ONLINE POLITICAL MEME AND ITS INFLUENCE ON PHILIPPINE MILLENIALS' VIEW ON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Mary Joyce Ann Lim[1*], Krystal Ann D. Macias, Dean Romulo R. Riparip and Mary Josephine M. Duritan

[1]College of Arts and Sciences, Department of Political Science, University of Perpetual Help System DALTA, Alabang Zapote Road, Las Pinas City Philippines

Abstract

Internet memes are becoming a big hit on social media that rapidly gains popularity in the Internet. It is observed that Internet memes spread virally. The youth today are most likely to use social media and while using social media they can come across to different political memes. This study utilized the qualitative descriptive research design.

This study addresses the issue on the influence of political meme to the Philippine millennials' view on the presidential candidates in the 2016 Philippine election. It aims to investigates its influence to the millennial voters. The data was gathered through a focused group discussion with six (6) participants-youth voters who were randomly chosen by using fishbowl method at the University of Perpetual Help System – Dalta Las Piñas campus.

The findings of the study revealed that memes have no influence on their voting insights and that it did not change their mind about their candidates. Furthermore, the result of the focused group discussion revealed that most of the online political memes in social media sites were all for the presidential candidate Jejomar Binay.

The result of the 2016 Philippine election, Jejomar Binay got 4th place among the five presidential candidates. Thus,this concluded that political memes were only created to make people laugh, assessed if the meme was true or not and make impressions for the presidential candidates to increase popularity. This study is limited to the six (6) participant's views on political meme, hence, further study with more respondents is recommended.

Keywords: Political Meme, Qualitative Design, Perpetual Las Piñas, Presidential Candidates

INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of years, a trend for internet memes about politicians has grown. Many of us have heard of these memes as funny popular internet videos, memes, the frozen picture with captions, or gifs. The Internet and Web 2.0 tools can empower audiences to actively participate in media creation. This allows the production of large quantities of content, both amateur and professional (Tay, 2012). Online memes, which are extensions of usually citizen-created viral content, are a recent and popular example of this.

The trending of memes over the social network has been significantly increasing that made impact not only on individuals but all sort of things that anyone can think. Social media platforms are the main avenue of the memes in which the millennials or the youth are actively involved. The "we are social Singapore (wearesocialsg)" reported during first quarter of 2015 that 80% of the millennials are utilizing different social platforms. And Filipino

Corresponding Email: *maryjoyceannlim@gmail.com

Youth are not behind in using social media. In fact, they were tag as "the Filipino Youth's life today is always trending" as stated by Richard Amazona speaker in the Youth Electorate seminar (2016)

The youth is said to be the catalyst of change. It is said that the youth is the hope of changing and bringing an ideal system. Millennial voters will be the key factor on today's election, according to the National Youth Commission (NYC). About 40 percent of the 52 million registered Filipino voters are youth aged 18 to 30. "Put it in context. In 2010, President Aquino won with 15.8 million votes. So technically if 75 percent of the youth vote chooses a candidate, that candidate will probably win" (Bautista, 2015). This expressed that the millennial vote can increase a presidential candidate's vote.

There are many studies that proved the impact of memes to individuals particularly on the views of the political candidates but few on the Millennials' view. In the study of Tay (2012) and Marcin (2014) defined memes as comprise of photographs of political figures altered either by captions or image editing software, and can be compared to more traditional mediums such as political cartoons, and 'green screens' used in filmmaking, while the study entitled Political Meme Humor and its Effect on views of Politicians and Policies (2013) revealed that the meme humor phenomenon has an effect on everyday life and is used to stereotypes of groups of individuals through these captioned pictures.

Richard Dawkins, the first person coined the term Meme in 1976 which means a cultural idea, be it fashion, technology, or ideology that self-replicates and spreads among the people. Often compared to genes and evolution, a meme can experience variation and mutation, they can evolve with society. (Naik, 2015) As Internet meme, on the other is an idea that spreads quickly via internet, in form of images or in a viral video.

