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Use of Facebook by A Science Political Party: A Uses and Gratification Study of Agham Partylist in the Philippines

Kristine Araguas

Office of Public Relations

University of the Philippines Los Banos, Laguna

Serlie Barroga-Jamias

College of Development Communication

University of the Philippines Los Banos, Laguna

This case study determined how the use of Facebook community page gratified the communication needs of the AGHAM Party list members and Facebook followers. Content analyzed were the 645 postings in the AGHAM Facebook Like Page by both AGHAM and its online followers from March 17, 2010 to December 29, 2012. Other data were gathered using key informant interviews and participant observation by joining the AGHAM Facebook group. The research was guided by the Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974) and Kim (2000) hierarchy of needs in online communities. The needs gratified were (in order): filling in time (entertainment) (16%); social empathy (integration) (12%); emotional release (entertainment) (10%); self-esteem (10%); conversation and social interaction (integration) (8%); self-actualization (8%); and finding out relevant events and conditions (information) (8%). Results were contrary to the researcher's expectations that the Facebook would be used more for seeking science-related or development information.

Keywords: political communication, uses and gratifications theory, political party, content analysis, development issues, science and technology

INTRODUCTION

Development communication is expanding in scope to cover political engagement for development, primarily because development planners

are realizing that development is not possible without good governance. McLoughlin and Scott (2010) stressed that communication is essential in good governance. For them, communication is the factor that leads to the development of state capability, accountability, and responsiveness. Citizens, leaders, and public institutions must relate to each other to make change happen in society. Further, they pointed out that dialogue between the state and the citizens can improve public understanding and support of government projects. Without the public's support, government might not get things done.

In the Philippines, the E-commerce Act of 2000 was enacted because "The state recognizes the vital role of information and communications technology (ICT) in nation-building." Through this Act, government agencies and even news networks have set up a website and other forms of social media where the general public can share their comments to catch the government's attention.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In the political scene, organizations have begun using the Internet as a space or venue for activism. Advocacies and activism have migrated from the physical environment to the online setting. In the Philippines, for instance, marginalized groups or previously unrepresented sectors as well as underrepresented sectoral groups have been given the opportunity to participate in the political process through the party list system instituted in 1995. On the 28th of February 1995, Republic Act No. 7941 known as An Act providing for the election of party-list representatives through the party-list system, and appropriating funds therefor was passed by the House of Representatives and Senate. This act was also a consolidation of House Bill No. 3043 and Senate Bill No. 1913. Party lists were created for the legal and fair representation of the minorities. This bill was created with the marginalized in mind so that they will have a fair representation in Congress.

Among the 28 party lists in the Philippines that won a seat in 2010 elections is the Alyansa ng Grupo ng Haligi ng Agham at Teknolohiya Para sa Mamamayan, Inc. (AGHAM). Given the proper voice and attention, they believe that science and technology could propel us to be at par with other developed neighbor countries like Singapore.

Others have pointed out the extensive use of AGHAM of online social

media and social networks to enhance the party list's popularity and reach among the public. The AGHAM party list maintains a website (Agham.org.ph). It also has a Facebook community page (<http://www.Facebook.com/aghampartylist>) to be able to reach to the younger crowd, gain popularity, and reach a broader audience. Its Facebook page <http://www.Facebook.com/aghampartylist> was created on March 17, 2010. The Facebook now has more than 3,700 members subscribing to the page, compared to the approximately 2,900 members subscribed to the page when the researcher first started studying the page in year 2011.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Why have they started to use Facebook in 2010? What needs did they have as a political party for such medium? And what needs did its followers have in using the Facebook page? Exploring these questions were guided by studies using the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974). Many of these were of Western origins.

Jere and Davis (2011) applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory to compare consumer motivations for magazine and Internet use in South Africa. Results showed that email and chatting were the most popular online activities. Factor analysis showed seven new factors for Internet gratification such as: interpersonal utility, information seeking, surveillance, self-development, exploration, diversion, and career opportunities.

Smeele (2010) also applied the Uses and Gratifications theory and used three methods of studying participation using Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter among Dutch and Australian users and non-users of social networking sites popular in these countries. The CCM results showed that Facebook offered the biggest possible fulfillment for the gratification 'need for social relationships.' Users searching for these gratifications labeled as features would browse on Facebook to fulfill their needs. Facebook was also the most preferred site to fulfill needs for 'identity construction/self-expression' for the users were motivated to create and maintain their online identities.

Yuan (2011) applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory to study social networking sites in China. He found that socio-integrative needs were the strongest motivation for Chinese SNS users. Other studies in Southeast Asia did not specifically use the uses and gratifications theory but they show how

social media are being used in the Asian culture.

The youth in the Philippines turns more to social media and the Internet for the news and current events. Sarmenta (2013) found that Tweets and links shared through Facebook often trigger moves to websites. In fact, in the last 2013 elections, Sarmenta found a lukewarm reception of the respondents that may be because of the disenchantment with the political process and with the failure of traditional media platforms to connect with the youth.

In Malaysia, Nurul Hidayah Mohammed Zin, Mariah Muda and Mohammed Zin Nordin (2013) found the top six needs and gratifications sought by students when using Facebook. These are entertainment, information, online transaction, social interaction or communication, passing time and personal usage. The study found out that they there is high dependency on the Internet as the respondents in the study were satisfied, having a slim chance of converting to other media sources.

In China, a micro-blog, Weibo, was launched in August 2009. Yu Dong (2013) found that the Chinese have integrated the use Weibo every day after class to get information and communicate with, people they played an active role in choosing specific media to fulfill their needs.

