The 'I' on Facebook: Self-presentation Strategies of Politicians

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INTRODUCTION

Politics and the media are locked in a ubiquitous relationship that can spell the difference between the politicians' electoral triumph and defeat, and their infamy or celebrity as public figures.   It is generally argued and found that media coverage of political candidates or of campaigns in general affects candidate support from the citizenry. It is through the mass media that voters hear and see the political candidates, and hence the media informs their perception of candidates and electoral choice (see for instance, Benoit, Hansen, & Verser, 2003; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). Non-mainstream politicians, such as those representing interest groups such as environmentalists, animal rights activities, and right wing politicians rely even more on the media for an electoral breakthrough (Art, 2006; Deutchman & Ellison, 1999, Mudde, 2007).

Hence efforts to manage image are integrated in the machinery of politicians and political parties machineries through in-house or outsourced public relations departments or officers, spokesmen, close-in photographers, handlers and the like.

Social network sites such as Facebook offer public figures a new channel for projecting their image. Touting the tag line" Be connected. Be Discovered. Be on Facebook," Facebook advertises its usefulness for this purpose, as follows:

"If you are a celebrity, athlete, politician or public figues, with Facebook public profiles, you can create an authentic connection with millions of ans and supporters on Facebook by communication with your real voice and participating in the conversations already happening about you online" and third party applications such as "iLike Songs"
(http://www.facebook.com/advertising/FB_Pages_Celebs_PubFig.pdf).

The advertising lists tips and tricks for image creation such as the use of the "Publisher on the Wall" tab, "Favorite Pages," sharing, liking and commenting, news feeds and updates. Other useful applications are blogging, facebook notes, the sharing of photos, videos and links, and custom content such as static FBML, flash player, and Facebook Events. In the 2008 US presidential elections, social network and mobile media platforms were deployed under the "banner of a movement" that created an "unforeseen force to raise money, organize locally, fight smear campaigns and get out the vote that helped them topple the Clinton machine and then John McCain and the Republicans" (Carr, 2008). Many innovative strategies in the use of social media for electoral campaigns were conceived and put to test during that election.

Research Gap

However, these reports do not explain the dynamics behind the use of social networks in electoral campaigns especially in a country marked by a low ICT penetration such as the Philippines. This research on the role of Facebook in politics in the Philippines seeks to help build the literature on the intersection between social media networks and politics.

The study seeks to describe social network practices and to determine telf-presentation strategies of Filipino politicians on Facebook, the dominant social network site in the country.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:
SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SELF-PRESENTATION

Social network sites are distinctive for their focus on the individual. They are "web-based services that allow individuals to 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd and Ellison, 2007). These sites are "online contexts in which individuals are consciously able to construct online representation of self" provide an online place for users to create and store information about themselves ; are "structured as "personal (or "egocentric") networks, with the individual at the center of their own community. An SNS user has great control over his or her profile as he /she can "inspect, edit and revise" his identity before it is made available for public consumption (boyd and Ellison, 2007),

Compared to personal pages on the web, social network sites such as MySpace and Facebook allow individuals not only to create information about themselves but also to create networks of 'friends' that are connected through links on their pages. They allow users to "articulate and make visible their social network" which are frequently comprised of acquaintances with whom they share an offline connection (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, Steinfield & Lampe, 2006). The articulation of friendship links serve as identity markers for the profile owner (Donah and boyd, 2004, boyd and Ellison, 2007,)

Hence social media are tools for creating and building communities as much as they are a tool for constructing and projecting individualities, or "the quality of character of a particular person or thing that distinguished them from others of the same kind, especially when strongly marked" (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2011).

This individual-centered nature of social network sites renders it a rich ground for examining the construct of 'self-presentation set forth by Goffman (1957).

Adapting the perspective of a theatrical performance, Goffman (1957) conceptualized the presentation of self in everyday life as an ongoing process of information management in such a way that the individual will have to "act so that he intentionally or unintentionally *expresses* himself, and others will in turn have to be *impressed* in some way by him."

When appearing before others, an individual enacts as "performance", ie all the activity of a given participant on a given situation which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. In the performance the individual uses a "front" which involves a 'setting' ("the scenic parts of expressive equipment") and a "personal front" or those items that are intimately identified with the performer and follows him wherever he goes, such as insignia or office or rank, sex, age, racial characteristics and the like. The personal front consists of an "appearance" and

"manner".   Appearance refers to those stimuli that tell of the performer's social status while manner refers to those stimuli which warn of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation" (Goffman, 1957). Papacharissi (2002) refers to this performance as a daily "information game" whereby the impressions formed of an individual becomes a result of his/her expertise in controlling the information given and given off,

As the 2012 US presidential elections near, Barack Obama's re-election team has been reported to be building a 'vast digital data operation that for the first time combines a unified database on millions of Americans with the power of Facebook to target individual voters." In light of its tremendous growth since 2010, Facebook is touted to become a "dominant political force" and a major campaigning tool that has the potential to "transform friendship into a political weapon" (Pilkington and Michel, 2012).

