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Understanding How Overseas Filipino Workers Engage on National Issues in Pinoy OFW Facebook Page

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Abstract

The Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) community is an important sector of the Philippines not only because of their economic contribution through remittances but also through their participation in national issues. Though dispersed in various countries, they converge in online communities such as the Pinoy OFW Facebook. Through content analysis, it was observed that participation in the threads is greater than interaction among OFWs. There were more tourists (likers) compared with the number of minglers, devotees, and insiders combined. Participation and interaction is higher when a thread appeals to emotion.

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1. Introduction

Diaspora is the mass dispersion of people from their ancestral homeland to other countries. Filipinos has created a diaspora because of their large magnitude in the world (Juan, 2000). Unlike the historic Diasporas of the Jews, Chinese, and other past Diasporas, the Filipino diaspora is a product of transnational or globalized capitalism. It is distinct because the Filipino identity is defined by regions, localities, and communities of languages and traditions.

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The Filipino diaspora is fast emerging with many expatriates, immigrants, and workers around the world. A large part is the community of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW).

Today, the number of Filipinos living and working abroad represents about 11% of the total population of the Philippines (POEA, 2013). The POEA (2013) also reported that there are about 3, 000 Filipinos leaving the country daily for overseas work. In 2012, a total of 2, 083, 223 OFWs are deployed around the world and the top six destinations are Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Qatar. These OFWs contributed 10 billion dollars remittances. Former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo proclaimed them as the new heroes of their country. Even the late President Corazon Aquino hailed the great contribution OFWs brought in their country in her speech in the December 1994 Global Filipino Conference. OFWs are not only regarded for their economic contribution but also for their active participation in national issues. Their views on national issues like the 2013 national elections and the PDAF (Priority Development Assistance Fund) controversy have, in one way or another, influenced discussions and government actions. Many of them manifested their concern for the country through absentee voting and conduct of public information sessions in the country where they worked.

The engagement of OFWs communities in national issues and concerns has increase in the Internet realm. Liav (2004) pointed out that Filipino Diaspora not only communicate through face-to-face communication, but also through the use of the Internet. The Internet enables two-way mass communication among Filipinos, facilitating the expression of emotions and opinions about a certain issue. In return, this helps in developing and reinforcing the social tie among the members of the Filipino Diaspora. In his study, Opiniano (2005) used face-to-face and Internet interviews to analyse the Filipino Diaspora philanthropy. He found out that early on, Filipino Diaspora communities have used Internet as a means of communicating their ideas. The use of the Internet has further increased in the advent of social media, through which virtual communities were formed and subsequently broadened their discussions about issues in the country. Given this, research on the Filipino Diaspora online community must be covered.

There are still limited studies on online OFW communities. Figer and de Torres (2012) explored the immigration issues Filipinos confronted in the Timog Online forum, a site where Japanese immigrants interact with each other. They concluded that online forums became supportive environment for a community because the member of the forum had a chance to improve their lives by getting information and resources from the forum. However, Figer and de Torres only looked at the immigration concern of the Filipino immigrants in the Timog Online Forum, and focused on their personal issues.

One of the most active online OFWs communities is the Pinoy OFW Facebook Page. The news, from national issues to personal concerns of OFWs, was updated regularly. With more than 100,000 likes, the threads are rich with posts and comments. The result of this study would be significant in shaping the discussion in the page so as to draw out relevant issues and concerns that could be used for policy and decision-making. For the administrator of Pinoy OFW Facebook Page, findings can help enhance the discussion and interaction among members. Administrator of other online social media sites that cater to OFWs may also benefit from this study. In general, the analysis of the page content and the patterns of communication between and among the members of the online community would lend to understanding how OFWs engage in national issues and concerns. According to Baxter and Babbie (2003) if you can “understand why people believe as they do and value some things, then you can make good guesses about why they will value other things.”

2. Objectives of the study

This study was conducted to understand the communication behavior of OFWs in the Pinoy OFW Facebook page. Specifically, it aimed to describe the Pinoy OFW Facebook Page, the patterns of computer-mediated communication among members, and the persuasive strategy used in threads of Pinoy OFW.

