Student Activism Offline and Online: A Mixed-Methods Study on College Students' Protest Participation in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the relationship between social media and political activism by answering the question, "*How does using social media as a news source affect students' engagement in activism?*" Guided by the uses and gratifications theory, this study argues that using social media as a news source leads to engagement in student activism in both of its two dimensions: digital activism and traditional activism. A case study is designed and situated in the context of the Manilakbayan protests at the University of the Philippines Diliman. Data were derived from surveys and focus group discussions with undergraduate students using mixed-methods approach. Quantitative results show that students who use social media for news have higher chances of engaging in digital activism, which is less labor-intensive than traditional activism. Qualitative findings, however, present that students treat digital activism with skepticism and condescension due to the high standards they hold in their understanding of student activism. This research concludes that the concept of activism should be broadened because such traditional conception makes activism exclusive and defeats its purpose of drawing people to engage in activism.

Introduction

Contemporary literature on social media and political participation has been marked by a debate engaged by social media optimists and pessimists. Social media optimists view social media as an extension of political arena where there is a democratization of power to express oneself in a public space and expose oneself to political information and political socialization. Grand narratives have been written about how social media were used to ignite protests and revolutions such as that of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa (Ufuophu-Biri & Ojoboh, 2017), the Umbrella protests of Hong Kong (Lee & Chan, 2017), the Candlelight protests in South Korea (Lee, 2018), and the Occupy Movement in the United States (Kavada, 2014). Several scholars have claimed how social media fostered the culture of resistance, encouraged participation, facilitated political learning and socialization, and empowered citizens in taking part in politics (Christensen, 2011; McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; Rheingold, 2002). According to Bennett (2012), we are in an era where there is a defining change in our political culture, and that "social fragmentation and the decline of group loyalties have given rise to an era of personalized politics in which individual expression displaces collective action frames in the embrace of political causes" (p. 20). The rise of personalized politics had been possible through the emergence of digital technologies.

On the other hand, social media pessimists see the rise of digital communications technology, such as social media, as an impediment to political participation. One of the notable works which take this view has been written by Putnam (2000), in which he argued the "time displacement hypothesis." Putnam (2000) explained that technologies distract people from engaging in their communities and their social activities. Similarly, Van Laer (2010) and Nam (2012) argued how the digital divide could become a consequence of using the internet to mobilize people politically. When used as a tool for activism, the channels of digital communication extend constituency reach yet narrow the mobilizing potential to those with greater resources and higher experiences as activists (Van Laer, 2010). These accounts pertaining to the negative impact of social media on political participation make online engagement problematic, especially when it is viewed as a "less powerful, fleeting, and unsustainable" form of activism (Vissers et al., 2011, p. 164). Pessimists argue that political actions in the virtual world are incomparable and not as effective as traditional forms of activism.

These debates have been relevant in the discussions surrounding digital technologies and student civic engagement. Compared to the student movements from the past that are characterized with "identification with the less privileged classes" (Valte 1987, p. 48), today's student movements are defined by their "identity-based and

campus-located focus," as well as the "prevalent use and amplified impact of technology" (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017, p. 63). Scholars have analyzed how the internet drastically contributed to the political awareness, civic learning, and democratic participation of youth and students (Biddix, 2010; Cabrera et al., 2017; Leyva, 2016). This study seeks further validation of the claim on the new media's potential in broadening political engagement among students who have been at the forefront of historical and contemporary movements that sought social and political change. In achieving this objective, three research questions (RQ) are raised: (RQ1) how does using social media as a news source affect students' engagement in activism; (RQ2) how do students view digital activism; and (RQ3) how do the students' perception of digital activism affect their engagement in protests?

The answers to these inquiries are drawn from the exploratory case study of the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD).[1] The selection of the research site was based on the university's historical role and identity as the bastion of radicalism and activism in the country's student movement (see Abinales, 1989; 1995.) Furthermore, this study is situated during the #Manilakbayan protests against military violence inflicted on the Lumad, the indigenous people of Mindanao.

The university played a role in hosting the week-long camp-out dubbed "Kampuhan sa Diliman" of the *Manilakbayanis* inside the university grounds from October 23 to November 2, 2015. The camp-out sought the "exposure and exchange between the public and the Lumads through interactive activities such as political and educational discussions, protests, concerts as well as art, sports and food festivals to get to know the state of the people in Mindanao" (Cabigao, 2015). Apart from the camp-out, the relevance of the issue is also tied to the #StopLumadKillings online campaign. Netizens condemned the spate of violence and killings of the military against the indigenous peoples, teachers, leaders. The hashtag #StopLumadKillings reached 4,100 tweets and more, which made it into a trending topic in the Philippines (Tupaz, 2015). Facebook pages were also created for the dissemination of news and coordination of protest actions. The events and activities conducted during the campaign manifested the synergy between offline and online protest movements, which also presented a research opportunity to simultaneously gather data on online and offline participation.

