

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF STUDENT-LEADERS IN RIZAL TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY: BASIS FOR A SCHOOL TOUR EXTENSION SERVICE ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

In a democratic country just like the Philippines, youth have a role in nation-building and must participate in any political activities under the constitution, which may influence government decision-making in policymaking. Youth participation was seen and evident in the past May 2022 national election and the political issues emerging in the Philippine context. Besides, the country is facing the COVID-19 pandemic that may affect youth's political participation, which led the researchers to determine the lived experiences and contributing factors that influence them to engage in political matters. The participants were ten selected student-leaders from various clubs at Rizal Technological University who serve as President and Vice President. To gather data, Semi-structured interviews were used and analyzed through the use of transcendental phenomenology by Edmund Husserl. The findings revealed that the participants conceptualize political participation as freedom of speech, possessing a political stand or opinion, and activism. Freedom of expression and political activism are the activities that they consider a sign of political engagement. Furthermore, social media, education, emerging trends, peers, family, and their interests are the factors that contribute to and influence participants' political participation. In accordance with the study's conclusion, a campus political awareness action plan was proposed, which is composed of three sets of webinar-training programs to strengthen the political awareness of the selected participants, which would be the basis for the school tour extension program. Also, this study was subjected to further studies regarding students' conceptualization of political participation in the Philippine context to fulfill the research gap.

Keywords: Political participation, Election, Political issues, Transcendental phenomenology, COVID-19 pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

Political participation can be defined in a variety of ways. There are four widely used definitions of political involvement. First, political involvement is conceptualized as a task or action. Second, rather than being done by politicians or paid lobbyists, political engagement is something done by people acting in their role as citizens. Third, political participation must always be voluntary and should never be forced through the use of rules, laws, or threats. Fourth, being politically active involves having an interest in the state, politics, or governance in general, Van Deth (2014).

Political Participation has various forms, in terms of voicing out and expressing ideas with regard to what happened to the status of society in terms of political, social, and economic, It was also endorsed by Article III, Section 4 of the Bill of Rights in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. As stated therein:

"No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances."

Also, According to Section 1 of Article V of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, everyone has the right to engage in important political engagement, such as voting or electing leaders. It states and emphasizes in a straightforward manner that the;

"Suffrage may be exercised by all citizens of the Philippines not otherwise disqualified by law, who are at least eighteen years of age, and who shall have resided in the Philippines for at least one year and in the place wherein they propose to vote for at least six months immediately preceding the election. No literacy, property, or other substantive requirement shall be imposed on the exercise of suffrage."

Youth make up nearly one-third of the 100 million people living in the country today. They play a significant political role in deciding the present and future of the nation as a distinct sector and essential

element of societal growth. They are also a valuable resource for the nation's upcoming leaders, lawmakers, businesspeople, and change agents. As cliché as it may sound, the future will be shaped by the young. The national hero of the Philippines, Jose Rizal, lauded the youth as the future of the motherland. The crucial role that young play in nation-building is recognized by Philippine legislation as well as the nation's government structures and practices (Cabo, 2018).

The Philippine Constitution acknowledges the contribution of youth to fostering a nation. Declaration of Principles and State Policies Principles, Section 13 of Article II of the Philippine Constitution of 1987, declared the following:

"The State recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building and shall promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being. It shall inculcate in the youth patriotism and nationalism, and encourage their involvement in public and civic affairs."

According to the Pazzibugan (2021) report, Comelec spokesperson James Jimenez stated that as of October 18, there were 62 million registered voters, of which more than half (32.7 million) are young people. For the first time, approximately 5 million people are voting. Political participation, specifically the right to vote of the new voters, which is mostly student, is significant in choosing the right leader who will bring the country to economic success.

However, the nation is still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts, which prompted the researchers to ascertain the student leaders' personal experiences and the contributing factors that influenced them to engage in political matters, given that there was a national election approaching and tremendous political issues arose.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study's goal is to identify and determine their lived experience and contributing factors that

influence participants to be engaged in political participation.

Furthermore, the study aims to:

1. Evaluate the participants on how to conceptualize political participation.
2. Determine the actions and activities the participants consider as signs of political engagement.
3. Analyze the factors that influence the participants to be engaged in political matters.