In the Philippines, memes started when the Department of Tourism introduced the term "It's More Fun in the Philippines" which became viral in 2012. This time, it's not just in the Philippines but trended worldwide. One of its examples is "Swimming is More Fun in the Philippines" with images of people walking in flooded areas. Another example is "Zombie is More Fun in the Philippines" with the photo of Cebu Dancing Inmates. Because of

this campaign from the Department of Tourism, it became tremendous viral in internet worldwide in social media and the campaign success for its goal of increasing the foreign visitor in our country with an increase of 12 percent from previous year, as the presidential spokesperson, Edwin Lacierda told to the reporters. Filipinos are very creative in many ways. Filipino is known as wide thinkers and internet memes became one of the new sensations for the Filipinos. For the election of 2013 for senatorial positions, Filipinos from all walks of life are still overwhelmed by how the senatorial race will be going to. According to some surveys and TV advertisements, the 2013 Election is a boring and many of voters are disappointed and creative Filipino netizens come up with funny political memes to calm down these disappointed voters. One of the familiar Political Memes is from the picture of Senator Legarda and Senator Lapid with tagalog phrase written "Pag isinuot ni Nancy Ang Robe na to. Magmumukha s'yang Nazareno". Another example is with the picture of Senator Miriam holding her head with phrases "Luto ang Eleksyon, Sunog ang nanalo".

Filipinos are also very observant the ways and means of every politician especially to critic them in funny ways that may entertain other people with tagline "No offense, it's just a joke" if you get angry with this, definitely you don't have sense of humor or easily angered by jokes or jests. In short, the use of internet is for entertainment purposes but what if these memes are used in different way? What if it evolves in form of Political Memes? Will it be a great impact as entertainment or will it affect the mind of the readers or critics?

The Internet meme is the main aspect in this research, an attempt to define and classify the significance in political discourse on how it influences the views of the individual to the political candidates, particularly for the 2016 presidential election. The researches will also find the spillage of how it affects the Millennial on their vote for the 2016 election and discuss the significance of the memes.

The related literature and studies obtained importance on the study, Online Political Meme and Its Influence on Philippine Millennials' Views on Presidential Candidates. Review of related literature by Dawkins (1976), Tsafti, (2001), Jurgenson (2012), Dijck (2009), Lhang (2009), Heylighen, Chielens (2008),

Compaine (2006), Bernstein (1964) provided substantial information regarding political meme humors and its influence to other people. While, Jimenez (2016), Owen (2007), Irvine (2008), Parker, Graf (2007;2008) made sense that the vote of the youth will be an advantage for a candidate's vote.

The related studies of Cabalza (2014), Cruz, Bautista (2010), Huntington (2013), Adar (2005), Leskovec (2009), Shifman, (2012), Jones (2010), Thompson (2009), Graham (2012) coined that social media plays an important role to the society these days and Baym (2008), Zoonen (2008), Street (1992), Scott (2013), De Silva (2012), Lang & Dhillon (2004), Cassino & Lodge (2007), Wyer (2007) proposed that popular culture and politics have been examined from multiple perspectives.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The Elaboration Likelihood Model or ELM (1980)of persuasion is used to look at how Memes can affect an individual's political perspectives or opinions using humor as a persuasion tool. The ELM model is focused on two routes of persuasion. The first route

known as the central route is focused on high elaboration of what is being presented. This route goes through the cognitive thought process of the individual and undergone more scrutiny be broken down to understand. Using the ELM method, the researchers looked at how political memes use as their scheme to be voted upon. McCombs and Shaw (1972) borrowed from Lippman and hypothesized that "the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues". They suggest in their conclusions that people do use the media as their primary source of information about presidential campaigns and, this information is used by people as an indicator to determine what issues are important.

