THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF SELECT LETRAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to social and political participation, the youth comes to mind last. The culture of politics amongst students is a shady idea especially in an institution like that of Colegio de San Juan de Letran. In a school setting, social media (websites that create inter-personal relationship), school culture (which can be described as characteristics inherent to the Colegio), and influential people (who may be members of the faculty and seminar guest speakers) are considered as primary influential factors for political orientation due to their accessibility for students while inside the school. Through Fairclough's critical discourse analysis that examines power relations involved in the discourses available in political forums, this paper describes the political culture of Letran students. As illustrated in this paper, the political culture of Letran students is a collection of characteristics that may as well give the political identity of the Letran student body as a whole: a mixture of tolerant, active-conservative and a democratic political culture.

Keywords: *Social Media, School Culture, Elite, Political Culture, Discourse*

INTRODUCTION

Students are heeded to be of less value in terms of political influence on grounds of lack of experience (Koffler, 2005; Miklosi, 2007; Payton, 2008) with political activities such as voting on elections and membership with socio-political movements hence the notion of apathy among them (McGrath, 2011; Niemi, 2010; Phelps, 2005; Seider, 2009). However, "the political participation of young people remain a salient topic and an issue for social concern" (Quintelier, 2010). It also has to be put into consideration that "young people are often involved in a variety of alternative or unconventional forms of political activity and not necessarily apathetic and uninterested in political issues *per se*" (Phelps, 2005). Youth activity in the political arena is still recognized to be important granting the presence of heterogeneous convictions (Williams, 2006), philosophies and culture (Lopes et al., 2009). Thus, youth engagement in politics is a crucial aspect in the political dynamics of democracy (Barnett, 2010; Curtin et al., 2010; Glynn et al., 2009; Kennedy, 2007; Lopes et al., 2009; Mitra, 2006; Pasek et al., 2008; Xenos and Young, 2008; Zvonovskii, 2009).

Youth political orientation and culture has been studied in recent years. Most were from the United States of America (Bargsted and Kedar, 2009; Curtin et al., 2010; Dilworth, 2008; Glynn et al., 2009; Richards-Shcuster and Checkoway, 2009; Walker 2006) and Europe (Chitty, 2010; Dilworth, 2008; Eliseev and Ustinova, 2011; Gschwend and Hooghe, 2006; Schwirtz, 2007; Topalova, 2006; Zarycki 2009). Given this, there is still a need for further research on student

political culture (Yohalem and Martin, 2007). Most researches regarding student participation concentrate on the factors or reasons why an active participant decides to support a political faction or actor (Zittel and Gschwend, 2008) rather than the actual orientation of students towards politics and the antecedents that propel participation. While ethnicity-oriented politics (McGrath, 2011; Mitra, 2006; Youniss, 2005) and social cleavages (Yohalem and Martin, 2007) were also considered common grounds for the participation of the youth, little is known about the other factors that propel political participation of students.

In the Philippines, statistics provided by the Commission on Elections states that, 47 million Filipinos are eligible to vote in the 2010 Philippine National Elections and 54% of the registered voters are coming from the youth bloc. Another similar advancement on the role of the youth is the organization of The Anak ng Bayan Youth Party (which was later renamed to KABATAAN Partylist) in 2001 with the vision of advancing the politics of struggle and hopes to fulfil the role of the Filipino youth in nation building and advancing social change and progress through the collective action of the youth and the people. Similarly, the Sangguniang Kabataan creation was a response to the United Nations' Convention on the rights of the children to create a medium wherein the youth can engage and represent their sector towards active participation in the affairs of the government and the country. All these manifest the potential and saliency of the participation of the youth in politics.

The purpose of this study then is to discover and characterize the political culture of a specific group of Filipino youth—Letran students. Categorically, the objectives of this study constitute (1) description of the political culture of Letran students and a (2) discovery of how (a) social media, (b) school culture, and (c) political education of Letran students shape this political culture.

