

Appropriating the Internet, Building Social Capital: The Case of Filipino Diaspora in Japan

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In this paper, I explore on the crossing points of Filipino diaspora in Japan, the Internet, and social capital. I provide reflections and insights on how information technology affords a great potential in cultivating and enhancing social capital resources and capabilities particularly for people who are disconnected from the homeland. Using textual analysis of two Filipino cyber-communities in Japan, I found two emergent narratives online which can be surmised to home-making and support-making. These two nascent features of cybercommunities in Filipino context bring to the crux how the Internet has become a haven for communication amongst them. Moreover, the appropriation of the Internet by Filipino migrants in Japan also revealed positive relationship with social capital. The findings of the study showed that the Internet is facilitating migrants' social capital through social networks, social support, and social trust online.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of globalization, low-cost transport as well as that dire need for economic bliss have driven me to work overseas. I first had a taste of it when I went to Thailand in the summer of 2004. During my short stint, I met some fellow Filipinos, who just like me, were there for greener pastures. One can find among them that peculiar positive outlook and that buoyant, cheerful disposition. Though leaving their families behind has not always been without nostalgia and loneliness. Filipinos easily get homesick in another land, experiencing extreme sadness and anxiety at the thought of home. The closely-knit family ground the melancholic feelings but these ties, as well, serve as the primary motive to be content knowing that their loved ones at home experience financial stability out of their remittances to the Philippines.

In dealing with them, I observed how modern modes of communication have been essential in their everyday struggle for contact and connection with their families and friends in the homeland. Clouded in solitude, I also took advantage of technology. During the two months of being away, my family and friends were in contact with me through landline and mobile phone. Though I would still receive snail mails and postcards, phone calls have been dependable forms of communication.

Then there was the Internet. At that time, it was still difficult to obtain broadband much less wireless connection at the confines of one's home; hence, Internet shops mushroomed all over. I, along with some newfound Filipino friends, trudged the alley to Khaosan Road where cyber café shops proliferated. The Internet became the new medium of communication. Sending and receiving messages via email were easy and convenient. It was also cheaper and affordable. Undeniably, the Internet has become the overriding means of contact among transnational families.

In 2007, I had the chance again to meet face-to-face Filipino migrants—this time in the Land of the Rising Sun. For the interim, I left the Philippines to pursue my graduate studies in Japan. I was again placed in a situation where the use of communication technologies was vital and indispensable for survival. Unlike before when the Internet was difficult to find, I was in a place where every household was wired and connected to the worldwide web. The Internet, in my case, has become my safe haven, my sanctuary and refuge.

As I navigated my way to the world of cyberlandia, I came across communities of Filipinos in Japan. This was interesting because when I was in Thailand, I ran into them in parks, grocery shops, churches and sometimes in train stations. But this time, I stumbled upon them in Yahoo groups (which were very popular then) and websites. As I wandered further, I have realized how the Internet has become a new avenue to commune and build kinship with other Filipino migrants in Japan. I reasoned that this could be one of the many ways by which Filipinos conquer new territories and new spaces to build new “homes” and establish new communities. I know that we Filipinos were created to be a tough and resolute race, that we had outlived corruption from colonizers and neo-colonizers; hence, conquering this new space could be a strategy to face the struggles in a foreign land.

This research then takes off from my curiosity to understand the interface between Filipino migration in Japan and the appropriation of the Internet. The Internet here is referred to the activities and consequences that come along with the use of it. My desire to unearth postings and messages online provided me the impetus to begin this academic voyage. Needless to say, this focus on the Internet and migration for knowledge is what led me to this study.

It is hoped that this expedition to the world of cyberspace supports its notion that capitalizing the net helps in the creation and building of Filipino migration in Japan, and at the same time in bridging migrants’ social capital.

1.1 Locating Filipinos in Japan

Filipinos have various reasons for migration. Whether it stems out of their desire for adventure or new experience, it is typical to call these world-class wage-earners as heroes of their homeland. The “I work for my family” attitude of about 10.2 million who left the homeland certainly has made the Philippines on acme of major labour exporting countries in the world (PSA, 2016).

