Innovations

Effects of Online Posts of Trolls in Shaping the Political Views of College-Based Student Councils

Wroclyl Jean B. Bullecer, [1] Parsons N. Hail, [2] Maria Adrielle Estigoy[3,] Danilo S. Vargas[4]

Central Luzon State University, Philippines

*Abstract**The study is conducted to generally aimsto determine the perceived effect of online troll posts in influencing political views, particularly among Central Luzon State University College-Based Student Councils. The researcher conducts a descriptive quantitative approach.Stratified random sampling was the type of probability sampling used to get a population. The researcher used an online survey containing questions to gather data from the respondents. Since it was descriptive quantitative research the researcher used percentage frequency as the statistical treatment and descriptive analysis to analyze the data that were collected. The result revealed the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents reported that most of them are female at age 22 and come from Bachelor of Science undergraduate programs. On the level of awareness of respondents about online trolls, the majority of them notice that trolls' posts are about politics but since those are spreading fake news, most of the respondents are debunking that information by providing credible sources instead of engaging in conflict. Third, on the level of exposure of respondents to online posts of trolls, data shows that majority of respondents are frequently encountering online troll posts but deemed that they do not engage or interact with them. Fourth, 23 respondents believed that students' engagement in online posts by trolls can open up their minds and can widen their political views while 42 respondents noted that as a voter, they are trying to weigh every inch of information they see on the internet before letting it affect their political views. On the perceived effects of online political posts on their political view, 86% said that online posts of trolls don't influence their political views because they already have eyes on candidates to vote in the election. While, in question, if trolls can educate the students, 68% said that trolls do not even educate them as their sources are not credible at all, that is why they just ignore the trolls on social media. Lastly, the level of exposure to online trolls does not correlate at all with the political views of the CLSU college-based student councils.*

Keywords:1.effects,2.online trolls, 3.political views, 4.awareness,5.fake news, 6.credible sources,7.exposure,8.social media

Introduction

Social media has progressed as a great medium for online social interaction due to the inevitable inseparability between technological instruments and humans. Nowadays, online social media platforms are increasingly being used to educate the public about politics, actively involve their users, and create a learning environment for offline political causes, among other things. It has become necessary for involvement in political discussions and activities, as well as for political engagement. In fact, across the globe, it is the primary means through which they establish their political identities and become socially aware through news consumption; hence, networks such as Facebook and Twitter have both social control and a rebellious population (Bradshaw & Howard, 2017).

The usage of social media is widespread, people can effortlessly share information and their opinion this resulted in uncontrolled online trolls that can influence miscommunication and causes of spreading fake news soa student shouldknow how to identify and character online trolls so that they will be knowledgeable of credible and reliable sources, as it is necessary to help the community in the spread of more fake news and put stop to the alarming trolling. It is crucial nowadays to discern the information if it is credible or not to avoid miscommunication. It is known that the CLSUCollege-based student council is politically inclined and exposed to mainstream media and aware of online trolls. Online trolls are altering the perceptions of those who do not wish to do their research, trolling manipulated information, and overshadowing the truth.

Despite the help that social media can provide, it also has its disadvantages. One of them is the rise of "online trolls." However, the Philippines has a limited study on online trolls. Articles about it are lacking and insufficient. Most online trolls' study is always relatedto their effect on society; there are only limited studies on how online trolls shape the political view of people, especially students. The more politically divided the target society, the more effective online trolling may prove. As is true with so many adults, children generally lack the critical thinking abilities essential to see divisive, emotional speech for what it is, resulting in a serious long-term impact on democratic institutions (Berghel&Berleant, 2018).

On the other hand, online trolling takes on a wide range of forms – from the unending malevolence to the blatant political provocation, from rouge falsification of information to justifiable disputes, and from psychological aggravation to inoffensive amusement. Although the acts of online trolling can be overlooked, understanding this phenomenon may unearth valuable discoveries about ourselves and society. Instead of delving into the difference between online and offline discourse, there should be more emphasis on the consideration of the complexity of social, political, and cultural factors that impact the perception of and motivations of online trolls (Swan, 2016).

