Gelito, Ibarreta, Igoy, JMiraflones, Neron, Patron, Solanoy, and Quimpo have a divergent viewpoint, asserting that technology can serve as a pivotal determinant that has the potential to either facilitate or impede a candidate's triumph in the realm of politics.

In the province of Aklan, there exists a divergence of viewpoints among politicians at the local and provincial levels on the significance of technology within the realm of politics. Flores acknowledged the potential of technology but emphasized

the constraints of internet campaigning in Aklan. According to Flores (2016), the provincial technological divide, which is caused by limited access to technology and inadequate technical adaptation, is a significant obstacle that hampers the effectiveness of internet campaigning in the province.

Likewise, Fernandez (2016) highlighted the significance of the technological disparity in Aklan, which stems from the province's inadequate access to and restricted technology adoption. This disparity significantly hampers the efficacy of internet-based campaigning efforts.

Miraflores (2016) had viewpoints comparable to those of Flores and Fernandez. Miraflores says the province of Aklan is characterized by a significant technical divide, which is exacerbated by inadequate access to technology and low technological adaptation.

This situation underscores the inherent limitations of online campaigning in the area. Individuals with access to technology are teens who are too young to engage politically (Fernandez 2016). Similarly, the candidates and the voters are familiar with each other; candidates are always cross-referenced to the defects or genius of one's clan, and the technology is not widely available to the population. Fabricated attacks to discredit a candidate can easily be addressed both by the voters and the candidates because they spend most of the time together, shoulder to shoulder during religious obligations, at arm's length at the marketplace, or sharing the identical cock houses during festivals.

Within the complex sphere of Aklan politics, the internet platform has emerged as a highly advantageous sanctuary for the widespread distribution of general information. This notion has been duly recognized by Igoy (2016) and Solanoy (2016).

In elections, the internet assumes a significant role as a potent tool that enables politicians to interact with several individuals, thereby optimizing time and effort expenditure. This medium facilitates the expeditious and cost-effective dissemination of their messages.

The influence of internet campaigning in Aklan politics is an intriguing subject of analysis, characterized by its unpredictable nature. It oscillates between being perceived as inconsequential (Flores, 2016) and recognized as a significant determinant (Marquez, 2016) in molding electoral results.

The Manila experience, on the other hand, provides a more complex ecosystem. According to the Bagatsing party campaign heads, their traditional campaign strategies from 1995 to around 2017 focused on providing free medical assistance to people experiencing poverty. It included free medicines and hospitalization. Through their institution, KABAKA, they also emphasized skills development and sports

programs for the youth in the fifth district. Former Congressman Amado S. Bagatsing highlighted his commitment to caring for the needs of people experiencing poverty in his district through programs such as the “Womb to Tomb” initiative, scholarships, and sports activities.

They also utilized newsletters to keep their members informed. In the 2016 election, their campaign heavily relied on radio advertisements, text brigades, word of mouth, and traditional house-to-house visits.

On the other hand, the Estrada party campaign heads mentioned their use of leaflets, posters, and billboards as locator tools to engage with the public. They acknowledged the credibility of their family name as an advantage for their campaign. They also emphasized the accomplishments of their candidate at the national level, showcasing his commitment to the local level. The Estrada party employed strategies that focused on close communication with barangay presiding officers and district heads to bring their candidate closer to the people. They targeted depressed areas and implemented programs for the underprivileged, such as blood donation drives and radio communication.

Their campaign also involved house-to-house visits, meetings de avance (large campaign rallies), and the provision of food, including the popular “lugaw” (rice porridge), to attract people. These traditional strategies were considered more costly but effective in engaging with the community.

According to Mr. Armand Dean Nocum, their team served as the news-generating arm of the Erap campaign. They had a communication office with television, radio, and newspaper facilities. They focused on generating 2-3 stories daily, highlighting Mayor Estrada’s accomplishments and government programs, particularly during the 2013 campaign. Their primary media were print, radio, and newspapers.

