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The Internet and Mobile Technologies in Election Campaigns: The GABRIELA Women's Party During the 2007 Philippine Elections

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ABSTRACT. New mobile communication technologies are gaining popularity in the study of political communication, as political actors across the world exploit their applications in the hope of affecting voting behavior. Social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Friendster have provided interesting and effective uses for political communication, and these trends are now migrating from the West to Asia. The 2007 midterm elections in the Philippines, conducted against a backdrop of violence and extrajudicial killings, generated intense international interest. In a historic development, the General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action (GABRIELA), the largest women's organization in the Philippines, won two legislative seats through its GABRIELA Women's Party (GWP). GABRIELA also secured the most votes in the overseas absentee voting system. The party's win marks a major reference point for women in politics. It symbolizes the growing power of Asian women and provides an illustration of the use of new media technologies for electoral campaigning. This study explores the GWP through a case study method and in-depth interviews (see the Appendix). As the party's limited funds restricted its use of mainstream media advertising during the elections, the GWP turned to Internet and mobile technologies. As a new entrant to the use of these technologies, the GWP was not able to maximize the potential of the Internet in its campaign, yet the party was able to make effective use of mobile phones to reach voters. The Internet and mobile media should not be seen as a replacement for traditional campaign strategies, but rather as integral parts of a holistic political communication network. While the Internet may complement the use of traditional media and grassroots campaigning, as it enables campaigns to reach a growing segment of the online population, the mobile phone deserves greater attention as a tool of personal communication with the electorate.

KEYWORDS. Elections, GABRIELA, mobile technologies, Philippines, social networking

Recent studies have found that the Internet now figures prominently in political strategies. Political campaign Web sites that contain dedicated candidate profiles and candidate blogs

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have become major aspects of election campaigns that seek to reach out to those sections of the electorate actively seeking information and participation in platform formulation (Bimber & Davis, 2003; Davis, 1999; Grönlund, 2001; Kluver, 2007). The latest trends point to the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Friendster. In Asian countries, political campaigning has evolved through a mixture of traditional and new media technologies. These are seen as useful in reaching diverse electorates, not only within countries, but also across the region and the globe, because the Internet and new media increase the speed and quality of political communication and are especially useful for targeting overseas voters (Albrecht, 2006; Foot & Schneider, 2006; Han, 2007; Kluver, 2007). Bentivegna (2006) explored how the use of information communication technologies (ICTs) shaped citizens' refocusing of their political attention away from formal politics. Social movements, civil associations, single issue groups, and even discussion groups can be considered indicators of what has been called "life politics" or "subpolitics." The Internet plays an increasingly important role in Asian campaigns, and candidates who sense the political shift to the new medium are venturing into cyberspace, driven by a new maxim: To find voters, look online (Associated Press, 2008). Though they are often neglected, it is also the case that mobile technologies are quickly becoming key tools for political campaigns that aspire to reach a wide audience, and achieve faster communication and more effective information dissemination.

This exploratory study focuses on how Internet and mobile technologies are being used in political campaigns in the Republic of the Philippines, one of the most politically active and democratic countries in Southeast Asia. Politicians in the Philippines have recently experimented with the Internet and mobile phones in political campaigning amid a context of a comparatively inferior ICT infrastructure. The General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action (GABRIELA) Women's Party (GWP), among others, provides an example of this new approach.[1] Given its limited funds for traditional

forms of mass communication, which have limited reach and which are increasingly expensive, the party has attempted to use Internet and mobile technologies to expand its support. As a result, the party won two seats in the 2007 midterm elections, making it the only women's group in the country's history to achieve success in the party-list group contest (Alojamiento, 2007).

This study explores how the GWP used the Internet via its own party Web site and social networking sites, and how it exploited the popularity of the mobile phone during the campaign to garner local and international votes. It assesses the extent to which the GWP considered that it had been successful in reaching the electorate. It uses a case study approach (Vidich & Lyman, 2000) involving in-depth interviews with the party's leaders and spokespersons (see the Appendix) and an analysis of the party's Web site and campaign materials.[2]

The article provides a brief background to politics in the Philippines and the importance of the founding of the GWP, both as a women's group and a political party. The "personal influence" hypothesis is discussed as a theoretical framework, with the aim of exploring how mobile technologies facilitate interactive political communication. The literature review discusses the roles of specific technologies upon which this study focused during the GWP's 2007 campaign. The Research Questions and Methodology section explains our approach, while our section on Findings discusses the data gathered from the analysis and interviews.