Chartprasert and Yuwakosol (2013) examined the use of Facebook in Thailand in three main areas: establishing personal relationship, identity presentation and personal information disclosure. They found that most Facebook users used their Facebook accounts to satisfy their already existing needs. The identities they portrayed on Facebook were not far behind their identities and personalities offline, although they differed in the levels of privacy for they controlled their information disclosure according to their perception of privacy. Thai users easily adopted technology to satisfy their existing needs and not create new ones.

In summary, the use of the Internet and social media, whether for sports, leisure or politics, gratifies more or less similar needs. These included interactivity, connectivity, and information sharing, diversional, and promotional. The Internet and social media were used for convenience, control, speed, ease of searching, and time/convenience.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to describe how communication

through Facebook is helping the party list AGHAM and its followers meet their communication needs. Specifically, the study aims to do the following:

1. Describe the backgrounder of the Facebook for AGHAM Party list and its current status and use;
2. Discuss the communication needs of the key AGHAM party list members and online followers that are being met in using Facebook; and
3. Give recommendations on how sectoral groups may use Facebook to better gratify the communication needs of online followers.

The study had limitations. It focused on only one party list – AGHAM - and results may not generalizable for other political parties in the Philippines. The researcher used only the data that have been captured or documented in the screen shot. The researcher did not have access to statistics about the respondents such as age group, usage of data, location, etc. as only the AGHAM website system administrator had this right/authority. But the researcher enhanced her findings by joining the Facebook page herself and being an active participant in the exchanges online.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE STUDY

The study used as theoretical framework the Uses and Gratification Theory proposed originally in 1974 by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch. This theory had been enhanced by Amy Jo Kim for online media in 2000.

These theorists said that the social and psychological origins of needs of users and followers, generate expectations of the mass media and other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure or engagement in other activities, resulting in need gratifications and other consequences.

Applying some of the relevant elements of the original theory by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) when media was not yet on the web and on Kim's (2000) community building based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as well as the variables of McQuail's (1983), the researcher came up with a modified framework to analyze the study (Figure 1).

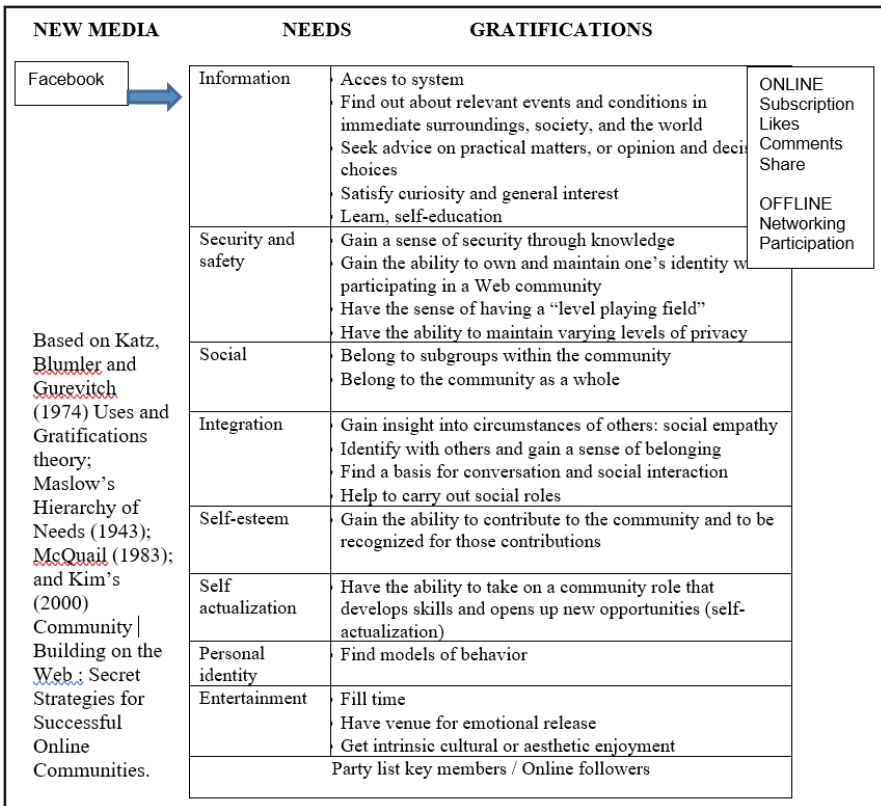


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Users of the Facebook of AGHAM (key party list members and online followers) meet certain needs or are gratified in terms of information, security and safety, social, integration and social interaction, and personal identity. This gratification leads to both online and offline responses.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This research is a case study of the AGHAM Party list's use of social media particularly a Facebook community page. The study was conducted in Los Baños, Laguna and in Manila where AGHAM has its headquarters and because Los Baños is known as a science community. The data gathered from the Facebook Like Page were filtered using the interaction

of online followers from March 17, 2010, the time the page was created, until December 29, 2012.

Respondents and Samples

AGHAM Party list members and staff

For the AGHAM organization, party list representative Angelo B. Palmones and his social media administrators, Key Respondent 1 and Key Respondent 2, were interviewed. Their names were not disclosed in the study as part of a confidentiality agreement.

Posts of online followers

To gather responses from online followers, all of the postings on the AGHAM's Facebook page from the time the AGHAM party list first created its Facebook Like Page account in 2010 until 2012 were collected. Overall, the researcher analyzed 645 postings including the responses, comments, and threads of these posts within the three-year period.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND DATA GATHERING

Key informant interviews

Guide questionnaires for the Key Informant Interview (KII) were prepared for key person/s in the AGHAM party list and for the developers/ administrators of its Facebook. The KII was necessary to get better perspective on how and why the party list used social media (Facebook) heavily aside from the website. Representative Palmones granted an interview last March 12, 2012 at Room 608 of the North Wing Building of the Batasan Pambansa Complex where the Congressmen have their offices.