Conceptual Framework

This study focused on how online political memes influence on Philippine millenials' view on presidential candidates for the 2016 presidential election. The researchers constructed a paradigm using the IPO (input, process and output) model showing the overall flow of the processes in helping them on their vote for the election.
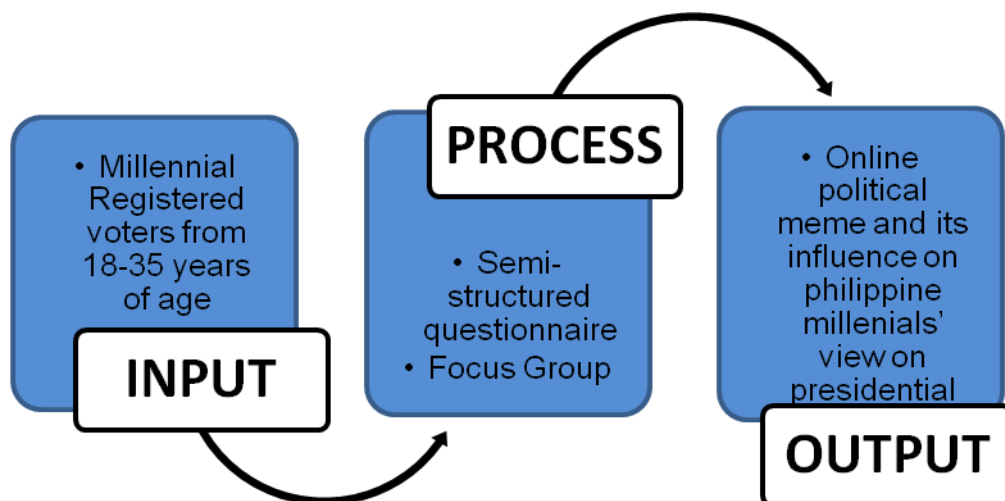
IPO Paradigm

Figure 2: IPO Paradigm

Considering the pronouncement above, this study proceeded in the manner presented in Figure 2 herein.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to analyze and evaluate the influence of the online political memes on Philippine millennials' view on presidential candidates for the 2016 presidential election. Specifically, will seek to answer the following questions:

1. How frequent do a Millennial visit a social media site?
2. What popular social media site does a Millennial frequently see political memes?
   3.1 Facebook;
   3.2 Twitter;
   3.3 Instagram;
   3.4 Tumblr;
3. How do political memes influence the respondent's views of a political candidate for the upcoming 2016 election?

The findings of this study redounded to the benefit of the society considering that the internet plays an important role in the cultural phenomenon of political memes today. Thus, political memes have become a new way for people to transfer ideas using the internet. Looking at this, The Researchers could find out if political memes influenced millennial votes for the election. For the researchers, the study helped them uncover critical areas in the popular culture. Thus, a new theory on influence of political memes arrived.

This study determined the influence of the online political memes on Philippine millennials' views on presidential candidates for the 2016 presidential election. The research was conducted at the University of Perpetual Help System-DALTA Las Piñas as perceived by the registered Philippine millennial voters from 18-35 years old.

The participants were students enrolled during the summer classes of the A.Y 2015-2016, who were chosen randomly. This study is limited to the online political memes of the five presidential candidates of 2016 election. This study was conducted last April 20, 2016,few weeks before the 2016 Philippine Presidential election.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, description of the respondents, instruments used, data-gathering procedure and statistical treatment.

The study made use of the qualitative research method. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2005) qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world.

The researchers used a semi structured interview. Here according to Piercy (2004), a researcher asks a series of open-ended questions with accompanying queries that probe for more detailed and contextual data. Participants' answers provide rich, in-depth information that helps one to understand the unique, as well as shared circumstances in which they live, and meanings attributed to their experiences. The researchers utilized this method to investigate whether online political memes are a potent factor in forming the political views of the Millennialsduring the 2016 Philippine Presidential election.

The targeted population of this study refers to registered Philippine millennial voters from 18-35 years of age particularly enrolled college students during summer classes of the A.Y. 2015-2016 in University of Perpetual Help System DALTA.

The participants were chosen using the fishbowl method. In this technique, the researchers randomly selected five (5) colleges where student participants came from. Convenience sampling is also used in this study; Using Convenience sampling technique, the researcher's selected six (6) students who are easy to reach or because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher.Everyone is chosen entirely by chance and each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample.

This research used an interview-questionnaire in assessing and gathering needed data. The instrument is a semi-structured form as the interview itself is patterned under the same form. The interview questionnaire is created using suitable questions modified from individual questions formed by the researcher.

A Focus Group discussion is also used, where the researchers together with the participants discussed, and shared their lived-experiences through shared answers; gestures; and body languages.