The primary aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between using social media for news and students' engagement in the online campaign #StopLumadKillings and the traditional protest activities conducted during the "Kampuhan sa Diliman." The secondary task of this article is to determine how digital technology

reconstructed the meaning and dynamics of student activism in UPD from its historical identity of radicalism and traditional activism. While several scholars have written about student activism, few have defined the concept and how its meaning has been transformed in the digital age (Cabrera et al., 2017).

By conducting a mixed-methods approach, the paper seeks to contribute to the literature on digital activism by using multiple data sources to unpack the relationship of social media to that of protest behavior and the meanings attached to digital activism. The theoretical relevance of the findings is anchored on the examination of the impact of negative perceptions of digital activism towards protest engagement offline and online. The six-year-old data gathered during the Aquino administration is recognized as a limitation of this study. However, the findings pertaining to UP students' perception of activism remain relevant as the UP community continues to be targets of red-tagging under the Duterte administration (Magsambol, 2020).

Digital Activism in Literature

The rise of the internet and social media led to the adoption of protest activity into the virtual world, which is captured by the concept of *digital activism* (Butler, 2011; Joyce, 2010)—also known as internet activism (Christensen, 2011), social media activism (Foster et al., 2019), online activism (Lewis et al., 2014), e-activism (Meisner, 2000), and cyberactivism (McCaughey & Ayers, 2003). Despite the myriad of terms associated with activism in the digital era, *digital activism* is used in this study to describe students' incorporation of technology in their activism. According to Joyce (2010), *digital activism* is exhaustive as it "encompasses *all* social and political campaigning practices that use digital network infrastructure" (p. viii). Other terms are not as comprehensive since other relevant practices are ruled out. For instance, cyberactivism and online activism only refer to activism via the internet and excludes offline digital devices, while social media activism refers only to the use of social applications and excludes texts and e-mails (*ibid.*). Furthermore, since this study unpacks the students' perceptions of activism in its entirety, it is fitting to adopt the encompassing definition provided by *digital activism*.

In describing the nature of political activities deployed in the digital network infrastructure, Vegh (2003) described how strategies would either be internet-enhanced or internet-based: the former is based on using the internet to enhance traditional strategies for raising awareness, channeling communication, and coordinating action, and the latter is its purposive use for activities that can only be done online like hacking into websites. According to Baringhorst (2008), the "tactical

function of using the internet as a weapon and target of political protest" allows the adoption of traditional protest tactics into online forms that are more efficient to conduct and engage in (p. 66). Meisner (2000) also emphasized how the internet is an essential tool for communicating and organizing by employing email and mailing lists, setting up websites for the distribution of information about campaigns and causes, and using Web skills in attacking organizations or institutions considered as threats. According to him, the net can be used "to educate and agitate…and web-based e-activism, like its flesh-world counterpart, ranges from the earnest and traditional to the humorous and radical" (Meisner, 2000, p. 34).

Digital activism, however, has also been reduced to its derogatory term called "slacktivism." For Morozov (2009), "slacktivism" is where our "digital effort make us feel very useful and important but have zero social impact." He described how it undermines activism since joining a group or signing a petition online often becomes the end of political or social engagement. Meisner (2000) argued how "point-and-click activism" does not require effort, commitment, and involvement that is associated with traditional constituency politics (p. 34). Foster et al. (2019) challenged the "slacktivism" critique; they argued that the positive affect of "feeling good" produced by social media activism is necessary for achieving consensus mobilization. Christensen (2011) and Jones (2015) similarly refute Morozov's (2009) substitution thesis of token support replacing meaning support. For Christensen (2011), internet activism is not damaging to civic engagement—it is, at worst, simply harmless fun, and at best, an attempt to raise awareness and mobilize people to take action in the outside world. Jones (2015) insists on a more nuanced slacktivist concept, similar to Rotman et al.'s (2011), which departs from the "zero impact" assumption of Morozov (2009). Rotman et al. (2011) described slacktivism as a "low-risk, low-cost activity" but recognizes its purpose in raising awareness, producing change, and satisfying the person participating in the online activity (p. 821).

Contrary to the inability of digital activism to foster a sense of community-belongingness, Baringhorst (2008) argued the affective function of digital activism in forming virtual communities, describing how "a moral case-related contextual identity seems to be sufficient, based on weak ties among members of action networks… in transnational protest networks, members do not have to meet and develop strong emotional bonds or community feelings" (p. 72). This is similar to Bennett's (2012) thesis of the personalization of politics in which he posited that due to societal fragmentation and decline of group loyalties, the era of collective action had been transformed into an era of personalized politics and individualized collective action. This

change in protest behavior has also been recognized by Butler (2011) on how contemporary social movement theory takes into account the importance of the anonymous individual in social movements, compared to the social movement theory before, which has demarcated individual and collective action as two different things.

