

# Novel or Novice: Exploring the Contextual Realities of Youth Political Participation in the Age of Social Media

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Social media platforms, as emerging political spaces, have paved the way for the re-conceptualization of political engagement, especially among the youth. Their participatory character, particularly blogging, social networking and content sharing, has encouraged more people to be involved in political issues and has contributed to changing the mode of protest from streets to cyberspace. Studies, however, show a dearth of sociological inquiry on the social impacts of the Internet, particularly on political engagement. This paper discusses the contextual realities of political participation in the age of social media from a social perspective of the Internet and the information society, using online content analysis, in-depth interviews and participant observation. In particular, the qualitative exploratory approach of this study focuses on how the key social platforms of the Internet affect political participation and, in turn, shape social movements.

*Keywords: political participation, social media, social movements, youth, social construction of technology, creative destruction*

## INTRODUCTION

In May 2009, a group of citizens took their advocacy against the tax and duty impositions on imported books in the Philippines to the Internet through Facebook, a social media platform which allows its users to network, post and share content and create and gather support for various causes online.

Prior to putting up the Facebook cause, advocates against the book tax have been ardent on forwarding their campaign in the mainstream media but only a few newspapers carried their message, more often in opinion columns than news reports. But within the same month, the Facebook cause which gathered more than 2,000 sign-ups online claimed victory as President Gloria Arroyo revoked Finance Department Order 17-09. Although the Internet, its social media platforms in particular, has already been used for protest on many occasions before, the antibook tax campaign was the first successful online advocacy, and what made it more remarkable was that it succeeded despite the absence of street protests.

In contrast, in June 2009, despite the overwhelming sign-ups on the Facebook cause against House Resolution 1109, which aimed to convene the two chambers of Congress as a Constitutional Assembly to amend the Philippine Constitution, the street protest which called people to action failed to gather critical mass. Crowd estimates ranged from a little over 5,000 according to policemen, to 10,000 according to a national daily, to 13,000 at most according to the organizers of the multisectoral rally held on a weekday, after working hours, in the middle of the country's central business district. It was the largest rally yet staged against moves to amend the Constitution in three years (Esguerra 2009), but the difference in number between the crowd estimates and those who joined online was apparent. At that time, close to 100,000 people had already signed-up for the Facebook cause against HR 1109.

Social networking platforms such as Facebook, Plurk and Twitter became popular in early 2008, coinciding with the exposé and investigation of a major corruption scandal involving the President, her family and several other cabinet and appointed officials, after opposition politicians alleged that the national broadband project dealt with a Chinese company was overpriced by \$135 million. At the height of the scandal, Facebook groups, causes and posts and tweets on the issue spread like wildfire, particularly among the youth, encouraging increased participation in street protests organized by traditional social movements (TSM). Premium has since been put on online social media platforms, particularly blogs and social networking and content sharing sites, as tools of protest, notwithstanding the success of US President Barack Obama's online political campaign which not only gathered a mass of volunteers and donors but has encouraged the youth to get involved and vote. However, it was not until the success of the antibook tax campaign that online social movements (OSM) gained some validity as a social force.

Unfortunately, the rather dismal attendance during the rally against HR 1109 watered this down and continued to cast doubts on the effectivity of OSMs in achieving their goals or at the very least encourage active political participation, highlighting a challenge to veer away from an emerging new form of armchair activism.

This qualitative exploratory study is an attempt to present the dynamics of political participation in the age of social media given different contextual realities with a view of understanding the relation between these dynamics and the traditions and culture of protest, as well as identifying their implications and nuances.

## SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Continuously evolving technologies as well as the changing approach of the public toward civic engagement, a social undercurrent, has redefined social movements and political participation (Rheingold 2002; Costanza-Chock 2008; Jenkins 2008), especially among the youth, who consider these technological advancements as demotic. In the context of the enduring tradition of social movements in the Philippines, such change becomes apparent as traditional approaches of civic sense are replaced with alternative expressions of civic virtues. If before young Filipinos were more likely to identify with and join organized groups with a set of ideals and express their concern through unconventional political actions, such as demonstrations and boycotts (Wattenberg 2008), the youth today are more likely to reject dogmatism, avoid commitment and express their indignation through rather conventional and convenient political actions, such as conversations, group discussions and volunteering. But this is not to say that the youth are becoming less concerned or are willing to stake less. In many ways, the social platforms of the Internet amplify these alternatives (conventional political actions) and reinforce and rationalize the view that political participation does not necessarily need to be inconvenient. Appropriately, considering a culture of protest and our long tradition of social struggles (our usual approaches being 'unconventional' for others), it is necessary to clarify, if not redefine, what social movements are and what political participation is to identify with which perspective to view the contextual realities of OSMs.

