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CONTENT

PREFACE

The inaugural issue of HSUHK Undergraduate Journal collects works of students in HSUHK from various disciplines that focus on a wide range of topics, including neurotechnology, mental health, memes as an ideological tool, and artistic reviews.

We would like to take this opportunity to convey our appreciation to the contributors, the reviewers, and the editors, for making this anthology possible.

Managing Editors
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TEEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

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Positive Impacts of Social Media on Teens' Mental Health

Social networking sites (SNS), also known as social media, have gained significant popularity in recent years. However, given the massive number of social media addiction cases worldwide, researchers often relate their studies on social media to the mental health issues of teens. Moreover, researchers commonly believe that the Internet is one of the major triggers of mental illness. An estimate from 2021 suggested that more than 210 million people around the world were addicted to social media. Besides, society too holds a relatively negative perspective on social media, given its addictive nature (Wang & Edwards, 2016)[1]. However, social media does not necessarily lead to psychiatric disorders. This report aims to outline the constructive aspects of social media on teenagers' self-image development and recommend possible measures that would assist them in benefiting from their exposure to social media.

Social Media Supports Teens' Mentality

According to data provided by Statista, more than 4.66 billion people had accessed the Internet as of December 2021, of which, 4.2 billion were active social media users. Designed to induce people to interconnect, and given its vast communications network, social media can become a shared means of maintaining psychological health through its accessibility, anonymity, and social support.

The Anonymity of Social Media

Anonymity is a significant advantage offered by social media in bolstering the mental health of teens and nurturing their social skills. According to Azadeh et al. (2015)[2], a sense of control is essential to socially anxious individuals during their stages of acceptance. A report in the US found that 33% of undergraduate respondents feared losing control of their emotions in conversations, while 28% of them put excessive emphasis on the opposing views posted by others (Meyer, Morrison, & Swingle, 2016)[3]. This could make them avoid real-time interactions. This indicates that mental disorders such as depression and anxiety arise from the concern of being humiliated in front of people because uncertainties often make conversations challenging. However, SNS permit people to initiate a conversation from a keyboard, making it easier for them to manipulate the entire conversation and control emotions, given that they are facing a screen and not an actual person. For instance, sending messages using emoticons to express feelings

can be less embarrassing than face-to-face communication, given the interactive tools available on SNS for such settings. Furthermore, anonymity affords the user a sense of security which increases the comfort levels individuals with mental disorders experience when sharing their thoughts on various issues. Thus, SNS will be particularly beneficial for adolescents who experience anxiety in situations of direct communication (Bilal, Sinan, & Ali, 2013)[4]. In addition, individuals with social phobia can unconsciously develop negative emotions when they wrongly interpret the facial expressions of others in direct communication (Amir, Najmi, & Morrison, 2012)[5]. Under these circumstances, they could instead choose to conceal their feelings and not engage in a discussion. Nevertheless, concealing one's true feelings is not advocated since it is detrimental to mental health. However, this problem does not arise with SNS, as social media encourages people to speak freely while evading dealing with immediate judgment from others. Moreover, the anonymity offered by SNS supports individuals with social phobia by encouraging them to engage in communication and express their ideas.

The Unrestricted Accessibility of Social Media

Since social media is not bound by geographical and time constraints, its ease of accessibility transforms it into a timely alarm system that enables depressed teens to reach out for help. A study by Gao et al. (2020)[6] indicates that people's exposure to social media increased substantially during the COVID-19 outbreak. The grim situation of the raging COVID-19 pandemic led to an escalation in unemployment rates, prices of daily necessities, and levels of stress. In addition, to combat the contagious virus, people refrained from social gatherings, schools were shut down, and teens were deprived of opportunities to interact with peers. Such an atmosphere thwarted people's desire for social interaction and expressing their emotions and concerns. This led to depression becoming a common psychiatric disorder among teens, with social isolation engendering feelings of loneliness. In these circumstances, social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook became efficacious mediums to help people stay in touch with each other at any time, particularly teens who were still developing their social skills. While offering copious amounts of up-to-the-minute information, SNS always generate positive content regarding depression prevention and offer possible means for stress relief (Dewa et al., 2019)[7]. This is extremely helpful in bolstering psychological health since this information is accessible to everyone. For example, SNS provide suggestions such as indoor activity options that could help people in giving vent to their stress during home quarantine. Apart from that, medical information that allowed people to take action to protect themselves was also accessible on SNS (Verner et al., 2020)[8]. Thus, on the whole, people benefit a lot from their access to SNS.

1| Wang, V., & Edwards, S. (2016). Strangers are friends I have not met yet: A positive approach to young people's use of social media. Journal of Youth Studies, 19(9), 1204–1219. doi:10.1080/13676261.2016.1154933

2| Azadeh, S. M., Kazemi-Zahrani, H., & Besharat, M. A. (2015). Effectiveness of acceptance and commitment therapy on interpersonal problems and psychological flexibility in female high school students with social anxiety disorder. Global journal of health science, 8(3), 131–138

3| Meyer, W. J., Morrison, P., Lombardero, A., Swingle, K., & Campbell, D. G. (2016). College students' reasons for depression nondisclosure in primary care. Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 30(3), 197–205. doi:10.1080/87568225.2016.1177435

4| Bilal, S., Sinan, Y., & Ali, E. (2013). Social anxiety and usage of online technological communication tools among adolescents. Journal of Economic & Social Studies, 3(2), 101–113. doi:10.14706/jecoss11327

5| Amir, N., Najmi, S., & Morrison, A. (2012). Image Generation in Individuals with Generalized Social Phobia. Cognitive Therapy & Research, 36(5), 537–547. doi:10.1007/s10608-011-9395-6

6| Gao, J., Zheng, P., Jia, Y., Chen, H., Mao, Y., Chen, S., Wang, Y., Fu, H., & Dai, J. (2020). Mental health problems and social media exposure during COVID-19 outbreak. PLOS ONE, 15(4), 1–10. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0231924

7| Dewa, L. H., Lavelle, M., Pickles, K., Kalorkoti, C., Jaques, J., Pappa, S., & Aylin, P. (2019). Young adults' perceptions of using wearables, social media and other technologies to detect worsening mental health: A qualitative study. PLOS ONE, 14(9), 1–14.

8| A. Verner Venegas-Vera, Gates B Colbert, & Edgar V. Lerma. (2020). Positive and negative impact of social media in the COVID-19 era. Reviews in Cardiovascular Medicine, 21(4), 561. https://doi.org/10.31083/j.rcm.2020.04.195

Likewise, SNS help people stay in constant touch with each other so that they are better connected. Most users on SNS are accustomed to sharing their thoughts and feelings on social media, such as on the time-limited story highlights on Instagram, and Dewa et al. (2019)[7] indicate that friends play a pivotal role in caring for the emotional needs of teens. By responding instantly with a reassuring message after reading a peer's negative views on the platform, users can promptly provide support to each other. The early identification of mental health deterioration via social media is also one of the major benefits of SNS (Dewa et al., 2019)[7]. However, teens can sometimes resort to concealing their depression to avoid criticism and discrimination or can be unaware of their mental health status. Here, social media can help identify worsening mental health problems since all people have unrestricted access to the Internet. Families/friends can stay alert to their children's/friends' behavior on social media as psychiatric patients always tend to express themselves through some medium (Purton, 2014)[9]. Therefore, social media could act as an alarm system.

Spiritual Support from Social Media

Social media offers a sense of belonging that most adolescents yearn for. Bilal et al. (2013)[4] point out that humans are often motivated by a sense of belonging and the desire for acceptance. According to research conducted by the Pew Research Center (PRC), 40% of US teen respondents believed that social media offered them increased connectivity with the world. Social media acts as an online community that permits individuals to express themselves in a larger social group, especially teens who crave attention and look to fit into a social circle. Moreover, social media tools can help maintain relationships (Wang & Edwards, 2016)[1]. Depression and anxiety often arise from difficulties in reaching out to others. Some depressed teens may not know how to express their indescribable feelings and can dread being misunderstood. Fortunately, tools on SNS allow people to express themselves through a wide variety of means, including emoticons and stickers. Moreover, language is never a barrier on SNS, and sending pictures and broken sentences are adequate when expressing emotions and thoughts with peers. With its feature of instant sharing, social media prompts users to provide adequate support to each other when necessary.