In a study, it is said that Duterte's force of between 400 and 500 online soldiers posts patriotic and pro-government remarks while also engaging in online harassment and person-to-person interactions with opponents; cyber troops in the Philippines are considered liminal spaces, although they do have some of the cooperation (Matsuzawa, 2020). According to Lalu (2020), Bayan Secretary Renato Reyes stated that President Duterte practically reveals that the government was behind the proliferation of false information and the creation of fraudulent identities. Online trolls have been a dilemma during President Rodrigo Duterte, and it is widely recognized that the administration has hired these trolls and utilized the same tactic to win the presidential election and campaign.

According to Story and Billing (2020), Nic Gabunda was the key element in campaign Duterte's last 2016 election and was found to be connected with a system of hundredsof accounts that were deleted from Facebook for engaging in suspicious activities. He is linked to a troll campaign and is believed to be one of the pioneers of this way of operations. The trolls have been a prominent problem on various online sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. They tend to spread false news and do anything that can maintain, serve, and protect the administration from any call-outs.

To thoroughly discuss the problem, this study aims to assess the level of awareness and exposure to online posts of the troll of Central Luzon State University College-Based Student Councils. Since it will be beneficial to give adequate remedies in handling online trolls for student welfare, it is of significance to determine how much they are equipped in understanding the effects of online trolls on their political stand.

The objective of the Study

This study generally aims:
1. Describe the Socio-Demographic profile of CLSU College-Based Student Councils.
2. Identify the awareness level of the CLSU College-Based Student Councils about online trolls.
3. Determine the level of exposure of the CLSU College-Based Student Councils to online troll political posts.
4. Describe the views of CLSU College-Based Student Councils regarding online trolls as a

contributing factor in their political views.
5. Determine the effects of online troll political posts on their political views.
    Correlate the level of exposure to online political troll posts with the political views of the CLSU College-Based Student Councils.

Review of Related Literature

Online Trolls

The term "trolls" has been used and described in folk tales and fiction literary writings for ages, but the first recorded contemporary use of the phrase "trolling" dates back to the 1990s, when it appeared on internet forums. It was originally intended to be a method for users to mislead recruits by sharing an in-joke regularly. Since then, it has evolved into a much more harmful behavior that in recent years, the public has linked with online abuse, labeling individuals who act this as "online trolls" (Vicente, 2020).

The absence of an accurate definition for the term "troll" has led to a lack of understanding and interest from the academe. And some of its definitions are not precisely described since this behavior is strongly subjective. Moreover, according to the Online Cambridge dictionary (2016), "online trolls" are troublemakers and want attention so the tendency is they leave annoying messages on the internet. Furthermore, based on Vicente (2020), an online troll, in internet slang, is someone who posts negative and harmful arguments on social media platforms to provoke emotional responses and manipulate the discussion of the subject.

The rapid increase of online trolls in recent years has become a prominent problem in many countries. One of its adverse effects is depicted in the Philippines, where it was used to spread false news and protect, maintain, and save the administration from any criticism from the public. Online trolls are mostly occurring on social media sites, where these platforms are composed of students. Thus, it is significant that such social media platform users are aware of online trolls and politics to avoid its negative effects.

Characterization of online trolls

There have been many definitions of 'trolling' given by academics, as well as attempts to explain the actions of trolls to easily identify them. Based on Globe (2020), trolls may be identified by their unique targeting, which makes it simple to differentiate between perception and reality, actual social interactions and predetermined commentary, legitimate accounts and troll accounts, and so on.

Some trolling, on the other hand, may not be perceived as malicious. Several writers have also stated that there may be more positive definitions of trolling than are currently available. Kudos trolling, as described by Bishop (2012), is a practice in which

individuals publish unrelated material while seeming to do so in good conscience. The interruption of online contacts, in this case, maybe seen as an undesired and unanticipated outcome of the behavior.

Another is disruption which Hardaker (2010) defined as the act of degrading a discussion without explicitly targeting a particular individual. Among the behaviors associated with this include the sending of pointless, unnecessary, or repeated messages in an attempt to attract attention. Alternatively known as trolling spam, it is related to but distinct from common spam in that it is motivated by the desire to elicit unfavorable reactions from its recipients. Through success, as discussed by Haradaker (2010), trolls can be recognized. According to research, trolls get more responses than the average user, indicating that they may be effective in enticing people into pointless and time-consuming conversations with their posts.

