

**Internet and Social Networking Sites in Election Campaigns:
Gabriela Women's Party in Philippines wins the 2007 Elections**

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Paper submitted for presentation at the Politics: Web 2.0: An International Conference

Royal Holloway, University of London

April 2008

Abstract

Internet is fast becoming the medium of election communication as political parties across the world are logging on to the Internet and it is impacting the political system and voting behaviours. An interesting phenomenon in political communication is the use of social networking sites like Facebook, You Tube and Friendster, that are being used as a means of election campaigning. While the popularity of Internet is increasing in the West, elections in Asian countries are also fast adopting these new technologies. In the recent 2007 elections in the Philippines, the Gabriela Women's Party (GWP) won two seats, making it the first and only women's group in the country to attain such a feat in the party list group contest. The party evolved from a feminist movement called Gabriela to a political force to reckon with, a testament to the historic development in women politics, and an issue of emancipation and power for women in Asia. Given the limited funds for mass forms of communication, the party made use of new communication technologies; in particular, the Internet and social networking sites like YouTube and Friendster along with its website and the mobile phones, to augment traditional campaign techniques. This study explores the strategies used by the GWP in positioning itself as a force in the Philippines political system and how the party introduced new media technologies. Though these technologies are yet to reach the grassroots in the country, they are successful in garnering international support and votes for the party. Through a case study approach and with in-depth interviews with its leaders and spokespersons, the study analyzes the party's campaign techniques and its present and future impact.

Introduction

“Social Networking is taking the political world by storm. This is real coming of age” as stated by Mr. Lee Rainei, founding director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project commenting on a study done on the Internet and American elections (Pereira, 2007) Recent research has focused on how party websites, candidate websites, weblogs have become the major source of election campaigns and citizens are actively seeking and participating in these interactive sites for election information (Bimber and Davis, 2003; Davis, 1999; Grönlund 2000; Kluver 2007). Added to these sites, the latest trends have been in the use of social networking sites like *Facebook*, *You Tube*, *Myspace* and *Friendster* for election campaigning. Along with these, the use of mobile phones as a tool of social communication is saturating the political communication process.

Asian countries have evolved using the traditional and the new media technologies in reaching their heterogeneous diverse audiences, not only within the country, but across other countries. The Internet, web-based campaigning, and other new media technologies are increasing the speed and quality of political communication (Albrecht, 2006; Foot & Schneider, 2006; Han, 2007; Kluver, 2007). In a study, Bentivegna (2006) explored how the use of information communication technologies has had significant changes in ways where citizens have refocused their political attention outside the formal political arena. Social movements, civil associations, single issue groups and even discussion groups can be considered indicators of what has been called “life politics” or “sub-politics”. Internet is playing an important role in campaigns, and candidates sensing the political shift to the new media are venturing into cyberspace, driven by a new maxim: To find voters, look online (*The Straits Times* Jan 29, 2008).

Philippines also embarked on using Internet, social networking sites and the mobile phones for their 2007 elections. Gabriela Women's Party (GWP), among others, was one of them. Given the limited funds for mass forms of communication, the party made use of new communication technologies, in particular, the Internet and social networking sites like YouTube and Friendster along with its website, to augment traditional campaign techniques. The (GWP) won two seats, making it the first and only women's group in the country to attain such a feat in the party list group contest (Alojamiento, 2007).

This study explores how GWP used the Internet and other social networking sites during the elections in garnering local and international support and votes for the party, and to what extent were they successful in reaching the electorate. Through a case study approach and with in-depth interviews with its leaders and spokespersons, the study analyzes the party's campaign techniques.

Theoretical Framework and background for the study

Political communication exists in all democratic and non-democratic systems. Considerable literature has evolved in this area in the western democracies as well as in Asia in the last decade (Kluver, 2007; Park et al, 2000; Takeshita & Makami, 1995). Election campaigns across the world have become more aggressive, using attack and counter attack strategies, many similar to the American styles of campaigning (Diamond, & Bates, 1988; Elebash, 1984; Blumler, 1987; Johnson et al, 1991; Karan, 1996). Some of the earliest works of Kraus and Davis (1976) and Rice and Paisley (1981) on political campaigns have studied the effects of mass and interpersonal campaigns, where partial successes and partial failures were reported.

Personal Influence hypothesis is an essential part of the dominant paradigm (Giltin, 1978) and has an important role and a strong effect in mass communication theory and media

ideology. It is also likely that interpersonal influences are stronger than information communicated through the media. In the same light, when personal communication becomes mediated, the effect is greater in political communication. Grönlund (2000) explained that it had been clear from the onset that electronic media played a significant role in opinion-building and voting among the electorate by influencing the process of political opinion formation of an individual. Drawing from Lazarsfeld et al's (1944; cited in Gronlund, 2000) theory of cross-pressures hypothesis, Grönlund further asserted that cross-pressures (written, electronic, or face-to-face communication methods) create insecurity among voters which results to "political passivity" and ultimately, to individuals abstaining from voting. Furthermore, in an attempt to demonstrate the relationship of media technologies and politics, Grönlund came up with a theoretical approach model, which he used in his study of the declining electoral participation and the growing demands for political responsiveness in democratic systems around the world. According to his model, technology has enabled the public of horizontal communication and increased direct communication that may be attributed to the creation of "new political needs and demands in the political system" although this does not necessarily contribute to an increase in voting participation. With Grönlund's model in mind, this study explores how Asian countries, and particularly Philippines have utilized new Information Communication Technologies in their political discourse?

Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigning

Social networking sites describe a category of websites with profiles, semi-persistent public commentary on the profile, and a traversable publicly articulated social network displayed in relation to the profile (Boyd, 2006). Turkheimer (2007) listed online social networking as one of the emerging powerful applications of the Internet in political

communication, as a means to disseminate and share information especially in the current 2008 US presidential campaign. She explored the ways in which *YouTube* was first used as a video sharing and networking site in campaigns back to the 2006 congressional elections, when the website made it possible for both candidates and voters to upload large video files pertaining to the candidates. The study further noted that the growing prominence of *YouTube* in the 2008 presidential campaign was evident early on when candidates announced they were running through online videos and podcasts.

The Pew survey found that roughly a quarter of the American public are regularly turning to the World Wide Web for election news, less than television but still the number doubled from 2004 and tripled from 2000. *MySpace* is the largest and most popular social network site (Pereira, 2008, as reported in *The Straits Times*. Singapore, Jan 29).

Similarly, a study by Williams and Gulati (2007) looked into how another popular social networking site, *Facebook*, played a big role in the 2006 congressional and gubernatorial campaigns in the US, when each candidate was given an account on the website.

Personalization of the entries was then undertaken by the candidates themselves or their aides and this allowed *Facebook* members to view entries and make their support for candidates known. The authors concluded that *Facebook* has indeed played a significant role in affecting the electoral process. Anstead and Chadwick (2007) also studied how politicians in Britain tried their hands in social networking sites following the 2005 elections. The warming up to the Internet for politics in Britain resulted in the founding of the *MpURL Membersnet*, which serves as a social networking site and provides each Labour Party member with a blog, allowing constituents to participate in discussion forums. At the end of their article, Anstead and Chadwick suggested that more needs to be done in examining the differences between political systems when it comes to the use of the Internet, specifically why Democrats are

better than Republicans in the US in the use of the Internet, and the gradual institutional changes in Britain.

Although social networking sites are increasingly being utilized in political campaigns, it has not yet been fully established that they can directly affect election results; but there is already a trend of positive contributions from these sites that has led to voter decision in favor of a political candidate (Conners, 2005). In this study, we examine how the GWP used the Internet and social networking sites as low cost forms of media tools, especially in reaching the youth and overseas voters.

Political Hyperlinking

Aside from content that defines a political campaign website, how candidates interact with the rest of the Internet population to build their presence can be analyzed through their use of hyperlinks. Foot et al. (2003) viewed links as “the essence of the Web” that show the structure of connections among websites, and although this application remains one of the least understood it is fast gaining momentum. Park, Thelwall, and Kluver (2005) concurred that hyperlinks are used to build “public recognition”. Furthermore, Ackland and Gibson (2006) argued that hyperlinks can bring about “a set of new and important communicative functions” that would help propel the candidates’ presence and make them more accessible to people. Hyperlinking is said to have a two-way perspective when, according to Park et al (2007), a website gets connected by linking itself to others (*outlinks*) and when others link back (*inlinks*). This is especially important in political discourse as Williams et al (2005) attributed this activity to the apparent encouragement of a deeper and interconnected understanding of public affairs where hyperlinks serve as an important feature of a new form of political communication.

In analyzing outlinking practices in candidates’ websites during the 2002 US elections, Foot et al (2003) used the web sphere as a unit of analysis. In their study, a web

sphere is conceptualized as more than just a “collection of websites, but as a hyperlinked set of dynamically defined digital resources” involving several websites that are seen as “relevant or related to a central theme”. Web sphere analysis, on the other hand, is an analytic strategy that includes relations between producers and users of Web materials, as induced and mediated by the structural and feature elements of Web sites, hypertexts, and the links between them. Foot et al to uses these analysis to conclude that hyperlinking is strategic and outlinks change over time. It is also important to cite the study by Ackland and Gibson (2006) that looked into 118 political party homepages in Australia, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and the UK. They concluded that political parties use hyperlinks differently from each other and that the differences spell out the ways in which they perform in online communicative functions such as network building, audience sharing, information provision, image creation, and force multiplication. Their results also differentiated leftist from far-right parties, in that the former favor linking to international organizations and from different sides of the political spectrum, whereas the latter favor building smaller networks and national presence.

On the contrary, Williams et al (2005) found that outlinking was not significant in online political campaigning. In 2004, they analyzed web pages from the websites of US presidential candidates John Kerry and George W. Bush to see how their blogs and websites functioned in online fundraising, hyperlinking practices, and focusing on political issues. Results of their study have shown that both candidates used websites more than blogs in raising funds. In terms of hyperlinking, both candidates were likely to limit their visitors “to the confines of their websites” because they linked only to contents within their websites while their blogs showed more outlinking practices.

Many studies have pointed out the importance of hyperlinking—both inward and outward—and although some have also found it not to be significantly important in political

campaigning, hyperlinking would most certainly figure prominently as one of the new media's technology's contributions to the current political communication. In this study we analyze the websites of the GWP political party and the extent to which it provided outlinks and inlinks .