This study may help find ways on promoting political activity and increase political awareness of college students to help them become active citizens. This research may also be of use for the government to strengthen its relationship with the citizens, more specifically to younger people through immersions in politics.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the critical discourse analysis theory. This theory was first introduced by Norman Fairclough in *Language and Power* in 1989. The principles of the critical discourse analysis theory include "focus on dominance relations by elite groups and institutions as they are being enacted, legitimated or otherwise reproduced by text and talk. One of the crucial elements of this analysis of the relations between power and discourse is the patterns of access to (public) discourse for different social groups. Theoretically, it is shown that in order to be able to

relate power and discourse in an explicit way, we need 'cognitive interface' of models, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies and other social representations of the social mind, which also relate the individual and the social, and micro and macro levels of social structure" (van Dijk, 1993).

Critical discourse analysis examines ideologies and power relations involved in discourse language in political forums such as the school environment and social media. One crucial presupposition of the critical analysis discourse understands the nature of social power and dominance. Social power is based on privileged access to socially valued resources status, position, education or knowledge. Power involves control. Such control may pertain to action and cognition. That is, a "power" group may limit the freedom of action of others, and more importantly, influence their minds. "Dominance may be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, everyday forms of talk and text that appear 'natural' and quite acceptable. Hence, critical discourse analysis also needs to focus on the discursive strategies that legitimate control, or otherwise 'naturalize' the social order, and especially relations of inequality" (Fairclough, 1985 in van Dijk, 1993). Power and dominance are usually organized and institutionalized. It is usually ideologically sustained and reproduced through varied means.

Literature Review

The Study of Political Culture

Aristotle and the likes of Montesquieu and Tocqueville, among others have conceived of the idea that the society's political order reflects the people's beliefs, values, and characteristics (Welzel and Inglehart, 2008). Political culture is the "citizens' participation [in political activities] (although they do not have confidence in political institutions or in elections themselves) and the political institutions that can take quasi-democratic forms" (Zvonovskii, 2009). Political culture are reasons that promote certain actions that causes involvement in political activities. Political culture is the set of attitudes, ideologies, premises which give shape to the political system. Political culture may therefore be connected to personal experiences or public manifestations absorbed by the citizen.

The work of Sidney and Verba in 1963, The Civic Culture, has been widely cited by researches in terms of studies pertaining to political culture. Different political culture theories branched out from this benchmark work. Politics and culture are individually different "social realms" and the term "politics and culture" are not interchangeable with "political culture". "Cultural rules, symbols, and practices may serve to create a new political culture, or they may simply contribute to the political culture that is already in place" (Berezin, 1997).

Sidney and Verba classified political culture in to three types: (a) parochial, in which the citizens or the members of the society are generally apathetic, (b) subject, by which the members of the society are highly aware of the issues but the participation is considered low, and (c) participant which both participation and awareness are at its highest value.

Little is known about the influence of the youth's political environment (Sandell, 2006) on their political culture. In this research, the researchers will qualify the political culture based not only on casting votes during elections, supporting political parties or actors and involvement with socio-political movements or activist groups. Participation as a whole in politics will not always fit well with unique characteristics of college students (Niemi, 2010).

Participation through Social Media

Social media (Kushin and Yamamoto, 2010; Payton, 2008) is an organic production model in which boundaries between producer and consumer are eliminated such that users create the content for each other" (Kushin and Yamamoto, 2010). The media has wielded power in distributing political ideas and "establishing narrative of campaigns". Advocating for change takes many forms and by linking with technology, students can voice the issues in communities (Payton, 2008). Technological features such as Facebook, YouTube and social networking sites enables transfer of information easily available and accessible to students and are taken advantage of by political actors (Collin, 2008; Payton, 2008; Vitak et al., 2011).

The increasing organization and impact of media provides an important framework to stimulate young people's continued political involvement (Collin, 2008; Payton, 2008; Xenos and Kyoung, 2008). New media has also helped organized volunteers to inspire and inform new participants. The media, especially the internet, often cited as key factor in effecting change and increasing knowledge. Media use has been associated with greater levels of involvement in civic activities as well as higher levels of political awareness (Vitak et al., 2011).