According to statistics reported from the Japan Times, Filipinos in Japan totalled to 229,595 in 2016 (Murai, 2016). Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Nagoya and Okinawa are regions with significant concentrations of Filipinos in Japan. These areas are highly urbanized areas and job opportunities are relatively plentiful amidst the very high standard of living.

As most foreigners, Filipinos are enticed to migrate to Japan because of some pull factors current in Japan since the 1970s. These include (a) the economic upsurge and the consequent rise of the Japanese Yen, which create better average wage and per capita income (Matray, 2000); (b) pessimistic attitudes among young Japanese toward jobs labeled as 3Ks, or 3Ds – *kitanai* (dirty), *kiken* (dangerous), *kitsui* (difficult) (Connell, 1993); (c) the labor shortages impinged on by the decline of population growth and the ensuing aging of the Japanese population (Hewitt, 2003; Usui, 2003)

The economic benefit that Japan affords to Filipinos is a merely a piece of the puzzle, so to speak, as compared to the larger picture which involves the physical and emotional drawbacks Filipinos have to contend with while living abroad. At the host environment, migrants experience profound pressures from internal and external means. The “pain of family separation, partial citizenship, the experience of contradictory class mobility and the feeling of social exclusion or non-belonging in the migrant community” (Parrenas, 2001, p. 12) and host society are corollaries to dislocations of Filipino migrants.

To survive, migrants maintain, create or recreate their cultural identities in their host societies through letter writing, phone calls, and videotapes. They also engage in the consumption of mass media. Some meanwhile involve themselves in setting up religious and cultural associations that provide venues for collective activities. But with the advent of new technology and media, Filipino migrants have become more interactive across great distances. The Internet now has become the ultimate medium for dispersed groups wishing to sustain an

identity in an “alien” land while working in solidarity with those facing challenges at “home” (Parham, 2004, p. 199).

These social realities that confront the Filipino migrant brought me to consider a relevant study about them. My investigation on Filipino migration foregrounds their social and communication aspects as I understand narratives of dislocations and emplacements while they continue their struggle to be part of the host society.

1.2 The Internet and the Filipino Migrants in Japan

The idea of Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) medium theory best encapsulates the phenomenon of the Internet technology. To boot, throughout history, technological innovation has altered and transfigured the society. Building on McLuhan, oral, written and electronic media, apart from whatever is communicated, influence individuals and society (Littlejohn and Foss, 2004). As media change and transform, “so do the ways in which people think, manage information and relate to one another” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2004, p. 290). For this reason, the discovery and development of the telegraph, telephone, radio, television and personal computer have instigated different effects and impacts on people’s behaviours and thoughts. Essentially these technological developments have established an easier, faster, and convenient mode of communication. These tools have abilities to compress time and space between and among people (Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). The conception of the Internet, moreover, has provided an unprecedented potential for information sharing capabilities. Actually, the Internet’s use and consumption as a means of information dissemination and a medium for connecting individuals have, in fact, generated a fertile ground for research and study.

In point of fact, the Internet has rapidly become a communication technology consumed by many people across the globe. This is exemplified by the number of Internet users worldwide growing immensely since its initial introduction to the public. Internet World Statistics (2017) estimated that the world Internet population as of June 2017 has reached about 7.5 billion people; whereas the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2017) approximated that about 3.6 billion people are using the Internet. Consequently, this year half of the world’s population are Internet users.

In interpersonal communication for example, the Internet has set off modern facets or dimensions of contact among people. There are now more people having dialogue or discussion on the Internet. These interactions could be done through the use of instant messaging format or discussion group format. Needless to say, this use of the Internet in interpersonal communication involves the transmission of information though minimizes the likelihood for interaction. Subsequently, this feature yields people to share more of their true selves, hence enhancing the development of friendships, free of the usual constraints of the first reactions to physical appearance and personal mannerisms (Chenault, 1998; Parks & Floyd, 1996).

Howard Rheingold’s (1993) pioneering study on the virtual community, meanwhile, establishes the belief that many people utilize the Internet as a means to forge relationships and build communities online. Rheingold’s case study explains how many members based in the San Francisco area imparted private and personal aspects of themselves with others through the computer-mediated-communication (CMC). Through bulletin board systems, email instant messaging, Internet relay chat and other text and graphical user interfaces, people get in touch with each other via this medium.