Mobile phones in political discourse

Across Asia the mobile phone is becoming the most popular medium of communication with high penetration rate in urban and rural settings. Mobile phones have a far wider reach than the Internet or the landline telephone system, because even people who do not have adequate reading skills find it much easier to use a mobile phone compared to other new media technologies. The portability of the technology also facilitates sharing within groups of people or communities where owning a personal computer remains a challenge (Stenson, 2006). With this in mind, Steenson elaborates that the mobile phone changes relationships among people and places, as people around the world are fast catching up with the use of the mobile phone. Pertierra (2005) added that although there are similar applications among the various new media technologies, their impact on a national scale depends largely on culture, economy, and “power structures” unique to each country. Specific to this, Pertierra referred to the interplay of the mobile phone technology and the socio-cultural make up of the Philippines in his survey of over 300 mobile phone users in the country. Similarly, Wei (2005) examined how the interaction of the state and the market in China gave birth to a new culture of SMS (a popular application of the mobile phone) that is changing political discourse in the country. In her study of SMS text messages and state regulations, Wei found that mobile phone usage in the country not only challenges state authority, but ironically, also helps the government exude more dominance and threatens deeper social division. Menduni (2005) found that in Italy, the mobile phone has seen an even faster diffusion compared to traditional media such as TV and fixed landline phones that took

more than a hundred years to reach 25 million. In a study, Menduni's research team found that politicians were the heaviest users of mobile phones with some MPs having more than one mobile phone. This technology has facilitated faster political communication in the Italian setting (Menduni, 2005). In Sweden, Jarner and Folkesson (2003) studied how politicians communicated with young voters to determine why voter turnout decreased in the last 25 years and they found that politicians believed that mobile technology can help in information dissemination and communicating more easily with the public, although e-mail is a more acceptable method compared to SMS. In the US, Dale and Strauss (2007) conducted an experiment to prove their hypothesis that mobile phone campaigning can potentially bring in more votes from the youth. Results from their study showed that the mobile phone indeed, through text messaging, was an effective tool to drive young Americans to vote.

Philippines recoded the highest users of SMS in the world and given the high penetration and use of the mobile phone, we looked into how the GWP utilized text messaging to reach Filipinos abroad and within the country, and subsequently converting their efforts to a high voting rate among Filipinos abroad in favor of the women's party.

Objectives of this Study

Given the historic win of GWP in the 2007 Philippine elections, making it the first and only women's group in the country to win two successive terms in Congress, this paper aims to explore the role of the Internet in the party's campaign strategies, and how the party used new media technologies for online campaigning through websites, political hyperlinking, and the social networking sites like *YouTube* and *Friendster*. The study examines the strategies used by the GWP in establishing the party's political identity and popularity among the citizens. The political communication strategies are particularly

noteworthy as new media technologies like the World Wide Web and social networking sites are quickly becoming channels of election campaigns.

Research Questions

- 1) What were the campaign strategies used by GABRIELA to reach local and overseas voters?
- 2) How significant were the Internet and social networking sites in the party's campaign?
- 3) To study the extent on the use of hyperlinks on the website that enables candidates interaction among the candidates/parties and Internet population
- 4) What was the impact of using SMS and mobile technology in reaching the young electorate in Philippines?
- 5) What was the impact of the use of social networking sites on GWP's campaign?

Methodology

The case study method was used with data collected from secondary and primary sources. Multiple sources helped the researchers improve the reliability and validity of the study (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). Reinard (2001) defined case studies as intensive inquiries about single events, people, or social units. Multiples sources are used for data collection. According to Yin (1994), there are three inherent principles of data collection in case studies – a) usage of multiple sources of data; b) creating a case study database and c) maintain a chain of evidence. There are six possible sources where data can be collected under the case study research method, namely- a) documentation; b) archival records; c) interviews; d) direct observation; e) participant observation and f) physical_artifacts.

1. Case Study of GABRIELA. The case study reviewed the election campaign, the major issues taken up by the party, and its campaign strategies. Emphasis was placed on the use of the Internet in campaigning through the analysis of their website, the role of political hyperlinking, and participation in popular online social networking sites in such as *Friendster* and *YouTube*. The case study was supported by in-depth interviews with members of the party.
2. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006) through phone and e-mail with two leaders of GABRIELA: Information

Technology Communications Officer, Ms. Joan Salvador and Rep. Liza Maza, and personal communication with Party campaign coordinator Ms. Cristina Palabay.

FINDINGS

Historical Background and Political System in Philippines.

The Republic of the Philippines has experienced several political transitions since the over 7,000-island Asian nation was ceded by Spain to the United States in 1898 under the Treaty of Paris. Since independence in 1946, the country has had six constitutions (the present constitution has not been changed since 1987) and 10 presidents, two of which are women.

The Philippines is a republic, in which all citizens aged 18 years and above have the right to vote. Political and territorial subdivisions or local governments are divided administratively into 16 regions, 78 provinces, 96 cities, 1,513 municipalities, and 41,943 *barangays* (villages). The Philippines has a democratic, presidential form of government and is comprised of the executive (the president), legislative (consisting of the Senate and House of Representatives), and judicial (Supreme Court and in such lower courts established by law) branches.