Other studies, however, would discount the efficiency of media and technology in promoting political participation. McGrath (2011) and Miklosi (2007) suggest that the usage of technology by both adults and young adults may not significantly affect overall participation. Technological advancement in terms of social media alone does not have monopoly on the advancement of political awareness and participation most especially among young adults. Traditional methods of campaigning awareness is still important and an integral part of political mobilization. Coleman (2006) has brought upon a dilemma in which the "combination of youth and the internet conjures up popular images of an aimless, distracted, addicted generation in the grip of an irresponsible and unaccountable technology."

In this study, the researchers identify how students use social media to gather or share information regarding socio-political issues and as such look into the varied instances when it becomes a venue for political participation. People would only view or post comments to comment threads if they are interested or see themselves as knowledgeable of the topic. With such, it is possible that political perception of the students may be influenced whenever they see someone familiar joining in with online discussions, thus shaping their political culture.

School Culture and Political Participation

School culture is the environment in which an educational institution may provide for individual, more specifically young political participants.

School culture is a vehicle by which the perception of voting, opinion on political and social issues could be transformed from one of relative unimportance to being seen as an integral part of being a productive and socially conscious citizen (Glynn, 2009). Schools are considered to provide influence in political identity of an individual as the culture of an institution may transform organizational structures within (Mitra, 2006). Pancer (2007) suggests that engagement will be sustained if young people are in an environment that structures values, perceptions, opinions of students towards political issues or community service.

Different educational institutions would have different school culture. Morals, philosophy and how a student thinks may be affected by the goals and visions of the school in which the student is a part of. Stereotyping and stigma of being a member of an educational institution may have an effect on one's political culture.

As a religious institution, the Colegio is known to have its own opinions on socio-political issues. It is possible that the Colegio's adherence to religious beliefs, teachings and views are transferred to students which are compelled to living the Letran culture. One proof of such claim would be the Colegio's position on the Reproductive Health Bill. Students might share the same stance with that of the institution based on the mere fact that they are part of Letran culture.

The Influence of the "Elite" on Political Education and Participation

Education is undoubtedly a powerful socialization force (Lopes, 2009) though it is not exclusive the only factor that would influence people's political participation but it is widely stressed that its importance in responsible and active citizenship. "Political literacy encompasses knowledge, skills and values that enable young people to become effective in public life at local to global level" (Lopes, 2009). Schools are also important in shaping political education as "it prepares students for the 'real' world and provide students with essential resources required for political participation" (Quintelier, 2010). Educators may have generally huge impact on tempering student opinion and mobilization (Chitty, 2010). In Singapore, politics is explicitly taught to students as a part of the curriculum most especially in the high school (Jianli, 2006).

Political education provided for by these influential people may be described as intentional actions enabling political awareness of students by infusing political issues with subjects and/or issues taught or discussed inside the school setting. Curtin et al. (2010) suggest that prior exposure to political identities enables one person interested, at the least, to activism. Educator and student partnership in identifying school problems and possible solutions provide unique perspective and

knowledge (Mitra, 2006). This partnership may also entail the change process even in broader policy environment such as the political society. Political education may increase student understanding of policies and electoral issues (Pasek et al., 2008). Political education may outright produce immediate gains in students' political activities and knowledge of local and national government (Pasek et al., 2008).

Communication between influential people and students, on the other hand, has been neglected due to the structure of the education of educational institutions. "Implementation gaps may exist" whereby the policy and vision outlined by school administrators does not necessarily correspond with the curriculum in practice (Lopes, 2009; Thorne, 2010). Apathy, or lack of interest with the socio-political atmosphere may be rooted to crackdowns by the school administration of student organizations promoting political participation and realization of issues that affect the society (Jianli, 2006).

Influential people inside the Colegio include members of the academe that provide education. Given their expertise in the subject areas, they are considered as "elites". It is also a common practice that educational institutions organize seminars, talks and forums and invite guests that would share their take or positions on political and social matters. These people that provide political education are influential considering they are authorized by the Colegio to share insights and opinions. These influential people are also viewed by students as someone with legitimate access to knowledge.

Given the survey of literature, we assume that social media, school culture and the "elites" characterize, shape and continuously reshape the political culture of Letran students. Access to social media, the identity, vision, and philosophy of the institution these students belong to, and the ideas or positions of the "elites" are considered to be determinants of the political culture of Letranites.