CONTEXT: THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE PHILIPPINES AND GABRIELA'S BREAKTHROUGH

The Republic of the Philippines, an Asian nation consisting of more than 7,000 islands, has experienced several major political transitions since it was ceded by Spain to the United States (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2007) under the 1898 Treaty of Paris. Political and territorial subdivisions and local governments are divided administratively into 16 regions, 78 provinces,

96 cities, 1,513 municipalities, and 41,943 barangays (villages). Since independence in 1946, the country has had six constitutions (the most recent being the 1987 settlement) and 10 presidents, two of which have been women.

The Philippines has a democratic, presidential form of government and is composed of the executive (the president), the legislature (consisting of the Senate and House of Representatives), and the judiciary (the Supreme Court and the lower courts). Following the restoration of democracy in 1986, elections for president and vice president have been held every six years, and midterm elections are held every three years for 12 of the 24 senate seats,[3] for congressmen, and for local officials. Elections are conducted by popular vote. In 1995, the party-list system, based on Republic Act No.7941, was signed into law. Its aim was to enable marginalized groups to achieve representation in the legislature through a competitive quota system. Twenty percent of the 260 seats are reserved for the party-list groups. A two-percent share of the total vote entitles a party to one seat; three seats is the maximum to which any party can be elected under this part of the system. The party-list system was active in the 1998, 2001, 2004, and 2007 elections, but it was only in 2004 and 2007 that the GWP won one and two seats, respectively. In 2007, the party-list system also made history by stimulating the registration of 93 parties, the highest since the system was introduced. More than 30 million voters participated in the 2007 elections.

The 2007 midterms marked two milestones for the country's largest women's movement. First, the GWP became the only women's party to be elected to Congress for a second straight term. Second, among the party-list groups, the GWP obtained the highest number of votes from Filipinos abroad.

The victory of the Philippines' first female president, Corazon Aquino, in 1986 heralded not only freedom from dictatorship, but the empowerment of women in a largely male-dominated society where women's rights were neglected during the years of Martial Law under former dictator, Ferdinand Marcos. However, Aquino's reign did not end these abuses, and incidents of torture of female detainees remained a problem.[4] As a result, the women's movement in the Philippines was at its strongest during Aquino's term.

GABRIELA was at the helm of this rejuvenated feminist politics during the country's transition to democracy (Alojamiento, 2007). The name GABRIELA is in honor of Gabriela Silang, one of the country's first women generals who fought against Spain during the 18th century. GABRIELA was founded in 1984 and brought together 42 local organizations, amid a strong desire to promote women's rights and to overthrow the dictatorship. It has since grown into an alliance of over 250 organizations and even has a United States chapter, which opened in 1989. Individual members of the movement include women workers, peasants, the urban poor, housewives, professionals, religious groups, and students across the country. The movement focuses on issues affecting women such as landlessness, militarization, the foreign debt crisis, prostitution, and trafficking, to name but a few. Ty (2006) considers GABRIELA to be an influential and prominent movement because of its foundation during the period of Martial Law, and describes its role as follows:

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

GABRIELA typically falls under the heading of what Chadwick (2007) calls "hybrid mobilization movements": organizations that have multiple and intertwined mobilization strategies involving rapid switches between online and offline repertoires. GABRIELA is active not just on women's issues, but on several other civic issues such as land ownership reform, responsible governance, and education.