Following the restoration of democracy in 1986, elections for president and vice-president have been held every six years, and every three years (called midterm elections) for the 12 of the 24 senate seats⁴, congressmen, and local officials. Elections in the country are by popular votes; whoever gets the most number of votes from the electorate becomes a member of the legislature. In 1995, the party-list system based on Republic Act No.7941 was signed into law giving GABRIELA and other interest groups a chance to be represented by allocating seats to their representatives in the Congress. Twenty percent of the 260 seats are reserved for the party-list, and two percent of the total votes won entitle a party

to one seat, with three seats as the maximum to which any party can be elected. The party-list system has been very active in the 1998, 2001, 2004, and 2007 elections, but it was only in 2004 and 2007 that the GWP won one and two seats respectively. The party-list system also made history registering 93 parties—the highest since the system was introduced in 1998 with more than 30 million voters participating.

The 2007 elections marked two milestones for the biggest women's movement in the country: First, the Gabriela Women's Party (GWP) became the only women's party to be elected in Congress for the second straight term, which was a historic development in women politics and an issue of emancipation and power for the Asian women (Alojamiento, 2007). Second, the party also obtained the highest number of votes from Filipinos abroad among party-list groups.

Political Movements and Formation of 'General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action (GABRIELLA)

The victory of the first female president, Corazon Aquino in 1986 heralded not only freedom from dictatorship, but empowerment of women as well in a largely male-dominated society, where women's rights were neglected during the years of martial law under former dictator, Ferdinand Marcos. However, Aquino's reign did not put a stop to these abuses, and incidents of torture of female detainees remained a problem³. As a result, the women's movement in the Philippines was at its strongest during Aquino's reign. At the helm of this rejuvenated feminist politics amid the country's transition to democracy was the *General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action* (GABRIELA)—the largest women's group in the country (Alojamiento, 2007).

The name GABRIELA is also in honor of Gabriela Silang, one of the country's first women generals who fought against Spain in the 18th century. GABRIELA was founded in 1984 and brought together 42 local organizations, amid the strong desire to promote women's

rights and overthrow the dictatorship. It has since then grown into an alliance of over 250 organizations with a chapter opening in the US in 1989. Individual members of the movement include women workers, peasants, urban poor, housewives, professionals, religious groups, and students across the country, all fighting for issues they believe to be affecting women such as landlessness, militarization, foreign debt crisis, prostitution, and trafficking to name a few. Considered influential and prominent because of its founding during the Martial Law, Ty (2006) described GABRIELA's role in the empowerment of women in the Philippines:

'GABRIELA, as a social movement, is a learning site that mobilizes and organizes women, moves them to critical reflection, raises the consciousness of women through popular education, and incites them to action. Unlike Western feminist movements, which treat women's struggle as a distinct struggle, third world women's movements, such as GABRIELA, consider women's struggle as integral to the whole society's struggle against poverty and patriarchal domination (page 4).'

The Gabriela Women's Party (GWP) is the political wing of GABRIELA. Claiming to represent the women's sector, GWP got two party-list seats in the last midterm elections. This was a major achievement for the party, which won only one seat in the 2004 national (presidential) elections. Hence, aside from re-elected party-list representative, Liza Maza (who also represented GWP in Congress in 2004), Ms. Luzviminda Ilagan also took the party's second congressional seat in the 14th Congress. The party ranked fourth in the party-list elections, trailing leader Buhay Hayaan Yumabong (BUHAY), a religious group; militant group Bayan Muna; and Citizen's Movement Against Corruption (CIBAC), which is also identified with a religious group. In terms of votes, more than 2% of more than 30 million votes went to GWP (Comelec Election Results, 2007).

In a phone interview with one of the researchers, GWP's Rep. Liza Maza stated that their victory showed how voters appreciated their past efforts, and that because of this victory, they would continue to work towards the betterment of women: "Through our

advocacy and practices, we have proven that we carry the interest of women, especially the poor women. We have not renege on that.”

Internet in Political Communication in the Philippines

The Philippines’ first foray into the Internet was in 1994 and was believed to have been brought by the existing telephone technology in the country with the use of the traditional PABX network (Villafania, 2004). Cuevas (2007) pointed out that the Internet was first used significantly for politics in the Philippines during the height of protests against the Estrada administration, when Filipinos posted charges against disgraced President Estrada. Their discontent was largely conveyed through online message boards, blogs, and political forums, which in turn aroused nationwide uprising that led to “People Power II” (Mirandilla, 2007). Although the event was historic and largely attributed to active online participation of the citizens, how much impact the Internet has on political communication in the Philippines has not been fully established. In an analysis of candidates’ websites during the 2004 elections, Cuevas (2004) observed that the Internet was used by Philippine candidates mainly on a “one-way flow, from politicians to voters” and did not, in any way, encourage active participation or contribution from the electorate. Mirandilla’s (2007) study also found that Filipinos treat political communication on the Internet very much like they do offline; where politics is mainly personality-based and little attention is given to educating the people on national issues, thereby limiting the potential application of the Internet content meant to simply provide basic information on the candidates.

Case Study: The 2007 Political Campaign of Gabriela Women's Party (GWP)

This section discusses the role of the Internet in political communication, a background on GWP and how the women's party galvanized their strategies on the Internet through websites and social networking sites.