Nancy Baym’s work (2000) is another seminal treatise that deals with the study of online communities and their social interactions brought forth by participants’ affinity for television soap operas. In her work, she explains how the Internet could provide an opportunity for fans to connect within a social network or community in order to create friendships and forge ties. As she herself reckons, “It is in the details that people develop and maintain the rituals,

traditions, norms, values, and senses of group and individual identity that allow them to consider themselves communities. Rather than judging from the outside, we need to listen closely to what members of new media communities have to say to one another and to those who ask. Only then will we understand their diversity and the opportunities and challenges they offer” (p. 218).

This advent of media and technology and its vast diffusion among the public and the emergence of online communities is a result of globalization. The worldwide exodus of people is also of a unique scale and scope in the context of globalization. Taking a holistic view, globalization has prompted the integration and interdependence of national economies across the world through a rapid increase in cross-border movement of people, services, technology and capital (Joshi, 2009).

This phenomenon is not lost on Filipinos as millions of them relocate, and move from one destination to another. In their quest for incorporation to the host society, communication and media—old and new—are utilized to connect and network in the host and homeland societies. As technology advances and develops, Filipino migrants become interactive across huge spaces. The Internet now, in a way, has become a daily form of haven to get information and social support from various individuals, from within the host country or otherwise. As such, globalization is regarded as a boon when it comes to the integration of nations and states into becoming an international federation.

In a survey called the Yahoo-Nielsen Net Index (2009), conducted by measurement and analysis firm Nielsen Company and Yahoo, reveals that 28 percent of Filipinos in National Urban Philippines—or in 22 major cities, including Metro Manila—access the Internet. E-mail and instant messaging (IM) were the most dominant Internet-related activities. This survey shows that, on a monthly basis, 63 percent log on the Internet for these two major activities. Aside from staying in touch with family, relatives and friends, users also utilize the Internet to be well posted about anything and everything under the sun, so to speak. They also play games and do socialization on the Internet (Ho, 2009). The Yahoo-Nielsen Net Index (2009) reveals that 58 percent of Filipinos use search engines, with Yahoo and Google as the most popular engines. On the other hand, about 53 percent of local Internet users play online games.

The survey further states that 63 percent of the contacts of local e-mail and IM users were not from the Philippines. Thus, this explains how local Internet users guarantee strong relationships with the huge number of their Filipino relatives or friends living and working overseas which has grown hastily as Internet technology became pervasive in this day and age.

In a short time, the Internet was not only utilized in social networking and advertising benefits as reported in the survey. According to Sheila Coronel, Executive Director of Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism, on her keynote speech during the Asian Bloggers conference in 2006: “the Net provides a space to one of the most profound expressions of humanity: the need to speak and communicate” (2006).

The Internet now has become a platform for people to voice out their opinions, express their sentiments about issues and events, or simply to communicate and connect, as afforded by the usage of Internet.

Likewise, because of the Internet’s ability to shrink space and time, migrant peoples have a way now to reach out and be in touch with their loved ones and friends instantaneously. By and large, it could be said that the Internet has a migrant reach. Migrants have congregated and established communities in cyberspace. It has truly become a public productive sphere where communities bound by interest, geography, language and innumerable other similarities and likeness have created a borderless world. As Coronel (2006) aptly puts, these