Participant observation

The researcher conducted participant observation to gain access and get information like the rest of the subscribers who "liked" the Facebook profile of AGHAM. This means that the researcher also received updates in her news feed every time she logged on to her Facebook account just

like the other online subscribers. The researcher was also able to access new postings by AGHAM on its Facebook Like Page.

Textual content analysis

To analyze AGHAM's Facebook Like Page account, the researcher used textual content analysis. The researcher made screenshot of the posts from 2010 to 2012 A coding sheet was used to conduct content inventory. The researcher organized the content in the coding sheet as it appeared in the screen shots. Each post and comment order was logged as it appeared in the thread.

Data Analysis

A coding sheet was used based on the conceptual framework. The researcher started with open coding and logged the posts according to how they appeared in the screenshots. The researcher used axial coding to organize all the postings including the comments in the topic thread according to the communication needs in the conceptual framework of the study.

As for the coding, the needs of the AGHAM Party list members and the Facebook followers were considered as the major themes. Their postings were categorized according to the needs gratified such as information, security and safety, self-esteem, self-actualization, personal identity, and entertainment following some of the of needs of online communities enumerated by Kim (2000).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Needs Gratified by Facebook Use

Figure 2 and Appendix Table 1 summarize the overall gratifications of AGHAM and its online followers based on the overall number of postings. Of the 645 posts, the top six needs gratified by Facebook use were to fill time or entertainment (15.65%); for social empathy or integration (11.93%); contribute to the community or self-esteem (9.61%); venue for emotional release (9.45%) take on community role that develops skills

and opens up new opportunities or self-actualization (8.37%); and find out relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society and the world or information (7.90%).

Fill time (Entertainment)

This need had the most number of postings (15.65%). Many of the postings were usually statements that were replies to statements posted by AGHAM or mostly, its Facebook followers. Rather than leaving the statements with no response at all, the followers gave reactions without leading to a discussion. This is illustrated in the posts such as the following: *“Tama po si Juan. kc ngayon ko lang napansin laging magkatabi o magkalapi ang Mercury at 7-11. minsan nga po mini stop. hahaha. bakit nga ba? (P#127;R#9)”*, fillers, “☺” (P#9;R#7) and light comments *“Good afternoon in there Rep. Angelo B. Palmones... It’s Monday @ 12:30 am here so good nite/and good morning to you too. Have a great evening!”* (P#132;R#2).

Majority of the postings logged were actual excerpts of AGHAM online followers’ jokes and other light topics. For example, they were also expressions of laughter in textual form (P#127;R#9) as responses to jokes posted by AGHAM. This demonstrated that in the Filipino culture, readers probably feel more comfortable to react to a post if it was something positive. AGHAM posted jokes that got more reactions from its online readers such as various forms of laughter. These also included topics and greetings like wishing Congressman Palmones a happy birthday. This finding is similar to that of Bowman and Willis (2003) that light topics have enhanced online communities and improved social capital among users in Facebook.

Social empathy (Integration)

This gratification came second with 11.93 percent of the postings. The sense of empathy or compassion for others is also very much rooted in the Filipinos’ culture. This was quite similar to the findings of Yuan (2011) in China that social media help people gather themselves together. This result is also similar to Smeele’s (2010) finding that the use of Facebook gratifies the need for social relationships. Readers feel comfortable when they were connected

to the party list of Congressman Palmones. This was also similar to the Pew Research and American Life Project (2012) wherein the audiences relied more on information from the social media compared to the traditional media because they felt that they were getting firsthand information from the former.

AGHAM gets people involved by posting information that might be useful and encourages its followers to join its cause. AGHAM, as much as possible, tries to get its supporters to do something, or it mobilizes them into participating in AGHAM's advocacy-related activities. When AGHAM issues an invitation to the public to participate, it encourages unity of a community. AGHAM also answers specific questions on what it is doing about the concern. Hence, followers are encouraged to be part of AGHAM because their suggestions or questions are being recognized and addressed.

AGHAM makes recommendations to help its followers who seek advice and help. AGHAM's advocacies for science, technology, education, and environment encourages followers to go to AGHAM for assistance. AGHAM, in turn, directly addresses questions and refers them to other sectors that could help.

Key Respondent 1 shared that a lot of people did not really read comments, but they used the site to leave a message. Readers commenting under the same comment thread got to virtually engage in a topic. Readers were encouraged to communicate more when Representative Palmones responded to the thread and replied to comments. They probably 'felt' that in linking with these about these concerns, there was a bigger chance that their own concerns might also be addressed.

AGHAM proactively asking its followers online to contribute to a project it was working on (P#57). The online followers, in turn, also raised issues and suggestions directly to AGHAM that might contribute and support AGHAM's interests.

The two postings from AGHAM were project-related and show collaboration between AGHAM and specific point persons.

Of the 75 logged posts by online followers, 26 postings were on education. Majority of the postings were included in a thread talking about the Philippines' low ranking in universities worldwide. Laws and policies came third as AGHAM Facebook followers suggested bills to contribute to AGHAM's advocacies. Different points of view were raised about our low ranking in education. Some said that it was not the lack of research but the

lack of funds to support educational systems and researches that contributed significantly to the low ranking (P#78;R#4).

The second most talked about topic was classified as being about citizen participation. Facebook followers stated their opinions and informed AGHAM party list their side of the story. Other Facebook users learned from each other's points of view. Followers suggested bills to contribute to AGHAM's advocacies. Online followers felt that suggesting directly to AGHAM about a certain bill or proposal gave them a foot in the door. They have somehow managed to relay the information to AGHAM without going through the bureaucracy.