When asked if Mayor Estrada still relied on traditional media, Mr. Francisco Ejercito de Castro replied that he did, citing the older generation who still preferred newspapers and had no internet access or smartphones. However, he noted a shift towards digital platforms due to technological advancements, with more people now using smartphones and social media like Facebook (FB) for free communication.

Despite traditional media’s advantages, traditional campaigning’s customary approach requires a higher budget and more human resources than new media (Internet). Mr. Francis Ejercito de Castro emphasized how social media made campaigning easier, faster, and more attractive, eliminating the need for camera crews and photographers. Atty. Eduardo E. Francisco added that social media was cheaper and allowed immediate message delivery. Engr. Louie Leyva pointed out that the

main difference between old and new media was the higher cost associated with traditional campaigns.

Congressman Amado Bagatsing emphasized the importance of resources for candidates running for office, particularly their ability to mobilize and encourage people to vote for them. He noted that their opponents also had their own supporters and political machinery.

Regarding digital campaigning, the candidates and their campaign teams navigated the vast digital space to garner votes and defend against attacks. The use of social media became increasingly prominent, as former Congressman Amado S. Bagatsing pointed out. He emphasized that the process had considerably evolved compared to previous campaigns.

Mr. Francis Ejercito de Castro, an Estrada Social Media Consultant, echoed this sentiment, highlighting the internet's and Facebook's role. He emphasized that people now turn to social media for instant information rather than traditional news channels.

Atty. Eduardo E. Francisco, President of KABAKA Foundation, Inc., acknowledged the significant effect of social media in empowering ordinary voters. He emphasized that social media has given a voice to previously marginalized individuals in the political process.

Engr. Louie Leyva, the Head of the Engineering Department for the Estrada Campaign, recognized the advantage of having technology and finances in the campaign. He believed these factors played a crucial role in effectively reaching the electorate.

Mr. Armand Dean Nocum, the Head of Estrada Communication Campaign, concurred with the growing influence of social media in political campaigns, suggesting that it was a powerful tool.

However, not all campaign heads shared the same enthusiasm for the internet as a campaigning platform. Atty. Robert B. Jurado expressed concerns about the negative impact of false news and the rapid spread of misinformation on social media. He believed this poses a serious problem and can shape people's opinions during the election.

AKA "MAAGAP," the Head of Estrada Special Operations, also expressed skepticism about the impact of social media, particularly in local campaigns. He stressed the importance of personal engagement and face-to-face interactions with voters, which he believed had a more significant impact than online campaigning. However, he acknowledged that technology could play a role in the future.

The opinions on the effectiveness of the internet in mobilizing votes varied. AKA "AGILA," the Estrada Youth Chairman, questioned whether social media

translates into votes. Atty. Eduardo E. Francisco believed that social media has a limited impact and cannot influence those not engaged in politics.

The narrative portrays a dynamic landscape where the internet and social media are recognized as important tools in election campaigns. The campaigns leverage these platforms to reach voters and share information, but concerns remain about spreading false news and the need for personal interactions.

The differing perspectives highlight the complexities and challenges of using the digital space for campaigning. Mr. Armand Dean Nocum recognized the democratizing power of social media in the campaign field. He acknowledged that social media has become the primary source of information for many people, surpassing traditional media outlets like ABS-CBN. He praised ABS-CBN's use of social media patrol, which started as early as 2010 through texting. However, he also emphasized that traditional media should not be disregarded, as it still reaches specific audiences, particularly those in higher strata who read print media.

Despite the undeniable influence of social media, some individuals remained skeptical about its effectiveness in mobilizing votes and addressing other issues. AKA "AGILA," the Estrada Youth Chairman, questioned whether social media truly translates into votes and believed that its role is primarily about creating awareness and disseminating information.