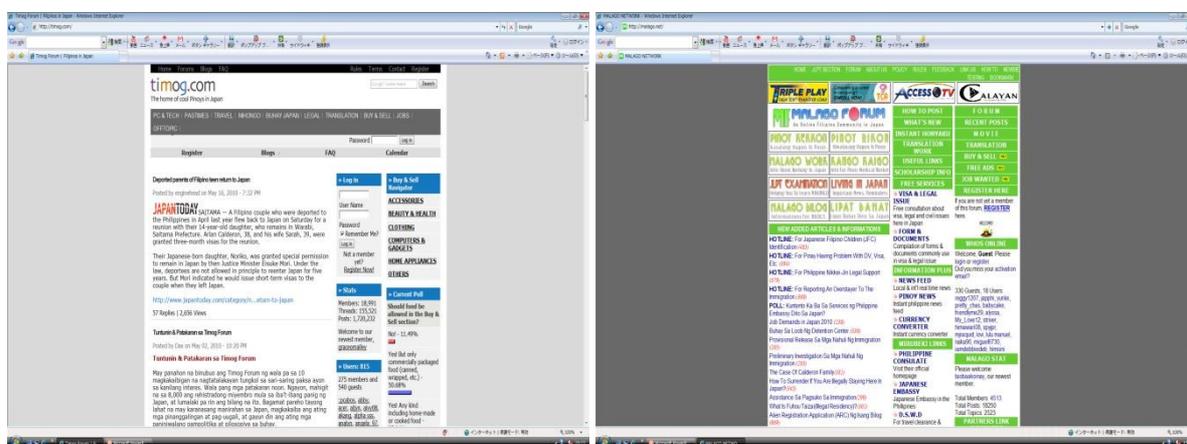
“communities would probably not exist at all if they did not have a place in cyberspace” (2006).

With 55.5 percent of the total population of 103 million Filipinos accessing the Internet for various needs (Internet World Statistics, 2017), the medium becomes indispensable in spreading messages beyond what used to be unimaginable. The innovations brought by the digital revolution may have altered the routine of a number of Filipino Internet users but that sense of being Filipino remains (Ignacio, 2005).

For Filipino diaspora in Japan, the Internet has become a new medium for articulating and maintaining national identities in the host environment (Figer, 2009). The migrants are then equipped with two tasks, going online to survive and sustain an identity in the host land, while working in solidarity with those facing challenges at home (Parham, 2001). Being a member of online communities strengthens their Filipino-ism (*pagka-Pinoy*). Going online, they become a part of a virtual home.

Timog Online (which means “south”) is one of those websites. Created in 2004, it was developed for Filipinos in Japan in search for friendship and common grounds. It started as a place “where Filipinos can meet, share their experiences and help each other specifically for Filipinos who do not speak Japanese can get help to learn the language” (Timog Online, 2009). With its growing membership, Timog Online addresses the migrant’s quest to belong. Another website is Malago forum (denotes a productive forum), conversely, was created for Filipinos in Japan who want to make friends with fellow Filipinos. These two websites have the most number of memberships online (Malago Network, 2009).

Figure 1. Screen Shots of Timog.com (see left) and Malago.net (see right)



1.3 Internet and the bridging of Social Capital

Social capital is a concept widely discussed among social scientists, yet its openness and encompassing nature make it more complex and difficult to pin down with a standard measure or singular meaning or measurement tool. For starters, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as: “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p.248). In simple terms, social capital is the collective resources or assets a person is able to extract or obtain as a consequence of social connections with other individuals. Hence, by linking or connecting individuals and groups to others, social capital is developed and enhanced. It can improve the individual’s ability to mobilize resources and increase their commitment to the community’s well-being, among other benefits (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004; Granovetter, 1973).

In 2000, Putnam pinpointed a decreasing trend in participation on civic venues and activities as proof of a grim decline in America's bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). He cited the increased use of electronic forms of entertainment and communication as one of the notable contributors to the decline of social capital, stopping short of including the then emerging Internet as part of the trend.

It should be noted, however, that one of the most interesting highlights of the Internet has been the "creation of mediated social networks of sociability and collective belonging, populated by an ever-increasing number of individuals of different national origins and backgrounds" (Diamandaki, 2003). Hence, in the case of dispersed individuals like Filipino migrants in Japan, this study presupposes that the appropriation of the Internet could lead to the development and enhancement of social capital through interconnectedness and the formation of social connections and networks between and among them.

Moreover, Waldinger & Lichter (2003) postulate that migrants cultivate social capital through the social networks that tender essential and critical resources in both the homeland and host society. These resources may be in the form of information or knowledge, or as forms of manifestos for expressions of identities, or simply as a contextual marker for the homeland.

Social capital then is manifested and bridged through the interactions and social exchanges between individuals and groups online. By linking and bringing together persons and groups with others, social capital is more cultivated and improved.