Contribute to the community (Self-esteem)

This gratification came third with 9.61 percent. Apparently, Filipinos bank on human relationships and the "Bayanihan attitude" of helping one another, hence, they take pride in helping others. It gives a sense of fulfillment to be able to contribute whether it is a referral or a call for movement in the Facebook. Majority of the excerpts in this section were commending AGHAM for its performance as a party list and for contributing to the community. This boosted the pride and esteem of AGHAM as a party list and encouraged its followers to be more involved. Meanwhile, feedback from AGHAM online followers were also acknowledged by AGHAM, giving the impression that the party list noted and valued the opinions of its followers.

As AGHAM is also competing with other party lists for performance and visibility on the Internet and to the public, it makes itself visible and easy to reach by the public. Its network as a science advocate group helps makes AGHAM a credible contact for issues concerning technology, environment, and education. Hence, all (100%) of the posts show that the AGHAM party list and its Facebook followers used the Facebook to contribute to the community and be recognized for such contributions, hence contributing to self-esteem.

AGHAM freely gives out its contact information, which makes the followers and even the Internet lurkers send the party a private email or private message other than posting them on Facebook. This move probably makes AGHAM more approachable as it gives the impression to its readers that AGHAM values what they have to say and contribute. It also seems to indicate that AGHAM is open and appreciative of what its followers are saying.

Commendations coming from AGHAM online Facebook followers

enhanced the party list's image and confidence in its advocacy. AGHAM appreciated feedbacks coming from its online followers (P393; R#2). In return, followers whose comments were acknowledged felt that their inputs were valued.

Excerpts in Appendix 17 show that majority or 45 postings fell under the theme 'citizen participation'. These comments composed of congratulatory messages such as *"congrats congressman...you are doing a great service to our nature and our country, our people.... mabuhay ang Agham party list!"* (P#122;R#8). Another post said:

"IM SO PROUD OF YOU SIR TO BE A REPRESENTATIVE IN THE FIRST DISTRICT OF NORTH COTABATO, CONTINUE YOUR GOOD PUBLIC SERVICE TO ALL PEOPLE, SO THAT THEY WILL LOVE AND SUPPORT YOU MORE, MORE, AND MORE, I'm the one of that people. GOD BLESS AND GIVE YOU MORE POWER (P#148;R#10).

Other postings were on laws and policies, energy, and health. Prominent issues on topics commended by followers were about AGHAM's support for education and scholars (P#50; P#148;R#15; P#154; R#5).

The excerpt from AGHAM shows how it recognized and acknowledged a suggestion raised by its Facebook followers. For example, one post said: *"Asiddin K. Arabain Uap, pa-review ko yung comments mo re the bill. Thank you for the feedback"* (P#93;R#2). Directly addressing a reader's comment shows how AGHAM treats its online followers and values their suggestions.

Venue for emotional release (Entertainment)

This gratification came in fourth place with 9.45 percent. Since Facebook has an interactive feature where AGHAM Party list and its readers can converse in a thread, it has also become a venue for discussion about issues that the AGHAM followers felt strongly about. The followers expressed their opinions, sought help, and asked the AGHAM party list to act as watch dogs especially when it came to issues such as the discrepancy of fundings and the provision of scholarships. This is quite contrary to Branston and Lee's (cited by Taylor, Kent, and White, 2001) assessment of a website. They said that since websites were mainly used for information dissemination, these did not promote interactions and return visits to the site, hence there was no

building of online relationships between the followers and the party list. The AGHAM Facebook, on the other hand, was interactive.

Postings that reflected appreciation from AGHAM followers. “Maraming salamat Jean. Nakakataba ng puso ang iyong sinabi..” (P#48;R#4). In addition, AGHAM followers’ statements reflected objection, defense of a statement, or a strong point of view that showed rather intense emotions. Since AGHAM Facebook serves as a freedom wall where followers can freely post their opinions and insights, it has become an unfiltered virtual graffiti wall, most especially for those harboring strong opinions about a certain topic. Major topics included ‘controversial’ or ‘emotional’ topics such as the passage and debate about the Reproductive Health Bill, (P#66), a Hollywood celebrity’s accusation of corruption in the Philippines, and issues on the economy and monopoly of businesses in the country.

AGHAM followers used Facebook to express and write objections on their wall such as this excerpt:

SINONG NAGSABI NA HINDI CORRUPT ANG MGA AQUINO? ANG NEGOSYO NILA AY PETRON, MERALCO AND LOPEZ CORPORATIONS DEALING WITH ELECTRICITY GENERATION AND DISTRIBUTION WHEREIN THE AQUINOS HAVE SHARES OF STOCKS.” (P#168) And “NOYNOY-BINAY RESIGN!!!! SNAP ELECTION NOW!!!!!!!! MGA INUTIL AY DAPAT PALITAN!!!!!!!! SERVE THE PEOPLE!!!!!!!! NOT THE OLIGARCHS!!!!!!!! (P#169)

The above post strongly criticized the Aquino family with statements linking the family to corporations from which the Aquinos benefited as share holders. It also called for snap elections and demanded the resignation of the administration leaders. This demonstrates how AGHAM facebook followers used the page as a platform for emotional outbursts.

Take on a Community Role that Develops Skills and Opens up New Opportunities (Self-actualization)

This gratification came fifth with 8.37 percent. Majority of the excerpts come from the online followers asking the AGHAM party list’s contact information so that they could raise issues and suggest ideas and proposals that are in line with the party list’s advocacy. AGHAM welcomes suggestions

that are mostly about legislation and encourages followers to email them by disclosing their email addresses. Most followers have gotten comfortable in sending a private message or email to AGHAM than leaving them in the comment section for the public to see.

Similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs was the realization that both the AGHAM party list and its online followers made a difference in Philippine politics and took on national responsibilities. Hence, all the respondents (100%) had postings showing that they used the Facebook to assume community roles that developed their skills and opened up new opportunities for self-actualization.

Example of the excerpts were those of supporters offering their services to support AGHAM's advocacy:

Thank you for the kind words Atty. Francisco Nob, we will be posting the full text of the Writ of Kalikasan soon and we're working on a FB campaign for it. Please follow the AGHAM page for updates. 'Kudos to Cong. Angelo B. Palmones. His Writ of Kalikasan for Taal Lake is laudable. To survive is not for agriculture but for recreation and tourist facilities. Can I have details of that plan? I intend to create a FB page to support his move. Great move for us, Batanguenos. We owe him. (P#124)"

For the AGHAM party list, majority of the excerpts were on networking or establishing relationships. This is where AGHAM openly addressed the questions of its followers and openly asked the followers to send an email disclosing their contact information like "Pls. send a letter to cong.angelo@agham.org.ph" (P#60;R#5). This was a way to open up new opportunities for both AGHAM and followers for future collaboration.

Majority of the postings from the followers stated that they had already sent their emails and were following these up with AGHAM. These were responses for potential opportunities between AGHAM and its followers. Two examples are as follows:

Sir, we will be sending an enhanced Balik Scientist bill with explanatory note...senate version sponsored by Sen. Jingoy Estrada to your office we are just waiting clearance from USec Boy dela Pena (P#57;R#6), and

Cong, I sent you email re green groups position on your HB1359. I hope

you will reconsider your views on incinerators. Let us not waste our future! Thanks (P#87; R#8).

These are bills that can change policies and laws. The statements mentioned were assumptions of AGHAM's community role. From the excerpts under self-actualization for taking on community role that develops skills and opens up new opportunities were of referrals so others could create new opportunities. Certain inquiries like request for funding (P#65) opened new opportunities not only for the online followers but also to those who came across the post in Facebook.

An excerpt from another AGHAM Facebook follower (P#72;R#4) reflected potential collaboration and the opportunity to contribute. It said:

Sir Angelo I already sent by email (you, vicky, usec fot, ann) the enhanced version of your bill on Anti Pilferage of Risk Reduction Equipment/ Instruments of PAGASA and PHILVOLS, ...we are awaiting TWG sked for this bill (P#72;R#4).

The reader proactively sent an email to help enhance of the version of the Anti-Pilferage of Risk Reduction Equipment/Instruments of PAGASA Philvocs. Since AGHAM's advocacies are wide ranging from science to other aspects like education, readers raised concerns such as the one stated in P#72;R#8. The follower was appealing to AGHAM to do something about the amendment of certain sections of RA 544 for it was in conflict with the provision of the architect law RA 9266.

Another follower used Facebook to appeal for reconsideration of a House Bill introduced by Congressman Palmones. HB 1359 was a resolution to direct the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to set standards for the use of incinerators. Although the information and details about the appeal were not disclosed publicly, the proactivity of the followers reflected their self-actualization of wanting to be able to take part in the development of the House Bill.

Belong to the Community

Excerpts of posts from online followers expressed that they wanted to be part of the AGHAM online community as a whole such as P#24. However, some

excerpts did not specify if they were representing a certain organization supporting AGHAM and its advocacies (e.g., “Sama ako dyan”, (P#30;R#6). These statements demonstrated the need for belongingness or association with the AGHAM community as a whole (P#52;R#6).

The Facebook followers responded and participated in science trivia that AGHAM posted. Readers responded more to light topics such as “Good Morning! How’s everyone after the Bgy. Elections yesterday?” (P#19). Nevertheless, these light comments ‘integrated’ them to the AGHAM’s virtual community.

All of the 26 posts of AGHAM were all about AGHAM’s promotion in the Facebook community. AGHAM encouraged all its followers to disseminate information about the AGHAM page so as to get more likes. A total of 13 posts out of 26 posts were about AGHAM encouraging its supporters to share the page. Excerpts of other updates on promotion such as the calendar giveaways, greetings, events, and conversation starters came next (P#2, P#16, P#19, and P #25). This shows that AGHAM used the Facebook to speak to its followers as a community. AGHAM also reached out to its Facebook followers by giving them updates and striking conversations to get them involved.

For the Facebook followers, most of the replies were appreciation, commending the party list for its performance in Congress in behalf of the community (P#122; R#6).

Find out about relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society, and the world (Information)

This gratification came sixth with 7.90 percent. This was contrary to the researcher’s expectations that the Facebook would be used more for information about national issues, especially on science and technology. Personally, this is disturbing because the postings for this need involved important elements of development – such as education, environment, laws and policies, disasters, and enabling technologies.

The postings also covered bills with implications to national development such as House Bill 5295 (Oil Deregulation Act). AGHAM also filed three bills (P#82) endorsed by President Benigno Aquino III such as the K+12 Law (Palmones was one of the authors); R.A. 10344 or the Risk Reduction and Disaster Preparedness Equipment Protection Act in

December 2012 and R.A. 10532 or the Philippine National Health Research System Act on May 7, 2013. Further, AGHAM authored two resolutions to investigate the importation of reconditioned fire trucks (P#80). These issues have great bearing on policies and governance, but unfortunately, the use of the AGHAM Facebook to meet the need for information about these issues is rather low.