Upon inquiry into black propaganda on social media and instances of attacks against candidates, former Congressman Amado S. Bagatsing, who ran as the mayoral candidate in Manila in 2016, acknowledged the natural occurrence of such stories being created for prominent individuals during election periods. He recognized the prevalence of fake news and how it deceives the public, with some believing the propaganda while others remain skeptical.

Engr. Louie Leyva, the head of the Engineering Department of Estrada's campaign, shared that Mayor Estrada frequently faces cyber-attacks. He mentioned that some individuals even create fan pages like theirs, from which they release negative statements. These attackers meticulously researched past issues related to Mayor Estrada to smear his reputation with propaganda.

Atty. Robert B. Jurado highlighted the difference in disseminating news about a candidate's programs and platforms on social media. While promoting their programs may be slow, spreading issues or negative news, such as rumors about multiple marriages, can quickly become widespread and readily believed.

However, Atty. Jurado argued that one advantage of traditional media over social media is that, in traditional media, the perpetrators of black propaganda can be

identified, creating a fear of potential lawsuits. On the other hand, social media presents challenges as anyone can engage in such activities anonymously.

The 2016 local election shows political shifts in Manila. Internet-based campaigns created a hybrid platform based on the evolving communication tools the Estrada and Bagatsing parties used to win and vote. The 2016 election saw parties deploy traditional platforms and strategies in new media. Unlike traditional media, the Internet also created a new media platform that allows mobilization, infiltration, and diffusion with a click. Finally, traditional media promotes political and voter-favored norms and efficiency. Its role as a political machine is undisputed, yet new media alone are inferior to traditional campaigning methods.

The Adoption and Use of Internet Technology

The table illustrates how political actors have adapted to new technology for campaigning. This technology has enabled close associates, friends, and supporters of candidates to communicate voting preferences and attack opponents online. The freedom and anonymity of cyberspace allow these actors to operate beyond traditional ethical boundaries, with their digital actions often having a more significant impact than those of regulated media professionals. There are three main types of cyber cronies: first, cyber warriors, second, the cyber mercenaries, and lastly, the virtual vigilantes or the cyber assassins.

Table 1. Types of Cyber Cronies.

Cyber Warriors	Relatives, friends, allies, and the politician himself/herself acting as cyber combatants
Cyber Mercenaries	Salaried employee acting as a cyber combatant
Virtual Vigilantes / Cyber Assassins	Individuals not related by consanguinity, affinity, or profession but acts as a cyber combatant to protect their ideology/candidate

Although electronic-media campaign strategies are evolving in the country, political parties have already devoted some resources to generating a database for cellular phone users, sending regular text blasts throughout the year.

Cellular phones are considered high-impact technology during elections. Internet technology, however, is perceived as a weak platform incapable of mobilizing votes, specifically in the provinces. The respondents mentioned the following reasons:

1. The current set of local leaders is not abreast of Internet technology.

2. The candidates and the voters are familiar with each other; thus, trolling may not be as effective as it is in the urban areas.
3. The Internet lacks personal appeal.
4. Technology is not widely available to the population, especially in rural areas.
5. The individuals with access to technology are teens who are too young to vote.

Recognizing the limitations mentioned above, veteran politicians like Manila's former president and mayor, Joseph "Erap" E. Estrada, and Congressman Amado S. Bagatsing maintain a blend of old and new media campaign strategies. Political platforms and propaganda were circulated using the television, radio, and newspapers on one hand and the new media tools on the other.

It is argued that the limitation of Internet campaigning is highlighted by the fact that the technological gap apparently exists in the country. The gap is characterized by the:

1. The remoteness of the location results from poor access to electricity.
2. Remoteness of location resulting from deficient satellite connectivity.
3. Absence of loading centers for Internet credits.
4. Absence of interest or indifference on the part of the older population to learn and use technology.

Although Internet connection may be difficult to access in several areas of the country, many believe that the technology can make or break an aspirant's political narrative.