This paper aims to examine the extent to which social media can reinforce or hinder protest participation offline and online. It argues that using social media for news is instrumental in political engagement, as posited by the uses and gratifications theory.

Theoretical Framework

In determining the relationship between social media use and student activism, this paper is guided by the classic media framework, uses and gratifications theory (UGT) (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz et al., 1973). The approach attempts to "explain something of the way in which individuals use communications, among other resources in their environment, to satisfy their needs and to achieve their goals" (Katz et al., 1973, p. 510). Sources of audience gratifications can be derived from media content, exposure, and social context. Media-specific motives influence audience behavior in taking action to fulfill wants and needs. Hence, UGT has been used to "study antecedents, motives, and outcomes of communication within interpersonal and mediated contexts" (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000, p. 176).

While scholarship on the UGT and young people's internet use focuses on the changes in their psychosocial attitudes and behavior (Jimenez et al., 2012; Kircaburun et al., 2020), research on political motivations behind internet use and its effects on political views and participation has also been advancing (Lariscy et al., 2011). Kaye and Johnson (2002) used UGT in explaining the motivations behind accessing political information over the internet, namely information-seeking, surveillance, social utility, and entertainment. They also argued that the motivations are linked to government trust, self-efficacy, political interest, and voting likelihood. In Lariscy et al.'s (2011) study, they found a generational difference between digital natives' and older people's understanding of political participation; for the young ones, solitary activities constitute engagement in politics. In the aspect of political behavior, research shows that internet use for news acquisition and surveillance leads to engagement in various forms of civic and political activity (Boulianne, 2009; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Leyva, 2016; Valenzuela, 2013). This paper seeks to reinforce such findings by arguing that the political motivation behind the informational use of social media is linked to political engagement. Guided by the UGT, it argues that students' social media use for news leads to activism. In

addition, this paper puts emphasis on the argument that traditional and digital forms of protest, also known as the old and new, complement each other and constitute broadened channels of student protest participation.

Research Method and Data Sources

This paper presents a case study that employs a sequential explanatory strategy. It involves two phases: the first phase of collecting and analyzing quantitative data, followed by the second phase of collecting and analyzing qualitative data which builds from the results of the first phase (Creswell, 2018). The first phase seeks to determine the predictors of students' engagement in online and offline protest activities through survey data collection and multivariate logistic regression analysis. The quantitative results are then be used to inform the design of the second phase, which involves the use of focus group discussions (FGDs) and narrative data analysis. The mixed-methods strategy is used to provide a broadened understanding and better explanation of how social media affect the dynamics of student activism, such as how digital technology has been incorporated in their protest engagement and how it has changed their perceptions of student activism.

Respondents and Procedure

A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 1,329 respondents from the entire subpopulation taking Philosophy 1, a course required to be taken by all university undergraduate students. For the survey data, linear regression and logit regression models were analyzed to determine the predictors of offline and online protest participation. Quantitative results were used to inform the FGD questions.

While the survey was being conducted in each class, the surveyor requested volunteers who can take part in the focus group discussions. Three groups were formed, comprising five to six undergraduate students from the same subpopulation of the university used for the survey sampling. Thereafter, schedules were arranged with the discussants. FGD data were analyzed using narrative analysis. Recurring themes from the three FGDs were identified and used to aid the survey data findings.

Free and informed consent, together with permission to record and analyze the respondents' data, were asked through the signing of consent forms. Research subjects from the survey and FGDs were briefed about the phenomenon being examined, the purpose of the study, and the consequence of their participation. Moreover, they were also informed of their right to withdraw their participation at any time.

Measures

The survey questionnaire was designed to take into account the students' social media use for news engagement in student activism, as indicated in their participation in digital protest and traditional protest activities during the "Kampuhan sa Diliman" camp-out and #StopLumadKillings campaign. The operationalization of student activism was based on the measures used by Valenzuela (2013), with modifications appropriate to the context of the study. *Student activism*, the dependent variable of interest, was measured using 13 indicators based on selected traditional and digital forms of activism (see Table 2).

The student was asked to check the activities that s/he has engaged in. Scores for each activity are all added to create a student activism index. With the same logic used by Dylko (2010 as cited in Valenzuela, 2013), analysis for each protest activity was also done separately to avoid misrepresenting the intensity of participation that may occur if an index is used as a measure.

For the measurement of the independent variable—*social media use for news*—a continuous measurement for this study was created by asking, "How many hours per day do you spend using social media for news?" *Social capital* was included in the model as a control variable. According to Valenzuela et al. (2009), the internet and social media positively affect social capital, which is a factor that leads to civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). Thus, a measure for social capital based on the social networks dimension was included using the question "Which of the following organizations do you strongly identify yourself as a member?" Choices range from academic, socio-civic, regional/provincial, political, interest, religious, mass organization, others, and none. *Political knowledge*, which is seen to positively affect offline protest engagement (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012), was also used as a control variable and was measured using a 5-point response scale to the question "How knowledgeable are you about the Lumad killings issue in Mindanao?"