Claiming to represent the women's sector, the GWP, the political wing of GABRIELA, won two party-list seats in the 2007 midterms when Liza Maza, first elected in 2004, was reelected and joined in the 14th Congress by Luzviminda Ilagan. The party ranked fourth in the 2007 party-list elections, tailing religious group Buhay Hayaan Yumabong (BUHAY), militant group Bayan Muna, and the Citizen's Movement Against Corruption (CIBAC), which is also identified with a religious group. GABRIELA won two percent of the popular vote (Commission of Elections, 2008).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The political communication literature has evolved over recent decades and now encompasses analysis of non-Western regions (Kluver, 2007; Park, Barnett, & Kim, 2000; Takeshita & Makami, 1995). Election campaigns have become more aggressive and exhibit attack and counterattack strategies similar to American styles of campaigning (Blumler, 1987; Diamond & Bates, 1988; Elebash, 1984; Johnson, Cartee, & Copeland, 1991; Karan, 1996). The Philippines' first encounter with the Internet came in 1994 and was based upon the traditional Private Automatic Branch Exchange (PABX) network (Villafania, 2004). Cuevas (2004) points out that the Internet was first significant for politics in the Philippines during the height of protests against the Estrada administration, when Filipinos posted charges against disgraced President Estrada. Their discontent was largely conveyed through online message boards, blogs, and political forums, which in turn aroused a nationwide uprising and led to what became known as "People Power II." Although the event was historic and has largely been attributed to active online participation by citizens, the true extent of the Internet's impact on political communication in the Philippines is yet to be established (Mirandilla, 2007). In an analysis of candidates' Web sites during the 2004 elections, Cuevas (2004) observed that the Internet was used by candidates mainly for the purposes of a "one-way flow, from politicians

to voters" (p. 54). Active participation by the electorate was not encouraged. Mirandilla (2007) also found that Filipinos approach online political communication the same way they do traditional political communication. Politics is mainly personality-based, and little attention is given to educating citizens on national issues. This has often resulted in a limited approach by politicians, in which Internet content simply provides basic information about the candidates.

Personal Influence

Nevertheless, political campaigning in the Philippines is evolving away from the traditional one-to-many, candidate-to-electorate model and towards a many-to-many, interactive model, in which members of the electorate participate actively in mobilizing fellow voters. To this end, we see the personal influence hypothesis as a valuable approach (Gitlin, 1978). Some of the earlier work on political campaigns studied the effects of mass and interpersonal campaigns and reported partial success (Rice & Paisley, 1981). Gitlin (1978) explained that interpersonal influences are often stronger than information communicated through the media, because gatekeepers and middlemen are taken out of the equation. In other words, when personal communication becomes mediated, the effect is greater in political communication. Similarly, Grönlund (2001) argues that electronic media play a significant role in voting decisions by influencing the process of political opinion formation. Grönlund suggests a model to study the paradox of declining electoral participation and the growing demand for political responsiveness in democratic systems. According to this model, technology has enabled the public, stimulated by "new political needs and demands in the political system," to communicate horizontally, but this does not necessarily contribute to an increase in electoral participation. Guided by Grönlund's understanding of the personal influence hypothesis, this study assesses the new technology-based campaign strategies of the GWP. It offers some preliminary discussion of whether the GWP's attempts to involve as many members of the electorate as

possible through interpersonal communication —social networking sites, political hyperlinking, and mobile phone messaging—contributed to the party's historic breakthrough.

Social Networking Sites in Political Campaigning

Social networking sites have been defined as a category of Web sites with profiles, semi-persistent public commentary on those profiles, and a traversable, publicly articulated social network displayed in relation to the profiles (Boyd, 2006).

In the West, such sites are increasingly important for election campaigns. Williams and Gulati (2007) discuss the role of Facebook during the 2006 congressional and gubernatorial campaigns in the United States and conclude that Facebook played a role in the electoral process. Anstead and Chadwick (2008) analyze British politicians' experimentation with social networking sites following the 2005 UK elections, pointing to developments such as MpURL Membersnet, which provides each Labour Party member with a blog and enables constituents to participate in discussion forums. Anstead and Chadwick (2008) however argue that more research is needed on the national differences between political systems when it comes to online campaign communication.

While social networking sites are increasingly used in political campaigns, their role in affecting electoral outcomes is a matter for further research. There is some very preliminary evidence of positive effects for candidates who engage with these sites (Conners, 2005). We examine how the GWP used the Internet and social networking sites as low-cost campaign tools for reaching young voters and those based overseas.

Political Hyperlinking

Candidates' interactions with the rest of the Internet population as a means of building presence can be analyzed through their use of hyperlinks. Foot, Schneider, Dougherty, Xenos and Larsen (2003) see links as the essence of the Web because they show the structure of connections among sites. Park, Thelwall, and Kluver (2005) concur that hyperlinks are used to build public recognition, while Ackland and Gibson (2006) argue that hyperlinks can bring about a set of new and important communication functions that would help project a candidate's presence and make her or him more accessible. Hyperlinking is said to have a two-way function due to the structure of outlinks and inlinks (Park et al., 2005). Linking is especially important for political discourse, because it encourages deeper, more interconnected understanding of public affairs (Williams, Trammell, Postelnicu, Landreville, & Martin, 2005).