It should be pointed out however, that social capital in this study is used as a conceptual tool and not a construct to be measured. Understanding on how Filipino migrants appropriate and make use of the Internet is the main concern of this study. This appropriation of the Internet is indicated in the messages and online postings of cybercommunities where they belong. Social capital comes into the picture as a way to capture in essence the social networks and support that the Internet provides to Filipino migrants in Japan. The study, then, argues that the Internet is an interactive means to connect and bond people and consequently has the potential to play a positive and constructive role in building and fostering social capital.

Based on the interconnections of CMC, diaspora, and social capital, the following research questions are posed: (1) What types of emergent narratives/messages are communicated in Timog Online and Malago forum and (2) How are Timog Online and Malago forum used and appropriated to construct and cultivate Filipino migrant's social capital?

Migrants built social networks like Timog Online and Malago forum that provides indispensable volume of information and supply of resources in both the homeland and host society (Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). With migration being an element of change, online communities which cater to migrants and their families from afar, can facilitate the utilization of migrant's social capital.

1.4 Methods

To understand the types of emergent narratives articulated on a migrant forum and its relation to migrant-specific social capital and to meet the objectives of the study, Timog Online and Malago forum bulletin boards were examined. The best feature of online discussion boards is that it offers an opportunity to observe the discourse and exchange opposing ideas among its member users. Moreover, the identity of the member could be withheld, as they can create a pseudonym upon their liking. With the practice of anonymity, forum users are able to discuss, debate and join intriguing conversation without the fear of being exposed or identified in the real world.

The messages exchanged among online members was explored and examined through thematic analysis. Through the message on the forum, I was able to extract themes rather than have pre-existing categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To do this, data were studied

Blumer (1979)'s method of inductive analysis, with focus on "occurrence of its analytical objects in a particular context" (Pernia, 2004, p.18)

2. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

2.1 Emergent narratives/messages communicated in Timog Online and Malago Forum I would like to believe that two emergent narratives can be surmised from the diverse, sundry online postings in Timog and Malago forums. The first one dealt with the homemaking process online. The second facet confers on support-making activity online. These nascent features of cyber-communities in Filipino context bring to the crux how Internet has become a haven of human *communication* amongst them. Let me now discuss the focal points of each emergent narrative.

A. On Home-making Online

Revisiting migration studies through history has established the notion that leavetaking (may it be within or outside the country) has been part of the daily experience of Filipinos. The concept of searching for "greener pastures" has also provided attraction to Filipinos. More so, the advent of globalization takes its role in reinforcing this activity. Apart from this, the national government is in all-out campaign for promoting overseas jobs because of its positive economic implication to the gross national product of the country (Yang, 2004).

In Japan, Filipinos thrive and grow in numbers every year (Sassen, 2009). This could be weighed down on the fiscal bliss that they gain which in effect provide an economic enjoyment to their families back home. Being in Japan, however, is difficult. Migrants are confronted with pressures from inside and outside the host society. Pressures inside would mean cultural differences, language incompetence and relational problems with peers and colleagues which may lead to loneliness, isolation and alienation. Pressures outside concern loved ones back home. These demands and difficulties have prompted Filipinos to recreate their identities in the host society through the use of letters and telephone communications, consumption of Filipino media programs, and participation or attendance in religious and cultural events and associations. These actions afforded platforms for collective activities. The dawn of new technologies and media offered great potentials for migrants to be interactive across distances. They have now used these mediums as new avenues to commune and build kinship amongst themselves in Japan.

As they journey toward their incorporation to the host society, they have also conquered new territories, new spaces to build a new "home" and establish communities. These acts of occupying cyber spaces are ways to articulate and perform their identity, build camaraderie and belongingness and ultimately create a home away from home.

Reinforced because of "placelessness" and "homelessness", the idea of a home is articulated and put forward through "memorializing the homeland and by building on familial and communal ties" (Espiritu, 2008, p. 14). Probing on the narratives online, Filipino diaspora in Japan have used their facility of imagination to connect with the homeland, and in this process of imagination, became part of a larger location where they get to belong to a community or a nation as a case in point. This in essence locates the migrant in the community, attaches family members and friends, and moulds one's identity. Memory of place, of home, is then a significant praxis. And this in spirit is offered by the cyber world. As Pops27 shows in this statement:

I believe that there is really no place like home. yes, japan is economically great but it does not erase the fact that my heart and mind still long for a place which is home, a place where i can say that it is mine, a place where i don't feel alienated because of some social and cultural differences or barriers...a place where i am at peace.