Evidently, the high penetration rate of Facebook and other social media networks in the US underlies their impact in the elections there. Nielsens (Nielsens, 2011) reports that social networks and blogs reach nearly 80 percent of active US internet users and represent the majority of Americans' time online.

Of the various networks, Facebook has outpaced earlier forms such as MySpace. In December 2011, Facebook was reported to have the highest penetration rate in the North American region, at 50.3 %, followed by Europe, at 27.4%. Of the eight regions surveyed, Africa was at the bottom of the rankings at a penetration rate of 3.6 percent. A notch above Africa is Asia, at 4.7 % (Internet World Stats, 2011).

And yet in sheer numbers, Asia ranked second to Europe in terms of number of Facebook users around the world, at 223.4 million and 183.9 million, respectively. Country-wise, Indonesians and Filipinos rank among the top users of Facebook.   Figures from March 2010 report that Indonesia had 18.9 million users, or 7.9 % of its population, translating to 63.15 % of all online users. The Philippines follow with 10.5 milllion users, or 11.4 % of the population or 42.83 % of all online users.

Indeed with the steady rise in the penetration of information and communication technology in developing countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, social media has also been becoming pervasive in social life there.

Examples from Mexico and the Philippines, in addition to the US were cited in a report on the role of Facebook in elections around the world in Jan 2010, written by *Inside Facebook*, an online news service specializing on news and analysis on Facebook's growth and innovations (http://www.insidefacebook.com/about/). It reported that the two contenders for the presidency in the 2010 Philippines elections - Benigno "Noynoy" S. Aquino III, a senator and Liberal party candidate and Nacionalista Party Senator Manny Villar - were ranked 11 and 12, respectively, on the service's weekly list of fastest-growing Facebook Pages. Each Page had hundreds of thousands of fans, who supported and criticized each other in English and Filipino, the national language, on the candidates' Walls.

In a follow-up report which looked at the use of Facebook by mayoral candidates, Inside Facebook found that many search results on Facebook for mayors running for elections yielded Filipino candidates who were running for the May elections that year. According to the report, fans and candidates interacted on the Wall and elsewhere in the Filipino language, and fan bases numbered from 74 to 981 on the Pages reviewed.

Social network sites also figured in the success of the election campaign of a women's party in the Philippines. Karan et al (2008) in a case study found that Gabriela Women's Party turned to the Internet and social networking sites like YouTube and Friendster along with its

website and the mobile phones, "to augment traditional campaign techniques" The sites were found to have had a supporting role in the campaign.

Drawing from experiments in an interpersonal situation Jones (, 1990) presented five strategies of self-presentation construction, and their corresponding goals, as follows: ingratiation, - the goal is to be liked by others; competence – the goal is to be perceived as skilled and qualified; intimidation – the goal is power; and exemplification, the goal is to be perceived as morally superior. Jones has also defined the strategies operationally.

Papacharissi (2002) argues that a web page provides the ideal setting for this type of information game, allowing maximum control over the information disclosed. In a content analysis of a randomly generated sample of 1,000 personal home pages Panacharissfound that individuals used a variety of design tools to present themselves, attract visitors and solicit feedback. The design elements were combined to stage an online performance through which the individual's personality or aspects of it were revealed. Web authors used both direct textual expression and indirect expressive elements, including hyperlinks, images, animations, color and font type to construct what Goffman referred to as "front" of a performance. The data showed that appearance was asserted with a variety of social status markers, predominantly hyperlinks, representing a conscious effort to create and affiliate with online communities and an effort to present the interests of the author as well as to structure an identity for the author by associating him/her with certain types of sites available online". "Manner" was conveyed through textual statements, along with the use of color, font type, and space served the purpose of conveying a certain "manner" to be associated with the individual. Specifically the tone and language use of the textual content communicated personality traits like aggressiveness, extroversion, compassion and other qualities the author may wish to project.

Dominick (1999) similarly studied personal home pages as channels of self-presentation. Using Jones's typology (1990), Dominick found that ingratiation was the most used self-presentation strategy, followed by the competence strategy. Exemplification ranked third while only a few pages categorized in the supplication and intimidation strategy. Dominick concluded that "when it comes to self-presentation strategies, behavior on the web seems to mirror self-presentation in the interpersonal setting."