In analyzing outlinking practices on candidates' Web sites during the 2002 U.S. elections, Foot, Schneider, Dougherty, Xenos, and Larsen (2003) use the "Web sphere" as a unit of analysis. In their study, a Web sphere is conceptualized as more than just a collection of Web sites, but as a hyperlinked set of dynamically defined digital resources involving several sites that are seen as relevant or related to a central theme. Web sphere analysis is an analytic strategy that includes relations between producers and users of Web materials, as induced and mediated by the structural elements and features of Web sites, hypertexts, and the links between them. Foot et al. conclude that hyperlinking is strategic and that outlinks change over time. Ackland and Gibson (2006) examined 118 political party home pages in Australia, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and the UK and found that political parties' use of hyperlinks reveals differences in how they perform communicative functions such as network building, audience sharing, information provision, image creation, and force multiplication. Their results also differentiated leftist from far-right parties: The former favor linking to international organizations and those from different "sides of the political spectrum," whereas the latter favor building smaller networks and national presence. In this study, we assess the Web sites of the GWP for their hyperlinking practices.

Mobile Phones in Politics

The mobile phone is fast becoming the most popular medium of communication across Asia, and it now has high penetration rates in both urban and rural settings. Mobile phones have a wide reach, because even people who do not

have adequate reading skills find it much easier to use a mobile phone compared with the Internet (Steenson, 2006). The portability of the phone also facilitates sharing within groups and communities where owning a personal computer remains a challenge. Steenson (2006) suggests that mobile phones reconfigure relationships among people and places. Pertierra (2005) adds that although there are similarities between new media technologies, their impact at the national level depends largely on culture, economy, and "power structures" unique to each country. In his survey of over 300 mobile phone users, Pertierra also refers to the interplay of mobile technology and the sociocultural context of the Philippines. Similarly, Wei (2005) examines how the interaction of the state and the market in China gave birth to a new culture of Short Message Service (SMS) text messaging that now shapes political discourse. Wei finds that mobile phone use in China not only challenges state authority, but, ironically, also helps the government exert its dominance. In Italy, Menduni (2005) found that politicians are the heaviest users of mobile phones (some members of Parliament own more than one mobile phone), and this has accelerated the pace of political communication. Meanwhile, in Sweden, Jarner and Folkesson's (2003) study of voter turnout decline reveals that politicians believe that mobile technology can help in information dissemination and communication with the public, though e-mail is still seen as a more acceptable method when compared with text messaging. In the United States, Dale and Strauss's (2007) experimental study showed that text messaging could be an effective tool in encouraging young Americans to vote.

It has been claimed that the Philippines has the highest levels of mobile text messaging in the world (Suhaimi, 2008). We examine how the GWP used text messaging to reach Filipinos, and in particular the role played by text in mobilizing those living abroad.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How did Internet and mobile technologies augment the limitations of traditional campaign strategies during the GWP's 2007 campaign?
2. Which Internet applications (Web sites, political hyperlinking, and social networking sites) were more important for the victory for GWP?
3. How did the GWP use the mobile phone text messaging to reach the electorate?

Reinard (2001) defines case studies as intensive inquiries about single events, people, or social units. Multiple sources are used for data collection, because this improves reliability and validity (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Our data is composed of the GWP's Web site, wherein political hyperlinking was analyzed through a site-mapper, as well as campaign materials such as election and campaign news, PR notes, and discussion forums. The latter were analyzed to determine whether the Web site had generated interest among voters. We also examined activity in the party's social networking site profiles. Data on how mobile phones were used during the campaign were collected through interviews with officials of the GWP.

The fieldwork was divided into two segments. First, we conducted an analysis of the GWP's election campaign by examining the major issues taken up by the party and its campaign strategies. Emphasis was placed on the use of the Internet in campaigning through the analysis of the GWP Web site, the use of political hyperlinking, and the GWP's participation in popular online social networking sites in the Philippines such as Friendster and YouTube. The aim was to find out if and how new technologies helped in the campaign (RQ1). Second, we conducted in-depth interviews with two leaders of GABRIELA: its IT Communications Officer Joan Salvador and Representative Liza Maza. We also had personal communications with GWP campaign coordinator Cristina Palabay. Data from the interviews provided information on which technology was the most useful to the campaign (RQ2) and how the mobile phone was used to reach voters (RQ3).