Furthermore, SNS also satisfy the desire of teens for acceptance. Lloyd (2014)[10] indicates that a sense of achievement supports the treatment of psychiatric disorders and helps individuals rebuild self-esteem. According to PRC (2018) [11] ,20% of US teen respondents claimed that they used social media to gain recognition from others because they could meet people with shared interests on the Internet. Given the worldwide connectivity of social media, people are bound

9| Purton, C. (2014). Wittgenstein and the expression of feelings in psychotherapy. Philosophical Investigations, 37(2), 152–166. doi:10.1111/phin.12029

10| Lloyd, A. (2014). Social media, help or hindrance: What role does social media play in young people's mental health? Psychiatria Danubina, 26 Suppl 1, 340–6 Media and mental health. (2018). Industrial Psychiatry Journal, 27(1), 1–5. doi:10.4103/ipj.ipj_73_18

11| Pew Research Center. (2018). Teens have mixed views on social media's effect on people their age; many say it helps them connect with others, some express concerns about bullying. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/pi_2018-05-31_teenstech_0-03/

to find someone who shares similar values. For example, users on Instagram can follow each other's channels or profiles if they have common opinions and can also send messages to each other without constraints. Teens can also gain recognition by expressing their ideas and eliciting responses from like-minded netizens. By receiving support from a group of people, teens acquire a sense of achievement that encourages them to express their ideas with increased confidence. Most importantly, it conveys the sense that they are not alone, and it is unnecessary to hide their feelings. Thus, social media helps teens rebuild their self-esteem and keep loneliness in abeyance.

Conclusion

Social media has become an indispensable part of contemporary society. Over time, technological advances have equipped SNS with highly improved interactive tools. They no longer remain conventional platforms with only a few available channels. Today, as more tracks open up to adolescents, SNS have succeeded in surpassing face-to-face communication when it comes to mental disorder prevention. Therefore, social media did not necessarily have to impact mental health negatively. Instead, it is more about how an individual deploys the social media functions at her/his disposal.

Recommendations

Depression, social anxiety, and low self-esteem are a few general characteristics that can typically be found among teens. These are the kinds of psychiatric disorders that are normally overlooked (Fathima, Priya, & Gayathri, 2019)[12]. Although it is undeniable that social media can negatively affect both the physical and mental health of teenagers, its positive effects outweigh the negative, and SNS can certainly help mitigate psychiatric disorders.

To appropriately deploy the beneficial aspects of social media, parental control is necessary to ensure that teens do not get afflicted by a behavioral addiction to social media. Parents need to educate their children about the consequences of intemperate and indiscriminate use of the Internet. Moreover, behavioral addiction can be eliminated by restricting addicted individuals' use of social media (Hou, Xiong, & Jiang, 2019) [13]. Considering Mainland China as an example, here, the government issued new rules that limited the time spent by teenagers playing online games to only three hours a week. Similarly, based on different situations, parents can set time limits for children for using the Internet to cultivate appropriate attitudes among them toward using social media and

12| Fathima, F., Priya, V. V., & Gayathri, R. (2019). Social media and anxiety-A survey. Drug Invention Today, 12(9), 1841–1844.

13| Yubo Hou, Dan Xiong, Tonglin Jiang, Lily Song, & Qi Wang. (2019). Social media addiction: Its impact, mediation, and intervention. Cyberpsychology, 13(1), 1–17. doi: 10.5817/CP2019-1-4

preventing teens from developing physical health problems as a result of its misuse.

As for cyberbullying, this unhealthy practice on social media can only be halted through joint initiatives by all participants. The accessibility of SNS encourages mutual supervision as everyone around the world can gather online without time and geographical constraints. Netizens must act responsibly in combating this menace by reporting inappropriate online behavior rather than turning a blind eye to cyberbullying. It is recommended that the online community should promote mutual care and respect, and users are encouraged to call out cyberbullies once they recognize them. Moreover, schools could also play a role in this regard by inculcating in students the right attitude to be adopted when using social media. Apart from the above, social media developers should reinforce their reporting systems and never arbitrarily decide on a cyberbullying case. It is imperative that after adequate scrutiny, steps be taken to shut down the social media accounts of those involved in cyberbullying cases. Additionally, netizens can also provide appropriate advice to teens in coping with malicious verbal abuse. This phenomenon of mutual care reiterates the feature of spiritual support from SNS. Parents also need to be constantly alert to behavioral changes in their children and offer timely support and care.

BRAIN –COMPUTER INTERFACE: A RISKY BUT USEFUL NEUROTECHNOLOGY

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Brain -Computer Interface:
A Risky but Useful Neurotechnology

Neurotechnology has tremendously changed with the rapidly developing technology. As a rising neurotechnology, the brain-computer interface revolutionizes telecommunication and mind-reading in multitudinous areas like medicine, the military, and security. The booming brain-computer interface has also sparked a debate about its risks and usefulness regarding various security concerns and thought control issues. This essay will analyze the main reasons why the brain-computer interface is risky yet advantageous for the reduction of traffic accidents, its significant contributions to medical treatment, the excessive harmful power of artificial intelligence, and the concerns about thought control.

One of the advantages of the brain-computer interface is the reduced number of car accidents. Traffic accidents usually cause death or serious injury, and the driver's inattention is an important reason for the latter (Abdulkader et al., 2015)[1] . However, if a car has a functioning brain-computer interface, that is, the driver's brain and the driving system are interconnected through the brain-computer interface technology, then the probability of traffic accidents reduces. Nissan's Brain-to-Vehicle technology is a prime example. When the brain-computer interface connects to the driver's brain, it can extract and analyze the driver's driving intentions in real-time. For example, the traditional braking method requires a response time of 0.2 to 0.5 s for the driver's brain to alert his muscles to execute the command, but if the brain-computer interface learns that the driver wants to brake, the brain-computer interface can perform it preemptively. This reduces the response time to 0.2 to 0.5 s and avoids car accidents (Nissan Motor Corporation, n.d.)[2]. In summary, the brain-computer interface is a useful neurotechnology as it reduces traffic accidents and saves lives.

Another remarkable advantage is using a brain-computer interface to advance medical treatment. The aim of developing the brain-computer interface research is to enhance or replace the impaired functions of patients with neuromuscular diseases, like stroke, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Shih et al., 2012)[3]. The brain-computer interface aids, which general medical treatment cannot for patients with nerve damage. For example, it can help people with partially impaired cochlea to hear through the internal interface of the cochlear implant to communicate freely with each other (Roy, 2016)[4]. The brain-computer interface also allows basic movements to paralytics through a robotic arm (Rosenfeld & Wong, 2017)[5]. The brain-computer interface is unique as a powerful communication tool that allows communication without using muscle strength (Forslund, 2003)[6]. It uses thought commands instead of physical

1| Abdulkader, S. N., Atia, A., & Mostafa, M. M. (2015). Brain-computer interfacing: Applications and challenges. Egyptian Informatics Journal, 16(2), 213–230. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eij.2015.06.002

2| Nissan Motor Corporation. (n.d.). Brain-to-Vehicle. https://www.nissan-global.com/EN/TECHNOLOGY/OVERVIEW/b2v.html

3| Shih, J. J., Krusienski, D. J., & Wolpaw, J. R. (2012). Brain-computer interfaces in medicine. Mayo Clinic proceedings, 87(3), 268–279. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2011.12.008

4| Roy, D. (2016). Study of Brain-computer Interfacing (BCI) with Cochlear Implant as an Example. SUNY Polytechnic Institute. http://hdl.handle.net/1951/68237

5| Rosenfeld, J. V., & Wong, Y. T. (2017). Neurobionics and the brain-computer interface: current applications and future horizons. The Medical Journal of Australia, 206(8), 363–368. https://doi.org/10.5694/mja16.01011

6| Forslund, P. (2003). A Neural Network Based Brain-Computer Interface for Classification of Movement Related EEG. Linköping University. http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:21837/FULLTEXT01

manipulations, and it may help those with limited or no mobility to live freely. Thus, the brain-computer interface is a useful neurotechnology as it provides medical benefits.