The research used a semi-structured type of method to conduct research. The following steps were followed for data gathering wherein the researchers used a convenient sampling method from 5 random participants who are enrolled in any course of the summer classes A.Y. 2015 – 2016.Sent an invitation to the chosen students to inform and request them to participate in this study. After informing the chosen participants, the researchers waited for their confirmation, upon confirmation, the researchers planned for the schedule of the focus group interview with the participants. Lastly, after confirmation and planning, the researchers and the participants engaged in a focus group interview.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data were gathered from the interview conducted by the researchers. The data was further analyzed if the online political memes has an influence on the participants' views on presidential candidates for the 2016 presidential election. The data is well-organized by the researchers, presenting each participant's experience and insights; likewise, a thematic chart cropped transcribed data from the interview to reveal the divergence and convergence of their stories and the reflections of the researchers.

The researchers conducted a focus group discussion with six (6) participants from five (5) different colleges who are enrolled in the summer classes of the A.Y. 2015-2016

1. How frequent do you visit a social media site?

The result of the conducted FGD revealed that, Participants were found to be active users of different social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr; thus:

Bulbasaur: "I visit a social media site every day. "

Chansey: "I also visit a social media site every day and every time. "

Dragonair: "For me, at least once a day"

Flareon: "For me, I visit 6-8 hours every day."

Except for two of the participants, the rest agreed that they visit these social media sites daily; thus:

Arcanine: "not that often, usually 2x a week, that's how often I visit a social media site like Facebook. That's all."

Eevee: "Moderately, like 2 days in a week."

2. What popular social media sites do you frequently see a political meme?

The researchers further analyzed that the participants were found to be more active users of Facebook among other social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr in which undoubtedly they frequently see a political meme; Thus:

Arcanine: "Facebook"

Bulbasaur: "Facebook also"

Chansey: "Facebook and Twitter but mostly Facebook."

Dragonair: "Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr."

Eevee: "Facebook and Tumblr"

Flareon: "Facebook and Twitter"

It was revealed in this part of the discussion that the participants have come across these online political memes most of the time as they visit different social media sites. As Daniele (2013) mentioned in his article, "…Memes have exploded onto social media forums like Facebook through the process of internet sharing." Therefore, it can be concluded that memes are one example of the growing use of social media as means to access, use, communicate and share ideas (this includes political). Thus:

Arcanine: "Every time I open my Facebook account; I always see these political memes."

Bulbasaur: "Yes, Every time I checked Facebook."

Eevee: "Every time also when I open Facebook, usually from my friends' shared post, I get to see these memes.

Aside from their usual encounter with these memes, political memes are most viral when there are recent political issues such as the 2016 Philippine presidential election. As Brad Kim (2016) mentioned in their research, "Memes can turn some of the most trivial moments and gossips about the candidates into central talking points of the campaigns..." Therefore,

it can be concluded that memes may be the source of political information and updates on the nation's political, economic, and social crisis. Thus;

Chansey: "Every time specially if there are live political issues like those of the Presidential candidates."

Dragonair: "For the past 3 months, maybe, after every 2 posts there is a political meme."

Flareon: "Often times, especially we are amidst of the upcoming election."

Participants were also asked on how do you react when you see these political memes. It was revealed in this part of the discussion that half of the participants find these political memes comedic, while the other half think in different ways. Those who laughed as they see these memes believed that political memes are for fun and entertainment through its satiric portray. Thus;

Arcanine: "I just laugh because mostly it was like a joke…"

Bulbasaur: "When I see these memes, usually I laughed, memes are funny because that's what they do, they are jokes."

Dragonair: "Every time I see, at first I love of course…"

Eevee: "…it was a laugh trip based on how it was edited…"

On the other hand, few participants in the discussion confessed that they also see these memes doubtful with its legality and truthfulness. They are firm in their belief that such memes are results of alteration of the creators giving fabricated information and biased reports.For them, there is a great deal of confusion between real political information from the fake ones circulating in social media by means of these political memes; Thus:

Chansey: "Nothing because not everything stated was definitely true."

Dragonair: "…after a split second you'll think if it is legit and factual."

Furthermore, least two of the Participants see political memes more than just a viral funny image but contains deep content of political point; Thus:

Eevee: "…jokes are half meant so, sometimes, I think it was factual not just for entertainment."

Flareon: "Depends on the political meme. If it is negative, I got curious; I research it if it is true and if it is positive, especially for my presidential pick; I feel a sense of pride that I was right about that person.