Social movements are purposive collective actions which an individual identifies with and draws (political) energies from and which outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of a society (Etzioni

1993; Castells 1997). Such a view allows us to look at social movements with a broader and more open perspective, without disputing the delineations between offline TSMs, such as civil society, nongovernment organizations, advocacy groups, political groups, spontaneous forms of mass actions and so on and being able to consider virtual communities (Rheingold 1993) and online cause-oriented groups (OSMs) as part of the category. On the other hand, political participation is an act of citizenship (Jenkins 2008) that connects an individual's views and concerns with that of the public's through active forms of engagement. This then considers intent as a fundamental determinant of one's action or non-action as a response to current situations and likewise allows for creativity both in matter and manner of expression.

## CONTEXTUAL REALITIES OF ONLINE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Dispute continues on making sense of the implications of the Internet on society. There have been attempts to explore the social impacts of the Internet (Rheingold 1993, 2002; Castells 1996, 1997, 1998; Uslaner 2000; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, Robinson 2001; Kim 2007; Hassan 2008) but while some argue that its platforms and mobility has allowed for increased participation in socio-political issues, albeit in new forms and ways (Rheingold 2002; Jenkins 2008), others contend that it has desensitized civics, especially among the youth (Bauerlein 2008) and that its much proclaimed effects and gains on citizenship remains questionable (Garnham 2001).

However, the Internet's developing platforms and increasing popularity and necessity in many aspects of life has led to its inevitable appreciation. Its ability to encourage, foster and develop grassroots initiatives has attracted many TSMs to bring their cause to cyberspace. At the same time, a sense of social activism has bred itself among many Internet users, enough to develop OSMs. The mutual shaping of political participation and the Internet's social platforms, as well as their impact on social movements, may be well understood in view of three contextual realities with which members of these groups make sense of, namely: Internet as a New Technology, Internet as a New Medium and Internet as a New Space.

### Internet as a New Technology

To date, Castell's (1996, 1997, 1998) work on the network society and the information age proposes the "most illuminating, imaginative and intellectually rigorous account" (Webster 2002) rationalizing the importance and impact of communication technologies on social life. He claimed that

novel and more efficient forms of communication and information storage and processing are stimuli that will drive economic, political, social and cultural changes. In particular, he envisioned that “political systems will evolve which will be responsive to the demands of a more informed population with easy access to a vast quantity of information, and less susceptible to traditional methods of persuasion” (Feather 2003). Certainly this still begs the question of whether OSMs reflect this evolution, but as far as being causative, it must be noted that Castell’s view essentially echoes McLuhan’s technological determinism.

Corrections to “the idea that technology affects society in a one-way relationship” have since been explored in sociology, but the popularity of deterministic thinking continues to affect how people respond to technology and innovations in their everyday life (Bell 2007). Deterministic thinking separates technology, as tools, from society. Tools, McLuhan (2007) argued, are extensions of man which in turn shape human existence. Such deterministic view was evident when radical left-leaning TSMs, considering Internet platforms as merely necessary “digital tools for digital times” (Pabico 1997), started building websites for propaganda. Pabico (1997) noted that “erstwhile technophobes of nearly Luddite proportions, *natdems* (national democrats) used to dismiss the Net as an imperialist tool to suit imperialist designs. Perhaps owing to a ‘rectification’ of sorts, they have now extended their belligerency status over to the Net...” With an agit-prop, top-down perspective to educate the public, they have, for a long time, struggled against the nature of the Internet; that it was designed to invite an open discussion among its users, as opposed to simply being a digital mimeograph. Such politburo approach remained fairly consequential until social media platforms, which exploit the participative quality of the Internet, became popular. In particular, blogging, which encouraged comments albeit with the option of screening, began to replace the appeal of static websites; correspondences which used to be privately done through electronic mail were increasingly being done in public, inviting other people, ideas and opinions.