FINDINGS

GWP Representative Liza Maza attributes the GWP's historic win to the reputation the group had established over the years. Maza argues that while GABRIELA is known as a women's group, it also stands on a broader platform:

> We are not only perceived as a women's party. We are perceived as a serious party which not only focuses on abuse against women but other issues, like the economy. While other feminist groups focus only on equal rights, we are also covering others hard issues like corruption, the visiting forces agreement, and foreign debt and poverty issues. All issues are women's issues.

This reputation had to be promoted through campaign strategies. The general approach included the mobilization of members for grassroots campaigns, a limited traditional media campaign through television commercials and print advertisements, and the use of new media. Internet usage during the campaign ranged from information exchange among members by e-mail, the establishment of a Web site and of accounts on social networking sites, and the joining of election forums. The group also sent numerous text messages.

E-Mail

E-mail was ascribed particular importance by GWP officers, due to its affordances for rapid information exchange. The GWP has members in the Philippines and overseas, and e-mail provided a cheap and effective means of communication. GWP member Joan Salvador stated that the GWP used the Internet during the campaign period "mostly for purposes of communication, campaign and advocacy, and research or news gathering, in contexts of both local and international." She went on:

> Whereas before we would have relied solely on snail mailing and faxing to communicate and enjoin our members, network organizations, and even various media institutions in our various campaigns and

activities, we now make use of the Internet (e-mailing, Web feeds, online petition/signature gathering, at some points multimedia feeds) to promote our analyses and positions on issues, our programs, advocacy and campaigns.

Campaign coordinator Palabay revealed that e-mail also made it easier for the GWP to send press releases to reporters, thereby increasing the chances of mainstream media coverage.

The Campaign Web Site

Other political parties in the Philippines had established their Web sites several years earlier, but the GWP only launched theirs for the 2007 elections. The site developed into an important tool for reaching Internet-savvy young people and overseas voters. As Cristina Palabay, said:

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

Palabay also stated that the party site created opportunities for women to report cases and seek help from the organization. However, there was a need to develop the Web site to make it more comprehensive in detailing the party's activities, ideology, and development strategies. The Web site only contained press releases about the party's progress during the campaign. These touched on issues of negative publicity and the party's stance on court decisions on election fraud, allegations of widespread cheating among contenders, and other issues. Palabay does not attribute their victory to the Web site:

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

Yet, despite the limitations of the Web site, Salvador reported that the party still benefited from the speed and convenience of the Internet:

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

The GWP also used the Internet to defend itself from criticism. Party members were mobilized to visit other election forums and Web sites to defend the GWP against what Palabay called "black propaganda."

> There was lots of propaganda against the GWP on the internet—in voters' forums, on yehey.com—so we also mobilized our members to visit the same forums, monitor the propaganda so we could answer them, and defend GWP in those forums by posting messages.

Political Hyperlinking

The party's Web site has more than 600 pages and was mapped using Powermapper Standard software (see Figure 1). Analyzing the map, it is quite evident that the party focused mostly on linking to its own content and did not link to any external organizations. Even when it posted promotional videos on YouTube, the party resorted to embedding the videos into its Web site rather than outlinking to the YouTube site. A good example of this approach was the video "Mahalin Mo Ako" (Love Me), a public service announcement about women's rights. The party did not take advantage of opportunities to use political hyperlinking to raise the profile of its candidates. The lack of both inbound and outbound linking may have reduced the party's reach, especially among younger women voters.