Awareness of online trolling

Despite widespread awareness of the issue, only a few substantial studies have been conducted on trolling. And the currently existing knowledge is dispersed and interdisciplinary. With that, online trolling has progressed to the fact that evolutionary patterns and future directions of trolling cannot be discerned. Now, more than ever, necessary thinking skills such as critical thinking are required to be aware of online trolls because this comes in many forms and can come off as a positive message at first (Bouygues, 2018). However, according to Rappler (2020), the critical thinking skills of Filipinos are declining throughout the years, indicating that the number of possible individuals who can identify online trolls or misinformation is decreasing (Bouygues, 2018).

The axiom "Don't feed the trolls" has both positive and negative remarks as a method to promote awareness against online trolls and lessen their numbers. Following this, numerous websites have taken measures to reduce the amount of trolling they receive by disabling the comment option and enhancing regulations of their message boards. Some limited their access to secure sites by requiring users to encode their personal information for verification purposes. And others modified their terms and regulations, which prohibit individuals from accessing the sites once they engage in or foster disruptive conduct (Reanon the Internet, 2016).

Given the current political environment in the Philippines, this action by the country's legislators is much-needed. Recently published research entitled Digital in 2017 found that the Philippines was the country with the highest number of hours spent on social media by individuals which is an indication that they are exposed to a large amount of news, whether true or false (Camus, 2019); thus, educating them about online trolls can prevent further spreading of fake news.

Roles of online trolls and their effects on politics

Social media is a powerful tool, these networks have already been utilized as mediums for change and development. And over the last several years, social media has taken part in the political structures of countries, especially in the Philippines. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are just a few of the social networking sites that are continuously being used to influence public opinion, start movements, and promote ideas in different areas of the nation. And, since a person can accomplish virtually anything with the touch of a button and has linked countries at an incredibly faster rate, it is reasonable to think that the scope of social media is boundless (Guzman, 2016).

Recently, the development of "troll farms" in social media, which are a large group of online trolls that are used to manipulate political opinions, has been detected. In many cases, these farms are funded by government operatives, and they manage thousands of accounts that operate under pseudonyms or as anonymous accounts, all of which are used to distribute fake news and propaganda in an attempt to manipulate public opinion, disrupt society, and perhaps influence the election (Linvill and Warren, 2018).

Given that, following the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, new research found that trolls' presence had a significant effect on the outcome since their actions may change public perception and jeopardize the credibility of the election. With the same strategy, according to press sources at the time of the Philippine election, the Duterte campaign confessed to using trolls and false accounts during the last presidential election in which individuals were compensated to create false social media profiles on different social media platforms to influence public opinion (Bengali & Halper, 2019).

Research Methodology

The researcher decided to use agenda-setting theory a theory that explores how the mass media can impact the public perception of a particular problem by placing it on the public agenda. A descriptive quantitative approach was used by the researcher in conducting this study. Stratified random sampling was the type of probability sampling used to get a population that is divided into smaller groupings called strata. The researcher used an online survey containing questions to gather data from the respondents. Since it was a descriptive quantitative type the researcher used percentage frequency as the statistical treatment and descriptive analysis to analyze the data that were collected.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Age of the respondents

Based on the distribution of participants by age, the data gathered from the respondents shows that the average age of the participants was 19.9 whereas the highest recorded age bracket was 22. This shows that the study was able to gather responses from individuals aged 19 to 22.

Gender of the respondents

Out of the 65 participants in the study, it shows that a majority of them were female, accounting for 57% (Figure1)of the total number of respondents, the men accounting for 27 (42%) of the respondents and 1 (2%) of them identifying as a Non-Binary individual.

Level of awareness of CLSU College-based Student Councils about online trolls

Awareness of Online Trolls

The results show that a majority of the respondents show awareness of online trolling being used in politics, amassing a total number of 60 (92%), with only 5 (8%) of them answering "No".

Engagement in an online post of the troll

Table 3, shows that 56 (86%) of these are "*no"*. This points to the idea that most of the participants have never engaged in online troll posts. However, 9 (14%) of the participants agreed that they had engaged in online troll posts before.