Ashting26 extends the same feeling:

ang pilipinas ang tinuturing kong unang 'HOME' ang japan ang tinuturing kong pangalawang 'HOME' at sa pamamagitan ng mga ganitong forums at sites, para akong nasa pilipinas ulit. para akong nasa bahay ulit. hehe. medyo weird ata ang sagot ko. pero yan ang totoo. sa tingin ko ang mga forums na ito ang nagbibigay ng venue para sa aming nasa malayong lugar na bumalik sa pinas 'virtually' at maging at peace ulit. (I consider Philippines as my first 'home'. Japan is my second home. And through these forums and sites, I feel like being at my first home again. I feel like I am in our house. It's weird though. But that's what I feel. Forums like this provide us an avenue to go home virtually and find peace.)

Hence, despite “placenesses”, the Internet buttresses place; despite “homelessness”, the Internet provides a home. As I put in context Gupta and Ferguson’s (1992) ideas, memorymaking of the Philippines online is an important lifeline among migrants in Japan and a sound foundation for group, community or national identity in the host society. This is also a significant basis for migrants as they construct a community, a home as they struggle for integration in the host society.

Performing religiosity is also a noteworthy aspect of being home, and one of the considerable social markers of Filipino identity. As migrants become homespun, they also made use of the Internet as a venue to carry out their religious practices and faith. As if in actual location, Filipinos reproduced religiosity as a form of a long-distance ritual practice and cyber pilgrimage. They have developed a connection with the blessed homeland, so to speak. Members of online communities viewed the Internet, as Campbell (2005) underscored in her study: “as a spiritual medium facilitating religious experience, a sacramental space suitable for religious use, a tool for promoting religion or religious practice and a technology for affirming religious life” (pp. 9-10).

Filipinos carrying out religiosity online is worthy of note in this research as this only showed that the Internet has become a sanctuary for people who are dislocated from their homelands; it has supplied a setting for communicating and living out religious faith and practices to which they could perform in a tangible place of worship. This does not mean, however, that online religiosity has substituted the actual way of going to church. It only goes to show that the Internet has considerably become a complementary site to enhance faith and trust in God. As GREENERY_YES exclaimed: *[I]t is Gods (sic) plan to save us.*

Napakasarap mabuhay na may kilala akong Diyos na totoo. Living in [j]apan proved me that [c]hristianity is our life. Hindi na maikakaila na sila man din ay nagiging Christiano na. Kung nagmamatigas ang puso pa ng marami, ito ay lalong ipaparamdam sa kanila ng Diyos hanggang sa matutunan nilang kilalanin ang Diyos. (This is God’s plan to save us. It feels great that I know a real God. Living in Japan proved me that Christianity is our life. It cannot be denied that even they (the Japanese) have become Christians. If one resists, God will show them the way to faith.)

B. On Support-Making Online

The rapid expansion of online communication through the usage of Internet has presented many new opportunities for assistance and collaboration. In the multitude of studies on the benefits of Internet use, support-making appeared to be extensive (Livingstone & Brake, 2010; Notley, 2009). In this body of literature, most of these delved on health support (Crafton, 2010; Perry-Maclean, 2010). This research extends further its coverage of support-making to correspond to the needs of Filipino migrants in Japan. Primarily because they are migrants in a foreign land, the main issue that confronts them is their immigration status; hence, the Internet

has become a good resource for Filipinos in addressing their problems concerning their passage and settlement in the host society.

The undocumented workers—the overstayers known as *bilog*—have used online forums to speak up and seek assistance from other online members. Since they were predisposed to be invisible in the actual society because of fear of being caught, they employed the Internet as their “speaking capital” (Mitra, 2001, p. 45). And as they have forged ties with other members, they have found an alliance in online forums where they could get information and resources on what to do with their situation. This is what Mitra (2001) hypothesized in his article that the commonness of Internet use has allowed immigrants to form links and networks in cyberspace that promote a sense of solidarity and amity. This sense of union, bond, and link is the start of developing trust and the encouragement to speak up and articulate one’s feelings.