Kane (2008) likewise used the Jones categorization of self-presentation strategies in a study of MySpace profiles to determine photographic self-presentation strategies and develop a measurement scheme for analyzing photographic and textual elements. Data showed that competence and ingratiation were the most commonly used strategies in the profiles.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As social networks become more entrenched in social life globally, they are increasingly intensively appropriated for political ends and incorporated into political practice, in particular for campaigning. Its emergence as a significant tool for electoral activities – as exemplified in the Obama campaign – prompts questions of how politicians are engaging them to present themselves and connect with their constituencies.

This study sought first, to examine social network practices of Filipino politicians, and second, to determine the self-presentation strategies they use in their Facebook Pages.

It is the first part of a research project that seeks to understand politicians' use of social network sites, with Facebook as example. In the second part the project will examine the politicians' use of Facebook for self-presentation during a campaign period.

METHOD

Operational Definitions

Social media practice refers to the variables self-revelation, network relationships, and messaging practice. Self-revelation was operationalized as information presented by the user about oneself such as birthday and birthplace, civil status, education, religion and age, photos, and photo albums. Network relationships refer to the user's number of friends or fans. Messaging practice refers to the frequency and type of comments (wall post, link, comment, tweet, photograph, photo album) posted by the user during the data-gathering week.

Self-presentation strategies refer to the categories proposed by Jones, namely: competence, intimidation, exemplification and supplication. The strategies were gleaned through a content analysis of the messages from wall posts, links such as when a video from You Tube was linked to the wall, comments, tweet (when the twitter account is linked to the Facebook account or page). The content categories were defined as follows:

1. Ingratiation: saying positive things about others, saying mildly negative things about oneself, statements of modesty, familiarity and humor. The person's goal is to be liked by others.
2. Competence: claims about abilities, accomplishments, performance and qualifications. The person's goal is to be perceived as skilled and qualified.
3. Intimidation: threats, statements of anger and potential unpleasantness. The person's goal is power.
4. Exemplification: statements of ideological commitment or militancy for a cause, self-sacrifice and self-discipline. The user's goal is to be perceived as morally superior or possessing high moral standards.
5. Supplication: includes entreaties for help, self-deprecation. The user's goal is to be perceived as morally superior or possession high moral standards.

Sample

Facebook was scoured for the presence or absence of Facebook accounts involving all incumbent members of the lower and upper houses of the country's legislature during a one-week period, 2 to 8 February 2012. This week was chosen as it fell on the fourth week of the impeachment trial of the chief justice of the country's Supreme Court, an issue that put the legislature, acting as an impeachment court, in the center of events The impeachment was an extremely contentious affair and thus provided the legislators a reason to engage their constituents and the general public through the media.

A total of 102 legislators were found to have Facebook accounts.

RESULTS

Background: The Philippine Political System

The Philippines is a republic with a democratic, presidential form of government. The three branches of government are the executive (the president), the legislative (consisting of the upper and lower houses, ie the Senate and the House of Representatives), and the judicial (Supreme Court and in such lower courts established by law) branches.

Twenty-four senators serving a term of six years compose the Senate. Elections for the senate take place during midterm elections (every three years) for 12 of the 24 senators. They serve for a maximum of three terms.

The present Constitution provides that the House of Representatives shall be composed of not more than 250 members elected from legislative districts apportioned among the provinces, cities and the Metropolotican Manila area in accordance with the number of their respective inhabitants and those elected through a party-list system of registered national, regional and sectoral parties or organizations. The party list representatives constitute 20% of the total number of representatives. Representatives serve for a term of three years, for a maximum of three consecutive terms.

Elections in the country are by popular vote; all citizens aged 18 years and above have the right to vote.

Social Media Practices

Findings show that 15 of the 24 senators (62.5%) comprising the upper house of the Philippine Congress and 87 of the 286 representatives (30.4%) comprising the lower house had a Facebook account. The Facebook Page was clearly the preferred type among senators. Among representatives, a dominant account type was not evident, however the number of those who have a Page was higher (see Table 1, Appendix).

Self-revelation. Data presented in Table 1, below, show that the legislators did not share much about themselves. While all the senators provided a profile photo, 3 representatives did not. Instead, they gave non-personal representations of themselves.

The senators revealed more about themselves on a Facebook page than the representatives as judged from the average percentage of senators who provided information on each of the profile items.). For both groups, there was least self-revelation of religious affiliation (see Table 2, Appendix). Information of their location (or place of work) and birthplace were shared by most representatives (68% and 54% respectively) while information about their titles and civil status were shared by most senators (both at 60%).