Familiarization of the respondents with the online posts of trolls for politics

Results revealed in table 4, that the last question that addresses the level of awareness of the participants asks the question of how familiar the respondents are with regards to the use of online troll posting for political agenda. It can be discerned that only 10 (15%) of the participants answered that they were only slightly familiar with the use of troll posting. The highest recorded frequencies were both *Moderately Familiar* and *Somewhat Familiar,* both amassing 21 respondents each (32%). Subsequently, the data shows that only 13 participants out of the 65 respondents gathered answered that they were *Extremely Familiar* with the use of online troll posting for political agenda. This can be correlated to the data showing that a majority of them stated that they were indeed familiar with the setup.

Level of Exposure

Table 5shows how frequently the respondents encounter online trolls. The highest recorded frequency was 25 participants (38%) who stated that they *sometimes* encounter online trolls. Only 10 (15%) of the participants agreed that they *always* encounter these types of posts, and none of the respondents answered *Never*. This data shows that a majority of the respondents are frequently encountering these types of online troll posts, with only a small number of them stating that they rarely encounter them.

It also shows that a total number of 30 (46%) participants answered that they never engage in these types of posts. Similarly, only 1 participant (2%) answered that they frequently engage with online troll posts. The data shows the idea that a majority of the respondents rarely or never engage in online troll posts, with only 15 (23%) of the respondents stating that they sometimes engage with the people affiliated with the posts.

Responses to online troll posts by the respondents.

The data in table 6,shows that 54 (83%) of the participants stated that they do not respond to these posts. This is aligned with the data gathered from table 3.1.1 in Q2 which states that a majority of them do not engage in the posts whatsoever. However, 11 (17%) of the participants stated that they have responded to online troll posts.

Interaction in an online post of the troll

Results indicated in the figures below the highest recorded frequency was 57 (88%) of the respondents stated that they do not interact with these online troll posts. However, 8 (12%) of the participants stated that they do or have interacted with online troll posts. The results show that a majority of the participants do not interact or respond to the troll posts for political agendas. In general, most of the respondents answered yes and interact with these troll posts to educate and give out real information.

View in Online Trolls as Contributing Factor in their Political Views

Findings revealed that 23 of the participants (35%) answered yes, believing that students' engagement in online posts by trolls can open up their minds and widen their political views. They can see how trolls have been manipulated and how they deal with information. This urges them to do fact-checking before believing the information they see. They also believe if they join the arguments online, the issue will be more bizarre. Meanwhile, 42 participants (65%) who answered "no" stated that as a voter, they are trying to weigh every inch of information they see on the internet before letting it affect their political view.

Respondent's interest and reasons for the online trolls' post

The results in table 9,show that 18 respondents (28%), who answered yes, trolls interest them in the way that they show us that there are still people that are not well educated or ethically educated enough to understand the word "respect". It prompts them to wonder whether it's true or not because it affects the political views of some people. Meanwhile, the 47 respondents (72%) who answered "no" believe that trolls are nonsensical and unworthy of

their attention. As educated individuals, they believe it is not right to harm others, especially in a way that affects their mental health.

Respondents' impressions of the offensive online posts of a troll

Figures in Table10indicated that 51 participants (78%) who answered yes mentioned that trolls are digging or even making dirt on someone's name just to show their support for a certain someone. Sometimes it is below the belt, like commenting about a politician's physical appearance. Other opinions by posting irrelevant and/or offensive comments. While, 14participants (22%), believe that those who try too hard to show themselves by provoking their opponents are already losers. There is nothing objectionable about the posts of trolls since they are not factual.

Perceive influence of online troll political posts on their political views

The nine respondents (14%) who said yes believe that seeing their quality sometimes makes them wonder if the candidate is good at taking care of the community. Also, based on the results and numbers of the votes, influences their choice. Lastly, if it is supported by facts, they believe it. Meanwhile, 56 of the respondents (86%) who said yes demonstrate that they have their reasons, positions, and beliefs. They only support candidates with a clean record.