In Aklan, for example, online attacks can be deployed to discredit a candidate. The recipient of the attack can easily respond to the assault and explain it to the voters since politicians and the voters spend most of their time together.

In a broader sense, the Internet platform is recognized as a favorable venue for general information. Related to elections, the Internet is an efficient tool for voter education, and at the same time, multi-person-to-person engagement saves politicians time and energy in delivering their message swiftly, efficiently, and economically.

The impact of online campaigning on election outcomes remains uncertain and fluctuating. Technology has revolutionized outreach for candidates, allowing them to present policies directly and receive real-time feedback. Voters benefit from improved access to information, enabling easier research on candidates and issues.

However, this new platform introduces risks such as attacks from cyber warriors, cyber mercenaries, virtual vigilantes, and concerns about misinformation, privacy, and biases.

The table below highlights key differences between traditional and Internet campaigning.

Table 1: Traditional Campaigning versus Internet Campaigning

Traditional	Internet
Personal	Impersonal yet Personal
Expensive	Affordable
Time Consuming	Time Friendly
Health /Energy Imposing	Less Physical Demands

While traditional campaigning offers a sense of intimacy, this campaign model faces logistical, financial, and personal challenges in the digitized political landscape. Internet campaigning, however, blends the personal touch of tailored communication with affordability, time efficiency, and reduced physical strain as the politician and the political machinery adapt to the milieu.

Aklan’s Political Communication Tools

A blend of communication strategies and personal interactions distinguishes the political discourse between the candidate and the masses in Aklan. As Gelito (2016) observes, the landscape is marked by online exchanges, reflecting the evolving nature of political engagement. This sentiment is echoed by J. Miraflores (2016), who emphasizes the limited yet discernible exposure across various trimedia platforms. In contrast to the digital realm, Solanoy (2016) underscores the enduring power of the personal touch, where intentions are conveyed through the impactful gesture of a firm handshake.

Furthermore, a deeper layer of engagement is revealed through extensive grassroots efforts. Ibarreta (2016) speaks to the candidate’s engaging charm during month-long house-to-house campaigns, creating a unique connection with constituents. Igoy (2016) shares a similar sentiment, noting the candidate’s ability to establish rapport during rallies and caucuses. Cawaling (2016) adds to this narrative, emphasizing the essence of personal interactions. JTemplonuevo (2016) adds depth to this portrayal, emphasizing the resonance of eye contact as a non-verbal medium of connection.

In politics, the need for physical contact becomes evident to build personal ties and generate immediate resonance with the grassroots. This phenomenon encapsulates an impromptu camaraderie and immediate interaction that holds the potential to transcend the boundaries of political discourse (Tejada 2016). MMiraflores (2016) delves deeper into this dynamic, emphasizing the role of spontaneous fellowship in creating a distinctive form of intimacy. Furthermore, Solanoy (2016) provides additional insight into this discourse, emphasizing the significant influence that direct involvement at the community level may have.

This unique political practice goes beyond surface interactions, encompassing the ability of the candidate to solidify their connection with the electorate. Tejada (2016) provides insight into this process, underlining how these encounters enable the candidate to establish their position in the eyes of the voter. In parallel, a sense of intimacy blossoms as MMiraflores (2016) articulates, where constituents are invited to engage with the enchanting personality of the politician following a friendly grip. Collectively, these accounts illuminate the intricacies of the politics of touch, which serve as a means of personalizing the political experience and fostering immediate connections, thereby creating an indelible impact on both the candidate and the voter.

Manila's Political Communication Tools

Both parties utilized traditional media tools by Incumbent Mayor Joseph E. Estrada and former Congressman Amado S. Bagatsing before the 2016 Manila election. Both are experienced politicians active in the political field, employing almost the same political machinery for their campaigns.

Team Estrada reveals the traditional media tools utilized by their party, particularly during Mayor Estrada's past and recent 2016 elections. It shows a combination of media-based and ground operations employed as campaign platforms.