Control variables such as sociodemographics, government approval, and political efficacy were also included in the model of student activism. *Sociodemographics* and personal background consisted of the following dimensions: sex, course/college, income bracket level, and political ideology. *Sex* was included to see if males or females engage in student activism more. The basis for including *colleges* as a dimension is Levy's (1991) study in which he discussed the courses associated with activism. The College of Mass Communication was selected as the course to be used as a control variable, assuming that students from this college are active in using social media because of

their discipline. *Socioeconomic status* was also included as a dimension in the form of the Socialized Tuition System bracketing. Political ideology was also included as a dimension as it is viewed to greatly affect engagement in protest demonstrations (Valenzuela, 2013). This control variable is measured as a degree of inclination to the leftist ideology using a 5-point response scale to the statement "Private property should be abolished."

Government approval was also included as a control variable because, according to Barnes and Kaase (1979 as cited in Valenzuela, 2013), government dissatisfaction has long been viewed as a significant factor in protest activity. Government approval was replicated from Valenzuela's (2013) work and was measured through the question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the current administration of President Noynoy Aquino?" The last control variable is *political efficacy*, which was seen as a predictor of online and offline protest behaviors in Gil de Zuniga et al.'s (2012) work. This was measured through the statement drawn from their study, "I think that people like me can influence the government," with a five-point response statement.

These variables were included in the linear regression analysis predicting student activism, using the index of 13 online and offline protest activities. Below is the statistical model presenting student activism as a function of the following independent and control variables:

$$\text{Student Activism Index} = B_o + B_1(\text{social media activity for news})$$
$$+ B_2(\text{sociodemographics})$$
$$+ B_3(\text{government approval})$$
$$+ B_4(\text{political efficacy}) + u$$

Logit models were also formulated for the disaggregated analysis of each protest activity. The survey results informed the structuring of the semi-structured FGD guide. Formulation of the questions revolved around five initial themes: *social media use, student activism as awareness, organization, mobilization, and perceptions of digital activism.*

Findings

Quantitative results demonstrate that while social media use for news is significantly correlated to engagement in student activism, it is not the strongest predictor. Furthermore, disaggregated analysis shows that students who use social media for news are more likely to engage in online protest activities than offline ones. Qualitative findings, on the other hand, present students' negative perceptions towards digital activism, which is treated as an inferior form of protest engagement.

Predictors of Traditional and Digital Protest Activities

In answering the RQ1: "How does using social media as a news source affect students' engagement in activism?", linear regression analysis predicting the dependent variable student activism is tested against the independent variable social media use for news, as seen in Model (1) from Table 1.

Primary quantitative findings show that (RQ1) *social media use for news* reveals a positive and significant correlation with *student activism* even when holding other variables as constant, as seen from Models (1) to (6). However, results also reveal that social media use for news is not the strongest variable that would predict student activism. Four control variables hold stronger relationships and greater effects on the engagement in student activism, with *affiliation to student political organizations* being the strongest predictor, followed by the *female* undergraduate students, political *efficacy*, and inclination towards leftist *political ideology. Government approval* is also revealed to be a relatively weaker but still significant predictor of student activism.

Apart from answering the research question as to whether social media use for news leads to student activism, this study sought to analyze the impact of using social media for news on digital and traditional forms of activism. Thus, a disaggregated analysis predicting participation in the 13 offline and online indicators of student activism was conducted using logistic regression, as presented in Table 2.

Table 1.
Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models predicting student activism

	(1) Student Activism	(2) Student Activism	(3) Student Activism	(4) Student Activism	(5) Student Activism	(6) Student Activism
Social media use for news	0.277*** (0.0439)	0.279*** (0.0474)	0.296*** (0.0479)	0.273*** (0.0469)	0.273*** (0.0485)	0.225*** (0.0466)
Social media use		-0.00439 (0.0253)	-0.0139 (0.0261)	-0.0121 (0.0251)	-0.0127 (0.0263)	-0.0185 (0.0255)
Female			0.530*** (0.124)	0.494*** (0.121)	0.484*** (0.126)	0.411*** (0.120)
Year level			0.00976 (0.0593)	0.0327 (0.0589)	0.00554 (0.0599)	-0.0145 (0.0555)
Political org affiliation				2.544*** (0.341)	2.421*** (0.352)	2.301*** (0.304)
CMC student				0.387 (0.292)	0.330 (0.293)	0.289 (0.275)
STS Bracket						
Bracket D					-0.375 (0.294)	-0.244 (0.277)
Bracket C					0.00112 (0.261)	0.192 (0.251)
Bracket B					-0.286 (0.265)	-0.0205 (0.254)
Bracket A					-0.515* (0.254)	-0.131 (0.247)
Ideology						0.354*** (0.0557)
Efficacy						0.438*** (0.0576)
Gov. approval						-0.116* (0.0539)
Constant	3.307***(0.0871)	3.326***(0.127)	3.027*** (0.178)	2.916*** (0.174)	3.285*** (0.287)	1.489*** (0.331)
N	1329	1323	1307	1307	1241	1227
r2	0.0317	0.0313	0.0452	0.0970	0.102	0.183