3. Methodology

Content analysis was used in the study. Two-cycle coding was used in the analysis of data. Using Microsoft Excel 2007, threads from August 2011 to August 2013 were coded in three categories: national issue, entertainment, and lifestyle. National issue is any thread about issues of national interest (culture, politics, showbiz, etc.), discussed by media, and brought controversies in the Philippines. Entertainment is any thread about jokes, food and recipes, and advertisements, while lifestyle consists of threads about OFWs stories in the country or other country, tips and

recommendations for OFWs, direct questions to OFWs, and policies and laws about OFWs. Coding the threads about the national issues using MAXQDA followed. Only threads with the following characteristics were encoded: (1) title and content of the thread are stated in English, Filipino, or both; and (2) with more than 10 comments.

Rich and descriptive comments were coded to better describe the process of their communication and the content (Kozinet, 2002). Rereading the threads and comments leads to a better understanding and holistic view of the comments (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Data gathered were analyzed using frequency count. Patterns of computer-mediated communication were identified after Kozinet (2002) type of participants in an online community-tourist, minglers, devotees, and insiders. Tourists lack strong social ties from the group, and maintain a superficial or passive interest in the threads (likers). Minglers maintain strong social ties, only per functionally interested in showing their opinions in the threads. Devotees maintain strong interests in the threads discussions, but have a few social attachments to the group. While insiders have strong social ties to the group and maintain a strong interest in the threads discussions.

4. Findings and discussions

A total of 4,213 threads, posted from August 2011 to August 2013, were coded in Microsoft Excel 2007. The topics of the threads were categorized into national issues (301), entertainment (746), and lifestyle (3,166).

In many threads, Pinoy OFW Facebook Page administration participated and posted comments. Oftentimes, the administrators themselves answered questions regarding the topic posted by the OFWs. The following comment of Pinoy OFW administrator, Mr. Patrick Vitug on the topic of racial discrimination):

Maaring racial discrimination yan lalo na kung ang ibig sabihin ay panlalait sa mga dayuhan unless kung totoo at nakakahilo and amoy. Kung tawagin tayong bansot o dark-skinned, kung totoo naman ay sana hindi na tayo magreact na parang tinawag tayong demonyo, bobo, o iba pang masakit na pakinggan na salita.

(We can call it racial discrimination especially if we tell that it is an insult to foreigner. If we are called small or dark-skinned, we should not react in the form of telling they are devil, stupid, or other painful words)

In this particular post, no one replied nor reacted but there were many Tourists (likers) of threads. Based on the analysis of the threads, “Likes” indicates approval and in most cases, the number of tourists affects the number of commentators, labeled as Minglers, Devotees, and Insiders. In the case of the commentators, there were more minglers compared to devotees and insiders. These minglers commented on the threads just to show their opinion about the issue. This showed the characteristics of minglers - “only per functionally interested in showing their opinions” (Kozinet, 2002).

Through the use of MAXQDA to analyze the comments and threads on national issues, 14 codes were generated. (1) Politics and national government code are comments on the state of the government when the thread was posted, including criticism of government officials. (2) Misdevelopment code included comments about the negative development in the country. (3) Negative characteristics of Pinoy code included comments on the negative characteristics of Filipino like crab mentality, brain drain, and the mañana habit. (4) Policies in the Philippines code included comments on policies in the country and criticisms as well as suggestions on how to improve them. (5) Prescription code included comments that prescribe actions or strategies to improve certain situations. (6) The Philippines and the Others code are comments comparing the Philippines to other countries, particularly the country where the OFW is working or have worked in. (7) Proposition code are comments that contradicted the thread’s main idea, or contradicted the comments of others. (8) Before and after code included comments about the difference of the present generation compared to the generation of the commentator. It showed how OFWs reminisced their days in the Philippines and their sentiments regarding the observed changes in the attitude and behaviour of the Filipino youth. (9) Religion code included comments that showed the system of Filipino religion. (10) Empathy code included comments that showed sadness over a situation or a system. (11) Dishonour code included comments that showed how shameful they were about something or an issue. (12) Humour code included comments that showed how OFWs made fun of and joke about an issue. (13) Pinoy Pride code included comments that honoured the victory or achievements of Filipinos who brought pride in their country; and (14) Only Pinoy/Filipino code included comments that showed the positive characteristics of Filipino like hospitality, respectfulness, and traditions like circumcision and festival.

An example of a comment under politics and government code is the comment of Mr. Jaime Espiritu about the Pork barrel or PDAF issue that was exposed in the Philippine media at the time when the thread is posted. Some of the comments that were coded are the following:

Syempre, kaya nga sila nakikipag patayan para manalo sa eleksiyon eh dahil sa pork. Bakit nga naman sila papaya na alisin yun? Eh di nawalan sila kurakot he he he. Malinaw na ang gumagawa ng batas ay pabor sa gumagawa nitoo at hindi kailanman papabor sa taong bayan na nagbabayad ng buwis kuha mo? O di pa malinaw sayo?