Maximizing YouTube

YouTube and Friendster are very popular among young Internet users in the Philippines. It was only logical for the GWP to turn to these sites to expand its networks and to establish its presence among voters. Political advertising, especially on television, is an obsession among Filipino politicians, and parties spend huge sums on it. The GWP had its own television advertisement created by volunteers and professionals who offered their services for free, including popular local actress Angel Locsin, who endorsed the party. But since buying airtime is expensive, the GWP ad ran for only three days on national television and for only a week on provincial stations. Thus, the GWP duplicated the ad on YouTube. Palabay asserts that YouTube helped the organization reach out to the middle class and the young urban poor who had access to the Internet. Salvador agreed: "This [YouTube video] helped our campaign a lot. It got wider exposure since our resources for putting up these videos on TV [were] very limited and we could only afford very few exposures on TV and radio." The ad emphasized the essence of an average Filipino woman, her plight, and survival against all odds. Two YouTube accounts hosted the video, one of which was started by Palabay herself. The video received a total of 2,913 viewings. It is a simple film, showing Locsin, as well as a montage of images of different women, from those in slums to those in Congress.

The GWP's use of YouTube pales in significance when compared with that of Bayan Muna (People First), another party-list group. (Bayan Muna is closely affiliated with the GWP and came second in the elections in terms of overall number of votes among the party list groups, receiving the maximum three congressional seats).

Bayan Muna established a YouTube account listed as "bayanmunadotnet" and uploaded nine videos: a political advertisement, a music video, two items of what appeared to be television news clips discussing Bayan Muna, and five videos showing its representative, Congressman Satur Ocampo, being interviewed. The most popular video was one of the five interview installments, which received 20,831 views.

FIGURE 1. A sitemap of the GWP Web site, mapped on January 5, 2008.

Note: Powermapper Standard software was used. See http://www.powermapper.com/products/mapper/std.htm.

The Bayan Muna account was set up around March 2007. In an interview with the researcher, Congressman Ocampo stated that it was one of his staff members who suggested that the party upload videos onto YouTube (E. Tandoc, Jr., interview, February 1, 2008). Due to murder charges, which he has consistently denied, Congressman Ocampo was forced to hide from the police during the peak of the campaign period. Bayan Muna's relative success

with YouTube is indicated not only by the number of viewings, but also by the fact that the mainstream media, not able to contact Congressman Ocampo, made use of the online videos in their news programs. According to Congressman Ocampo:

> It was an experimental move, but it turned out to be successful. Television stations aired the videos we had uploaded. They

captured the video for their reports. So it also gave additional media exposure for our party. Information technology is really a big help. It enabled small parties, which otherwise will be unable to spend for communications in an election campaign, to promote advocacy. It has become an equalizing factor for small parties against big-moneyed political organizations. (E. Tandoc, Jr., interview, February 1, 2008)

Finding Support in Friendster

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

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

By October 2007, the user account had approximately 175 "friends." Among the list of friends were 13 militant groups, four Gabriela chapters, and an educational institution. The account had five pictures, three of which were the logos of the group. One showed a picture of what appeared to be a protest rally, another showed Congresswoman Maza raising her fist. In her interview, Palabay said that the site was "a venue for us to reach out to young women, to

show them that [Congresswoman Maza] also carries the issues of the youth and students, issues like tuition fee increases and campus press."

The Mobile Phone Campaign

While they expressed mixed feelings about the Internet, interviewees made generally more positive assessments of their mobile phone campaign. The strategy was simple: a writer would compose messages and send them out during special occasions observed by the party. Palabay reports that the effort paid off in terms of expanding the party's social network: "We sent [a text message] to our friends and urged them to send it to five of their friends. We also asked the members of our public information team to send the messages to everyone in their phonebooks." When the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) started in April 2007, the mobile phone was also used to expand the campaign through the sending of messages to Filipinos abroad. Under the OAV, Filipinos outside the country can register as absentee voters. The GWP appealed to its supporters in the Philippines to send text messages to their relatives abroad to urge them to vote for the party. A "Text Back" campaign, mounted a week before Election Day, reinforced this approach. The campaign was significant: Palabay states that the GWP had around 500 members in Australia and 1,000 in Hong Kong, each of whom sent a text message to their relatives in the Philippines.

The GWP sent these chain text messages at least five times during the campaign period, beginning on Valentine's Day 2007, which they called *"Mahalin Mo Ako* (Love Me) Day." They also sent messages on International Women's Day (March 8). The next set of messages was sent when the OAV voting began in April, on Mother's Day, and finally before the campaign ended on May 12, 2007. Palabay personally sent each message to all of the 600 contacts in her phone directory, though it is of course impossible to track how many friends forwarded her message. Still, her belief that the text messaging campaign worked to their advantage is significant.