The strategy of Team Estrada is characterized by a dynamic combination of media-based communication tools spanning multiple platforms. Their skillful use of television, radio, and newspapers demonstrates a profound comprehension of the influence of these established channels. By disseminating their messages through these well-established channels, the political party intended to reach a large audience and influence public perception. This symphony of media-based engagement is the basis for their all-encompassing campaign narrative.

The campaign approach employed by Team Estrada extended beyond the utilization of traditional media platforms, incorporating a range of grassroots initiatives aimed at establishing lasting relationships with the local community and rallying support. Acknowledging the significant impact community leaders have on

molding public opinion, the political party actively interacted with them to solicit endorsements and establish a solid support base. The team's dedication to engaging directly with the community was apparent through many initiatives, such as distributing articles and letters, coordinating food programs, making door-to-door visits, conducting leaflet campaigns, and carrying out impactful medical missions. The "Meeting de Avance" served as a significant demonstration of their commitment to engaging with the local community, aiming to establish a strong connection and gain insight into the distinctive needs of the people whom they aimed to represent.

The diversified approach demonstrated by the Estrada party manifests their commitment to fostering an authentic rapport with the community and effectively addressing their prevailing issues.

Team Estrada's inventive use of comics as a campaign tool is evident, as they employ compelling visual storytelling to convey their messages. Some team members also mentioned using black propaganda, which employs comics and tri-media channels.

Team Bagatsing shared insights into their traditional media techniques, drawing on former Congressman Bagatsing's campaigns in Manila's 5th district (Pandacan). The Bagatsing team emphasized ground activities to intensify its campaign efforts, with special consideration for its institutional arm, KABAKA. Additionally, the Bagatsing party utilized caucuses, house-to-house visits, and the influential "Meeting de Avance" to engage directly with the community and establish relationships. In addition, they utilized newsletters to keep supporters informed and posters and billboards to increase visibility.

In addition to traditional media, the Bagatsing party demonstrated its commitment to community development by providing scholarships, skill-building opportunities, and recreation programs. Their "Womb to Tomb" program, designed to address the requirements of individuals throughout their lives, demonstrated their commitment to whole-person governance.

The dissemination of the Bagatsing party's message throughout the community relied heavily on word-of-mouth campaigning. This grassroots strategy relied on the influence of personal relationships and referrals to garner support.

Team Estrada and Team Bagatsing utilized new media tools in their 2013 campaigns for mayor and congressman, respectively, in Manila. Consequently, new media tools are more prominent in the 2016 mayoral campaign landscape.

During the 2013 election, the party employed a flash mob as a novel and attention-getting strategy, which garnered media coverage and online attention via YouTube and other websites.

Traditional and New Media as Political Machineries

This section portrays the scope, strengths, and weaknesses of traditional and new media campaign tools as specified by the campaign heads of the Bagatsing and Estrada parties collectively.

	TRADITIONAL MEDIA	NEW MEDIA
<i>Scope of Media</i>	<p>"Very personal campaign... purely networking"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amado S. Bagatsing <p>"Down to the roots"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Atty. Eduardo E. Francisco <p>"Ground war"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Armand Dean Nocum 	<p>"Not personal"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AKA "AGILA" <p>"Air war"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Armand Dean Nocum
<i>Strengths</i>	<p>Preferred by the majority</p> <p>Can take legal action against black professionals and the wrong information dissemination</p> <p>Impact voters more</p> <p>Translate into votes</p> <p>People go back to traditional media in light of the recent bombardment of fake news on social media.</p> <p>Uses credibility</p> <p>Reaches out to "AB crowd/ higher strata"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Armand Dean Nocum 	<p><i>Rapid dissemination of information and awareness.</i></p> <p><i>Easy communication</i></p> <p>"Cost-effective"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AKA "AGILA" <p>"Viral"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AKA "AGILA" <p>"Brought in more younger generations"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Francis Ejercito de Castro <p>"Easier, faster, and more attractive"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Francis Ejercito de Castro <p>"People can speak"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Atty. Eduardo E. Francisco <p>"Free"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Armand Dean Nocum <p>"Empowered... democratizing"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Armand Dean Nocum
<i>Weaknesses</i>	<p>Expensive/ Need resources</p> <p>"Takes longer... not like current media where it is there when it happens"</p>	<p><i>Fake news</i></p> <p>"Cannot translate into votes"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AKA "AGILA"