METHODS

This study was undertaken qualitatively to characterize the political culture of Letran students. By means of a descriptive method via a series of in-depth interviews, this study attempted to delineate how certain ideas, values and beliefs translate into political culture.

Interviews with 12 enrolled students were conducted within Colegio de San Juan de Letran in the second semester of the academic year 2012-2013. Target sample for this research are Letran students enrolled the previous and current academic year. In addition, students who are in the 3rd and 4th year were specifically and purposively chosen. Different interview guides were developed for the sample to characterize (1) school culture, (2) social media, and (3) the ascendancy of influential people in campus in relation with political culture. Questions contextualizing the importance of the content of social media in line with its influence and importance to students were asked. Researchers asked about personal views of students regarding current socio-political issues; additionally, views of

the respondents with regards to the opinion of the Colegio were also asked. To analyze the significance of influential people to the culture of Letran students, respondents were asked who among members of the faculty and guest speakers on seminars they think they relate very well. The narratives were then analysed from which the themes and categories were based.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Social Media and a Tolerant Political Culture

Social media is one of the more common means of Letran students in getting informed. The primary concern of the respondents of the interviews conducted by the researcher with regards to social media is receiving information from both corporate pages like ABS-CBN, GMA, and schools, and government agencies like PAGASA and DOST. Respondents have cited pages of individuals like Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago and Richard Gordon, media personalities such as Kris Aquino, Ces Drilon and other news reporters, and school administrators. The accessibility of social media is a reason why it is considered a forum for political interaction.

The social media has been utilized by both students and political personalities alike to communicate. Primarily, students have to be interested with the subject or main purpose of the Facebook profile or Twitter page. Connection between students and online forums start only if the content being presented satisfy the interests of the students with which political discussion propagates. Beyond interests, the usability of the information from these pages is also important. These pages need to have content such as posts and updates that benefits the daily routine of the students. These factors pave the way for the initiation of the forum particularly essential in the discourse.

Personal interest was the primary reason of respondents for liking, following, or subscribing into these individuals' social networking accounts or pages. The individual content of these pages is likewise a reason for following these pages. Responses like *"I really like politics… I am very interested to things they do."* and *"It captures my interest. It feels good to interact on something that I can relate to."* describe the participation of Letran students in political discourses and dialogues propagate when students are primarily interested with the topics at hand. It is because of his or her interests in the content of the profile pages in social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter that initiates the connection and transfer of information from political individuals or organizations to students and vice versa. Students' interests to these topics potentially transform into the "power" in which students are enticed into continuing the communication. Interest to whichever topic being discussed in these social media sites arouses interaction. Letran students only react to socio-political issues because said issues catch their attention. In relation to discourse analysis, the student's inclination to politics is dependent whether the topic interests him/her or not. This seeming interest is however created foremost by a need. Such was implied when a respondent was asked on why the respondent subscribes to news feeds from ABS-CBN News Channel Facebook page: *"With ANC, it depends*

because as an Economics student, I need to follow whatever is happening with the business sector." Social media in this case then transforms the need to an interest in socio-political issues. Students orient themselves to socio-political information because it is reshaped by media from being initially a need to something sustained as political interest. They access information regarding topics related to the courses they are taking up through social media as various social media pages are set to provide exclusive information on specific topics. They find topics helpful for their studies with these pages. In this situation, the cogency of discourse relations is the scholarly need of the student. School-related works demand not just book-based knowledge but applications to real-life scenarios are also at the premium which may at times oblige students to amass information through other means.