Some may argue that the brain-computer interface is ineffective because its usual research focuses on disabled people, so there are fewer benefits for able-bodied people. Some opponents also express their worries that advanced brain-computer interface technology could eliminate humankind. As Stephen Hawking warned when artificial intelligence fully develops, it will redesign and improve rapidly, but humans will not be able to compete with it due to our slow biological evolution. Thus, we will be eventually replaced, meaning the end of mankind (Cellan, 2014) [7]. However, this is not the case. Firstly, the brain-computer interface can benefit disabled and non-disabled people because there is evidence that it functions as an interactive and fascinating tool for non-disabled people in several fields like video games (Bonnet et al., 2013) [8], industrial inspection (Angrisani et al., 2020)[9], and virtual reality (Lécuyer et al., 2008)[10]. Secondly, if humans want to survive with robots in an era of artificial intelligence, they may need to use more advanced brain-computer interfaces ("Using Thought To," 2018)[11]. Although artificial intelligence is powerful, it would not compare to the combination of the human and the brain-computer interface (Valeriani, 2017)[12]. When a person's ability could be enhanced, it will probably be superior to artificial intelligence, and the brain-computer interface cannot support this improvement of capacity. Valeriani et al. (2019)[13] added that the brain-computer interface is a powerful tool for the disabled to improve personal life, like transcending humans' limitations in doing sensory, cognitive, and motor tasks. In a nutshell, the integration of the brain-computer interface into the individual is favorable because the advanced development of artificial intelligence is advantageous. It will benefit the disabled and the non-disabled public, helping them survive in the era of artificial intelligence.

Despite the advantages outlined above, opponents may contend that the risks of the brain-computer interface are greater than its advantages due to the manipulation of the users by the operating system, namely, thought control. When the brain-computer interface is directly inserted into the brain, some are concerned that the system might control the user's thoughts without their authorization (Best, 2019)[14]. This creates the risk of implanting a brain-computer interface that may outweigh its benefits. Despite certain risks, the threat connecting the brain with the brain-computer interface is inferior to its benefits as its current version cannot control thoughts. It can read simple commands in our minds, but it cannot control the user (Best, 2019)[13]. Since every brain wave is different, the same brain-computer interface cannot be used by another person, which makes its programming difficult (Andujar, n.d., as cited in Best, 2019)[13]. Three methods

7| Cellan, R. J. (2014, December 2). Stephen Hawking warns artificial intelligence could end mankind. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-30290540

8| Bonnet, L., Lotte, F., & Lécuyer, A. (2013). Two Brains, One Game: Design and Evaluation of a Multiuser BCI Video Game Based on Motor Imagery. IEEE Transactions on Computational Intelligence and AI in Games, 5(2), 185–198. https://doi.org/10.1109/TCIAIG.2012.2237173

9| Angrisani, L., Arpaia, P., Esposito, A., & Moccaldi, N. (2020). A Wearable Brain–Computer Interface Instrument for Augmented Reality-Based Inspection in Industry 4.0. IEEE Transactions on Instrumentation and Measurement, 69(4), 1530–1539. https://doi.org/10.1109/TIM.2019.2914712

10| Lécuyer, A., Lotte, F., Reilly, R.B., Leeb, R., Hirose, M., & Slater, M. (2008). Brain-computer interfaces, virtual reality, and videogames. Computer, 41(10), 66–72. https://doi.org/10.1109/MC.2008.410

11| Using thought to control machines. (2018, January 4). The Economist. https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/01/04/using-thought-to-control-machines

12| Valeriani, D. (2017, March 4). Elon Musk wants to merge man and machine—Here's what he'll need to work out. Observer. https://observer.com/2017/04/elon-musk-wants-to-merge-man-and-machine-artificial-intelligence-eeg-neurotechnology/

13| Valeriani, D., Cinel, C., & Poli, R. (2019). Brain-Computer Interfaces for Human Augmentation. Brain sciences, 9(2), 22. https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci9020022

to prevent thought control in the future are proposed, including more research and development to strengthen the security of encryption technologies like EEG equipment, wireless communication, close control devices, and remote-control devices in real-time. The government would implement effective supervision measures for special equipment and increase consumers' awareness through campaigns organized by independent agencies like the European Consumer Organization (Usieto & Minguez, 2018)[14]. Although thought control may occur, the benefits of brain-computer interfaces are still superior to their disadvantages because of no current significant risks and effective preventive measures.

Thus, this essay shows that the brain-computer interface is a beneficial neurotechnology. Its installment in a car could reduce traffic accidents, which guarantees the safety of the driver and the passengers. The research and development of the brain-computer interface also facilitate medical advancement. Disabled and non-disabled people benefit from the brain-computer interface and improve living in the era of artificial intelligence. Despite the potential risks, preventive measures have been introduced. The brain-computer interface is a powerful neurotechnology, provided that it is used properly. The minimization of possible risks will improve the well-being of its users.

14| Usieto, P.B., & Minguez, J. (2018, November 21). Avoiding brain hacking — Challenges of cybersecurity and privacy in Brain-computer Interfaces. Bitbrain. https://www.bitbrain. com/blog/cybersecurity-brain-computer-interface

ARTISTIC REVIEW – MY NAME IS KHAN

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Introduction

Background

My Name Is Khan is a 2010 Indian Hindi-language drama film directed by Karan Johar. It was written by Shibani Bathija and Niranjan Iyengar and produced by Hiroo Yash Johar and Gauri Khan under their banner Dharma Productions and Red Chillies Entertainment, respectively. It stars Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol in leading the roles. It is Fox Star Studios' debut film as distributor and co-producer. They bought the rights for the film for US$ 14 million, making it Bollywood's most expensive film of 2010. It was also screened at the 60th Berlin International Film Festival (wiki, n.d.)[1]. As a film, My Name is Khan focuses on issues like juvenile delinquency, racial discrimination, and prejudice against neurodevelopmental disorder.

1| My Name Is Khan. (n.d.). . Retrieved June 3, 2021, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Name_Is_Khan#Airport_security

Plot

The story begins in 2010. Rizwan Khan is a Muslim boy who grew up in Mumbai with his elder brother and mother. He is a family man married to a Hindu woman Mandira Rathore and is the stepfather to Sameer "Sam" Rathore. The 9/11 attack disrupt their lives. Sam, the audience learns, is suspected of terrorist. Sam finds himself involved in racially motivated attacks resulting in his death. Mandira is heartbroken and argues with him to tell people and the President of the United States that his name is Khan, and he is not a terrorist. Hence, Khan starts his journey to prove that he is not a terrorist.

Social Issues implied by the story

Our inaccurate and traditional inherent values

When someone seems different from us, we always brand them as abnormal. Various places have various cultures and habits. Khan, for instance, just prays and does what he usually does. Since he has Asperger Syndrome, we may define Khan as "different". He never did anything illegal and was compassionate to the people around him. Unfortunately, this world is cruel, and no one wants to listen and empathize. Strange does mean one is abnormal or bad. Everyone has different characteristics and behaviors. These differences create a comprehensive society. We should respect these differences and not discriminate or ignore them.

This movie deals with the serious issue of juvenile delinquency. In the story, Sam suffers due to racially motivated fights, resulting in his death. No investigations were made by the parties at that time. It is ridiculous how being a Muslim makes you a victim of bullying. It is unacceptable under any circumstances. However, in this movie, everyone ignores the victim's pleas. The victims are not only the family members and friends of the deceased and injured due to the September 11th attacks, but also the Muslim community. Since their difficulties are different, their appeals are different. The government must empathize with the family members of the victims of this attack and find the real terrorists to prevent grievous situations like Sam's from repeating. There are good and bad Muslim people in the world. It would be unfair to the good ones. Everyone deserves equality and not to be discriminated against by their religions, nations, etc.

The definition of good and bad people

Khan's mother Razia said, "Khan, there are only two types of people in the world, good and bad people. Even if they belong to different religions, countries, and social status, we should not define a person by these factors." Here, we see that people usually define a person by their religion, nation, etc. It is unfortunate that the general struck and killed a boat full of people with a bamboo pole. Even though the September 11th attacks were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Wahhabi Islamist terrorist group.

Al-Qaeda is against the United States, and they are Muslims, but these terrorists do not represent the whole Muslim community. People's prejudiced views lead to unfair discrimination in the world. There are good and bad people of different social classes, religions, and ages. We should never define a person by these factors and instead uphold moral values.

Conclusion

Fortunately, the main characters, Khan and Mandira, have a happy ending. However, the reality is cruel, and there are several issues of discrimination and intolerance worldwide toward a race of people who are unassociated with terrorism. One cannot hope to meet the President and broadcast their speech to clarify that they are not a terrorist.

Therefore, I believe that treating each other equally and being compassionate with others is the best way to curb discrimination. It takes time to meet and know a person. We can always listen to others' opinions on people since being a good listener is important. Judging people, however, depends on us. We must learn how to distinguish the good people from the bad ones.

Everyone has varying morals and values. Different people have different standards. One cannot calculate it accurately, like Mathematics.