- **Mr. Francis Ejercito de Castro** *"There are too many out there... You do not know what is real or not."*
- **Mr. Francis Ejercito de Castro**
-
- "Only eight percent are using it [Facebook] for politics."*
- **Atty. Robert B. Jurado**
- "Reputation is endangered in a click of a mouse."*
- **Mr. Armand Dean Nocum**
- "Faceless influencers"*
- **Mr. Armand Dean Nocum**
-

The table summarizes traditional and new media's perceived strengths and weaknesses in campaigning. Traditional media demands personal involvement in the campaign process, contrasting with new media, where social media posts handle candidate promotion. Traditional media functions as a "ground war" involving personal interaction with opponents, while new media, including tri-media, operate as an impersonal "air war" without direct personal engagement.

Accordingly, traditional media is favored by most politicians and voters due to its perceived strengths. It is considered effective in mobilizing votes, unlike new media. However, new media excels in rapid news dissemination and raising awareness, areas where traditional media falls short. Social media, a part of new media, is beautiful to younger generations, making it a powerful tool for reaching them. New media has also empowered voters and democratized campaigning, giving people a platform to express their opinions about candidates.

Nevertheless, fake news or false information disseminated on social media sites is considered a weakness for new media because the reputation is endangered in a click of a mouse (Nocum, 2017), unlike traditional media, where one can take legal action against false indictments. Likewise, the resources needed to operate traditional media are higher than those of new media. Traditional media requires human resources and financial support, whereas new media is cost-effective.

However, despite the practice of traditional and new media, it is noted that monetary consideration was manifested in the campaign.

"They just go around, talk to political leaders, give them money, and feed them with food or anything. And then at the last minute of the campaign, they buy votes, that is the traditional way in local politics."

Moreover, considering the field notes gathered during the interview process, both parties' campaign heads consider monetary compensation fundamental in campaign practice. It is a general political scheme used by politicians to seek votes and support. One aspect to consider during campaigns is the resources available, specifically fiscal transactions between politicians and voters.

Conclusion

The Philippines' digital evolution unfolds in five stages. First, cellular tech brought interconnectivity. Second, democratization arose from global connectivity, fostering political participation. Third, the blogosphere became politicized. Fourth, cyberspace is weaponized, with cyberattacks targeting various entities. Lastly, cyber cronies were deployed. This progression highlights the technology's transformative role in shaping Philippine political participation.

Political campaigning combines communication strategies and personal interactions in rural areas like Aklan. Despite the importance of modern technology in elections, the internet is seen as less effective for mobilizing votes in this context. Reasons include local leaders' unfamiliarity with the internet, the close relationship between candidates and voters, the impersonal nature of online campaigns, limited rural internet access, and the younger age of internet users who may not yet have voting rights.

The limitation of internet campaigning highlights a significant technological gap in the country, characterized by remote locations with poor access to electricity and satellite connectivity, a lack of loading centers for internet credits, and general indifference among older populations toward learning and using technology. As a result, the importance of physical contact and personal ties in politics remains evident, particularly in building connections with the grassroots.

Similarly, the Manila experience combines media-based and ground operations in its urban campaign platforms.

Integrating technology into political campaigns is a complex matter shaped by local dynamics and the obstacles posed by existing infrastructure. The internet possesses the capacity to assume a more substantial role in future elections; however, it is imperative to prioritize the resolution of the prevailing technical disparity to leverage its influence on political dialogue and engagement fully.

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