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2.
Logit models predicting participation in digital and traditional forms of student activism

	Forms of digital activism related to the #StopLumadKillings Campaign							Forms of traditional activism related to the Manilakbayan protests					
	Searching the internet	Blogging or writing posts	Sharing, liking, tweeting	Signed an e-petition	Donated money through the internet	Sent emails to media/ politicians	Supported pages/ joined groups	Reading newspapers, watching news, and attending forums	Talking/asking about the Lumad issue with other people	Signed a petition	Donated money	Sent letters to media/ politicians	Visited the Lumad campout or attended protest actions
					Odds Ratio								
Social media use for news	1.26** (0.07)	1.15* (0.06)	1.16* (0.06)	0.99 (0.06)	1.27* (0.12)	0.46 (0.54)	1.11* (0.05)	1.25*** (0.06)	1.16* (0.07)	1.06 (0.05)	1.01 (0.05)	1.61 (0.62)	1.14** (0.05)
Social media use	1.02 (0.03)	1.00 (0.04)	1.05 (0.03)	0.98 (0.03)	0.90 (0.13)	1.07 (0.38)	1.00 (0.03)	0.92** (0.02)	1.03 (0.03)	1.01 (0.03)	1.04 (0.03)	0.69 (0.66)	0.97 (0.03)
Female	1.47** (0.13)	1.35 (0.20)	1.80*** (0.12)	1.13 (0.17)	1.68 (0.48)	1.44 (1.47)	1.00 (0.14)	1.12 (0.12)	1.46** (0.13)	1.12 (0.14)	1.71** (0.17)	0.14 (1.15)	1.01 (0.13)
Year level	0.96 (0.06)	0.90 (0.09)	1.03 (0.06)	1.15* (0.07)	1.04 (0.19)	2.09 (0.50)	0.96 (0.06)	1.01 (0.06)	1.09 (0.06)	1.14* (0.06)	1.02 (0.07)	1.31 (0.28)	0.89 (0.06)
Political org affiliation	1.55 (0.39)	3.33*** (0.36)	3.83*** (0.33)	2.68** (0.33)	1.15 (1.11)	0 (.)	4.9*** (0.34)	1.02* (0.40)	2.58* (0.47)	5.45*** (0.32)	3.62*** (0.33)	6.92 (1.20)	3.92*** (0.32)
CMC student	1.28 (0.31)	1.03 (0.41)	1.73 (0.33)	1.41 (0.32)	0 (.)	0 (.)	1.40 (0.31)	1.55 (0.31)	1.18 (0.32)	1.02 (0.30)	0.32* (0.49)	0 (.)	1.19 (0.27)
STS Bracket													
Bracket D	0.64 (0.34)	0.40 (0.53)	0.94 (0.31)	0.82 (0.43)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0.90 (0.31)	1.3 (0.3)	1.19 (0.34)	1.33 (0.34)	1.01 (0.41)	1.59 (1.36)	0.96 (0.31)
Bracket C	0.72 (0.30)	1.58 (0.37)	1.45 (0.27)	1.35 (0.37)	2.27 (1.05)	1.57 (1.70)	1.08 (0.27)	1.6 (0.27)	1.29 (0.30)	1.06 (0.30)	1.12 (0.35)	0 (.)	1.02 (0.26)
Bracket B	0.82 (0.31)	1.00 (0.40)	1.08 (0.27)	1.40 (0.38)	2.48 (1.09)	0 (.)	0.86 (0.27)	1.01 (0.26)	1.32 (0.31)	1.18 (0.30)	1.31 (0.36)	1.06 (1.06)	1.12 (0.27)
Bracket A	0.71 (0.30)	0.79 (0.39)	1.08 (0.27)	1.37 (0.37)	2.34 (1.08)	0 (.)	0.73 (0.27)	1.15 (0.26)	1.39 (0.30)	1.06 (0.30)	1.16 (0.35)	0 (.)	1.07 (0.26)
Ideology	1.20** (0.06)	1.41*** (0.09)	1.21*** (0.06)	1.39*** (0.08)	1.51* (0.19)	3.60 (0.67)	1.38*** (0.06)	1.13* (0.06)	1.12* (0.06)	1.24*** (0.07)	1.01 (0.07)	2.03 (0.54)	1.21** (0.06)
Efficacy	1.29*** (0.06)	1.43*** (0.129)	1.45*** (0.07)	1.35*** (0.11)	1.00 (0.22)	1.54 (0.37)	1.29*** (0.08)	1.27*** (0.06)	1.31*** (0.06)	1.24*** (0.08)	1.2* (0.09)	1.51 (0.50)	1.15* (0.07)
Gov. approval	0.92 (0.06)	0.89 (0.09)	0.97 (0.06)	0.92 (0.08)	0.68 (0.20)	3.14** (0.40)	0.93 (0.07)	1.06 (0.06)	0.87* (0.06)	1.1 (0.06)	1.09 (0.08)	1.08 (0.53)	0.87* (0.06)
Constant	0.63 (0.38)	0.02** (0.64)	0.10** (0.39)	0.02*** (0.55)	0.01** (1.83)	13.24*** (3.14)	0.10*** (0.40)	2.46* (0.36)	1.07 (0.39)	0.11*** (0.43)	0.04*** (0.54)	0.001* (3.34)	0.3*** (0.38)
N	1227	1227	1227	1227	1046	675	1227	1227	1227	1227	1227	788	1227
r2	0.0505	0.0944	0.0844	0.0511	0.0534	0.2183	0.0720	0.0462	0.0427	0.0501	0.0383	0.2203	0.0381