The Use of New Media Technologies:

The Campaign Website (<http://gabrielawomensparty.org/>)

Though other political parties in Philippines have already established their websites, the GWP was among the last few to foray into the bandwagon of online campaigning by launching their website in time for the 2007 midterm elections. The website was an important tool to reach the internet savvy young people, and most importantly the overseas voters and be connected to the party supporters and Filipinos living abroad.

Campaign coordinator, Cristina Palabay in an interview with one of the researchers stated:

“We think having a website was a positive thing. We were able to reach some sections of the middle class as well as some members of the urban poor youth who access the Internet. They were able to access more information about GWP because of our website”

There is a need for developing the website and make it more comprehensive detailing the party activities, ideology and development strategies. The website mostly contains press releases about the party's progress during the campaign, which touched on issues of negative publicity against the party and GWP's stand on court decisions on election fraud, allegations of widespread cheating among contenders and other issues. Palabay also emphasized that their website opened opportunities for women to report cases and seek help from the organization. The members of the party also had to be mobilized during the campaign to visit other election forums and websites to defend the party against what Palabay called “black propaganda” against the group.

Though the party did better in 2007, winning one more seat than they did in 2004, Palabay does not attribute their victory to the website:

“For a website to be popular, you have to develop it and advertise it. We only mounted the website late into the campaign period, so time really mattered to us. We had a problem maintaining the website because we did not have enough funds.”

Despite these limitations of their website, GWP member Joan Salvador said that the party still benefited from the speed and convenience brought about by the Internet:

“Speedy campaign coordination and other forms of communication between country chapters and the GWP headquarters here in Quezon City, Philippines (were) also facilitated through e-mail and internet chat. We were also able to share with them the campaign trail here in the Philippines through our website and also through e-mail.”

Political Hyperlinking

The party’s website has more than 600 pages and was mapped using a sitemapper (see Figure 2). Analyzing the map, it is quite evident that the party focused mostly on linking to their own content (internal linking) and did not link to any external organizations. Even when they posted promotional videos on *YouTube*, the party resorted to embedding the videos into their website rather than outlinking to *YouTube* (Figure 1).

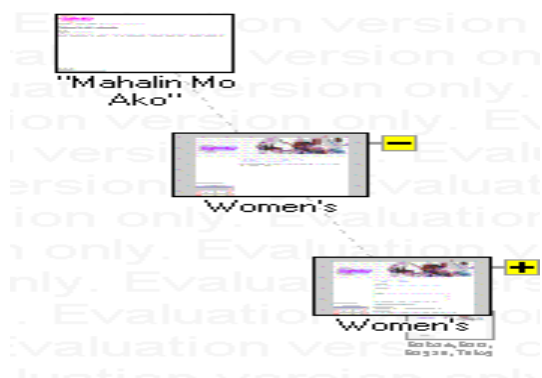


Figure 1. A mapped out internal link of the video “Mahalin Mo Ako” (Love Me) which was uploaded to YouTube and linked to <http://gabrielawomensparty.org/node/88/print>. The video is a public service announcement about women’s rights.

Ironically, the organization did not deem it necessary to outlink to other organizations or make it possible for others to link back, when many studies have pointed out how political hyperlinking can propel and build the image of candidates and particularly the organization, according to Salvador,

“The party had been extensively using the Internet “(from) facilitating communications and researches to promoting our issues and advocacies both locally and internationally”

A bigger sitemap of the party’s website (Figure 2) further shows that the incidence of the lack of both inbound and outbound linking may have hampered the party’s potential wide reach especially among young women voters in the country.