Similarly, students tune themselves in to social media to receive updates on events that are transpiring. These occurrences may appear to the students as a rare or a strange event that does not happen often rendering it very important for the student to have ample knowledge of. The rarity of such an event has become a motivation for the student to get hold of information on what is happening in the society, therefore rendering him or her engaging in to socio-politics. Curiosity leads students into engaging and reacting to current events. Mere unconventionality of events itself would already be enough to instigate engagement of the students. One responded commented: *"… It depends if I can relate. Recent example would be the Colorado shooting. I looked forward to news updates about that event."*

Among the respondents, there are cases of being active in relaying personal insights towards issues being discussed in pages that he follows and is a subscriber of. When asked if they post comments in pages of the accounts they follow, one respondent cited her perceived insufficient knowledge on certain issues a hindrance in providing her insights. Social media as a venue for political discussion then is also a venue for power relations to exist. The very fact that a student lacks knowledge on a particular issue bars him or her from engaging in political discourse as apparently, those who are knowledgeable impose upon the others an influence felt by the latter. This could be captured by a statement from a respondent when she said: *"I am not really politically-inclined. I feel that I would always be wrong whenever I comment that is why I just read and never comment."* Participation in politics by students may be hampered because the student believes he/she lacks ample knowledge to be shared. A student who has the intention of joining discussions in social media sites may somehow find it difficult to express him/herself. The student's apprehension brought about by presupposed lack of knowledge ultimately denies the student from participating in the discussion. This implies that students may assume that he/she is not politically-inclined though in reality, the intention to participate makes him/her predisposed in politics, though he/she is passive in doing so. This brings forth the idea that knowledge, the lack thereof and even the perceived lack thereof, is one of the "powers" that dictate political participation of students. However, as the critical discourse analysis provides, it is not only the lack of knowledge that hinders participation; it is also brought about by the apparent influence that knowledgeable individuals have to the other members of the forum. The former sends an explicit idea, an influence that makes the other members quiet even when they

wanted to share their own ideas or beliefs, too. This extends more, far way beyond just silence, since the students would now think and believe, they are not politically-inclined.

Though social media may appear to have sound influence over the followers of personalities and/or organizations, it is still yet to have a clear grasp on the influential aspect of this medium. Personal ideologies still play crucial roles in maintaining an adherence to an opinion. Additionally, one reason for maintaining an opinion is because students tend not to follow someone who seems to be contradicting the initial perception of the student. Students follow a particular set of pages because of the affirmation of their stand regarding a societal or political issue. As these respondents suggest, *"For me, our [opinions] match. I follow them [their pages] because we have the same ideologies in the first place. I like their principles. It's as if they are re-affirming my stand,"* and *"… I really like Bongbong Marcos because of the Marcos-Aquino [feud]. Another is because during the impeachment of [Chief Justice] Corona, he did not vote against Corona. I am pro-Corona."* Students tend to connect and interact with other people who share the same ideas and philosophies. The matching opinions fortify their belief in certain ideologies, and in this case, sharing it with someone who they identify with as authorities due to their positions they hold in the government. This gives students a sense of affirmation from someone who is considered to as knowledgeable to the field making it easier to discuss openly their convictions. This describes that the political attitude of Letran students tend to flourish when someone of greater hierarchical status seems to approve of their political deductions. As in the case above, when one finds that another is more knowledgeable and influences him not to comment further, this immediate case also is a manifestation of power relations in the social media. Subscription is in the first place generated by identification to a similar view; otherwise, the students would not comment or subscribe or "like" the pages they see.

School Culture and an Active-Conservative Political Culture

The responses indicate that the opinion of the school in which the respondents are a part of can somehow sway their opinion based on the idea that the administrators says so. On the other hand, some respondents may accept the institution's opinion but would somehow stick with their pre-disposed opinion. *"For me, none. The church has its stand, politicians have their own, and I have my personal opinion. It [church's opinion] does not affect me. That is their stand, and this is mine."* Students are well aware of the differences between their opinions and to that of the school's. Students turn to their ability to discern and lean on their freedom as a person to choose an idea which they think benefits them. *"Actually, we are all entitled to the freedom of thought. If that is their opinion, then so be it. As long as they are respecting our opinion. I just do not really like having their opinions imposed to us. I get irritated with that."* This apparently means that the school's efforts in alluring students to share its ideas would be futile. Rather, students usually recognize and respect the school's inclinations. This may be described to as both active and immobile political participation. It is active because students are well aware of their own political choice. It is immobile as the growth of the belief is hampered, if not limited, by opinions contradicting it.