The participants were also asked if they have you forwarded or posted a meme about a political personality or a political issue. Four (4) of the participants do not have any experiences that involve themselves to forward or post a meme about a political personality or a political issue.

They tend feed and not to forward or post these (political memes) to avoid online wars; Thus:

Arcanine: "No, just letting others does it and I never join..."

Chansey: "No, because I'm not familiar of their memes and I don't know which ones is true."

Dragonair: "I haven't honestly. For me, people are recently "war freak" about their presidential pick."

Eevee: "No, I just feed."

The two other participants involve themselves by posting or forwarding memes about a political personality or a political issue. They firmly believe that doing such may influence others as to promoting their presidential bets for 2016 election and stimulate awareness towards a political issue.

Bulbasaur: "definitely yes, I have shared; promoting my presidential bet."

Flareon: "share, No. forwarded, yes because I want to stimulate awareness among my friends."

When asked who among the 2016 presidential candidates is most likely you make a comment or forwarded the political meme. This part of the discussion never indulge to comment or forward the political meme of the 2016 presidential candidates; Thus:

Arcanine: "None. I never commented because whatever defamation they spread, I don't care."

Chansey: "None. I never commented, not a single."

Eevee: "No, I don't comment. I keep my comments to myself because I avoid online wars."

Flareon: "same with her, I kept opinions to myself."

Moreover, at least two of the participants commented to a meme of the presidential candidate as their way of examining such candidate and also as support; Thus:

Bulbasaur: "Mostly,I comment positively towards Miriam."

Dragonair: "Personal comments, all of presidential candidates because as much as possible I try to see the positive and negative side of everyone."

Among the five presidential candidates the participants revealed the candidate they usually see on a political meme and describe the meme. They specifically describe each based on how they remember such; Thus:

Arcanine: "Binay regarding his skin tone and also Mar regarding his made up controversies towards other candidates."

Bulbasaur: "same. Binay and Mar. Binay, regarding his corruption issue. Meme featuring the buildings he allegedly with a text stating the cost of his corruption. While Mar, pictures featuring how he abuses the government resources like with his recent issue with Kris and Korina, choppers and everything."

Chansey: "Same. Binay and Mar. Binay, his comparison with Kokey."

Dragonair: "Everyone has meme but mostly It is Binay, Poe and duterte. Binay, mostly about his skin color and his comparison with Kokey; not to be harsh or anything. Mar, normal his made up controversies towards other candidates and about his being retard. Poe, the meme that I remember is with a pack of Lays in which the face of Grace Poe was in that pack of Lays; It was like the feature was nice but truly it is empty.

Eevee: "Usually, Duterte, Poe and Binay. Duterte, about why due process is needed when you can kill it immediately then Poe, about being the First American President of the Philippines and Binay, usually about his skin colorization.

Flareon: "Mar Roxas and Duterte. Mar Roxas, regarding the issue where he uses the glass as for the rice and his hands as for the water. It became remarkable to me. While Duterte, there is this political meme where the pictures of Duterte, Miriam and De Lima was collaged so it was named as "DUMEDEDE.""

3. How did these Memes affect your voting insights/decisions on the upcoming 2016 presidential election?

Upon further analysis, the participants finally made a clear statement that more than the entertainment they are getting from these online political memes, it was agreed, almost unanimously, that they're voting insights or decisions on the upcoming 2016 presidential election was not affected by the persuasive impact of these memes. They too agreed that other media appearances of the candidates and other related factors may affect their voting insights and decisions more than of these online political memes; Thus:

Arcanine: "Nope, it did not affect me because every candidate has its negative and positive. Most important is what negative side of him that you can accept. Everyone has its negative; Also, His ability to find solution to the problems of the Philippines."

Bulbasaur: "My Voting decision was not really affected of these memes because as part of the internet community you understand what are memes and what they do and you have to treat them as they are meme, they are jokes. But it is a means to an end, when you get to see memes, the follow up question is important. If it is based on facts or not, then afterwards start educating yourself and there you will see if there is affection."

Chansey: "I am not also affected of these memes because with these Presidential candidates, they all have different excuses but whatever happens and whoever wins, we should respect it."