Grassroots Campaigning Strategies: Rallies and Door-to-Door

The GWP did not abandon grassroots campaigning altogether, and its use of new media only served to enhance and support traditional strategies. Salvador revealed the main factor that may have shaped the party's approach:

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

Palabay reinforced this point by mentioning that the group joined several rallies against the current administration. The Labor Day Rally on May 1, two weeks before the elections, was an example. The rallies not only exposed the party to bystanders in the street but also generated some mainstream media exposure. Traditional door-to-door canvassing was important, and the group also had small motorcades in some areas (E. Tandoc, Jr., Interview with Congresswoman Maza, October 15, 2008).

DISCUSSION

The GWP combined grassroots campaigning, traditional media, and ICTs in generating support for the party. This strategy apparently worked. The party won two seats in Congress, and this case study shows how small, marginalized political groupings may harness ICTs to mobilize voters, principally as part of a holistic, multilevel campaign strategy. GWP's victories cannot be fully attributed to its use of new media. It was not able to maximize the potential offered by the Internet's social networking sites in political campaigning, but it did actively use the mobile phone—a more accessible medium in the Philippines. This is understandable since it was the first time the party used the Internet.

Also, the fact that the majority of the population in the Philippines still does not have Internet access is a hindrance to online politics. The GWP launched its Web site during the campaign itself, denying the party enough time to carefully plan its design. For a campaign site to be effective, it must actively hyperlink to other organizations or groups that might help in its promotion and dissemination. Unfortunately, the GWP Web site did not link to external sites, reducing the likelihood that other sites would link back.

Social networking sites also played a supporting role in the campaign, but their potential in mobilizing support was not fully maximized. The GWP Friendster account only had 175 members during the campaign period. Identical user names by other Friendster users also constrained the visibility of the account. Promotional videos on YouTube would have had a bigger impact had the material been uploaded early in the campaign: the videos were viewed less than 3,000 times and were obviously drowned out by the vast population of videos on the site. There were few cross-promotion efforts to invite potential voters to visit the party Web site as well as its social networking profile pages.

Of the new media technologies used in the 2007 campaign, it was the mobile phone that seems to have most lived up to campaign organizers' expectations. This is in line with previous developments—the same technology helped galvanize Filipinos during the People Power II demonstrations that ousted the controversy-ridden Estrada administration in 2001. Thus, the GWP also relied on traditional campaign techniques applicable to the current sociopolitical status of the country, where the Internet remains largely out of reach, especially in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

The use of new media for political campaigning should be viewed in a national context. While multiple studies have demonstrated that the Internet now plays a significant role in campaigns in the United States and some other Western countries, the diffusion of online campaigning in parts of Asia, particularly in the Philippines, is unfolding at a slower and more

complex pace. Kluver and Banerjee (2005) list three constraints on the impact of the Internet in democratizing politics in Asia: political culture, regulatory regimes, and unequal levels of access to information technology. This study reiterates that these forces constrain the use of the Internet for political campaigning. Access to the Internet is dependent on available infrastructure and skills. The Philippines has hitherto lacked a comprehensive national government project for encouraging people to use computers and to go online. Many public schools, especially those in far-flung areas, have not integrated computer literacy into their curricula (Herold, 2006). This is in contrast to mobile phones, which have a high penetration rate and which require minimal technical knowledge. Our case study of the GWP reveals that campaign officials saw mobile phones as more effective for the party than Web sites. The use of mobile communication in politics has been a strangely neglected aspect of the literature on new media and politics. Further research is needed if we are to fully understand how these techniques sit within the broader political communication environment.

NOTES

1. See more, Gabriela Women's Party Web site, http://gabrielawomensparty.org/.

2. There have been significant changes in the GWP's Internet campaigning and Web site content since this study was conducted in 2007 when its Internet campaigning was in its experimental phase. For instance, the party has been more actively campaigning on the Internet: revamping the Web site's content and hyperlinking to more external Web sites on a regular basis.

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

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

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APPENDIX

List of Interviews

1. Liza Maza, GABRIELA party-list representative, October 15, 2007.
2. Cristina Palabay, GABRIELA party-list representative, December 2, 2007.
3. Joan Salvador, GABRIELA IT Officer, October 15, 2007.
4. Satur Ocampo, Bayan Muna Representative, February 12, 2008.