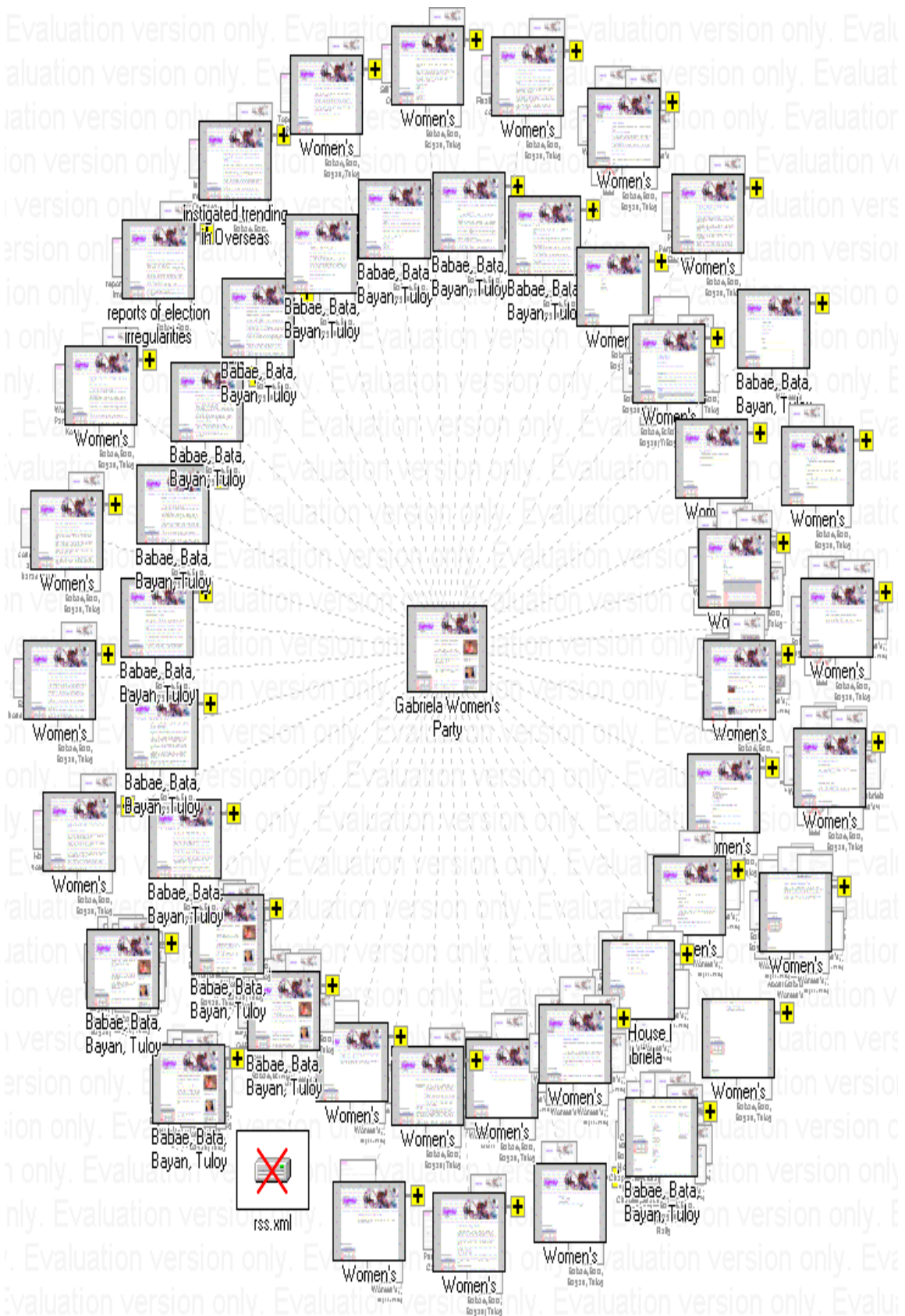


Figure 2. A sitemap of the whole website.

Maximizing YouTube

YouTube and Friendster are very popular among young female Internet users in the country. It was only logical for the GWP to turn to these sites to expand their networks and establish their presence among Filipino voters. Political advertising is an obsession among politicians in the country especially when it comes to TV advertising. All parties make efforts to be on television and spend the maximum amounts on advertising. Television advertising being expensive, the GWP after a few commercials on television, extended this kind of advertising to YouTube by uploading a video endorsement of Angel Locsin, a young local celebrity.

The airing of the endorsement on TV was expensive and only ran for three days on national broadcast and one week on provincial networks. Due to the mounting costs and the video uploaded in YouTube runs for less than a minute., but it can stay as long as it is needed and was free. The party believed it was a good move as Salvador explained:

“This helped our campaign a lot, it got wider exposure since our resources for putting up these videos on TV (were) very limited and we could only afford very few exposures on TV and radio.”

Palabay also asserted that making use of the video sharing website helped the organization reach out to more people in the middle class and other young urban poor who had access, albeit limited, to the Internet. The emphasis on the content related to the essence of an average Filipino woman, her plight, her fight and survival against all odds. The videos are a source of encouragement and inspiration for the women of the country. Two accounts uploaded in the video sharing site, one of which was started by Palabay herself. It is a simple video, showing Locsinas well as a montage of images of different women, from those in slums to those in Congress. Speaking in Filipino, Locsin says:

“There is a Gabriela in each one of us, one who loves, gets hurt, participates, suffers, is oppressed, takes risks, is looked up to, is harassed but takes a stand and dares to fight. You are a Gabriela! Fight! Vote for Gabriela Women’s Party.”

The video uploaded by the first account got 1,260 views, while the second account got 1,653 views. The usage of the *Youtube* site during the campaign of GWP pales in comparison to what another party-list group, Bayan Muna (People First) that maximized the use of video sharing site. It is closely affiliated with GWP and won the second highest number of votes among the party list groups that participated in the midterm elections in 2007.

Bayan Muna has a Youtube account listed as “*bayanmunadotnet*” and contained nine videos: the party’s political advertisement, a music video of the group, two items of television news clips on Bayan Muna and five videos showing its representative, Congressman Satur Ocampo, being interviewed. The video with the most number of views was one of his interviews that was shown in five installments and had 20,831 views.

The account was formed around March, 2007 and in an interview, Congressman Ocampo said that it was one of his staff members who suggested that they upload videos on YouTube (Personal Communication, February 2008), as a good forum for online campaigning. As he was arrested murder charges, (which he had consistently denied) Congressman Ocampo was forced to hide from the police at the peak of the campaign period. His group had thought of doing an interview with him using a mobile phone and uploading the interview on YouTube. Congressman Ocampo said:

“It was an experimental move, but it turned out to be successful. Television stations aired the videos we had uploaded. They captured the video for their reports. So it also gave additional media exposure for our party.”