Lastly, I believe that life is full of obstacles, but we must strive to overcome them. Just like the rainbow comes after the rain, the calm after the storm, and the morning after the night, I hope for a new beginning that comes with the end of such discrimination.
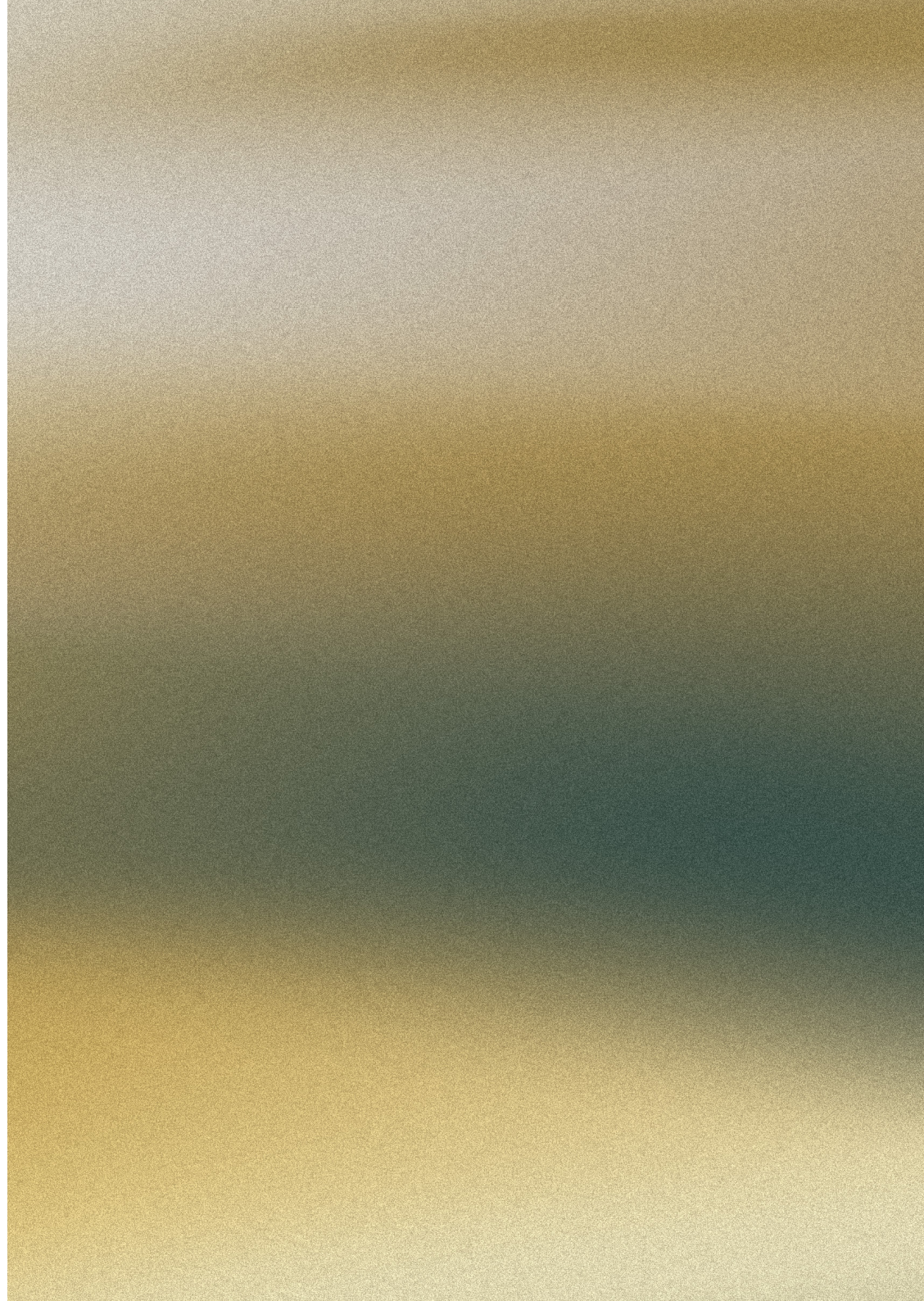
MEMES AS A MEANS:
CHALLENGING THE IDEOLOGICAL
CONSTRUCT OF POLITICAL
DISCUSSIONS
IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Bachelor of Social Sciences in Asian Studies - Year 4

Introduction

For nearly five years, President Rodrigo Duterte has been the focus of constant attention in the Philippines and in global politics. Since the beginning of his presidential campaign in 2016, Duterte consistently promised to eradicate drugs and crime throughout the country within six months of becoming president. This campaign has continued until today and is now termed 'the ruthless extrajudicial killings'. Throughout his term, Duterte has also become notorious for making sexist remarks and rape jokes, as well as speaking ill of the Catholic Church. He has remained seemingly unabashed in the face of international criticism from governments and media outlets directed at his administration. Domestically, his controversial policies have been opposed by a variety of groups, including the passionate and zealous Filipino supporters who nonetheless disagree with his iron-fist approach, anti-Duterte forces who believe that Duterte is a threat to the Philippines' hard-earned democracy and rule of law, and those disappointed with Philippine politics in general. The fiery clash between these opposing sides has been playing out largely on today's largest source of content—social media. Those who are outraged by Duterte and those supportive of his party have expressed their opinions in the digital public sphere. Among the emergent communication mediums of contemporary participatory media culture, internet memes have become one of the most popular expressions of support and dissent. This paper explores the nature and content of internet memes created to express dissent toward Duterte and members of his political party. I examine these internet memes as a mechanism for the Filipino masses to reproduce new meanings to manage the absurdity of the current government. Internet memes reach a wide range of people, which enables the political discussion to become part of public conversations (Milner, 2013; Shifman, 2014)[1]. This process attempts to reconcile with the idea of "everyday talk," where even politically neutral citizens can argue for different courses of action based on their merits, which is facilitated by the framework of social media, an effect that could be just as persuasive as formal debates (Mansbridge, 1999)[2]. Since the digital media environment is, by nature, participatory, the spread of everyday talk first amasses the people's will, sparking the interest of the media and consequently further spreading to garner many other people's attention (Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009)[3]. Specifically, I discuss how humor in these political memes challenges the normalized political ideological constructs in the Philippines, a domain previously only for the elites in the country. In this study, I analyzed internet memes posted on Facebook and Twitter—two of the most popular platforms for political discussions in the Philippines—to understand the influence of internet memes in deconstructing the Filipino traditional political discussion. Through the creation and circulation of online memes to respond to Duterte's policies, the Filipino public engaged in

an unfolding discourse on Philippine politics, which demonstrates that they too, regardless of their position in the society, can have the power to make their voices heard.

Literature review

The Philippine Political System

It is important to put the Philippine political situation into perspective. Despite being known for its adherence to Western democracy and liberal political system, Philippine politics, especially political leadership, is traditionally a system of patronage (Pertierra, 2012)[4]. Political leaders—both current and prospective—offer patronage to their constituents. This patronal strategy employs tactics that range from giveaways for poor local communities to secret lavish dinners with wealthy business tycoons; however, perhaps the most important factor that makes this politically successful is the culture of the celebrifying politics. The celebrity culture in the Philippines is considered "a symbolic function of parasociality" (Centeno, 2016, p. 441)[5], which refers to an illusionary sense of intimate connection with TV or film celebrities. It has been suggested that, due to the everyday consumption of media complemented by magnified social interaction, celebrities have been constructed as significant others, which is a parasocial act (Centeno, 2015)[6]. Centeno implies that this parasocial act is a cultural manifestation that determines an individual's political preferences and the decisions they make therefrom. The correlation between celebrity influence and the public's political behavior is well-established in the literature, most of which is explained by the prominent role that traditional media plays in the realm of politics. Celebrities invoke a more dramatic and personal style of public discourse because their day-to-day existence is constantly portrayed and filtered through media (Hughes-Freeland, 2007; Meyer, 1995; McKernan, 2011)[7]. Celebrities' political endorsements also affect political discourse in a way that renders otherwise repulsive political remarks more benign and commonplace (Jackson & Darrow, 2005)[8], as if they are part of a drama for members of the public sphere (Rojek, 2001)[9]. Philippine politics is dominated by this patronage, leading to the celebrification of politicians for the purpose of creating a favorable media image, a strategy that is normalized and expected of successful politicians. Unlike the Western archetype, Philippine politicians neither espouse ideological positions nor compromise grassroot-level movements. Rather, they are actors, supported by powerful, influential patrons with financial resources, consequently subjugating control of the political arena to the politico-economic elite in the country. Despite being the most liberal and democratic society in Asia and having a media renowned for its brazenness and pugnacity, the Philippines

1| Milner, R. M. (2013). Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement. International Journal of Communication, 7, 2357–2390. Retrieved from https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1949/1015

Shifman, L. (2014). The Cultural Logic of Photo-Based Meme Genres. Journal of Visual Culture, 13(3), 340–358. doi:10.1177/1470412914546577

2| Mansbridge, J. (1999). Everyday Talk in the Deliberative System. In S. Macedo, Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement (pp. 211–239). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3| Jacobs, L. R., Cook, F. L., & Delli Carpini, M. X. (2009). Talking Together: Public Deliberation and Political Participation in America. Chicago: University of Chicago.