### Internet as a New Medium

Developing social media platforms have increased activity among Internet users, particularly in the Philippines. A global research on social media use shows that from 2006 to 2008, reading and posting blogs have increased most in the country. Despite a still low level of Internet penetration (figures range from less than 10 percent based on OpenNet Initiative (2009) to 15.4

percent based on UniversalMcCann (2008), blog readership, among those who have access, almost tripled from 33 percent in 2006 to 90 percent in 2008, while active Internet users posting blogs surged from 14 percent to 65 percent (UniversalMcCann 2008). Likewise, the Philippines posted the most number of users who have created an account in a social networking site, such as Friendster, MySpace and Facebook (83.1%), and is consistently part of the top five countries sharing and consuming other Internet content (photos, videos and podcasts) (UniversalMcCann 2008). These data show that while Internet penetration remains marginal, those who have access are increasingly exploiting the Internet as a new medium that facilitates multi-user and multi-modal forms of communication.

As the connectivity and mobility provided by the Internet increasingly becomes part of everyday routine, its use is reflected in the various aspects of social life, including expressions of protest. Indeed, technology use is essentially a form of resistance, a manner with which the way things are is challenged, that things could be done differently. The phenomenon of using the key social media platforms of the Internet for protest then does not only become a resistance to the status quo but also to the old forms of protesting against the status quo. Wattenberg (2008) noted that:

“Young people are almost always in the forefront of new types of activities, and are typically more adventurous and open to novel ways of doing things. If there really is a new kind of political engagement, then it seems reasonable to hypothesize that young people would be among the first practitioners of new means of involvement in the political process.”

Wattenberg (2008) classifies writing to public officials, donating to a campaign or cause and working for a campaign as conventional political actions, while he regards demonstrations and boycotts as unconventional. Jenkins (2008), on the other hand, contends that demonstrations and boycotts are not the only alternatives to what Wattenberg classified as conventional political actions. He argues that “crystallizing one’s political perspectives into a photomontage that is intended for broader circulation is no less than an act of citizenship than writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper that may or may not actually print it” (Jenkins 2008). In context, however, ‘conventional’ or the usual modes of political action in the Philippines would refer to street protests or activities which “object is not just to make opinions heard by those in power, but to actually change the status quo through means other than elections” (Wattenberg 2008) and this has been true for most TSMs

for decades and continues to be true today, albeit with dwindling participation. Unconventional modes of political participation then are those that strive to work “within the confines of the political establishment” (Wattenberg 2008), including joining OSMs, which harness the social media platforms of the Internet.

When the scandal over the national broadband project broke out early in 2008, TSMs exploited the then emerging social media platforms such as Facebook, Plurk and Twitter along with older ones like blogging and content sharing through YouTube to inform, agitate and encourage people to protest against corruption in government. At the same time, OSMs began emerging, initially through Facebook groups created mostly by individuals also involved in TSMs. Internet platforms were mainly used as media to rally the public, similar to how texting became instrumental in gathering people at EDSA in People Power Two. Blog entries, posts and tweets on the issue circulated, developed into online discussions and built enough excitement to translate the indignation of Internet users, particularly the youth, into active participation in street demonstrations. It was noticeable, however, that TSMs were struggling to reinvent street protests as they continued to experiment with different formats, including holding public concerts and silent rallies in lieu of the usual large political gatherings, which were characterized by a slew of banners, speeches and sloganeering; some even preferred holding group conversations and school forums. Excitement for street protests waned towards the end of the school year as students went on vacation but while the momentum was gone upon their return to school, protests online continued.

From being merely a tool and an alternative medium for many TSMs, the Internet increasingly began to become an essential component for emerging social movements, in particular, those formed by students and young professionals. Podcasting, webcasting or the digital distribution of recorded conversations and forums on issues became an imperative. Internet users have been re-imagining the traditional approaches of civic sense and replacing them with alternative expressions of civic virtues; a superficial transformation of indignation which accommodates convenience and consumption. Internet activity has become the mode of protest in itself. But because increased political participation through the Internet does not necessarily translate to involvement in demonstrations, much less to tangible changes in policy or government, TSMs had much discontent about it. This has particularly become a threat to the survival of radical groups as it rejects and emphasizes the

ineffectivity of mass actions and prefers changing the system through elections or institutional means.

Consumption has been traditionally regarded as opposite to citizen participation (Keum et al. 2004; Jenkins 2008). Critics from various fields contend that commercialized mass media has contributed to “the decline of civic culture”, as its emphasis on personal needs consequently diminishes civic-mindedness by “creating an individualistic consumption-oriented culture” (Keum et al. 2004), the ideological opposition to (radical) TSMs. But in their study of citizen-consumer behavior, Keum et al. (2004), find that in the “social world,” consumption does not necessarily oppose or diminish civics.