The success of Bayan Muna’s use of YouTube can be attributed not only to the number of views the videos got, but to the fact that the mainstream media, not able to contact Congressman Ocampo, used the uploaded videos in the general television news. Congressman Ocampo concluded:

“Information technology is really a big help. It enabled small parties, which otherwise will be unable to spend for communications in an election campaign, to promote advocacies. It has become an equalizing factor for small parties against big-moneyed political organizations. Television stations aired the videos we had uploaded. They captured the video for their reports,”

He said the attention his interviews posted in YouTube got when he was still hiding had built the “momentum” until he surfaced at the Supreme Court in March 16, 2007, when he was mobbed by hundreds of supporters and was subsequently arrested. The high court later ordered his release on April 3, 2007 (Santos & Salaverria, 2007).

Using Friendster

The hugely popular Friendster was also extensively used by GWP during the campaign through an account established by the members in February 2007, at the beginning of campaign period. It is difficult to find the account, however, as a simple search for the name “Gabriela” in the Philippines network yielded 758 accounts with the same name. The account is named “Gabriela Women Partylist.” It describes itself as “female, 29, single.” In the section “More About Me,” the party describes itself as:

“...a sectoral party dedicated to promoting the rights and welfare of marginalized and under-represented Filipino women through participation in the country's electoral system and organs of governance. It is a sectoral party composed of women 18 years and above, having varied occupations, education, interests, ethnic origin, religious affiliations, and sexual orientation. The Gabriela Women's Party seeks to harness the potential, initiative, skills, and leadership of marginalized women towards empowerment, justice, and equality.”

The user account has over 200 friends, while most are females; there are at least 34 males. Among the list of friends are 13 militant groups, four Gabriela chapters, and an educational institution. The account has five pictures, three of which are the logos of the group, one showed a picture of what appeared to be a protest rally, and the last one showed Congresswoman Maza raising her fist. Congresswoman Maza herself maintains a Friendster account. Speaking about Friendster, Palabay satted:

“It (Friendster) is a venue for us to reach out to young women, to show them that she (Congresswoman Maza) also carries the issues of the youth and students issues like tuition fee increase and campus press.”

However, the congresswoman’s account is difficult to find, as a simple search for “Liza Maza” referred to one account which did not have any contents. Searching for “Liza” yielded 17,417 accounts while searching for Rep. Maza and similar variations yielded “zero results.”

The Mobile Phones

Assessing how significant the Internet was in the success of GWP would not be easy unless a survey of voters is done. However, what apparently worked for them was their mobile phone campaign through SMS—a very popular and affordable service in the Philippines. The strategy was simple: a writer composed messages and sent them to people during special occasions observed by the party such as Valentine’s Day, which they also call *Mahalin Mo Ako Day* (Love Me Day), and according to Palabay, the effort paid off in terms of expanding the party’s social network:

“We sent it to our friends and urged them to send it to five of their friends. We also asked the members of our public information team to send the messages to everyone in their phonebooks.”

The mobile phone was also used to expand the campaign to send messages to Filipinos abroad when the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) started in April, 2007. Under the OAV, Filipinos outside the country can register and vote as absentee voters. GWP appealed to voters at home to send text messages to their relatives abroad urging them to vote for the party. Similarly, their “Text Back” campaign also urged members abroad to send messages to their relatives at home in support of the party a week before the elections to vote for Gabriela. The campaign was big: For instance, Palabay said they had about 500 members in Australia and about 1,000 members in Hong Kong, each of whom sent a text message to their relatives in the Philippines.

GWP sent chain campaign messages at least five times during the campaign period. They first sent messages promoting Gabriela on Valentine's Day 2007, which they also called "Mahalin Mo Ako (Love Me) Day," echoing a promotional TV plug they did with Senator Manuel Villar. They also sent messages campaigning for Gabriela on the International Women's Day on March 8, 2007; the next message was when the overseas absentee voting began in April 2007, on Mother's Day and before the campaign period ended on May 12, 2007.

It worked as a social networking effort: "We sent it to our friends and urged them to send it to five of their friends. We also asked the members of our public information team to send the messages to everyone in their phonebooks," according to Palabay. For instance, she personally sent each message to all of the about 600 contacts in her phone directory. It was impossible however to track how many friends had forwarded her message. According to her, what apparently worked, more than online sites, was the use of text messaging (SMS) in Gabriela's campaign. This gels well with the fact that text messaging is hugely popular in the Philippines and recent world surveys showed that Filipinos send the most number of messages per day (Suhaimi, 2008).

Traditional Campaigning Strategies: Rallies and Door-to-Door

The GWP did not abandon grassroots campaigning altogether and admitted that the use of new media technologies only served to enhance and support traditional campaigning. Salvador zeroed in on the factors that may have restricted the party in fully utilizing the new technologies:

"The Internet is effective only if it is accessible, and unfortunately the reality is that many Filipinos, especially those at the grassroots, still do not have access to the Internet. This, of course, is a concern for Gabriela, which emphasizes on the empowerment of grassroots women and whose primary means of communications are identified by the women and people whom we organize and try to empower."

Therefore, to reach voters who have limited or no access to the Internet, Congresswoman Maza stated that the party members went on a door-to-door campaign and also held campaign motorcades across the cities. Limited funds restricted the party to a few street protests and unlike other parties, GWP did not organize or participate in political rallies or sorties.