Political stands of schools may be imparted to its students. Colegio de San Juan de Letran, as a Catholic institution, has a background of religious conservatism. Respondents were asked on their opinion regarding controversial issues like to that of the proposed Reproductive Health and divorce bills. Most respondents would pose neutral to positive attitude regarding the said legislations. However, when asked about their awareness of the perspective of Catholic institutions, Letran *per se*, the responses are as follows: *"I understand the position of the school because it is a Catholic institution."* Another response was: *"Isn't Letran a Catholic institution? They are against RH Bill … I am already used to them taking sides on an issue because I was also from another Catholic school.* Being a Catholic institution, Letran is known to take sides favouring religious faith especially on controversial issues that might be transgressing moral boundaries set in lieu of the Catholic faith.

Students in Letran practice tolerance, weighing between personal opinion and the ideology the school intends to share among its students. Letran students, on the other hand, tend to practice acquiescence. The reason behind this may be because of the awareness of the students of the religious conservatism the Colegio employs as one of its core values. Tolerance for differing principles is one characteristic that the political culture of Letran students exhibits. *"I think they attach themselves too much on the concept of Catholicism but they do not really see the possible benefits of [this bill] to our country."* A respondent even expressed displeased sentiments towards religious conservatism. *"When the church involve themselves with these kinds of issues, I get irritated because we are already beyond the Spanish era and yet, they still act as if the Spanish are still here."* Conservatism of school ideologies may at times be unpopular among students. Students have embraced the concept of modernity and at times would even denounce remnants of colonial era characterized by the legitimizing aspect of religion.

Biases against or in favour of issues with the school have been cited by some of the respondents. Campaigning against or in favour of particular opinions may lean towards an ideology especially in an institution bounded by its adherence to religion. This has been viewed as disadvantageous to the contradicting paradigm as they do not have the proper channel in relaying the positives or defend their beliefs with which the burden of proof has been denied.

"In my experience with Letran, though they [priests] have authority, they do not impose … As long as they do not cross the line of giving opinion. If ever that happens, I will go along with them." Although Letran has its reservations on matters regarding controversial issues, the school administration does not compel its students to share its opinions. The administration of Letran, in its part, practice tolerance. However, if Letran does coerce its students to share its opinion, students, specifically this respondent, would confine accepting the authority of the school. Being a Catholic institution makes it easier for students to accept, or tolerate at the least, the views of the school administrators. The school environment has somehow does not encourage discourses. Students who have pre-determined their personal views would rather keep their own opinion than sharing them in an environment that are vocally against their views.

It is undeniable that the mere membership with the institution can shape an opinion. Students who stand neutral on a particular issue may somehow find themselves getting acclimated with the Colegio's stand and find it befitting to their personal views as one respondent put it: *"I adhere to the decision of the school."* Constant exposure to specific ideas, in time, may indoctrinate students into sharing the same philosophies with the school. As one respondent argued: *"Here in school, they prevent [the promotion of RH bill] because they are the authority here."*

While other students most likely have their opinions contradicting the views of the school particularly with the controversial issues that battle with the Catholic culture, it is by personal choice that students do not share the same opinion of the school. However, the influence of the school cannot be denied. Students tend to temper their views and opinion most especially while inside the premises, just to show respect to the institution. Students neutral on the issue may, however, be swayed towards sharing the opinion of the school administration. Schools have the rules and regulations at their disposal. Though the school may not explicitly employ these, students may become apprehensive in expressing their ideas. School authorities may subtly curtail participation and propagation of ideas by the students due to the awareness of students of the possibility of sanctions that may be imposed upon them by school authorities. In critical discourse analysis, subtle elements of power and authority can shape and redirect positions as the above cases provide.