At the time of this study, there were 23 senators and 286 representatives comprising the legislature. The lone vacant position in the senate was the post vacated by the incumbent president, Benigno Aquino, Jr.

Table 1. Percentage of senators and representatives with information and data available on Facebook Page.

Data	Senators N: 15	Representatives N: 87
Title	60 %	25
Birthplace	33	54
Birthdate	33	29
Civil status	60	27
Education	73	52
Religion	6	8
Profile photo	100	96
Location	46	68
Mean %	48.55	41.11

Network relationships. The variable 'network relationships' refer to the user's number of friends or fans. The data show that 38 (45.78%) of the representatives had less than 1,000 friends, while 9 of the 15 senators (60%) had more than 6,000 friends. A senator who had run for the presidency in the 2010 elections and was reputed to have spent an inordinate sum of money for the campaign outnumbered all the legislators with a friends' base of 1.6 million.
Age and sex were not found related to the number of friends kept on Facebook.

Table 2. Number of friends of legislators.

	Senators	Representatives
Below 1000	1	38
1001-2000	0	15
2001-3000	2	6
3001-4000	1	5
4001-5000	1	13
5001-6000	1	4
6001-above	9	2
No Data	0	4
Total:	15	87
Range	824 - 1,653,640	11 –11,405

Messaging practice. Findings reveal that the senators were far more prolific in Facebook than the representatives. All of them logged in at least once during the seven-day period. Among the 87 representatives who had Facebook accounts – either personal or business – only 32 of 87 (or 36.78%) had any posts on their walls, but only 23 had posts which were made by the legislator themselves. For the other 14, the posts were made by others.

All the senators posted a message in their Pages. Among the representatives however, only 26 of the 87 (29.88%) made a post during the data-gathering period. For both, the preferred posts were comments (36 of 169 post for senators, or 21.30%, and 43 of 127 posts, or 33.85% for representatives.

Table 3. Number of posts by Filipino legislators.

	No. of senators	No. of posts of senators	No. of representatives	No. of posts of representatives
Wall Posts	6	19	8	17
Links (YouTube)	2	7	1	2
Links (Others)	7	36	7	16
Photos	4	27	4	7
Photo Albums	3	7	10	38
Videos	2	2	1	1
Tweets	1	30	2	3
Notes	1	5	0	0
Comments	6	36	7	43
Total:		169		127

Self-presentation strategies

Text-based posts such as wall posts, tweets, non-visual links, notes and comments made by the legislators (not those made by fans) were content analyzed. Data show that representatives used the ingratiation strategy the most (53,60%) while senators used the competence strategy.

Table 4. Self-presentation strategies of Filipino legislators in Facebook, in percent.

Strategy	Senators (No. of posts: 126) %	Representatives (No. of posts: 79) %	Average %
Ingratiation	22.46	53.60	37.26
Competence	63.04	31.20	47.9
Intimidation	7.24	12.00	9.5
Exemplification	5.07	3.20	4.18
Supplication	2.17	00	1.14
	99.98	100	99.98

Discussion

With the increasing pervasiveness of information and communication technology in developing countries, social network sites are seen to become a key part of political life as they did earlier in developed countries, notably the US. Thus far, there are reports that social networks, Facebook in particular, have been used for political campaigns in Mexico and the Philippines. As channels for political communication, Facebook would allow politicians to project a favorable image of themselves through photos, multimedia content and other applications, and to create networks of "friends" that are connected through links on their pages.

Data gathered in this study suggest however that politicians in the Philippines have a low level of use of Facebook functionalities for projecting their personal images and for building networks for political ends. It appeared that they did not took advantage of this opportunity to express themselves not only to their constituents but to a potentially even larger audience. There were however noteworthy differences in the practices of the senators and the representatives. The senators engaged the potentials of Facebook much more than the representatives. The differences were not explained by demographic factors. A possible explanation could come from their status. Senators serve a term of six years and have a much larger budgetary allocation at their disposal than representatives. Thus the senators had a larger staff, among which are public relations personnel including those who are in charge of their social media presence. This information was gathered in an interview of the staff of three senators. A further study might dwell on the dynamics of self-presentation in situations where there are surrogate creators of the image which usually happens with public figures such as politicians and celebrities.

The finding that ingratiation and competence strategies were most prevalent was consistent with earlier studies (Dominick, 1999; Papacharissi, 2002, Kane, 2008). Even here the senators and representatives differed, with the former tending to use the competence self-presentation strategy and the latter tending to use ingratiation strategy.   The goal of being liked by others appear to be more pronounced among the representatives while the goal for credibility was more distinct among the senators.   Future research might concentrate on explaining these differences.

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