“That is, consumer culture and civic culture both manifest themselves through integration into certain social roles and sets. From this perspective, it is easy to see how potentially conflicting forms of consumption are inter-related and tied to civic participation. To be clear, this study does not seek to defend or advocate a culture focused on status and materialism, nor one that requires the proper display of taste to enter into networks of engagement and social power. It does, however, seek to begin to clarify our understanding of the complex connections among these constructs and shed greater light on the role of the media in generating consumer and civic culture” (Keum et al. 2004).

These findings support Bakardjieva’s (2005) revision of the argument of the social construction of technology that shaping the functions of technology does not only rely on the influence of “relevant social groups” (Bell 2007), but more importantly on ordinary users, the consumers. While many encourage grassroots participation, TSMs normally reject challenges to their framework, making political participation through the Internet and its platforms akin to Bakardjieva’s correction – that the re/construction of social processes, as in protests, are shaped not only by the influence of relevant social groups (TSMs) but more so through the participation of ordinary individuals (Internet users forming OSMs).

The changing nature of protest and political participation, especially among the youth, who comprise a large majority of both the population and Internet users in the Philippines, are indicative of the “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 1950) of social movements, a likewise inevitable part of modernization where current chaos is rationalized by an imminent synthesis. Case in point is the blurring lines between TSMs and OSMs as TSMs go

online and OSMs form offline groups, albeit informally through meet-ups. But, notwithstanding the upcoming 2010 presidential elections, the most evident illustration of creative destruction is the recent rapid emergence and decline of many TSMs and OSMs. The Obama campaign's proof-of-concept for the viability of using the Internet to encourage political participation has undeniably excited the public to action both offline and online, but while many of these groups claim novelty, they are merely reinventing the wheel.

### Internet as a New Space

Views that the Internet is the new "public sphere" (Habermas 1999) or that it has commodified the public sphere have been explored from different perspectives by social scientists, even before the emergence of social media platforms (Rheingold 1993). However, it was not until their introduction, which allowed for increased participation, interaction, convergence and, later on, mobility on and through the Internet, that the idea became more apparent. This has been particularly noticeable in 'wired countries' or countries where Internet penetration is high.

The notion that the public sphere is an amorphous network where people, ideas and opinions convene without coercion is realized to a certain extent in wired countries. This assumes, however, the absence of Internet censorship or laws that dissuade freedom of expression. But in a recent survey of OpenNet Initiative (2009), wired countries appear to have at least suspected levels of social or political filtering, while countries with lower levels of Internet penetration, as the Philippines, appear to be the freest, with no evidence of any censorship. This suggests that, generally, as the Internet is exploited as a medium so much so that users begin to create an alternative, communicative and political space, governments tend to regulate its development; effectively, such reaction impacts dissent online, particularly the growth of OSMs. Case in point is South Korea, the most wired country with 90 percent of its households having access to the Internet, where the Korean Communications Standards Commission started to police online content since 2008, after protests and debate on the Internet drove President Lee Myung Bak's entire cabinet to resign over his decision to lift the ban on importing US beef (OpenNet Initiative 2009). But while online censorship does impinge on freedom of expression, it does not necessarily diminish dissent, as in the case of other wired countries like Malaysia and Singapore (George 2006) and even Kuwait (Dashti 2009), where blogging thrives and is increasingly being accepted as a nontraditional form of journalism. Interestingly, the audience

of these blogs and posts as well as the public conversation it created online has developed a constituency which has sociopolitical impact (George 2006; Dashti 2009), akin to the idea of OSMs. Accordingly then, Castell's vision that in the information age, an evolved political system would be more responsive to the demands of an informed population merits a review.

While the impact of OSMs on policy makers has been marginal, its impact on the public has been enormous so much so that confidence in the potential of the Internet has only created a *virtuous cycle of credence* and this appears to be true despite levels of censorship (George 2006; Dashti 2009). In wired countries, the creation of OSMs appear to be organic to the Internet, that is, despite the absence of TSMs, constituencies are able to build on ideas and opinions posted online, although without assurance of formal organization. In contrast, there has not been any case to argue that this is true for countries with lower levels of Internet penetration. On the one hand, this suggests that the contextual realities of the Internet are evolutionary, which develops as the level of access increases; on the other, it also suggests that the contextual realities of the Internet are a function of prevailing social realities, noting the absence or at least the waned tradition of mass political actions in most wired countries, and that despite increases on the level of access will be constant as long as such realities remain unchanged.