2.2 Appropriation of Online Communities for Filipino Migrants’ Social Capital

The interface between Filipino diaspora in Japan and their appropriation of the Internet imparted positive relationship with social capital. The Internet has the potential of enhancing and reinforcing social capital (Stern & Adam, 2010; Trevett-Smith, 2010; Ogan & Ozakka, 2010). The results of the thematic/textual analysis pointed out that the Internet is facilitating migrants’ social capital through social networks, social support and social trust online. These three elements are actually the main constructs of Putnam (2000) in his definition of social capital. How then are these three constructs manifested and characterized in my research?

A. On Social Networks Online

Because of loneliness, isolation and homesickness, Filipino migrants find ways in order to combat these feelings of exclusion, survive and eventually be assimilated to the new environment. Aside from the face-to-face communication that they live through, they also have consumed the Internet as part of their daily chores, so to speak. As they began to realize the power of the Internet and how it could be of great potential for connection and community formation, migrants built and created neighbourhoods or fellow online users for some collective activities online.

Personal contacts and associations online became dense. These neighbourhoods subsequently offered access to information and resources, higher social status and power (Burgess, 2009). Needless to say, Filipino migrant online users achieved positive social gains through the communication linkages formed and sustained by users themselves so as to build on mutually valuable relationships.

The home-making activity online situated what social network, and social capital are all about. The concept of imagination of the homeland was originally taken from Anderson’s (1983) imagined communities. Anderson underscored that the probability of meeting all the members of the community is far out, hence, the process of imagination. In this case, an online participant who does not know personally a member of the online forum is brought together through the Internet to collectively carry out the imagination of the homeland. The social network one has online gave the migrant a chance to create a neighbourhood, a community, a home in cyberspace. Memory and remembrance of the Philippines became the lifeblood of migrants in Japan for group and national identity in the host society, apart from the fact, of course, that these memory-making exercises helped migrants contend with feelings of desperation and desolation.

Moreover, the idea of creating an ideal homeland online and the desire to have one similar to the host country was being mutually shared in these cyber communities. Sharing their views about the homeland and the host society was a major force that drew them together to form a coalition, an alliance. This then empowered participants to proactively engage in the process of creating the imaginary homeland. This then facilitated building Filipino diaspora in Japan through capitalizing the Net.

B. On Social Support Online

Online communities have also been sites for social support activities (Livingstone & Brake, 2010; Perriton, 2008). In the case of this research, social support was manifested in the immigration forums of Timog and Malago websites. Primarily because they are migrants in Japan, immigration issues have become an instinctive and consequential discussion. Having an Internet connection and being part of online forums do not necessitate major investments on time, money, energy and physical presence, and can be carried out in the comforts of one's home. Social support online became easy and trouble-free. This support online could be in the form of information, emotional and self-help support (Notley, 2009; boyd & Ellison, 2008).

These cyber communities have been most helpful especially to Filipino overstayers in Japan as their status have become illegal and prohibited against the law. Overstayers have sought aid from online users on information about measures on what to do when caught by the authorities. They have also inquired about ways to make themselves legitimate in terms of status, knowing that being in Japan is better than being in the Philippines, as far as monetary gains is concerned. Aside from overstayers, online forums have provided good locations for discussions on migrants who want to continue their quest for the American dream. Fellow migrants afforded advice on requirements for visa application and the interview process. Cheers and good lucks were also extended to those who are intending to migrate to the US.

In a nutshell, online forums have become supportive and compassionate environments for a community which will never exist have they not found a place in cyberspace. The Internet has created spaces for individuals or groups who seemed to be invisible (like the overstayers) in the real setting. It has also become a reservoir, a basin for information and resources for those who want to know about immigration policies, within Japan and the US. Essentially, the concern for each other among Filipinos in Japan as characterized online proves that Filipinos' nationalistic zeal and commitment may be translated to extending help to fellowmen who are in need. And the Internet becomes the envoy to make all these support, guidance and care materialize.