The party list members and web administrators used the AGHAM Facebook to share information, while the online users readily accessed information that were updated and relevant to their needs. Other readers were informed by reading the updates and reading the page shared by other readers. The online followers could also access information such as performance reports and other information about AGHAM and science and technology concerns. They could also subscribe and post messages on AGHAM's Facebook Page.

The stakeholders used the AGHAM Facebook to share as well as to gather information about relevant issues on almost all the science-related issues mentioned above, except for nanotechnology. Of the 35 postings, most of the information posted by the AGHAM personnel dealt with education (5 postings), environment (8 postings), laws and policies (7 postings), disaster (3 postings), and enabling technologies (3 postings).

They shared issues on education such as the needed capacity building of science educators in the Philippines (e.g., incentives for Filipino scientists so they will not go abroad (P#59); letting them sign a contract that would require them to serve the country for a certain period of time (P#91); making the science profession more attractive as a career (e.g., S&T scholarships to young students (P#9; P#84;1); increasing government spending on universities so they will rank higher (P#78); organizing scientists and their associations (P#81); and capacity building of various sectors (e.g., Barangay scholars, P#85). Hence, the AGHAM party list gave out information about science education, its status, challenges, and even a glimpse of the future.

High on the relevant issues posted was also on energy covering oil, biogas, and hydroelectric. The House Bill 5295 called for the repeal of the Oil Deregulation Act (P#128). AGHAM Party list representative Angelo Palmones joined with the DOST Region IV-A in helping plan the setting up of a biogas plant using chicken droppings in Rizal, Laguna (P#161).

The other energy issues discussed in the posts were rather controversial. These involved the four-to-eight hour daily power blackouts in Mindanao

that have been affecting 25 million people and their livelihoods (P#151, P#153, P#155, P#157). The AGHAM Party list was planning to file a class suit against the Napocor Power Corporation (NAPOCOR) and its service conduit, the National Grid Corporation, to address the power crisis. It was also reported that Mindanao's residents and business operators would file a Php5 billion class suit against NAPOCOR. Another controversial issue was the anomaly discovered over the power privatization of the Agus-pulangi hydroelectric complex in Mindanao (P#164). These issues were very current and 'gripping' during those times.

Information and issues about laws and policies were also shared or posted. These included lobbying for increased budget for R&D in the country (P#79) and rationalizing the organization of scientists for engagement in policymaking rather than letting them remain in the periphery (P#81).

Again, there were controversial issues that AGHAM was lobbying for. AGHAM authored two resolutions to investigate the importation of reconditioned fire trucks (P#80). AGHAM also filed three bills (P#82) endorsed by President Benigno Aquino III. Followers and other readers were informed on this in AGHAM's official site, which states among others that *"the K+12 Law is one of the three enacted laws with Palmones as one of the authors. In December 2012, R.A. 10344 or the Risk Reduction and Disaster Preparedness Equipment Protection Act, and on May 7, 2013 R. A. 10532 or the Philippine National Health Research System Act were signed by Pres. Aquino."*

AGHAM also informed its followers that Marikina Rep. Romero Federico Quimbo and AGHAM party list Representative Palmones II penned the Anti-pilferage Act of Risk Reduction and Preparedness Equipment of 2011, and they had already obtained the approval of a technical working group and are expected to hurdle committee deliberation soon (P#88). The followers were also informed that AGHAM has filed a resolution seeking a House probe into why official development assistance-funded projects have been delayed, costing the government some Php7 billion in cost overruns (P#100). AGHAM used the Facebook not only to update its followers on the party's advocacies – what it was doing, the bills it was drafting or co-drafting and passing –but also presumably to gain wider support.

Postings about the environment and disasters were also high. Two postings showed that AGHAM asked the Supreme Court to issue a Writ of Kalikasan to stop the alleged degradation of the Taal Lake (P#115; P#122). AGHAM was successful because the justices issued the writ during the

Court's regular executive session (P#122). In P#89, Rep. Palmones said that the community should stop blaming LGU on the garbage problem; instead the community should be involved in waste segregation at the barangay level, which in turn, should start at the household level.

There were fewer postings on disaster than expected by the researcher. These included risks that the Philippines experienced from weather such as typhoons and storm surges (P#53) and what could be done. Again, two controversial issues were posted for discussion. These involved the urgent declaration of bills by no less than Science Undersecretary Graciano Yumul Jr. to address the pilferage of the instruments of the PAGASA and the Philippine Institute for Volcanology and Seismology. These machines and equipment were donated by PAGASA's technical partners (P#99).

It is also worth noting that AGHAM Facebook followers posted or replied to 16 postings. Compared to the AGHAM party members, they were apparently more concerned or they sought more information about with economics (5 posts) and education (6 posts). They posted issues on how to improve investment for technology transfer and livelihood of the community (P#67). Replies followed such as suggestions that the government should promote personal savings to start sustainable projects on food production, housing, energy, reforestation, and infrastructure building (P#67; R#2; R#3; R#4; R#5; R#9). They suggested changing the culture of dole-out and teaching communities 'how to fish' instead. One post (P#67; R#4) even computed that an average savings of Php 5,000 for 50 million Filipinos with per year would be equivalent to Php 250 Billion. Another suggested a concrete strategy to address prevailing problems in the country. It said: *"Government can issue short, medium, and long term bonds at 3-5 percent interest rate. This will help government to prime the economy by investing these funds in building classrooms, sustainable agriculture, housing, infrastructures, energy, and ecotourism."* Another post (P#67; R#9) suggested that the government should have a trust fund, so poor people can borrow from government financial institutions at the lowest possible interest rate and invest in small enterprises. The post showed support to Rep. Palmones' position against pork barrel of the congressmen because it had turned into funds for the campaign war. *"HINDI PURO LIBRE AT DOLE-OUT! parang kasing tinuturuan silang maging TAMAD ng Gobyerno!"* [It should not be all dole out! It appears that the government is only teaching them to be indolent] (P#67;R#9).