Dragonair: "Like them, I believe, it hasn't change my decision ever since. these memes were created to be a joke and make people laugh but I never took the memes seriously as people have posted it but like the saying, jokes are half meant but my basis is always how it was in the news and how they portrait themselves."

Eevee: "No, but it made a change in me that I should know more about my candidate bet. I think, Meme for me, it can make people laugh but its true essence it wants us to be aware that there is a bigger person that there is a candidate that we should vote.

Flareon: "As a Millennial, I believe that these political memes paid an impact on how I should pick among the presidential candidates because it gives me

more points to weigh my options plus it gives me the impression of who among the presidential is the most attention from the people. Certainly, Yes It affects me."

Note: (President Rodrigo Roa Duterte is declared by the Philippine Commission on Election as the 16th President of the Republic of the Philippines. In this study, Presidential Candidate Jejomar Binay has the most number of political memes in all social media sites, while in the result of the 2016 Philippines election, he got 4th place among the five Philippine Presidential Candidates.)

THEMES

As the study progressed, the researchers discovered things that were identified as themes. These were basically shared and lived experiences from the participants which remained constant as their responses to the interview were later dissected. The identified themes are as follows:

1. **Political memes are part of the Filipino Culture**

As part of the Filipino Culture, people nowadays especially when it's the season of election, they tend to edit pictures of the candidates and make fun of them.

2. **The Political memes were created to make people laugh**

Basically, Political memes are just made by the people to make others laugh. Though, some Political memes can offend some candidates, but still the thought of Political memes just make people laugh.

3. **Political memes do not affect the millennials' votes** on the 2016 Presidential Election, but instead makes them think in who they are voting for.

CONCLUSION

The Millennials use social media sites in gathering information about the presidential candidates. Political memes were to create presidential candidates towards increasing popularity. Online political memes do not affect the voting insights and decisions of the participants but instead provides direction on how they should select among the 2016 Philippine Presidential candidates. Also, the memes made the

millennials' think whom they are choosing as a candidate. This research not only provided the researchers with the output, it also concluded that indeed the generation today is the thinking generation.

RECOMMENDAITONS

The researchers of this study highly recommend that the millennials must be responsible in utilizing social media sites and must know how to ponder information they gain from these sites especially those of political in nature.

This study utilizes qualitative approach with six (6) participants, a further study with more participants is recommended.

REFERENCES

Books:

Embracing LOLitics: Popular Culture, Online Political Humor, and Play Griffin, E. A. (2009) A first look at communication theory. (7th Ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill

Hoffman, L. H., & Young, D. G. (2011). Satire, punch lines, and the nightly news: untangling media effects on political participation. Communication Research Reports, 28(2), 159-168. doi:10.1080/08824096.2011.565278

McCombs, M. E. (2006). Attributed agenda setting and framing. Maxwell

McCombs. Setting the agenda: the mass media and public opinion (86-98) Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity

Menzie, J. (2012, October 3). Mitt romney hates big bird? Gop candidate's 'pbs funding cut' sparks meme. Christina Post.

Morris, J. (2009). The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and audience attitude change during the 2004 party conventions.

Tay, Ganiesa (2012) Political Behavior, 31(1), 79-102. doi:10.1007/s11109-008- 9064-y

Journals:

Collaboration, Competition, and Coercion: Canadian Federalism and Blood System Governance by Adam David McDonald

Shifman, L., & Thelwall, M. (2009). Assessing global diffusion with Web memetics: the spread and evolution of a popular joke. Journal of The American Society for Information Science & Technology, 60(12), 2567-2576.

Online:

http://www.academia.edu/6508355/Political_Memes_Socia l_Spaces_How_Partisanship_and_Perceptions_of_Network _Heterogeneity_Influence_Corrective_Intent_and_Views_o n_Censorship ret. 02/12/2016

http://www.academia.edu/6508355/Political_Memes_Socia l_Spaces_How_Partisanship_and_Perceptions_of_Network _Heterogeneity_Influence_Corrective_Intent_and_Views_o n_Censorship ret. 02/10/2016

http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:os o/9780192632449.001.0001/acprof-9780192632449-chapter-6 ret. 02/12/2016

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24211917   ret. 03/18/2016