C. On Social Trust Online

Though trust is difficult to characterize online, trust as noted by Fukuyama (1995) may be considered as an expectation that "arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behaviour based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community" (p. 27); trust then is evident in online communities. Social networks and social support then have placed significant functionality over Timog and Malago forums. For this reason, trust operates in the online community. It is regarded then as a surfacing feature of social networks and social support.

Undoubtedly, trust is a positive trait and the bedrock of most relationships (Littlejohn & Foss, 2004); trust is also as essential to online relationships as elsewhere (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). As observed in online communities, migrants' confidence on the information-sharing about immigration issues have built better exchanges for more information and resources. This has smoothened the progress for cooperative and amalgamated action by letting migrants take risks and in good faith trust that fellow migrants will not take advantage of them (Sullivan et. al, 2002). Though there were still some online users who were not confident with the idea of social trust online because of lack of face-toface interactions, they still believed that in real situations, it is also hard to build trust among people. So trust definitely is earned through time, whether it is online or offline.

D. On Social Capital

In sum, the results of the study revealed that Filipino migrants' appropriation of the Internet has an affirmative connection to the concept of social capital. As discussed above, social networks, social support and social trust, all important elements of social capital, are inherently

at work in online forums. These elements have ushered in the construction of communities online, which I believe are significant results of social capital. Given the prevailing situation of placelessness, of pluralism and of segmented societies, the Internet has reinforced otherwise. It has fortified the concept of place, strengthened national identity and community and has instigated a solidarity network among Filipino diaspora in Japan. As

Quan-Haase & Wellman (2002) and supported by Sullivan et. al (2002) underlined:

An analysis of the impact of the Internet needs to consider that the Internet may be contributing to new forms of interaction and community that cannot be measured using standard indicators of social capital. The fact that people are not interacting in visible public spaces does not mean that they are in isolation. They may be going online to create new online worlds, using instant messaging to chat with old and new friends, visiting online communities, or playing multi-user games...The Internet makes it necessary to redefine our understanding of what social capital is. We believe that the Internet will intensify the interpersonal transformation from 'door-to-door' to 'place-to-place' and individualized 'person-to-person' networks (pp. 10-11).

3. CONCLUSION

In here, I could surmise that the Internet has been a mirror to some of Filipino attributes. It has given migrants the ability to reproduce, re-create, and maintain their sense of being Filipinos despite their absence from the homeland. These online communities have paved the way for the Filipino touch and feel for belongingness and kinship to exist in foreign land.

In terms of the future directions for this research, I would like to believe that this study is a pioneering one since the review of related literature did not yield any research that will serve as a guiding entry to my research. The benefit though of breaking new grounds is that I was able to open the floodgates for the growth of other areas of research on Internet use by Filipino diaspora and its crossing point with social capital. It used Japan as the host country in point. And because of the magnitude of data and my inability to analyse all Filipino diasporic websites, future research should be able to target an entire continent or regional areas in order to examine exhaustively the narratives online. This will for sure succumb to more generalizable conclusions.

As this research only focuses on online postings, I believe an offline component should be put in place so that there is a comparative analysis of the virtual and actual communities. In this way, differences and similarities will be plastered and study of the connection between online and offline ties may also be considered.

Since this serves as a benchmark on the study of Filipino diaspora in Japan, the Internet and social capital, I believe that a separate qualitative and quantitative research should be conducted. The qualitative aspect should delve more on the conduct of netnography so as to extend further the depth and breadth that I have started. The quantitative aspect, on the other hand, should do extensive online surveys and provide ways on how to attract online users to participate in the research.

The possibility of the government, both the homeland and the host society, in utilizing these online communities to better the lives and conditions of migrants, is a good way to build a stronger diplomatic relations between the two countries. Future researches on this area should establish the role of ICT in building communities and social capital, and how this could configure mobilization, empowerment and social change among stakeholders of the research.

In essence, the possibility of doing research on Filipino diaspora and the Internet is gargantuan. As long as the exodus of Filipinos persists, their tales and stories will always have a place in

the academe. And as long as there will be people who will listen, who will share these tales and stories, and who will build the Filipino diaspora to the test of times, research and scholarship on Filipino diaspora will continue, remain, and live on.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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