

The Monday Afternoon Tree: A Grounded Theory of Slacktivism among Filipino Students in a State University



ISSN 2672-3107 (Print) • ISSN 2704-288X (Online)
Volume 7 Number 2 April-June 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v7i2.944>

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Article history:

Submitted: July 1, 2024

Revised: October 23, 2024

Accepted: November 9, 2024

Keywords:

Political science
Slacktivism
Filipino students
Grounded theory
State university

ABSTRACT. This grounded theory study explores the emerging worldview of “slacktivism” among Filipino university students, utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with students active in online activism. Employing Charmaz’s constructivist approach, the research introduces the “Monday Afternoon Tree” model to illustrate the key components of slacktivism: its roots, blooming, and withering. The study finds that various factors motivate slacktivism, leading to both positive and negative consequences. While slacktivism’s impact on political affairs is often minimal and indirect, it can increase political awareness and participation. Future research should employ a sequential exploratory approach to further understand this complex phenomenon and empirically validate its underlying domains.

1.0. Introduction

Neil Armstrong stated that when man first walked on the moon, it was “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” From the Greek forum and Roman assemblies, humanity has arrived in an age where people are ever more connected to the world and ever more aware of what the world needs. But how much impact could one make in the present with just a tap of a button, a share, or a like?

Slacktivism, a portmanteau of “slacker” and “activism,” denotes a form of “lazy activism” characterized by minimal cost and risk but with negligible impact on the cause it supports (Morozov, 2009). Lodewijckx (2020) suggested that slacktivism offers a means to express one’s opinion on a particular cause without the need to take to the streets or “risk one’s neck.” Other frequently used terms include ‘clicktivism’ or ‘armchair activism’. In a sense, slacktivism represents a diluted form of traditional activism. To illustrate, one does not even need to leave their home to effect change. Through this approach, individuals can easily garner attention and support. However, it is imperative to ask whether this type of participation truly contributes to advocacy efforts as a catalyst for growth or merely serves as a nuisance.

Meanwhile, the importance of political

participation on the Internet remains a debated issue. Ayres (1999) and Barber (1998) asserted that the Internet was heralded as a potential solution to the significant decline in political participation. Nevertheless, scholars have become increasingly skeptical about whether the internet positively influences people’s civic engagement or not. While citizens have become increasingly active on the internet over the years, many argue that it often serves more to showcase engagement, boosting the individual’s self-esteem rather than effectively addressing urgent political issues (Shulman, 2005; Hindman, 2009). Moreover, the emergence of social networking platforms like Facebook has profoundly altered citizen activism, giving rise to what is now known as micro-activism (Marichal, 2013).

Morozov (2009) suggested that slacktivism is a derogatory term used to describe activism that has minimal impact on real-life political outcomes and primarily serves to boost the participants’ positive emotions. Concerns have been expressed that these activities are futile because they fail to achieve political goals and can divert political participation away from more effective forms traditionally found in the activist repertoire (Putnam, 2000).

Moreover, Noland (2019) noted that much of the discourse on slacktivism occurs online, where it has been subject to various theoretical tests, particularly using the theory of planned behavior and behavioral intention. His findings indicated that while such

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theories may apply, behavioral control may not significantly impact slacktivist behaviors.

Contrary to Noland's findings, Ralston et al. (2022) explored post-digital slacktivism, highlighting how motivations such as resistance to changes or institutional policies can spur individuals to engage in online activism. They observed that individuals threatened by changes in their lives may gravitate towards slacktivism, utilizing online platforms to express their views without comprehensive knowledge of the issues. This scenario underscores a potential vulnerability where individuals may engage in superficial acts like liking or sharing without fully grasping the underlying complexities, potentially leaving them susceptible to external influences.

Furthermore, Lane et al. (2017) conducted a study using a novel sharing simulation paradigm to examine the impact of public versus private sharing of videos suggesting a social cause on subsequent offline engagement. Their research demonstrated that publicly sharing such content on platforms like Facebook could significantly enhance individuals' willingness to participate in related offline activities, illustrating the powerful influence of social validation and community support in motivating activism.