4| Pertierra, R. (2012). The New Media, Society & Politics in the Philippines. Berlin: Fesmedia Asia. Retrieved from https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/asia-media/09241.pdf

5| Centeno, D. D. (2016). Parasociality and Habitus in Celebrity Consumption and Political Culture: A Philippine Case Study. Asian Journal of Social Science, 44(4–5), 441–484. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/43954178

6| Centeno, D. D. (2015). Constructing celebrities as political endorsers: parasocial acts, cultural power, and cultural capital. Philippine Political Science, 36(2), 209–232. doi:10.1080/01154451.2015.1084746

7| Hughes-Freeland, F. (2007). Charisma and celebrity in Indonesian politics. Anthropological Theory, 7(2), 177–200. doi:10.1177/1463499607077297

Meyer, D. S. (1995). The Challenge of Cultural Elites: Celebrities and Social Movements. Sociological Inquiry, 65, 181–206. doi:10.1111/j.1475–682X.1995.tb00412.x

McKernan, B. (2011). Politics and Celebrity: A Sociological Understanding. Sociology Compass, 5(3), 190–202. doi:10.1111/j.1751–9020.2011.00359.x

8| Jackson, D. J., & Darrow, T. I. (2005). he Influence of Celebrity Endorsements on Young Adults' Political Opinions. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 10(3), 80–98. doi:10.1177/1081180X05279278

9| Rojek, C. (2001). Celebrity. London: Reaktion Books.

is nonetheless acknowledged as partisan. The ownership of the largest and most influential media companies in the Philippines belongs to prominent families that are directly involved in the political or economic scene and wield paramount authority over the wider varied sectors of the society. The nature of the traditional media landscape is self-serving, one in which companies "engage in shameless self-promotion and often report their own activity as news" (p. 15). Although there are other forms of media also accessible to the Filipino masses, they either rarely express opinions on national issues, are ineffective or are propagandistic (Pertierra, 2012)[4]. Traditional media, which is an essential source of political information, has been monopolized by private interests and functions as an extension of the elite, serving primarily as a means to characterize public mainstream discourse in a way that suits their own interests. Research has shown that political entertainment significantly contributes to shaping the viewer's mental model of politics (Centeno, 2015 ; Centeno, 2016; Hughes-Freeland, 2007; Jackson & Darrow, 2005; McKernan, 2011; Meyer, 1995; Pertierra, 2012)[5], which bolsters the claim that mainstream Filipino political views are heavily influenced by those at the top of the patronal system.

Media in Philippine politics

Understanding the relationship between the traditional media, politicians, and the public in the Philippines through this lens is vital to understanding the profound power of digital media, especially that of memes, which are created and propagated by ordinary Filipino individuals. In The New Media, Society & Politics in the Philippines, Raul Pertierra (2012)[4] assesses the role of modern media technologies in facilitating new forms of political activity in the country. Conformity, hierarchy and subservience have been normalized in the Philippine political scene due to the tradition of the patronage system; thus, less powerful or aspiring politicians openly dissenting public figures are not a common feature of Philippine politics. The growth of online media threatens this elite-exclusive controlled, top-down, non-interactive nature of the Philippine political system. While the Filipino masses previously only communicated political opinions and interests within their personal networks, such as family members and close associates, political opinions and interests are increasingly being shared in the digital public sphere. Furthermore, the range of people airing critical views of the government is becoming broader. However, there is still a paucity of literature regarding the transformation of the Philippine political landscape caused by new means of political activity, meaning that the consequences of this transformation remain unelucidated.

5| Centeno, D. D. (2015). Constructing celebrities as political endorsers: parasocial acts, cultural power, and cultural capital. Philippine Political Science, 36(2), 209–232. doi:10.1080/01154451. 2015.1084746

Centeno, D. D. (2016). Parasociality and Habitus in Celebrity Consumption and Political Culture: A Philippine Case Study. Asian Journal of Social Science, 44(4–5), 441–484. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/43954178

Hughes-Freeland, F. (2007). Charisma and celebrity in Indonesian politics. Anthropological Theory, 7(2), 177–200. doi:10.1177/1463499607077297

Jackson, D. J., & Darrow, T. I. (2005). he Influence of Celebrity Endorsements on Young Adults' Political Opinions. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 10(3), 80–98. doi:10.1177/1081180X05279278

McKernan, B. (2011). Politics and Celebrity: A Sociological Understanding. Sociology Compass, 5(3), 190–202. doi:10.1111/j.1751–9020.2011.00359.x

Pertierra, R. (2012). The New Media, Society & Politics in the Philippines. Berlin: Fesmedia Asia. Retrieved from https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/asia-media/09241.pdf

The rise of digital media as the central domain of political expression in the Philippines today has brought about new modes of communication. Among them, internet memes have become one of the most popular. Internet memes are user-generated media that often use pop-culture references and are made anonymously by ordinary people. Shifman (2013, p. 367)[6] defines memes as "units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process". Furthermore, rather than communicating only a single idea, this cultural unit makes use of a collection of ideas that reference other cultural units. Hence, memes, as recontextualizations of each other, share common features. Internet memes are easily overlooked in the academic area because their content does not appear sufficiently substantive, though the role they play in influencing political participation (e.g., Ross & Rivers, 2017)[7] and political expression (e.g., Soh, 2020) [8] has been acknowledged. How citizens view and feel about internet memes matters because the way that internet memes present political issues could affect citizens' perceptions of those issues. It could alter which political news outlets they choose to follow and the way in which they search and process political information. In a culture dominated by online media, in which posting content that trends and becomes viral is a measure of value, regardless of the content of that post, internet memes are amenable to wider consumption among internet users (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013)[9]. Because a meme is exchanged "from person to person, [and] gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon" (p. 365), the micro level wherein memes spread generates a macro-level effect (Shifman, 2013). The decentralized and non-hierarchical attribute of such user-generated media complemented by online application sites allows internet memes to shape mindsets, behavior, and action (Jenkins, 2006; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007)[10]. Nonetheless, little is known about the contribution of internet memes in affecting the political consciousness of internet users, and even less is known about the role of internet memes in public discourse. There is also a lack of studies of internet memes that use quantitative methods to investigate their influence on political participation and outcomes.

Humor in internet memes and in the Philippine political context

Internet memes are also characterized by their humor. Knobel and Lankshear (2007, as cited in Varona, 2016, p. 83)[11] noted three elements found in successful internet memes, namely, humor, intertextuality and the "anomalous juxtaposition of images", making humor an essential component in the study of internet memes. Memes can be postulated as the "weapons of the weak" (Calimbo, 2016, p. 3)[12], a vehicle for resistance by those subordinated in the society to express opposition against the powerful. Though the humor of internet memes

6| Shifman, L. (2013). Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual Troublemaker. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 18, 362–377. doi:10.1111/jcc4.12013

7| Ross, A. S., & Rivers, D. J. (2017). Digital cultures of political participation: Internet memes and the discursive delegitimization of the 2016 U.S Presidential candidates. Discourse, Context & Media, 16, 1–11. doi:10.1016/j. dcm.2017.01.001

8| Soh, W. (2020). Digital protest in Singapore: the pragmatics of political Internet Memes. Media, Culture & Society, 42(7–8), 1115–1132. doi:10.1177/0163443720904603

9| Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture. New York; London: NYU Press. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfk6w

10| Jenkins, H. (2006). Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide. New York; London: NYU Press. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qffwr

Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2007). A New Literacies Sampler. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291334749_A_New_Literacies_Sampler_Cover_plus_Introduction

11| Varona, K. Y. (2016). The Role of Internet Memes in Public Discourse: The Case of the Philippine Pork Barrel Scam of 2013. In A. Azmawati, & R. E. Khan, Social Media in Asia: Changing Paradigms of Communication (pp. 76–106). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

remains understudied, the growing body of research on the topic has recently been gaining attention. Chandler (2013)[13] has stated that internet memes could potentially contest existing power relations and reconstruct the representation of disenfranchised groups. Varona's (2016)[11] study of the Philippines resembles Chandler's in emphasizing the opportunity internet memes grant to the common people. Internet memes allow them to criticize those in power, enabling crowded or repressed voices to be known and heard, consequently empowering them to join the public conversation. Other findings also showed that, although the humor of the poor masses might not ultimately lead to political revolutions, it is susceptible to discursive space where dialogues on previously unquestioned or silenced opinions can have a platform (Kuipers, 2008)[14]. The use of humor through internet memes as a form of political aggression (Pearce & Hajizada, 2014)[15] and political protest (Soh, 2020)[8] also reveals the capacity of the oppositional political humor of internet memes to publicize political dissent. This paper provides additional insight into humor and its potential to challenge ideological political constructs.