Effects of online posts of a troll on the respondent's political view

Based on table12, showsthat 43 respondents (66%) answered yes, trolls' online posts don't affect their political views because they already have their eyes set on some political candidates to vote for in the coming election. The other 22 respondents (34%) who said no stated that trolls do not influence their political views because they have their reasons, stand, and beliefs. Furthermore, their political views should be shaped by both their experiences with the current and past administrations as well as credible sources.

Respondents' impressions on the educational content of online posts of a troll about politics.

In table 13, the results revealed that 21 participants (32%) who stated "yes" answered that social media can provide us with both necessary and unnecessary things. Everything people read and accept on social media must always be filtered by truth and reliability. Meanwhile, the other 44 (68%), who said "no", stated that some trolls only make it seem like it's credible. They are entertaining but not actually a reliable source of information. Their posts mostly do not have attached links, so it is not credible source for education in all aspects.

Respondents' consideration of the opinion of the online post of the troll.

According to table 14, the results show that for 20 respondents (31%) who answered yes, it is enough to let them rethink and reevaluate their stand to see a bigger picture because each supporter has a point. When it is destructive, they will never consider it. People have different political views and not a lot of people on social media knowhow to be media literate, but it can be learned. Then, the 45 respondents (69%) who said no said that some trolls do not make sense, hence making them uninterested. Also, the trolls are full of nonsense, and they just use other people's personalities to hide. The people who answered "no" also said that it depends on the content of the posts.

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Respondent'streatment of online posts of trolls

Based on table 15, shows that the 53 respondents (82%) who said yes, explained they ignore it because their post or comments will not benefit their life or standing. Most of the time, they are not interested in those kinds of posts, and they have much more important things to do than waste time on fake news. Meanwhile, the 12 respondents (18%) show that they are reading some of it, but only just to see if it has reasonable and logical content. They read it to gain information, and they usually do not respond to some online posts by trolls, but they read it anyway to get some ideas.

Level of exposure to online political trolls and political views of the CLSU College-based Student Councils.

A chi-square test (with α=0.05) was used to evaluate whether the level of exposure to online troll posts is related to political views or not. The chi-square test was not statistically significant, p=0.67. Therefore, the level of exposure to online troll posts is not related to the political views of the CLSU college-based student councils.

Conclusions

Since most of the student councils are about 19-22 of age, it proves that those in that bracket are using social media frequently and encounter the online posts of trolls, which are about politics.

Respondents are aware, familiar, and can spot the false information of trolls on social media. Fortunately, the students still try to educate the fake account users by providing credible information sources so that the trolls cannot spread fake news anymore.

Many respondents frequently encounter a troll on social media and to combat the activities of fake accounts, students chose to ignore the political posts and avoid interacting with them as they know that the persona behind that account does not have authenticity at all.

Online trolls' posts on social media do not contribute to the political opinions or views of students as they believe that aside from the aggressive behavior of trolls, their posts do not make sense and neither widen their knowledge.

Online political posts of trolls do not affect the political views of students because the trolls'

behavior is offensive and their posts mostly contain false information or do not make sense at all, that is why they chose to ignore the posts and comments as it will not benefit them.

The exposure to online political trolls of respondents is not related to their stand or political views. It just proves that the student council is not easily swayed by other people in terms of beliefs. Hence, they choose and vote for candidates because of their research and not based on what they see on social media.

Recommendations

1. Since teenagers and young adults are most active on social media and encounter trolls posts, they should be vigilant in interacting with fake accounts.
2. Social media should familiarize themselves with the difference between a troll's posts from an authentic account. When they encounter one, users should just ignore the fake information presented by the trolls so that they will stop spreading fake news.
3. Since it is common knowledge that troll accounts and trolls' posts exist because of financial matters, social media users should not engage with them so that they will not earn money, and eventually decide to stop spreading fake news and creating chaos on the internet.
4. Students should take time on researching and be knowledgeable about the candidates they will support in the election by acquiring credible resources unlike the conduct of trolls who do not care about facts.
5. In choosing a candidate, the voters should take into consideration that the clean record of a public servant matters the most as it reflects the adequacy and performance of a person. In addition, people should elect a candidate forthe right reasons instead of just voting out of peer pressure.
6. Voters should be vigilant about the things they see on the internet because it is common knowledge that not all information on the virtual platform is true and happens in reality.
7. The future researcher can conduct the study with the whole student as respondents and go deeper with the trolls by knowing the online trolls fromthe respondent's perspective.