Standard errors in parentheses
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

Logistic analysis shows that social media use for news is significantly correlated to five out of seven online activities and three out of six offline activities. It is inferred from the logistic regression results that social media use for news more likely leads to student activism in terms of engaging in online activities than in offline actions. Furthermore, control variables such as political organization affiliation, political ideology, and political efficacy are revealed to have impacts that cut broadly across models predicting activism. It is also interesting to note that students who are members of political organizations are more likely to engage in traditional activism than digital activism.

Narratives on Social Media Use and Protest Engagement

The quantitative findings drawn from the survey data are triangulated with the qualitative findings based on FGDs participated by 17 undergraduate students. Three major recurring themes are emphasized in this section, all of which are based on students' perceptions of digital activism. Generally, the results show that students recognize the merits of digital activism and movements, but they are also cautious in limiting activism within the virtual realm alone (RQ2).

Digital Activism Does Not Encompass What Student Activism Is. While there was a consensus on how social media allow students to participate in issues and protests easily, there was also difficulty equating digital activism with student activism. In the first group, one student captured this sentiment by saying that:

> Social media activism is lower than activism itself, more so because all you ever did is to share information and awareness. In my opinion, awareness really isn't enough because for activism to really work it should be able to convince people to join causes, and convincing people through social media would be really difficult. To convince them, you have to say a lot, have to give a lot of effort and most of the time, honestly, for me I would just scroll down and I wouldn't really pay much attention.

This view was echoed by the others, with one student stating that that the ideal characteristic of activism is arousing, organizing, and mobilizing people; in relation to digital activism, users are simply arousing people's awareness. This was supported by another discussant who argued that "the success of traditional activism hinges on its leaders, but the thing with cyberactivism, there is no leader to bring people to act and bring together." She thinks that it may be why traditional protests are more successful than online protests because there is no point person in digital activism, and it fails to make people act since those who have different opinions are not brought together.

One vocal student from the second group provoked the others with his skeptical view towards digital activism:

> Social media activism makes me cringe… It is a nice way of informing people but it is like shoving your beliefs down to people's throats if you're posting it as a status for your thousands of friends to see.

The same student continued by stating that in online movements, people participate to join the wave and that social media activism does not feel genuine if it is not accompanied by offline activism. This opinion was receptive to the others, with one discussant adding that people subscribe to social media activism because it is faster and easier to the part of the person than participating in rallies and other forms of offline action. Another student shared an apprehensive view of social media in which she thinks that several people politically participate online for self-serving purposes.

(Digital) Activism is Stigmatized. Participants from the three groups similarly expressed being discouraged in engaging in digital activism because of the radical and leftist connotations attached to UP students. A member of the group shared his experience: his mother called out his active posting on social media and told him, "*wag kang magpaka-radikal*" (do not be too radical). All of the other members, in defeat and understanding, spoke words such as "*ganun talaga*" (that is just the way it is) and "that's the harsh truth."

In the second group, the discussants attempted to unpack the stigma attached to activism by challenging it with their own experiences. One student explained that coming from a private high school, she would hear stories from relatives about how radical students in UP would get themselves killed in order to protest, along with all other negative connotations about UP students being "leftists" and "communists." Upon entering UP, she realized that student activism goes beyond rallying in the streets. For her, being an activist is not limited to just waving banners and shouting; you can also raise others' awareness. Another discussant noted how interesting activism could be—as a concept, it has been perceived to be connected with radical, leftist, and violent notions, when activism is not entirely limited to that. According to her, as long as you support a cause and do actual steps to promote your advocacy, then that is activism.