The online Facebook followers also asked questions about the educational system such as the improvement of science education. They asked about the participation of deans of science programs so that “Engineering and Science colleges would include a more visionary and applicable approach in the students’ curriculum” (P#81; R#6). They also asked how foreign scholars will choose studying in the Philippines when our facilities and instruction are inadequate (P78; R#10).

Furthermore, they pointed out the marginalization of our scientists, such as weather forecasters, who are now transferring to meteorological centers in Singapore and in Australia (P#81; R#1). They announced the visit of NASA’s Filipino Physicist Dr. Josefino Comiso to Albay to share his researches and experiences and expressed hope that the Congress will recognize our Filipino scientists excelling all over the world and bring them home (P#51; R#6).

As for laws and policies, they were quite vocal about wanting Rep. Palmones to investigate the illegal act of government officials violating RA 9184 or otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act. “*Kailangan ninyo imbestigahan yan Congressman*, [You must investigate this, Congressman,]” they advised (P#80; R#1). AGHAM said that this Act will not only kill the domestic fire truck industry, it will also affect local manufacturers. AGHAM Representative Palmones was questioning Robredo as to why he wanted to push through with purchasing these imported, reconditioned fire trucks.

Finally, an issue with cultural implications and which represented ‘manufacturing and production’ was also raised by Cong. Palmones. It was about a barong Tagalog that he purchased. The issue became national when it was broadcast that Rep. Palmones accidentally found out that the barong he bought was not the genuine pina fiber but a counterfeit. One post commented “*Congressman Angelo, the barong Tagalog issue must be in the context of sensitivity to protect our identity as Filipinos* (Sept 12 on TV)” (P#93; R#1).

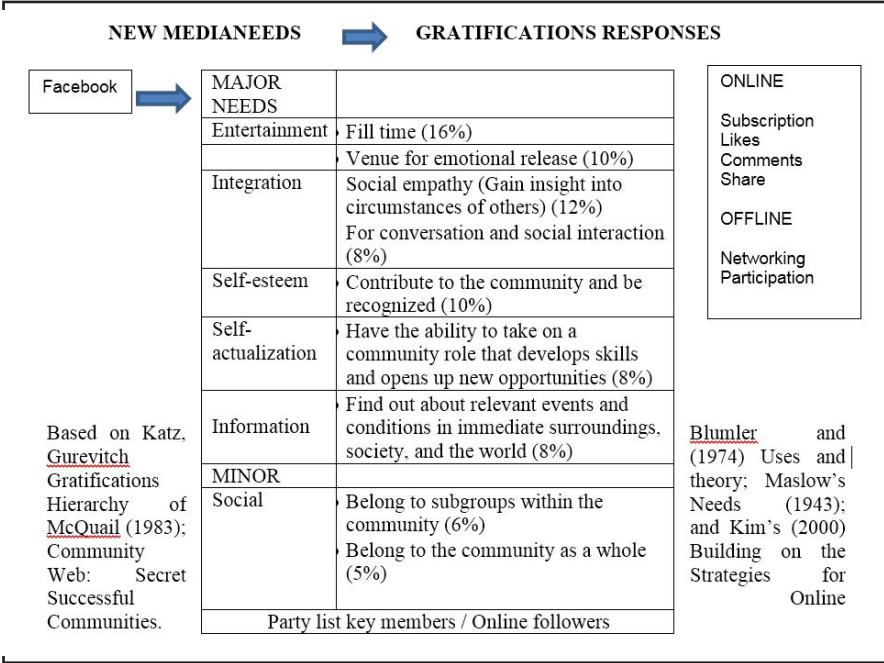


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of the findings of the study

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the researcher’s expectations, the AGHAM Facebook seemed to have been used more to fill in time and ventilate emotions rather than to seek useful development information. Of the 645 posts in the AGHAM Facebook, the needs gratified in the use of the AGHAM Facebook were (in order): for filling in time (entertainment) (16%); for social empathy (integration) (12%); for emotional release (entertainment) (10%); for self-esteem (10%); for conversation and social interaction (integration) (8.37%); for self-actualization (8%); and for finding out relevant events and conditions in society (information) (8%).

The recent loss of the AGHAM Party List during the recent Senate and Congressional elections in the Philippines last May 10, 2013 drives a realization that social media like Facebook and media connections may not always give a political party an edge. Philippine politics, it seems, shows that losing or winning may be caused by various factors or a confluence of other factors (e.g., political history, election fund, electoral base in the communities, political partisanship etc.). Social media such as Facebook

may increase awareness of a party list among the public especially among the youth, but these may not necessarily translate to votes. A study by Skoric and Kwan (2011) in Singapore has shown that being a member of a political group increases the member's likelihood of signing online petitions and subscribing, and this was also demonstrated by the Filipino followers of AGHAM. However, signing petitions is still different from actually voting in a national election, and this is a rich area for future researches.

POSTSCRIPT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study covered the period January 2011 to December 2012 or a two-year span. In the recent congressional election last May 10, 2013, however, AGHAM Party list lost its Congressional seat. Given the efforts of AGHAM to engage in social media to the point of even hiring two dedicated staff to maintain these, its loss in the recent election is quite illuminating.

Inside information, however, shows that AGHAM will run again for a seat in the future. The researcher checked the website of AGHAM as of October 14, 2013 and found that it has not been inactivated. Its Facebook Like Page is also running. In fact, its most recent post was shared to the public on September 24, 2013. This was about the approval of the court for AGHAM's petition for the Writ of Kalikasan for the Zambales mountain, a petition filed by AGHAM when it was still in Congress. The post shared on Facebook was a press release from AGHAM's website published on September 19, 2013.