Discussion

The case study shows that GWP's victory in the 2007 midterm elections cannot be fully attributed to its use of new media technologies. As a new entrant to the use of new media technologies, GWP has not maximized the potential benefits of the Internet and the social networking sites in political campaigning, but has actively used the mobile phone which is a more accessible medium in the country. This is understandable since it was the first time the party used these online tools in campaigning and a majority of the population in the Philippines still does not have access to the Internet.

The GWP acknowledged that building a campaign website came a little too late for them and are likely to use it more in the future. For a campaign website to be effective, it has to be actively hyperlinking to other organizations or groups to continue its efforts in the promotion and dissemination of party information. Unfortunately, the GWP website was not linked to any website or any external content and others did not link back to it and, in essence, simply relied on **word of mouth** to spread the existence of its website, which is tantamount to chance visits and almost a passive promotion of the website.

Social networking sites also had a supporting role in the campaign, with GWP having registered merely 175 members on Friendster during the campaign period, but which has been steadily increasing. Identical usernames by other Friendster users also constrained the visibility of maintaining an account. Uploading promotional videos on the YouTube seems to have helped, but it would have had a better impact if their material was uploaded early in the

campaign as it was viewed only 3,000 times and was obviously drowned out in the vast number of videos on YouTube. However, they claim that the video was much talked about and it would be a major source of campaigning in the future.

The study however demonstrates in the example of *Bayan Muna* party that had an extensive impact, especially since the leader was not available for direct interview and the main stream media also used clips from the You Tube to report stories about the party. The party also demonstrated that the use of YouTube and the new media can complement traditional media and vice versa. Television news, which needed to report about Congressman Ocampo, who had gone hiding, had to rely on his YouTube videos. On the other hand, the YouTube videos got free exposures in the traditional media, creating more awareness about their existence, and increasing the number of online views.

Of the new media technologies used in the 2007 campaign, it can be concluded that the mobile phone is the one which lived up to the expectations of the party in terms of impact. This is not something new in the country because the very same technology helped galvanize Filipinos in striking up the People Power II that ousted the controversy-ridden Estrada administration in 2001. It also helped as the recent market researches list Filipinos as the top senders of text messages in terms of average number of SMSs sent per day.

Drawing from Grönlund's theoretical approach model for political communication, the case of GWP's use of new media technologies indeed provided opportunities for direct communication between the party and the electorate. It can be argued that the text messages served as "personalized" messages to target voters, in a country whose political culture is defined by strong interpersonal communication between candidates and voters. However, because of lack of planning and lead time in publicizing its efforts, the move was not as successful as it was expected and it did very little to increase voter turnout—merely 66% compared to 76% turnout in the 2004 elections and a disappointing 18% turnout from

overseas Filipinos ((Bantay Eleksyon ,07: Peoples Coalition to Monitor the 2007 Election, 2007).

Apart from using the new media technologies, which the party plans to use much better in the future, the emphasis that the GWP relied mostly was on traditional campaign techniques applicable to the current sociopolitical status of the country, where the Internet remains largely out of reach, especially in rural areas.

Conclusion

The present study and other studies cited in this paper mostly point out to both the importance of new media technologies and the trend towards their exploitation in current political settings. Their maximization for political campaigning should be viewed, however, in the context of where these new technologies operate. Realizing the importance of web based political interaction, the Malaysian government, in a latest development has stated that candidates contesting for posts in Malaysia's ruling party (Ummu) will be required to set up blogs, a surprising move for a party until recently did not think of much online political writing (AP report, *The Straits Times* , 12 April, 2008) Though studies have demonstrated that new technologies have been playing significant roles in campaigns in the US, the diffusion of online campaigning in parts of Asia, particularly in the Philippines, is unfolding but at a slower pace. Kluver and Banerjee (2005) listed three constraints to the impact of the internet in democratizing politics in Asia: "political culture, regulatory regimes, and unequal levels of access to information technology". This study reiterates that that these constraints also play roles in the use of the Internet for political campaigning. Moreover at access to the Internet is also related to the available infrastructure and skills. In the Philippines, there had been no comprehensive government project for a national internet connection. Many public schools, especially those in far-flung areas, have not integrated computer literacy in their lessons wherein using the Internet requires some degree of technical knowledge (Herold, 2006). This

is in contrast to mobile phones, which have a high penetration rate in the country and require minimal technical know-how. The case study of GWP showed that mobile phones worked for the party more than campaigning in the Internet.

These do not discount the promises of the Internet for political campaigning. If offline conditions change, it is likely that online uses will follow. In the meantime, it is important to look at the Internet as an integral part of a holistic political campaigning strategy, which can complement the use of traditional media and grassroots campaigning by reaching the growing segment of the population using the Internet. Future studies in this field of political communication would help in understanding how far the applications of the Internet and its contemporaries would go in bringing political actors closer to the public and how politics itself would change in the years to come as these new technologies become more sophisticated at the same time societies around the world evolve and change.

End Notes

¹Considered as the President of the First Philippine Republic.

²In Encyclopædia Britannica: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-23716/Philippines>

³In the 2001 Amnesty International Report:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa350012001>.

⁴Starting 1992, the first 12 senators with the highest number of votes shall serve for six years and the remaining 12 for three years (Senate of the Philippines, www.senate.gov.ph).

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