The "Elite" and a Democratic Political Culture

Discourses with influential people garnered positive reception from the students. Guest speakers' insights during seminars and talks provided inside the institution have been widely anticipated by the students. The interest to the kind of seminars to be attended is program-based. The interest of the respondents to the seminar is still dependent on whether or not it is somehow connected to their present realities. These realities would include their studies. This is evident with the following statements: *"Of course. If it is related to my program, it captures my interest more"*, *"If it is subject-related, it is fine with me."* Seminars and talks may provide wider views of the society. It provides a venue in which unusual topics are given own forums. As such, the respondents get new information and widen their perspective beyond what is being discussed in a usual classroom setting. *"The most memorable [seminar] that I have attended is about communism. [Seminar] on awareness against the NPA and communists."* New topics that are being discussed in seminars expand the knowledge of the student. If the education in classroom settings is limited to topics related to academic studies, seminars may educate students with extraordinary topics and yet are happening in reality. This characterizes the political culture of Letran students as something open to new ideas.

Power in seminar discourse emanates from speakers who provide knowledge in these seminars. Political orientation of Letran students may be influenced by persons who have experience in the field of their studies. Perceived authority is important in influencing political orientations. Students usually take to heavy considerations opinions by someone who they think of as authoritative. This authority is manifested with positions these people hold. Authority, for students

basically are manifestations of credibility and knowledge. *"Primarily, they have authority, they are credible. They are in their position and we expect them not to put us in danger."*

Seminars from outsourced speakers can give new insights to things in the present society. There is, however, the fact that the teaching personnel still are good sources of socio-political discourses in which students can learn from a lot. When asked who among the teaching personnel has been of great interest for them in terms of being an influence to their perception on things around them, certain names have recurred among the respondents. Reasons as claimed by the respondents include their confidence in delivering the concept of the topic which seems to have emanated from their knowledge on things that they won't get from other sources. *"The way they speak and the things they say are important. It is as if they tell you new things. They appear to really know things very well."* Although they maintain a hierarchal superiority over students, the mere presence of interaction between the students and professors to create a forum within or outside the formal educational structure provides a democratic set-up. As teachers, they are also reputable and on the accounts of students interviewed, are highly trusted because of the impression that their professors would not lead students towards fallacious beliefs.

Speakers in seminars and members of the academe act then as educators for socio-political issues. They provide fresh ideas and new learning and therefore believed by students. Their power lies on their ability to inform students. Speakers and professors thus take part in influencing the political orientations of students. Through interaction with the speakers and their professors, the students are able to show and provide their opinions however dissenting these may seem.

DISCUSSION

The results highlight nonetheless the idea of the existence of subtle power relations when one is barred from or encouraged in participating in discourse or expressing views in social media, the school administration and the "elites" because of an influence stemming from a supposed need from and differences or similarities of ideas or views with the actors involved in the discourse.

Social media can only influence the political culture of students if the content of social media pages or profiles especially by political figures and socio-political organizations satisfy the needs and interests of the students and when they share the same sentiment with the members of the forum; otherwise, they would be just silent if not passive. On the other hand, school influence, by means of the rules and regulations imposed by the school itself, may restrict participation of the students to socio-political movements and/or activities which students tend to tolerate by the fact that these restrictions emanate from authorities of the institution they chose to be a part of. Influential people at school, which include both outsourced resource speakers and the members of the academe, influence students of their political opinions as they are viewed upon by students as knowledgeable individuals most especially on topics they employed to teach and/or talk about.

The political orientation of Letran students may be described as interest-driven as participation may only propagate if it fits well to the academic and personal needs of the students. This is supported by Lee and Kahne (2008) that "[online] activities have supported the development of a participatory culture that provides youth with multiple opportunities to develop civically-relevant skills …these opportunities in turn may foster a range of civic and political outcomes". A tolerant political culture is also seen as students tend not to openly object to arguments contradicting their opinion but rather accept these as means of widening the scope of their knowledge on issues at hand. Political tolerance is important to building and maintaining democratic relations (Seligson, 2000) and in the case of this paper, the maintenance of harmonious relationship between students and school administrators. Letran students find authoritative people who they deem to have easy access to either by social media or personal means as highly-influential; the constant openness of the speakers and professors provide venue for the Letran students to ask and argue with a broad range of issues thereby providing a participative environment. As illustrated in this paper, the political culture of Letran students is a collection of characteristics that may as well identify the political identity of the Letran student body as a whole: a mixture of tolerant, active-conservative and a democratic political culture.

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