METHODOLOGY

To identify and determine the lived experiences and contributing factors to the students at Rizal Technological University about political participation, and the activities that the students consider to be their political engagement, a qualitative method of research was used in this study, more specifically, descriptive phenomenology research through virtual interviews.

Phenomenological research examines how several individuals' common understandings of a concept or phenomenon are founded on their actual experiences. When discussing a phenomenon, phenomenologists emphasize what all responders have in common (for instance, grief is a common feeling). The investigator then gathers information from people who have witnessed the event and creates a composite narrative, consisting of what and how the people experience it, of the essence of the phenomenon for all of the people involved. (Creswell, 2013, p. 76).

The participants of the study are the student leaders whose ages range from 19-24 years old, both male and female, a 3rd year or 4th-year student, serving with their respective organization as a president or a vice president. All participants had substantial knowledge of how they engage in political participation and were expressive about what happened in society. The ten (10) selected participants are student leaders from different

colleges and organizations who are currently enrolled and serving in the school year 2021-2022 at Rizal Technological University from the different departments.

The researchers created a poster that was posted in a different Facebook group within the university to find the 10 target qualified participants, with the consent that they agree to participate in an online interview using Google Meet. The researchers assured the participants that the data collected would be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The completed recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed through the use of the transcendental method, whereby the researchers analyzed the lived experiences of the participants. The philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology known as transcendental phenomenology, developed by Edmund Husserl, aims to explain human experience (Moustakas, 1994). The researchers will use a transcendental phenomenological method to gather information needed for the study for the reason that it uses a process of bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. The approach of phenomenology is to put on hold all judgments about what is real until a more solid foundation can be established (Creswell, 2013). The researchers code the transcribed data and create emerging themes. Through these themes, the essence of the participants' lived experience is determined. The researchers presented the responses of the participants and discussed the findings with the support of a review of related literature. Lastly, based on the results of the data, the researchers proceed to summarize the findings and, from that, the researchers come up with a conclusion where the recommendation is generated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Conceptualization of respondents concerning Political Participation

Based on the responses of the participants, most of them conceptualized political participation as *freedom of expression*.

... "political participation includes yung expressing your opinion or your stand na.. About politics."

.... "kailangan nag paparticipate tayo in political matters. Kumbaga dapat naririnig ang boses natin."

The concept of political participation takes on a motivational perspective, encompassing deliberate activities undertaken by citizens, be they political or non-political, to foster political cooperation. Scholars have classified this phenomenon as "expressive political participation," "individualized collective action," and "personalized politics" (Van Deth, 2014). Technically, the respondents conceptualize "civic engagement" because they are only expressing their opinions and discussing political matters online without ensuring that these opinions will influence the particular political institution they are referring to (Sairambay, Y. 2020). It becomes political participation once there is intentional influence on the concerned institution.

The participants conceptualized political participation as **possessing a political stand**.

.... "being politically aware enough to be....to create a stand on everything that's going on politics."

.... "for me malaw- ano sya eh malawak yung range nya when it comes to activities... your stand na... About politics."

According to the insights provided by EACEA (2013), a forward-looking concept of youth participation in politics revolves around actively shaping opinions and initiating actions to catalyze positive societal change. Young people can express their involvement in various distinctive ways, such as exercising their right to vote in general elections, actively engaging with political parties and attending dynamic events, immersing themselves in youth organizations or issue-based NGOs, generously volunteering their time and skills, actively participating in thought-provoking debates on youth or community matters, employing their influence through the written press or youth-oriented radio outlets, actively contributing to online discussions, either by curating compelling content

or closely following influential blogs, and demonstrating a genuine thirst for knowledge and understanding of democratic principles, such as immersing themselves in simulated political processes, attending immersive training programs, or passionately embracing educational opportunities both in formal institutions and within the realm of youth organizations. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that the depth of individuals' comprehension of the political process is profoundly impacted by the quality of democratic governance in place (Clark, 2016).

The participants conceptualize political participation as **activism**.

.... "pagdalo sa mga political activities like mobilization ah, volunteering and public petition ano pa ba, making resolutions.."

.... "is through activism..."