## FROM CONSUMERS TO CITIZENS

The social transitions brought about by the Internet are similar to the changes that the pervasiveness of television has brought before (particularly as a new technology and a new medium). The difference, however, is that because the Internet and its social media platforms allow for increased (faster and more direct) participation from the audience, a characteristic unique to it, and in effect for grassroots initiatives in the context of social movements, the transitions have become a concern for TSMs, particularly in the Philippines where a robust tradition of civic engagement and political participation has taken root and has developed a formula of protest. For instance, social media platforms have given the option for people to become 'passively active' online through hyperlinking or content sharing; such passive activity allows for the expression of opinions of the inarticulate who would otherwise be disengaged if not for their Internet access. Amid the chaos of transition, however, the effect of OSMs on the public seem to be more significant than their actual impact on policy makers as the virtuous cycle of credence, along with cases of successful OSMs or the remarkable use of social media platforms for

indignation, as in the case of the recent protests in Iran, continue to build the validity of political participation through the Internet.

As shown by how Internet usage has shaped political engagement in wired communities (Rheingold 1993; Jenkins 2008) and countries (George 2006; Kim 2007; Hassan 2008; Dashti 2009; OpenNet Initiative 2009), the future towards the construction of a new space online also appears to be certain. This, however, underscores the importance of at least an informed, if not an 'educated,' public. But while such space is expected to develop among less wired countries as Internet access and connectivity increases, there are several caveats. First, information overload would be apparent. Because social media platforms are essentially storages of content, Internet users are required to 'pull' from a wide array of information, not to mention opinions, made available on rapid succession and a public less 'educated' can be easily confused or be driven by propaganda. Misinformation is also likely to happen, as in the case of the reported death of American actor Jeff Goldblum on Twitter. On June 2009, 'delicioushair' tweeted that Goldblum died in New Zealand, after falling on the set of his new movie. The tweet spread fast on other social media platforms, as well as Google and other websites, and was eventually reported on Today Australia, a local morning news show, where police reports confirmed the incident. The television footage was, likewise, quickly uploaded on the content sharing site YouTube. When the news reached the US, Goldblum appeared on television to falsify the rumor and denied that he was in New Zealand on the weekend of his reported death. The complacency to accept such information as fact, especially on the part of the mainstream media which disregarded a journalistic maxim to verify rumors, highlights an adverse effect of the virtuous cycle of credence on the Internet, as people begin to respond reactively to new information and seemingly opposes the objectives of a public sphere.

Third is the cult of celebrity. Unlike in other forms of mass media, however, cults of celebrity on the Internet tend to be more defined than mass and its audiences are more likely to sustain interest, as a result of narrowcasting and owing to the pull content nature of social media platforms. While there are instances, particularly in YouTube, where a cult becomes mass, this usually happens when such content is able to crossover to traditional mass media and this is further nuanced by a convergence of media technologies (Jenkins 2008), which likewise allow for 'alternative,' multimodal content to thrive both online and in other mass medium. Case in point of such cult behavior is the success of the "Colbert Report," an American news parody shown both

on cable television and online through its website (where, also because of its popularity, Goldblum first made an appearance to falsify rumors of his death). Steven Colbert, comedian and host of the program, has gathered numerous and committed fans locally that it catapulted him in the early stages of the 2008 Democratic primaries, as a nominee.

But the most precarious, in context of a new space, is homogeneity, though it is not so much an effect of the Internet as it is a reflection of socio-cultural reality. Even as it may provide anonymity to its users, encouraging bolder behavior, language and opinions, the public appreciates the Internet as part of a larger media environment – an environment which, on the whole, is prone to reinforce certain social controls and these reflect online. Forms of censorship, which by trend develop as countries get wired, likewise contributes to homogeneity. South Korea's case is evident of both situations. In 2005, when a girl who allowed her dog to defecate on the subway and later refused to clean it up was caught on video, which was later shared on the Internet, indignant users traced and publicly exposed her. She was ridiculed as the "dog poop girl" and the humiliation drove her to quit university (Kim 2007; OpenNet Initiative 2009). Kim (2007) also noted a 'spiral of invisibility' in the South Korean blogosphere, where bloggers posting favorable remarks about the US and Japan are mobbed by angry comments from other Korean bloggers, forcing them to remain anonymous. Partly driven by such "online vigilantism," South Korea has legislated real-name registration as a requirement for any user to post a comment on blogs and public forums (OpenNet Initiative 2009). While this appears to be a proactive response to such social incidences, it has also impeded on freedom of expression, as in the cases of censorship and arrests of bloggers who were vocal, negatively and favorably, of some presidential candidates in the 2007 elections (Sung 2007).