While the Party list is now inactive from the national political scene, it continues to maintain its profile and presence in the web (as it had done when it lost in 2007). After all, its founders and members are still active in the science and technology sector as consultants and policymakers. Former Rep. Palmones also still has his communication programs and media connections as well as clout.

Hence, the recommendations forwarded may be used by AGHAM to recover its position for the next election. However, they are also applicable to other political or sectoral political parties that would like to maximize the potentials of social media, especially Facebook. More importantly, these may enhance the use of Facebook to promote and/ or advocate the development causes of a political party with the aim of inputting to policies on ICT for development.

Content

1. **Establish a clear identity of what AGHAM really is all about.** Although AGHAM says that it advocates for Science and Technology, the Facebook Page still does not depict a clear identity of what it is really advocating.
2. **Post a laymanized, easy-to-understand messages for the general public.** AGHAM needs to create messages that cater to the general public and not only to those with specific science-related interests. In the Philippines, a third world country, many marginalized voters would support a party list that provides them the basic needs such as food and shelter. While AGHAM claims to cater to farmers, and aims to be the bridge for pushing technology that can improve the state of its farmers and marginalized sectors, this is not obvious to readers. AGHAM apparently still had that 'elitist' image being a science and technology party. Hence, stakeholders will know and understand AGHAM's advocacy for the poor better if these were clearly explained in a language they understand.
3. **Use familiar language in posting the messages.** Filipinos react more to familiar things and to development agenda made understandable to the general public. The mother tongue is better understood in many cases, hence using Filipino language can make the page less intimidating.

Policies

Address readers' feedback and inputs. AGHAM must ensure that it makes its appreciation felt by the followers through fast response to issues raised by readers online. Some posts didn't get replies, leaving the impression that AGHAM failed to answer and address the concerns or issues raised by the followers. Statements should not be left hanging, and it must continue to be conversational. It may result to a longer thread, but it will establish relationship between online followers and the party list even with the lack of face-to-face communication.

Management

1. **Enhance information needs.** The information need of the followers should be considered even though this was ranked 6th of their needs met. Most followers appreciate being informed and getting the summary of vital issues. When posting information, AGHAM should not just post excerpts but short sentences of what the post is all about is all about but why it should concern the online followers. Development communication is educational and processed so vital information for learning should be shared to followers.
2. **Analyze online activities through monitoring and evaluation** (e.g., Google Analytics). Have a social media team document online and offline activities. With the rapid growth and extensive coverage of the Internet, AGHAM should know what is being said and disseminated about the party list. At the same time, the social media team should always be updated on the projects and activities of the party list.
3. **Face time with people is still effective when it comes to getting support.** Although social media have become popular, the mobilization of the virtual community remains effective. Filipinos, seem to prefer the human touch and to feel a great sense of security and trust. They prefer seeing the person behind the page, rather than let the Facebook page do all the work. Since the study is exploratory in nature, the researcher has discovered that one of Facebook's limitations is not only the lack of face-to-face interaction but some inconsistencies in the showing of documented posts.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Summary of postings of communication needs gratified
by the use of Facebook

NEEDS	AGHAM		FOLLOW-ERS		TOTAL	
	Freq N=135	%	Freq N=493	%	Freq N=645	%
Information needs						
Find out about relevant events and conditions in immediate surroundings, society, and the world	35	5.43	16	2.48	51	7.90
Satisfy curiosity and general interest	17	2.64	2	0.31	19	2.94
Have access to system	1	0.16	12	1.86	13	2.01
Learn, self-education	2	0.31	9	1.40	11	1.66
Seek advice on practical matters, or opinion and decision choices	2	0.31	7	1.09	9	1.39
Sub-Total	57	8.85	46	7.14	103	15.9
Security and safety needs						
Gain a sense of security through knowledge	0	0	14	2.17	14	2.17
Have the sense of having a “level playing field”	1	0.16	5	0.78	6	0.93
Gain the ability to own and maintain one’s identity while participating in a Web Community	0	0	3	0.47	3	0.46
Sub-Total	1	0.16	22	3.42	23	3.56
Social Needs						
Belong to the community as a whole	26	4.03	11	1.71	37	5.73
Belong to subgroups within the community	6	0.93	12	1.86	35	5.42
Sub-Total	32	4.96	23	3.57	72	11.15
Integration						
Social empathy (gain insight into circumstances of others)	2	0.93	75	11.63	77	11.93
Conversation and social interaction	1	0.16	53	8.22	54	8.37
Carry out social roles	0	0	11	1.71	11	1.70

Identification and belongingness	1	0.16	1	0.16	2	0.31
Sub-Total	4	1.25	140	21.72	14	22.3
					4	1
Self-Esteem						
Contribute to the community and be recognized.	1	0.16	61	9.46	62	9.61
Sub-Total	1	0.16	61	9.46	62	9.61
Entertainment						
Fill time	3	0.47	98	15.19	10	15.6
					1	5
Have venue for emotional release	1	0.16	60	9.30	61	9.45
Get intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment	10	1.55	14	2.17	24	3.72
Sub-Total	14	2.18	172	26.66	18	28.8
					6	2
Personal Identity						
Identify with valued others (in the media)	0	0	1	0.16	1	0.15
Sub-Total	0	0	1	0.16	1	0.15
Self-Actualization						
Take on a community role that develops skills and opens up new opportunities.	26	4.03	28	4.34	54	8.37
Sub-Total	26	4.03	28	4.34	54	8.37