(Of course, they want to win on election for the pork barrel fund. Why would they approve to remove that? It shows that the law is in favor for them and never to people who are paying the taxes, do you get it? Or it is not yet clear to you?) The persuasion strategy used in the threads was also analyzed. There are three persuasive strategies or modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos. In Pathosethoslogos.com (2013), these are defined as: 1) Ethos or the ethical appeal is used to convince an audience of the author's credibility or character. It shows that the commentator is fair or unbiased in his/her comments. 2) Pathos or the emotional appeal is used to persuade an audience by appealing to their emotions. In the context of the OFWs in the Pinoy OFW Page, these are comments and posts about the difficult experiences or sufferings of some OFWs. 3) Logos or the appeal to logic uses reason such as comments citing facts and statistics, historical and literal analogies.

In the following comment of Crisostomo Dedios regarding criticisms of President Aquino's actions, the intense feeling of nationalism of an OFW was shown. He used pathos to appeal for a more positive action. This led to reactions and suggestions on how to be of help instead of being critics of the Aquino Administration. This confirms that nationalism must be seen in action, not merely in words. By comparing, contradicting, and commanding comments, OFWs are well aware of their roles in nation building. It is not a mere responsibility or obligation for someone, but a choice.

Wag na po kayo mamansin tumulong at gumawa nalang po kayo mga senador, dakdak kayo ng dakdak wala naman kayo ginagawang maganda para sa bansa. Dapat sama sama tayong magpray sa lord at magkaisa at tulongan natin si sir pinoy sa pagsulong at ikakaganda at iunlad n gating bansa at suportahan ang palano ng pangulo...

(We should cooperate and help our senators instead of complaining because it didn't make good things for our country. We must pray together to the lord and unite, and help Sir Pinoy in the development of our country...).

The top ten threads on national issue were used to analyze the persuasive strategy used by the threads (Table 1). There were four threads for each Pathos and Logos while there were two threads that used ethos. The average number of comments for threads using pathos is 250, 191 for threads using logos, and 211 for threads using ethos. This indicates that if a member of Pinoy OFW Page used pathos in a post, it would result to more comments and reactions. This finding is supported by the result of the U.S. Pollster Gallup survey of how people in 152 countries feel about their lives. This survey showed that the Philippines is the most emotional nation in the world (Daniel, 2012).

Table 1. Persuasive strategy and number of comments used by ten selected threads about national issues.

Thread	Number of Comments	Persuasive strategy used
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=271528489552899&se t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702 &type=1	541	pathos
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=525025520869860&se t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702 &type=1	262	logos
https://www.facebook.com/OverseasFilipinoWorkers/posts/576718252367253	274	logos
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=272740236098391&se t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702&type=1	278	ethos
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=578001525572259&se t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702&type=1	205	pathos
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=275636182475463&se t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702&type=1	143	ethos
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=417365328302547&se	111	pathos

t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702&type=1 https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=270975836274831&se	135	logos
t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702&type=1 https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=547639291941816&se	144	pathos
t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702&type=1 https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=373267216045692&se	94	logos
t=a.261068697265545.64243.126997140672702&type=1		

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This study is applicable only to OFWs who participated and interacted in Pinoy OFW Facebook Page from August 2011 to August 2013. Threads about national issues were analyzed without direct link or referral to all OFWs, thus this study cannot generalize facts. Based on the review and analysis of the page content, the insights were gathered:

- Pinoy OFW Facebook page is an online community where Overseas Filipino Workers can interact among themselves without any restriction. The page administration always interact with OFWs commenting on the threads by answering questions raised and by agreeing or disagreeing to the comments of OFWs.
- There were more participation in the threads than interaction among OFWs as shown by the number of minglers, devotees, and insiders. It showed that OFWs were more comfortable by merely commenting (participation) in the threads and not in interacting with other commentators.
- The 14 codes generated showed the different personalities, values, and experiences of OFWs.
- The level of participation and/or interaction of OFWs in the threads about national issues in Pinoy OFW is related to the persuasive strategy used in the threads.

The study of online Filipino communities should be pursued. The use of two or more sites is recommended to compare the level of participation or interaction of OFWs. It is also recommended that researchers try to be a participant observer to validate the findings on persuasion. Textual analysis can also be done to find more meaning in the threads.

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