Rafael (1986)[16] has analyzed the use of humor specifically in Philippine politics. Looking at two of the most oppressive time periods in Philippine history, namely the Spanish colonial period and period of the Marcos regime, Rafael describes political humor as being symptomatic of Filipinos struggling to produce and disseminate signs and meanings in order to express themselves in the midst of oppressive rulers. Filipino humor consists in "fishing out," that is, responding to the tactics of tyrannical rulers with decontextualization of those tactics. A central component of Spanish colonization is its evangelizing mission, hence the imposed Catholic masses where priests sermonize in Spanish. In Rizal's literary canon, most of the comedic scenes narrate local Filipinos "fishing out" Spanish words from the sermon and arbitrarily connecting them to random reverie. Rafael draws a parallel with the struggle against the Marcos regime following the assassination of Ninoy Aquino Jr. Ninoy's bullet-riddled body was an icon, an overdetermined sign invariably hailed anywhere that it could be appropriated. Yet another icon that dominated post-assassination protests was the alleged killer Ronaldo Galman, popularly regarded as the scapegoat of the assassination. Galman's corpse donned only a pair of underwear, with his nickname Rolly stitched on them, and sparked a flood of Galman jokes. Men's underwear advertisements capitalized on the situation, claiming that wearing their briefs would "bring out the killer in you!" (p. 5). Placards of rallies and demonstrations displayed men's underwear, a symbol of defiance against the government's allegation that Galman was a communist hitman. Rafael observes how, in both situations, there was a continuous shuffling from the masses' display of anger and resentment to the avid telling and retelling of humorous content fished out from the situation. Humor is the outcome of the analogous process of negotiating the possibilities of expression between themselves and the oppressive regime.

Similarly, internet memes serve as one of these expressive possibilities under Duterte's administration. Especially in a participatory media culture, these user-generated memes have emerged as a means of political commentary and, while Rintel (2013)[17] reflects on the value of internet memes in the "comment culture" and how they characterize "comment culture itself" (p. 265), there has yet to be a study on the effectiveness of internet memes as political or social commentaries.

The user-based and user-generated element of internet memes is vital to understanding their impact on politics, especially in the hierarchal political system of the Philippines. Previously, the traditional media was the biggest, most established means of inquiring and propagating political information. As digital media technologies have taken their place, the creation and dissemination of content are not exclusively controlled by the wealthy. Because the modern media environment is more affordable and imposes far fewer barriers of space and time, any user has the capacity to produce content. Meme creation, for example, requires the bare minimum of tools, literacy, and content creation experience (Vickery, 2014)[18]. It is an example of "amplification by simplification," which McCloud (1994, p. 30)[19] defines as the process of allowing ideas to be accessible to a broader audience through emphasizing certain information and streamlining images to fit the intended message. Content from both amateurs and professionals can trend and become viral. An internet meme posted several minutes ago could take the online sphere by storm, as could content resurfacing from decades ago; however, to reiterate, common among these user-generated internet memes is the quality of humor (Shifman, 2011)[20].

Significance of the research

This research was conducted with the intention of providing additional insight into the influence of internet memes in Philippine politics. There is currently a lack of studies that explore the impact of digital media platforms in the Philippines and an even greater lack of studies that focus specifically on internet memes. The outcomes of this paper will redound to the existing literature, which could also extend to the discourse of online political discussions and digital protests. Through this research, I hope to convince more researchers that internet memes can be regarded as independent entities. Internet memes are not a universal form of media. They are not static, and hence, I hope to further emphasize that the study of internet memes is important to the study of society or culture in general.

The content of this study will also redound to the benefit of the Filipino masses, considering that political positions among Filipinos are becoming increasingly instrumental, especially in the digital age. In a society where important

11| Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2007). A New Literacies Sampler. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291334749_A_New_Literacies_Sampler_Cover_plus_Introduction

12| Calimbo, A. (2016). Deconstructing Myths Via Humor: A Semiotic Analysis of Philippine Political Internet Memes. CASS Langkit Journal, 6, 1–20. Retrieved from https://www.msuiit.edu.ph/academics/colleges/cass/research/langkit/2016/1–20.pdf

13| Chandler, R. (2013). Meme World Syndrome: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the First World Problems and Third World Success Internet Memes. University of Central Florida. Retrieved from http://etd.fcla.edu/CF/CFE0004828/Chandler_Robert_C_3127154_MA.pdf

14| Kuipers, G. (2008). The Sociology of Humour. In V. Raskin, & W. Ruch (Eds.), The Primer of Humor Research (pp. 361–398). Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/6196205/The_Primer_of_Humor_Research_Edited_by_Victor_Raskin

15| Pearce, K., & Hajizada, A. (2014). No Laughing Matter: Humor as a Means of Dissent in the Digital Era: The Case of Authoritarian Azerbaijan. Demokratizatsiya The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization, 22(1), 67–85. Retrieved from https://demokratizatsiya.pub/archives/22_1_B158221228502786.pdf

16| Rafael, V. L. (1986). Fishing, underwear, and hunchbacks: Humor and politics in the Philippines, 1886 and 1983. Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, 18(3), 2–7. doi:10.1080/14672715.1986.10412606

17| Rintel, S. (2013). Crisis Memes: The Importance of Templatability to Internet Culture and Freedom of Expression. Australasian Journal of Popular Culture, 2(2), 253–271. doi:10.1386/ajpc.2.2.253_1

18| Vickery, J. (2014). The curious case of Confession Bear: the reappropriation of online macro-image memes. Information, Communication & Society, 17(3), 301–325. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2013.871056

19| McCloud, S. (1994). Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art. New York: Harper Collins & Kitchen Sink Press.

20| Shifman, L. (2011). An anatomy of a YouTube meme. New Media & Society, 14(2), 187–203. doi:10.1177/1461444811412160

36 Memes as a means: Challenging the ideological construct of political discussionsin the Philippines
Lo Kar Li, Karli

Memes as a means: Challenging the ideological construct of political discussionsin the Philippines 37
Lo Kar Li, Karli

discussions are only attended by the rich and privileged, this study hopes to provide insight into the significance of involving the public in such conversations. A greater level of awareness of the impact of the public's opinions allows for a greater capacity to prompt the indifferent high-ranking individuals and groups to pay attention to the needs of the people. This paper hopes to raise awareness about the power of the people and their opinions in political and social affairs in the Philippines.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used for this study. Among qualitative research methods, this paper employs semiotic analysis to elucidate political internet memes that criticize Duterte and his administration. Semiotics is the study of "sign" and is used to convey the meaning that forms our perception of reality. A sign can be a word, an image, or anything with meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, distinguishes between the two components of a sign: the "signifier" (things that give meaning) and the "signified" (meanings evoked by the signifier). Since internet memes are full of both linguistic and visual signs, they are a rich source for semiotic analysis. Davison (2002) explains that the characteristics of internet memes align with Saussure's sign system. First, they constitute observable objects (the signifier); second, they convey ideas (the signified). The semiotic theory is employed because it proposes that a sign that conveys an idea can elicit significant responses amenable to study.

Model of Semiotics Theory
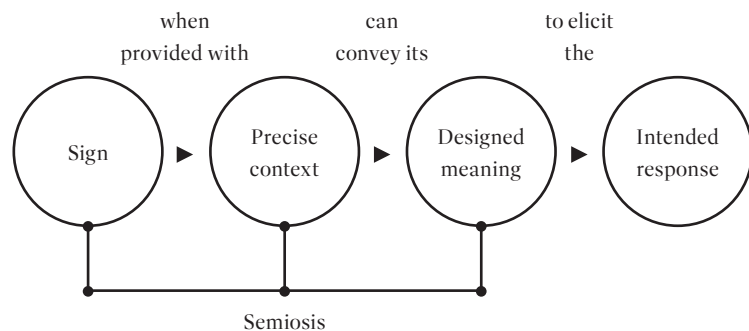
Thus, semiotic analysis investigates the sign, the context of the exchange that explains connotations and meaning. This meaning refers to the recipient's understanding of the sign through his or her interaction and relationship with their reality. Semiotic analysis is a process that examines not only signs but also the meaning that they produce. This paper concludes with the "meaning" derived from the analysis of the internet memes (the sign) in the context of the Philippine political system (the context) as the deconstruction of the ideological construct of political discussions in the Philippines.