Young people today are promising generations of political activists, mobilizing their energy, enthusiasm, and aspirations to realize democratic processes and policies, "good society," and "good government," and it concludes that they can be used to reinforce their desire for "good." (Cabo, 2018). Consequently, they closely link their lived experiences with the notion of political participation. Comprehensive research has concentrated on six countries—the Philippines, Egypt, Sudan, Thailand, Zimbabwe, and Colombia—where student-led movements have flourished amidst societal turbulence. These movements have frequently encountered repression from authorities in diverse nations due to their outspoken and dynamic character (Subingsubing, 2021).

2. Actions and Activities that Participants consider as sign of Political Engagement

The findings show that *Freedom of Expression* is one of the e activities that they considered political engagement. Ever since the pandemic began, social media has become the platform for

everyone to express their opinions regarding the happenings in society.

..voice out the peoples struggle, especially sa mga event like womens month, pride month at ibat ibang panawagan, kase ano, we want to make progress kumbaga we need natin maging innovative"

...pagiging vocal sa idea mo ng ah politics or kung ano yung gusto mong ipaglaban, dapat vocal ka avative.."

The youth today are more active in voicing their opinions and concerns in terms of political and social issues, especially on social media. The participants voice out their opinions for the reason that they might see a problem in the society that may affect them and or the people in the society and put them at a disadvantage.

This concluded that freedom of expression can be considered a sign of political participation as it can influence decisions politically. It is stated in the study of David (2013), that online voicing of thoughts is strongly regarded as a political activity and is considered a politically significant action. Additionally, Young people displayed apprehension about the country's political future, according to Cabo (2018), which emphasized that politicians are willing to disregard election campaign laws to win elections.

The study also finds that *Political Activism* is another action and activity that they consider a sign of political engagement. Joining rallies is one of the common actions in political activism that is considered by the participants as political participation based on their statements. Other than that participants also expressed voting, signing petitions, sharing news and information about politics, advocating, and joining political debates as a sign of political participation.

... "and siguro yung pagparticipate sa mga campaign rallies or yung pagpapatugtog ng mga kanta ng mga kandidato pagbibigay ng flyers house to house and siguro yung a- kahit yung a.. simpleng pakikipag-usap, pakikipagkwentuhan sa mga kapuwa kabataan mapatungkol sa politika ay isang pamamaraan ng political engagement."

.... "you can donate to other organizations, that established a certain political stand, you can also volunteer, you can also join their rallies and, and pwede ka ding mag-sign ng mga petitions."

The participants are aware of and utilize their rights to engage in political matters by being political activists. According to Durso et. al (2018), someone who actively engages in collective political activity to help or reject sociopolitical change is referred to as a political activist. The lived experiences of the participants show how involved they are when it comes to political matters. Digital and traditional activism can be both seen in the participants' responses. Additionally, Lanuza (2015) stated that young revolutionary students have traditionally been at the forefront of the national battle opposing foreign invaders and the country's abusers.

Lastly, The youth's political participation can therefore take a variety of forms, from traditional democratic politics to the more innovative, creative, and strikingly different contemporary generation, which is shaped and inspired by their sociopolitical circumstances and worldwide social movements. According to Sebastians' (2014) research, youths' dissatisfaction with both local and national politics is the reason they haphazardly engage in other political activities.

3. Factors that influence the respondents to be engaged in political matters

The participants revealed that different factors influence their participation in political matters such as the utilization of **social media** platforms.

"...pag may nakita kang peedler ng fake news or misinformation and disinformation dapat may gawin to correct them.."

"..meron akong nakitang isang share, na shinare siya ng 4th year na nasa Filipino Department din.....Naimpluwensyahan niya ako sa simpleng platform lang na iyon, na hihila niya ako sa paniniwala na dahil sa plataporma na nabasa ko."

In the study of David, C. et. al. (2019) The use of social media specifically for political content has been associated with various types of political engagement because Facebook content is diverse and only a small portion of it is political, it is expected that those with more politically active social networks will be exposed to more news content than others which will be linked to higher levels of political knowledge and engagement.

Another factor that the participants consider is *Education*.

... "senior high school ako which is under HUMMS mas exposed ako sa mga political debates tsaka political usapan sa classroom.."