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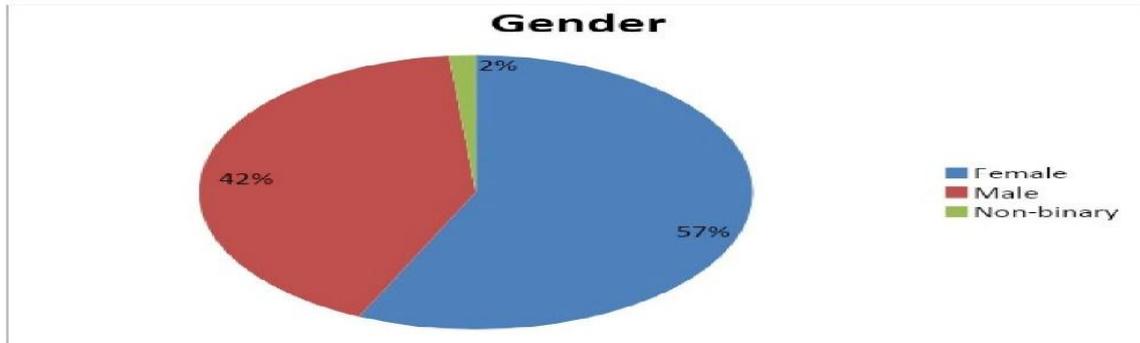34. *Zain, N. R. M. (2014). Agenda Setting Theory. ResearchGate. (www.researchgate.net.)*

Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents' Gender

TABLES

Table 1.Age of the Respondents

Age of the Respondents	
Mean	19.98
Minimum	18
Maximum	22

Response	No.	Percentage
No	5	8%
Yes	60	92%
Total	65	100

Table 2.Awareness of the respondents in online trolls

Table 3. Engagement in an online post of the troll

Response	No.	Percentage
No	56	86%
Yes	9	14%
Total	65	100

Table 4. Familiarization of the respondents with the online posts of trolls for politics

Response	No.	Percentage
Extremely familiar	13	20%
Moderately familiar	21	32%
Somewhat familiar	21	32%
Slightly familiar	10	15%
Not familiar	0	0%
Total	65	100

Table 5.Level of exposure of the respondents to online trolls.

Statement	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequent		Always	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Frequency of encountering online trolls	0	0%	11	17%	25	38%	19	29%	10	15%
Frequency of engaging in online trolls	30	46%	19	29%	15	23%	1	2%	0	0%

Response	No.	Percentage
No	54	83%
Yes	11	17%

Table 6. Responses to online troll posts by the respondents.

Response	No.	Percentage
No	57	88%
Yes	8	12%

Table 7. Interaction in an online post of the troll

Response	No.	Percentage
No	42	65%
Yes	23	35%

Table 8.View in Online Trolls as Contributing Factor in their Political View

Table 9. Respondent's interest and reasons for the online trolls' post

Response	No.	Percentage
No	47	72%
Yes	18	28%

Table 10.Respondents' impressions of the offensive online posts of a troll

Response	No.	Percentage
No	14	22%
Yes	51	78%

Table 11. Influence   of trolls' online posts on the respondent's choice of political candidates

Response	No.	Percentage
No	56	86%
Yes	9	14%

Table 12. Effects of online posts of a troll on the respondent's political view

Response	No.	Percentage
No	22	34%
Yes	43	66%

Table 13. Respondents' impressions on the educational content of online posts of a troll about politics.

Response	No.	Percentage
No	44	68%
Yes	21	32%

Table 14. Respondents' consideration of the opinion of the online post of the troll.

Response	No.	Percentage
No	45	69%
Yes	20	31%

Table 15. Respondent's treatment of online posts of trolls

Response	No.	Percentage
No	12	18%
Yes	53	82%

**wrocyljean.bullecer@clsu2.edu. ph[1],parsons.hail@clsu2.edu.ph[2],
mariaadrielle.estigoy@clsu2.edu.ph[3,]dsvargas@clsu.edu.ph[4]**