There is Difficulty in Considering Themselves as (Digital) Activists. One noteworthy finding from the three groups is the unwillingness of all students to consider themselves as activists or digital activists. The first group of students attempted to define a digital activist as "one who talks online and then organizes,"   "one

who actually convinces people," and "*sila yung gumagawa ng shine-share namin*" (those who publish what we share online). The discussants claim that they were supporters but not digital activists.

The second group of participants encountered difficulty calling themselves digital activists. One student stated that the word activism has such a huge impact or holds a high standard, making it inappropriate to consider activism done solely through social media as activism itself. This was supported by another discussant who stated that digital activism "pales in comparison to what activism has been." According to him, even if one is fervent in social media, it is not considered activism if s/he is only sharing and blogging online. A participant agreed with this view and added that it is shallow compared to traditional forms of activism.

For the third group, when asked if they considered themselves as activists, a definite "no" answer was given. One of them said that he would call himself a "passivist," to which the group responded in humor. He reasons that while he supports causes, he does not really do much about it, such as "actively" engaging in protests and talks. He continues by saying that activism is a matter of dedication and sacrifice, such as cutting classes and rallying done by student activists. Thus, being active online and typing on the keyboard cannot be considered as activism for him. Another student added that she is passionate about the advocacies but not enough to put her life at stake.

Discussion

This study's main task is to establish the relationship between social media use for news and student activism. Linear regression analysis confirms the thesis statement that *using social media for news leads to student activism*. However, upon looking closer into the logit models predicting each protest activity, findings show that social media use for news is significantly correlated with more online protest activities than offline ones. This result reinforces Leyva's (2016) conclusions in the two ways in which student participation is influenced by exposure to political content: first, there is a positive but weak association with offline activist participation; and second, there is a considerably stronger relationship with online activities compared to offline ones. This can be interpreted differently by following Nam's (2012) and Vissers and Stolle's (2014) argument that offline inactive individuals can be mobilized to be politically active online through internet use.

The estimates also pointed out that frequency in general internet use does not lead to increased political engagement online, as compared to internet use for news which was a significant predictor. The result reinforces the UGT: those who frequently use the internet for news — the

politically aware, informed, or interested—have a greater likelihood of engaging in online activities, as well as in offline activities, albeit in a lesser likelihood. UGT assumes that individuals deliberately seek information and choose the best medium to meet their needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz et al., 1974). The qualitative findings further explain the motivations behind the use of internet for news, as well its varying effects between online and offline political engagement.

The narratives project a different picture of how the respondents understand digital activism and the broader concept of activism. In the students' narratives, they recognized social media protest engagement as a substantial first step towards activism because it can reach and inform people, who are apolitical in the first place, to involve themselves in issues. This finding is also present in Lariscy et al.'s study (2011), where digital natives consider "more solitary activities, such as searching for political information or reading blog content" as constitutive of political participation (p. 760). Following the assumptions of UGT, social media were viewed and used by the discussants as a channel or means for people, who are unable or who do not wish to physically engage themselves in direct protest actions, to participate online politically (Nam, 2012; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Although these views reinforce the findings from the regression results on why students are more likely to engage in online actions, the first recurring theme from the narrative analysis presents consensus understanding that *digital activism does not encompass the entirety of student activism.* Hence, the discussants were cautious on solely relying on social media protests and would emphasize that activism should not be limited within the virtual realm.

The difficulty in equating digital activism with student activism is hinged on its comparison with the conventional understanding of student activism. The respondents shared that social media use fosters a mindset that sharing and liking are enough contributions to the movement—instead, they consider it a fallback on one's efforts. This view is reinforced by Lewis et al.'s (2014) conclusion on the "inverse relationship between broad online social movement mobilization and deep participation" (p. 7). The discussants argued that online forms of action are incomparable to offline protest actions, which they view as more effective, especially when projecting the message and drawing people into the movement. One student pointed out the paradox of how online dissemination reaches more people but delivers the message in a trivial and superficial way, compared to offline communication which is limited in terms of reach but delivers messages more effectively. Another student said that "online is better for informing people, but offline is better for engaging people" because convincing people to join the movement requires more time and effort, which social media is

incapable of doing. Other discussants expressed that activism through social media alone is not genuine if not accompanied by offline activism. For them, issues are reduced into trends that come and go depending on its hype and popularity, and that people would participate in it and join the wave for self-serving purposes.

The misgivings of the respondents reflect the views of scholars (Kavada, 2010; Morozov, 2009; Tufecki, 2017) on the efficacy of digital activism. Tufecki (2017) argued that while networked movements grow rapidly through digital technologies, it lacks the formal and informal organizational capacities that create resiliency and acclimatization to collective decisions present in the pre-internet movements. Tufecki (2017) aptly describes the limitation of networked protests: "they often faced greatest peril in their infancy when they were both powerful and large, but also underprepared and fragile" (p. xiii). For Kavada (2010), the solution for the lack of stability and continuity is not through rigid and bureaucratic organization structures but through open and inclusive narratives, regular face-to-face meetings, short-term objectives, and a permanent online space. These studies and the qualitative findings from this research converge at the recognition of digital activism's limitation in creating effective movements.