Understanding the intricate relationship between social media engagement and activism is difficult. While social media can amplify protest movements, it also risks fostering what some perceive as 'lazy activism', where superficial online actions substitute for deeper engagement. Smith et al. (2019) suggested that uncovering this hypothesis requires moving beyond quantitative analyses to explore other dimensions of engagement. They proposed a model-driven approach that considers factors like communicative competence, empowerment, and social stakes, which collectively shape the outcomes of social media activism.

Based on the literature review conducted by the researcher, empirical and population gaps were identified about Filipino slacktivism in the Philippines. Exploring student digital activism provides a nuanced understanding of Filipinos' online activist behavior, which serves both as a platform for expressing political opinions and as a means to enhance one's self-esteem, reflecting current trends in online public opinion. The study employs grounded theory to explore emerging perspectives on student slacktivism in the Philippines, laying a theoretical foundation for understanding this phenomenon. Thus, it seeks to unearth the emerging worldview of slacktivism among Filipino students in a state university.

2.0. Methodology

This study used Charmaz's (2014) constructivist

grounded theory approach to understand "slacktivism" among college students at the University of Southern Mindanao (USM). Grounded theory focuses on developing theories based on systematically collected and analyzed data (Noble, 2016).

To recruit participants, the researchers used snowball sampling, a method where existing participants help recruit new ones (Simkus, 2023). Fifteen USM students who actively engaged in online activism were interviewed. Participants were required to be current USM students, active on Facebook, involved in online discussions about socio-political topics, over 18 years old, and enrolled in an undergraduate program.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted until researchers reached data saturation, meaning no new information was emerging. Focus groups then explored shared and divergent perspectives among participants.

Data analysis followed Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory, an iterative process that develops theories based on empirical evidence and participant perspectives. This involved various stages, including initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical sampling, culminating in a comprehensive explanation of slacktivism.

Throughout the study, the authors adhered to ethical research protocols, ensuring voluntary participation, privacy, informed consent, and participant safety.

3.0. Results and Discussion

Marcaida (2020) demonstrated the link between students' use of social media and their engagement in student activism. Accordingly, students were more inclined to participate in online protests rather than offline ones. During interviews, they often distanced themselves from activism and did not identify as activists. Marcaida aimed to portray digital activism or "slacktivism" as a stepping stone or gateway to traditional activism. However, negative perceptions of slacktivism, both culturally and socially, deterred its practitioners from engaging in traditional activism, making it a "safer" choice due to less potential backlash than traditional forms of activism.

With the definition of slacktivism in mind, one must question its legitimacy as a form of activism. Halupka (2017) explored the longstanding debate on whether digital activism and, by extension, the more pejorative term "slacktivism" qualifies as a legitimate form of activism. He concluded that legitimacy remains subjective and varies depending on the perspectives of those interpreting it. Halupka further argued that while these actions are undoubtedly politically oriented, their status as political participation is still contentious. He emphasized the

need to approach the topic of digital activism, or in his case “clicktivism,” with a multifaceted perspective, examining theoretical boundaries such as adherence to traditional avenues, societal acceptance, belief in the efficacy of the action, and the intentionality behind the action.

The studies presented highlight how the potential for individuals to engage in traditional activism is often limited by the prevalence of slacktivism. Within the university setting, a lack of understanding regarding the specific context and impact of slacktivism reveals a research gap that warrants further exploration. Therefore, this study aims to delve into the lived experiences of slacktivism among students at USM, providing insights that are crucial for developing a theory that effectively explains this phenomenon within the Philippine context.

In framing student slacktivism, the researchers probed the students’ understanding of slacktivism, the factors influencing their participation, their emotional responses to engaging in slacktivism, the implications of their participation in their socio-political life, and their recollections of activities that significantly shaped their perspectives. These themes of inquiry were crucial in developing a community-based theory of slacktivism from the perspectives of students.

Limited to unconventional political participation

In the age of digital communication and social media, political participation has evolved into new forms. One such phenomenon is slacktivism, a term coined by combining “slacker” and “activism” to describe low-effort online activities to support social or political causes. These activities typically involve liking, sharing, or retweeting posts, signing online petitions, or changing profile pictures to demonstrate solidarity with a movement (Skiba, 2024). Despite criticism, slacktivism represents an unconventional yet significant mode of political engagement in today’s interconnected world.