While these caveats have lesser emphasis on OSMs, they highlight the dynamics of engaging a public of consumers to becoming a public of citizens, making the issue of a new space primordial on quality than on quantity or structure. Seemingly opposite is the case of the Philippines today where, because of traditional (unconventional in Wattenberg's classification) frames, groupings, numbers and personalities, remain to be the focus of impact of social movements. Social media platforms have undeniably paved the way for the reconceptualization of political participation in social movements, especially among the youth. Their participatory character has and continues to encourage more people to engage political issues and at the same time

contributes to changing the mode of protest from streets to cyberspace. At the very least, it has become a political barometer and an entry point for concerned and interested people but who would otherwise not join social movements.

In characterizing Asian protests, Lee (2002) described the middle class as “the main locomotive of democratization,” citing in particular the opposition to former President Ferdinand Marcos led by the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections, which resulted in People Power One. The influence of the middle class is a prevailing social reality in the Philippines that despite the decades-long tradition of left-leaning TSMs, the success or failure of protests have been rather dependent on their opinion and action or non-action. People Power Two was likewise successful because of the middle class, which then exploited text messaging to gather their ranks. But between the two People Powers, both of which successful and TSM-driven, the middle class has disengaged from politics (Villegas 2009). Villegas (2009) qualified that Filipino middle classness is ascetic and should be viewed as a permeable social class that is not so much defined by income or educational attainment, but by a set of values which allows “entry points into middle-classness that transcend being rich or poor, and as such, disarm the Manichean class divide...” This characteristic complements the Internet’s inclusive nature. Likewise, conceptualizing the Filipino middle class this way suggests two things in relation to its contextual realities – first, the ‘digital divide’ or the marginalization of those who do not have access to the Internet may not necessarily be relevant; and second, that the convergence of people, ideas and opinion towards middle classness, in effect, creates a homogenous public, as opposed to Habermas’ (1999) view that diversity and debate characterize a public. Internet access in the Philippines is nuanced because of the popularity and practicality of Internet cafés but plurality on the Internet does not necessarily translate to diversity. That the opinion of a value-based middle class dominates and invites other people of different economic and education profiles to converge on an inclusive, participatory platform and level off with a compromised view also suggests that a new space will most likely be an online version of the existing social framework, a case indicative of Althusser’s concept of ‘conditioned helplessness.’

The difference between the success of the OSM against the book tax and the failure of the rally against HR 1109 to gather enough numbers, despite the overwhelming sign-ups on the OSM against it, offer a stark snapshot of the creative destruction social movements are experiencing in the age of

social media, particularly in terms of political participation. But other factors merit consideration in evaluating them, such as their difference in magnitude. Notwithstanding the upcoming 2010 elections, the government giving in to public pressure to revoke Finance Department Order 17-09 constituted merely an attempt to win public affirmation especially when compared with how it has rejected calls to abandon charter change through Constituent Assembly. The explicit call of the Facebook cause against HR 1109 should also be noted—condemn the representatives who filed the bill; write to your representative to condemn the bill; write to Senators, seeking support in condemning the bill; spread the cause to family, relatives, friends and colleagues nationwide and abroad; organize and attend local “eyeball events”; and remember the proponents of the bill and vote them out of office on May 2010—that it meant to encourage what Wattenberg (2008) defines as conventional political actions, as opposed to the rather traditional ways of organized protest. Moreover, the online participation of overseas Filipinos should be taken into account.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

What seems to be clear, then, is that social media platforms have enhanced political participation and that the creative destruction of social movements, an aspect of modernity, is inevitable as Internet connectivity increases and its use becomes more and more indispensable. Social movements that continue to view the Internet as a tool then are being left behind and their inability to appreciate it both as a new medium and new mode of dissent only widens the gap between them and others which embrace and exploit its potentials.

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