The traditional understanding of student activism that is historically rooted in the university's student movement has also been an obstacle in the protest engagement of the respondents. The second recurring theme from the narratives is how *student activism is stigmatized* and branded with negative connotations of being "leftist," "radical," and "communists." Several discussants shared their parents' concern and fear of seeing their daughters and sons participating in protest events.

When faced with the dilemma of distrusting the effectiveness of digital activism and the stigma attached to student activism, the respondents find themselves *unable to identify themselves as activists or digital activists*, which is the last recurring theme from the qualitative findings. The respondents echoed the view that student activism is a matter of dedication, effort, and sacrifice; they attached cutting classes and rallying as the basis of being "activists." This high regard for their understanding of student activism also implies their low regard for digital activism, and explains why it is difficult for them to consider activism done solely through social media as activism in itself (RQ3).

These findings follow Butler's (2011) conclusions on how digital activism, which comprises a broad range of activities, is treated with suspicion because it does not fit the historically accepted conception of activism. According to her, the traditional concept of activism is

represented with a narrow range of activities situated within the normative framework that is "always high risk and hard to accomplish" (p. 88). This, in turn, creates an activist identity that is exclusive and attainable only to a set of people who will sacrifice jail time and bodily harm for their causes (*ibid.*). She argues for a concept of activism that is semantically inclusive and which exists along a continuum that can be initiated through their computers. García-Galera et al. (2014) similarly argued that online participation ought not to be ruled out of the possibility for continued engagement, especially when their research concluded further engagement of young people beyond their computers.

Even if the causal connection between online and offline participation is questioned, the benefits of digital activism should not be dismissed as merely "slacking." Foster et al. (2019) argued that the "feel-good" mechanism of social media activism is necessary for fostering support and creating consensus mobilization—a form of collective action and effective activism. This study reiterates the insistence of Jones (2015) for a more nuanced slacktivist concept that would recognize the "low-risk, low cost" (Rotman et al., 2011, p. 821) nature of online activities but would not dismiss the possible impact it can achieve.

It can be surmised from this study that digital activism is treated with skepticism and condescension vis-à-vis traditional activism. This is due to the high standards that UP students have for activism, associated with dedication and sacrifice that marked the historical student movement during the Martial Law era. This exclusive and unattainable notion of student activism makes it difficult and unlikely for them to consider themselves activists and even digital activists. The concept of activism should be broadened because an exclusive definition no longer fits the present-day context of technology-assisted activism. Furthermore, this narrow conceptualization draws unnecessary delineation between the potential for action and actual mobilization. Activism should be viewed in terms of utilizing appropriate forms of activism that different situations may call for, alongside maximizing all channels of political engagement.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that using social media for news is positively and significantly correlated to student activism. However, upon further disaggregated analysis of survey data on each protest activity, it is revealed that students who use social media for news have higher chances of engaging in online protest activities than offline protest actions. While social media allow students to participate in protests conveniently online, narratives demonstrate that the

respondents do not consider themselves engaging in "activism" as "activists." For them, digital activism cannot be equated with student activism, a concept they have associated with the student movement's historical tradition marked by radicalism and high risks. Furthermore, narratives show how the stigmatization of student activism inhibits the respondents' involvement in conventional protest actions. This dilemma—the inability to participate in traditional protest activities and the unwillingness to consider online engagement as activism—discourages students from fulfilling their potential as activists who are individuals actively fighting for a cause.

This paper's findings seek to contribute to the literature on social media and political participation by presenting how the negative branding of "slacktivism" and the stigma on student activism can inhibit protest engagement among the youth. This also serves a practical purpose to student organizations that intend to engage their fellow youth politically. It does not intend to replace the traditional understanding of student activism. Rather, it aims to broaden the meaning of "activism" by recognizing how social media can open the door for everyone's engagement in political issues, as gleaned from the students' narratives. The spirit of activism that is unwavering, unafraid, and undefeatable does not develop overnight. It is cultivated through relentless and tireless persuasion, which may begin or end in social media or the streets. While the current political milieu has yet to be rapidly transformed into a fertile ground for a full-fledged protest movement, all channels of activism must be maximized, including social media and its crucial battleground of discourses and narratives.

Future research can focus on the relationship between digital activism and traditional activism in other universities, particularly in determining whether online forms of protest translate into offline protest actions. A more in-depth study can also be conducted about perceptions of the Filipino youth on digital activism in relation to other concepts, such as clicktivism or slacktivism, as well as the quality of activism found in digital activism. Finally, future studies can examine the effectiveness of online movements in achieving political reforms or political change.

Note

1 This study was heavily lifted from my master's thesis entitled *Social media and student (cyber)activism in the University of the Philippines Diliman* (Marcaida, 2016).

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