One of the defining characteristics of slacktivism is its accessibility. Traditional forms of political participation, such as voting, attending protests, or volunteering for campaigns, often demand substantial time, effort, and financial resources. Barriers like time constraints, physical mobility, or socioeconomic status can limit engagement in these activities. In contrast, slacktivism enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate in political discourse with minimal effort and no financial cost. Anyone can contribute to a cause by simply clicking a button, making it an inclusive form of activism capable of reaching a broader audience.

The study revealed that students consider slacktivism a relatively unfamiliar concept, with little to no prior knowledge. However, they understand it as

unconventional political participation, somewhat akin to “activism” but requiring minimal effort to voice grievances or socio-political aspirations. As Jane, one of the participants, expressed, *“My understanding is that it is like being an activist with advocacies, but you do not want to do it traditionally, like marching in the streets and all that.”* She differentiated it from traditional activism, citing street protests as a clear example. On the other hand, Marcos expanded their understanding of the term “tivism,” closely linked to activism, *“I am not very familiar with the term slacktivism itself, but from ‘tivism,’ maybe it is related to activism.”* Further, Toby, a social science student, characterized it as an online form of protest in digital format, stating, *“An online protest in digital form, where you basically express your protest to someone.”*

From the participants’ perspectives, it is evident that slacktivism, as a form of digital activism, is closely associated with internet use. Its digital nature distinguishes it from conventional political engagement, such as “working for a political party or candidates during elections, attending political meetings, being a party member, always voting, attending political rallies, discussing politics with friends, family, and colleagues, and actively participating in community problem-solving” (Gopal & Verma, 2017). Waeterloos et al. (2021) agree that slacktivism constitutes a form of online political engagement, leveraging social media and online platforms, thus representing a distinctly modern form of activism. Social media algorithms amplify these messages, ensuring they reach a broad audience swiftly. This digital engagement reflects the evolving landscape of political participation in the information age, particularly in expressing political opinions or sentiments. Jane highlighted, *“You can’t really put it into reality, but you can put it on the internet surface, like your thoughts, feelings, and reactions.”*

In summary, students’ understanding of slacktivism is rudimentary at best, preferring the more recognized term “digital activism” over slacktivism. One of the participants mentioned:

As I mentioned before, activism is about fostering social change and influencing political dynamics. For me, digital activism involves leveraging the internet, social media, and other online platforms to amplify causes, mobilize support, and advocate for change. It is about using the digital world to raise awareness, engage people across distances, and create meaningful conversations around social and political issues. (Rudy Quirino, in-depth interview, May 15, 2024).

The responses indicate that while the term is often unfamiliar to typical students, they associate it with digital activism, which is somewhat derogatory in its morphology. Given its relative unfamiliarity, it can also be implied that students may not realize they are engaging in slacktivism while actively following trends in online public opinion or social resistance. Reflecting on this point, Morozov (2009) and Putnam (2000) argue that slacktivism is synonymous with “lazy activism,” as its efforts are minimal, as described by Lodewijckx (2020) as activism without risking one’s neck.

Access to the internet and social media presence

One of the most common narratives participants proudly shared during the interview is the fact that they all have mobile phones, and by extension, they also have social media apps installed on these phones. Luis narrated, *“I use my phone for online activities, and I have close friends on Facebook and Twitter.”* Jane added, *“Yes, I have Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and I use them frequently because they’ve become part of my daily routine.”*

These responses suggest that most of their interactions with slacktivism occur on social media platforms. This aligns with Kemp’s (2024) findings, indicating that among 86.9 million Filipinos, 16.1% are aged 25-34, and 12.5% are 18-24, all having internet access. Assuming most have at least one social media platform, political information that could trigger online activism becomes readily accessible. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become powerful tools for communication, enabling users to share information, mobilize support, and raise awareness on a global scale.