By searching the keywords "Duterte memes" on Facebook and Twitter—two of the most popular social media sites for political discussion in the Philippines—I compiled the top generated images from the search engine from March 2021 to April 2021. This study also analyzes internet memes featured and reported via the national broadcasting stations in the Philippines. As Pertierra (2012) [4] describes it, television and other traditional forms of media serve as an extension of the elites' control over the public sphere. Hence, the appearance of public-generated content on these elite-dominated platforms allows for a more diverse representation of political interests and perspectives. The political conversations of the ordinary masses that were previously limited to personal circles are now being presented to a broader audience. Particularly, this study employs internet memes that were specifically deployed as a response to important political events in the country. Through the creation and circulation of internet memes in these crucial and major political events, average Filipinos have become a part of the public political discourse, which exposes how their participation deconstructs traditional Filipino political ideology. The analysis uses the semiology theory to analyze the humorous signifiers found in internet memes and examines the way that they deconstruct ideological constructs in Philippine politics.

when   can   to elicit
provided with convey its   the

Sign ▶ Precise context ▶ Designed meaning ▶ Intended response

Semiosis

Discussion

As previously mentioned, internet memes are characterized by their humor, intertextuality, and peculiar combination of images. This section examines the signifiers of the memes selected for this study to understand how their connotations contribute to the deconstruction of the seemingly natural political ideologies in the Philippines.

Figure 1: Duterthanos and his incomplete infinite gauntlet.

Figure 2: Duterthanos, with his completed infinite gauntlet, snapped.

The first meme (Figure 1) is a photoshopped face of Duterte on Thanos' face. Alluding to the plot of the fictional supervillain in Marvel's Cinematic Universe (MCU), Thanos desired to collect the six infinity stones to complete the infinity gauntlet, which would allow him to snap his fingers and instantaneously disintegrate half of all living creatures in the universe. In the meme, the "impunity" stones, a wordplay with infinity, were replaced with different Philippine institutions key to upholding democracy and human rights in the country, though the "Supreme Court" stone remains missing. Figure 2 was immediately circulated online on 11 May, 2018, when Maria Lourdes Serrano was removed from her post as the Philippine Supreme Court's Chief Justice. The coat of arms of the Republic of the Philippines is shown to be disintegrating, just as how human beings in the MCU were portrayed when Thanos finally completed the infinity gauntlet and initiated his plan.

Several disintegrating memes soon followed, alluding to the film's cinematic portrayal of those who have been affected by Thanos' snap (Figures 3 and 4). There is nothing incongruous in these internet memes, because the context and the graphics of the images are consistent with the emotions implied in the meme. The humor in this series of Thanos memes lies in the element of intertextuality as it references to popular culture. Intertextuality occurs when

media is understood only in reference to other media (Calimbo, 2016)[12]. These Thanos memes have several connotations. For one, they connote that Duterte's authority as the president is unchallengeable. Duterte was able to successfully consolidate his power legitimately. Another connotation is the vulnerability and weakness of the Philippine political institutions and their leaders, as they were incapable of safeguarding and defending Serrano and the institutions Duterte has triumphantly seized.

21| Milner, R. M. (2012). The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media. University of Kanses. Retrieved from https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/10256

Figure 3(Left): The Supreme Court building and logo are disintegrating from the snap.
Figure 4(Top Right): The Philippine Constitution disintegrating from the snap.
Figure 5(Bottom Right): Duterte has the final word.

Figure 5 shows how Filipinos have felt after Duterte consecutively subjugated the biggest, most influential foundations to the Philippines' democratic freedom. In this meme, Thanos is Ricardo "Cardo" Dalisay, the protagonist of the film and television remake of Ang Probinsyano. Cardo Dalisay, having been played by Fernando Poe Jr. and then by Coco Martin, is an iconic character in Filipino popular culture. Dalisay is a police officer whose goal is to defend the entire country and fight against the excessive corruption in the Philippines. Poe and Martin are also legendary action stars who are best known for playing the Philippines' Robinhood and other such noble characters. Referring back to the MCU film, the meme in Figure 5 does not depict Duterte as the hero that Iron Man/Tony Stark is but rather connotes that even the most powerful cannot outdo Duterte.

These internet memes might suggest the passiveness of the masses in the face of Duterte's tyrannical actions, but the element of cross-referencing in these memes shows the awareness of the masses regarding the political state of affairs; these memes reveal that the public masses are not ignorant of the current political situation in their country. Through internet memes, the wider Filipino population is able to voice their opinions.

Furthermore, these internet memes create a space for constructing "truths". Milner (2012)[21] asserts that internet memes are like everyday texts, which are

essential because it is through combining such texts that people construct their reality. In this space, alleged truths can be contested, and different points of view are developed. In a political landscape where top-down and one-sided narratives predominate discourse, the connotations of these internet memes could re-introduce a new political reality for the Filipino masses.

Figure 6: Meme reads "Put a finger down.... If you have done something to end the pandemic."

Figure 7: The popular Drake-format meme

Figures 6 and 7 are both further examples of intertextual reference, this time to Duterte's common tendency of addressing everything except for the issues that the public expects him to address. Figure 6 is based on a viral TikTok challenge where you put a finger down for things you have done or experienced. This internet meme was created following Duterte's announcement of a month-long lockdown in Luzon to deal with the continuous rise of COVID-19 cases on the island. The reality of the situation was the "no work, no pay" struggle of many citizens and the difficulty of trying to manage to earn a living under precarious labor circumstances. Amid the economic strife, Duterte's announcement centered on convincing Congress to grant him emergency powers and prioritizing military matters instead of updating the population on health-oriented solutions and plans regarding mass testing. The humor elicited from the texts of these internet memes (Figures 6 and 7) stems from the binary contrasts fortified by the image and contexts that suggest cynicism and sarcasm. There is an incongruity between the patriotic and self-righteous image that Duterte projects and the reality of the situation. Early in his presidency, Duterte had been considered a father figure to the Filipinos, but this has evolved into viewing him as a hypocrite, as signified by the humor in the above internet memes.

Another connotation signified in these internet memes is Duterte's indifference and ignorance on issues he disregards, despite their obvious importance. The annual State of the Nation Address (SONA), which was supposedly scheduled to air at four p.m., was broadcasted seven hours behind schedule. A similar scenario happened in 2019 when the president's most important speech was delayed by an hour. Filipinos' frustration and dismay were, once again, voiced on social media through internet memes (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Internet memes were full on speculation on what could have caused the delay (Figure 9, 10).

Figure 9

Figure 10

As far as the "fishing out" went, a netizen tweeted #DuterteStandardTime to humorize his habitual lack of a sense of urgency amid the crisis the country was facing (Figure 11).
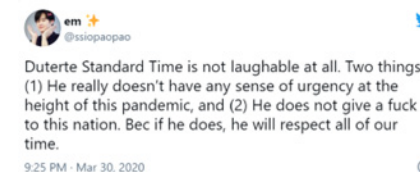

Figure 11

Figure 12

As the SONA was broadcasted, Duterte's remarks were entirely predictable, prompting some Filipino viewers to make a 'VIRUS' version of the popular bingo card, where you tick the items that have been announced (Figure 12). Though many admitted to still expecting the president to address the worsening economic and health crisis in the Philippines, Rappler (2020)[22] reported that internet memes "made [...] SONA just slightly easier to digest" (Figures 13, 14).

Figure 13

Figure 14

As previously mentioned, the use of internet memes creates a space where political conversation can be incorporated into an everyday talk by allowing everyone to voice their opinion. The growing dissatisfaction with the Duterte administration has already been established in this paper. In the following internet memes, criticism is leveled not only against Duterte but also against the larger political system. The internet memes in Figures 15 and 16 use Duterte's speech to attack previous and current political leaders from the Liberal Party, who have long been part of the political elites in the Philippines. The word "basag" is synonymous with "broken," though the word is popularly used as slang which refers to being the recipient of a comment that was not purposely directed at someone but is nonetheless perfectly suited to them.