... " Yung mga law subject na kinukuha ko ayun nagkaroon sya ng fact- ng influenced din kasi yun nga inaaral namin."

According to Isaacs (2021), universities offer a large number of learning opportunities for young people. Inside the classroom learning is one of these learning opportunities. Students must attend civics, government, political science, and history studies to become more aware of political issues and contribute to the socialization process that occurs in elementary school. Education provides more civic skills and political understanding, which aids in political involvement.

The participants also emphasized that *emerging trends* are a factor that they consider to participate in political matters.

... "yung mga real-world problems na nakikita mo sa araw-araw na lumalabas ka ng bahay. Once na makita mo kasi ang problema, kanino ka makakisip na mag address, diba doon sa politicians kasi sila ang mga leaders."

... "current happenings, kumbaga ayan, yung pagtaas ng presyo ng langis, sabihin nating all the regulation law pagdating sa mga ganyang bagay naapektuhan tayo."

According to the study conducted by Wike and Castillo (2018), various types of issues will get the

people to political actions such as contacting an elected official or taking part in a protest poor health care, and poor-quality schools. Overall, issues inspire people to take action.

Peer was also mentioned as a contributing factor.

... "factors nakaka-influence din siguro friends, school mates kasi ayun nga kapag may same shared interest kayo.."

According to McCabe (2016), friends have a significant impact on students' life. Friends' perspectives on politics might influence students' perspectives, especially if they share a common interest in something. According to the social penetration theory, for peers to become closer, they are more likely to talk about politics, which will lead to political socialization. Individual political opinions can be influenced by individuals with whom the student interacts often. When students converse about politics with their peers frequently, according to Isaacs (2021), they will develop a strong political orientation. Vasilyev stated that he chooses his friends because his friends share his ideas and enabled him to reinforce those ideas. Friends are more likely to agree with a person's point of view and to add to it with their own opinions and ideas on the subject.

Along with this, the participants also consider *family* as a factor to engage in political matters

... "other factor I think is family, kung ano ung tingin ng family ko is right or kung ano ung tingin kong tama ughm, I was being influenced by them."

Having more conversations with their parents, those relationships become more influential (Quintelier, 2015). According to Shulman and DeAndrea 2014, political participation can go both ways with upward and downward influence, to simply put, children can also influence their parents.

Additionally, participants consider *Interest* as a factor that motivates them to engage in political matters.



.... "yung pansarili kong ah.. pansariling kagustuhan na mas maging a.. Developed as a first time voter, mas maging matalinong botante, mas maging matalinong mamamayan na bumuboto para sa bansa."

Al Slihat (2014) argues that awareness encompasses a person's viewpoint on himself, his intellectual and emotional capacity, as well as his evaluation of the elements of the external environment, including his perception of himself as a member of the community.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study's findings, it revealed that participants conceptualize political participation inaccurately and subjectively in nature. Although they express themselves on various social media platforms, there is no guarantee that it will affect the decision-making process of political institutions. On the other hand, some of the participants have a precise and concise conceptualization of political participation because activism has an avenue where they may be heard. Thus, it could influence the decisions of a political institution. The said actions and activities that the participants experienced demonstrate how active they are in participating in political matters. Although the respondents have their concerns and reservations, such as red-tagging, they still manage to engage politically. Moreover, different factors influence the respondents' engagement in political matters such as social media, education, emerging trends, peers, family, and their interests, which indicates that they are conscious that their political participation can be influenced.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study's findings and conclusion, the researcher recommends conducting a webinar that will be implemented in a three-day training program that will be included in the proposed action plan (*Campus Political Participation Awareness Action Plan*). This plan serves as the basis for a school tour extension program. It would also be

beneficial to collect qualitative data on the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders who participate in the aforementioned extension program to understand the program's implications. Similarly, further research might focus on the individuals who benefited from the study. Furthermore, the researcher may recommend that future researchers conduct studies regarding the political participation of students and student leaders in different state and public universities within the National Capital Region (NCR) that gather data concerning the political culture of the universities. Since there is a research gap regarding students' conceptualization of political participation in the Philippine context, the researcher recommends future researchers conduct further studies.

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