Figure 15

Figure 16

"Aray ko beh," on the other hand, translates to "ouch", but "beh" too is often used as a slang that was originally exclusively categorized as gay lingo. The use of the slang words "basag" and "beh" signifies an important aspect of these memes, namely, that they were created or influenced by the public masses, specifically the street poor. These words are rarely used in formal environments but are common among those on the streets. To acknowledge the impact of using informal speech, Duterte's massive following, despite his absurd and extreme propaganda, was largely due to the zealous support of the Filipino masses, who preferred his frank and vulgar manner of speaking over the well-articulated ways of other democratic leaders. Such manner of speech signified and characterized Duterte's genuineness. The incongruity between the street slang and the political elites connotes the prevalence of the poorer masses being granted the opportunity to criticize individuals who may have previously seemed too socially far away to reach. The same is true for criticizing the political system itself, which has continued to fail the Filipinos throughout several administrations. The text in the meme below (Figure 17) contains the slogans and trademarks of the following political figures. The meme's creator purposely ends these texts with wordplay on the word "daan," which can mean 'way' or 'road.' It generates a profound meaning because it exhibits how, regardless of the changes in the ruling political party, promises and individuals involved, no matter what era or history of lineage and service, there would be no "way," pun intended, for Filipinos.

The old/previous way/road   A straight way/road   You will drop dead on the road   Gave away five hundred

Did not learn/remember anything   Where is the way   Will continue the way   Blocked the way

Figure 17

Barthes (1991) asserts that both the literal meaning (denotation) and what is signified (connotation) contribute to the system of organizing myths. Myths carry ideological meanings that are either hidden or obvious but are nonetheless naturalized. They are not arbitrary but are constructed and motivated by their producer. Myths are instinctively perceived as the way things are, just like how we identify sushi with Japan, but it is an intended and designed connotation of signs. From this study, many of the internet memes are deconstructions of the myths created by different political actors in the Philippines. Duterte, despite branding himself as a 'man of the people,' won his presidential seat by relying on the myth that he could save the Philippines from its decaying system, a myth that has been deconstructed here. Through the virality of internet memes, Duterte will perhaps be remembered instead as a madman who killed drug users. More importantly, this paper has shown the importance of internet memes in providing a platform for those who have been neglected and silenced by the traditional media and the hierarchal nature of politics. The myth that politics, political conversation, and commentary are only for the elite has been debunked. With particular attention to the humor and intertextuality components of memes, this study reveals the awareness of the Filipino masses regarding the political situation in their country despite the long history of leadership employing a top-down and patronal approach. The creation and sharing of internet memes may or may not be intended to consolidate specific ideological positions, but it certainly presents an avenue for those who have been silenced to reclaim the means of media production and contribute to constructing and deconstructing realities. As the use of digital media becomes more common and accessible to the poor, internet memes could serve as the first step in developing a system in which the previously repressed and silenced voices of the masses are finally heard and shared, allowing them to become part of the wider public political discourse.

Conclusion

In this paper, I analyzed several political internet memes and explored their effect on the deconstruction of political ideologies in the Philippines. Through the existing literature looking at internet memes and Philippine politics, I argue that memes have become a powerful tool for political expression for the ordinary Filipino masses. The humorous and decentralized nature of internet memes has emerged as an alternative to Filipinos' political discourse. These memes "fish out" (Rafael, 1986)[16] from politics and marginalize the intent and meaning behind the preaching of the elites. The result of this "fishing out" is the concatenation of the limitless expressive possibilities of internet memes. As examined in this study, memes have served as a means to express national dissent not only against Duterte but also the Philippine government and political system at large. They are

representative of everyday discussions occurring outside the realm of traditional political deliberation. It is the absurdity and chaos of the generation of memes that is both thrilling and encouraging, evoking hope in reclaiming the course and mechanism to produce meaning. These signs are perceived and understood as fragmented; as such, those who consume them invariably hurry to diverging lines of association to render them accessible for other kinds of appropriation.

As with all research, this study has some significant limitations. Media—particularly online media—is decentralized in nature; hence, its effects are difficult to operationalize. I employed a semiotic analysis in this paper, but other types of analysis may offer different results. The method of data collection employed in this study may also lead to inaccuracies because top-generated results vary according to the time at which data collection took place. Since the samples were derived in accordance with directly responding to major political events, the internet memes generated from the search engine could be different had the search been closer to or farther from the time at which those events occurred. Another limitation of the present study is that internet memes are generated and spread online. This obviously requires an internet connection, basic pop culture knowledge, and editing skills. Yet, in the Philippines, despite being ranked as having one of the highest rates of internet users in the world, internet connection remains a luxury. This limits the reach of the ordinary Filipino people on whom this paper focuses. However, the political memes chosen for this study were purposely taken from Facebook, which offers free internet service in the country. There has already been discussion on how the lack of internet access may have contributed to the rise of Duterte; hence, future studies could focus on comparisons between internet memes on Facebook and other social media sites that require a non-Facebook-granted internet connection to elucidate the still vague effect of internet memes in the context of social groups.

There is growing research on the discourse of internet memes, the pervasiveness of political memes, and their influences, yet many questions remain for future studies to understand how internet memes function. The present study constitutes exploratory research on the effect of humorous, user-generated media on political ideology. Future research could further investigate the outcome of using these tools to deconstruct political ideology, such as the intention to engage politically or whether this process affects the actual political environment. Although this paper did not gather any demographic data about the creator or consumers of the memes investigated, it would be fruitful to have studies that include such data.

On Todd Phillips' Joker (2019)

By Cheung Chor Fai, Anson
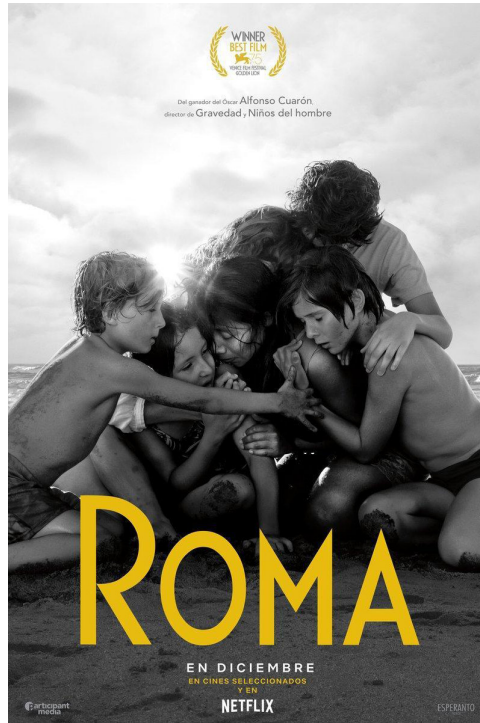Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Applied and
Human-Centred Computing - Year 4

Please visit the following page for the video essay:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyarlQkJxQc

Or scan the QR code below:

On Alfonso Cuarón's Roma (2018) - Analysing the symbolic meaning of "Water"

By Choi Yi Lik
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Cultural and
Creative Industries - Year 2

Please visit the following page for the video essay:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uV7Sj8Mrg08

Or scan the QR code below:

On Christopher Nolan's Interstellar (2014)

By Pun Pak Chi
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Convergent Media and
Communication Technology - Year 4

Please visit the following page for the video essay:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZ4HnLuhVd0
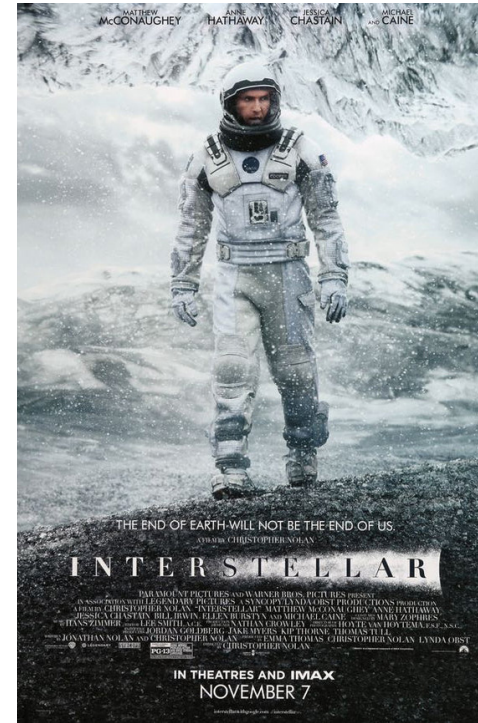
Or scan the QR code below:

On Ridley Scott's Prometheus (2012) - Using Macro Film Language to Analyze the Symbolic Meaning Of David 8

By Tang Yan Wa
Bachelor of Management Science and
Information Management (Honours) - Year 4

Please visit the following page for the video essay:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aq-YPI7VGmk

Or scan the QR code below:

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