Social media’s significant contribution to slacktivism lies in its unparalleled ability to amplify messages (Rani, 2019). Unlike traditional media, which can be selective and slow, social media allows instant sharing and widespread dissemination of information (Petalla & Tatlonghari, 2023). A single tweet or post can reach millions of people within minutes, transcending geographical and cultural barriers. This rapid spread enables causes to gain momentum quickly. Hashtags, viral videos, and trending topics bring issues to the public’s attention, mobilizing support in unprecedented ways. Lyka supported, *“On Facebook, I upload or share posts criticizing school policies or similar issues.”*

Moreover, social media facilitates symbolic actions central to slacktivism (Kristofferson et al., 2014). These actions include liking, sharing, retweeting, commenting on posts, signing online petitions, and changing profile pictures to show solidarity with a movement. While these actions may seem superficial, they serve crucial functions by

signaling support, fostering a sense of community, and maintaining issue visibility. Participants confirmed engagement through symbolic actions, *“Yes, online, I share or tweet, or like someone’s post and share a caption, something like that.”*

Becoming political to social issues

Socio-political issues also play a role in enticing students to participate in slacktivism. Issues such as gender equality, racial justice, and environmental sustainability have gained prominence in public discourse, amplified by social media. These platforms provide spaces where individuals can express solidarity and support without the physical, time, or financial commitments associated with traditional activism.

Social media’s role in raising awareness about social issues is significant. Viral posts, hashtags, and campaigns quickly inform and mobilize people globally. Stories of injustice or suffering evoke empathy and inspire action, with slacktivism offering an accessible outlet for involvement. Despite the complexity and scale of these issues, slacktivism appeals to individuals seeking low-effort online actions to contribute to causes they care about. For instance, the Israel-Palestine conflict has sparked global attention and discussions on humanitarian concerns. Participant responses highlight how such events trigger engagement and awareness. A participant expressed:

For example, after seeing ‘All Eyes on Rafah’ following ‘Free Palestine,’ I felt compelled to dig deeper. Even though we are physically distant and may not know the people affected, this is still our world, and their suffering is real. While we enjoy comfort and security, others are enduring unimaginable hardships. Understanding their experiences and the realities they face is essential—not just out of curiosity, but out of empathy and a sense of shared humanity (Bryan Santiago, focus group discussion, May 07, 2024)

Social media enables important public dialogues, particularly during significant political events. Research indicates that social media use helps build political identity and community awareness, leading to financial contributions to civil society groups (Lee & Hsieh, 2013). Social media supplements traditional media by providing interactive political information, making users more politically informed and engaged (Massanari & Howard, 2011). Kruikemeier and Shehata (2016) suggest that young people’s use of social media, coupled with television news consumption, fosters civic engagement. This

includes their attitude and behavior in contributing and promoting social justice within their community (Nitafan, Gaspan, &Samoy, 2024).

Moreover, gender issues also largely shape engagement in slacktivism. Accordingly, the rise of feminist movements and LGBTQ+ rights advocacy highlights ongoing struggles for self-determination and protection from violence. Participants' experiences reflect heightened awareness and involvement through online channels. One of the participants shared:

For me, gender equality is significant because discrimination based on behavior, even subtle, can label you and judge you based solely on appearances. A close friend introduced me to women's rights activities, piqued my interest, and deepened my involvement. (Kenny Historia, in-person interview, May 07, 2024).

Participants became aware of these issues through online exposure, reinforcing their commitment to understanding and supporting causes. The environment significantly influences perceptions and sustains slacktivism.

Openness to political growth

One's desire to foster interest in political discourse engagements is another factor driving slacktivism among participants. The internet, particularly social media, provides vast information resources that enhance understanding issues and conflicts. Curiosity fuels intellectual, emotional, and mental growth, motivating individuals to explore and advocate for progressive social change. Jasper narrated, *"Every time I see something like that, I dig deeper. For example, the current focus on Rafah followed 'Free Palestine.' It's our world, and despite our comfort, people suffer."* These narratives underscore a desire to expand knowledge and explore global issues, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.

We have explored how our intrepid adventurers have been plucked from their world and included in this study. It was also recorded how the participants' backgrounds have shaped their entry into and approach to the activity of slacktivism. To navigate the discussion rigorously, it is crucial to note that slacktivism, according to Lodewijckx (2020), is essentially described as a way to voice one's opinion on a cause without taking to the streets or risking one's safety. Although some argue that expressing opinions is futile in the face of social injustice, Nitafan and Idris (2024) highlight its significance in addressing and correcting governmental transgressions.

Principle above all

When our own beliefs are questioned, disrespected, or attacked, we often resort to drastic measures to defend them, sometimes even turning to violence. However, the modern era has introduced an alternative approach, elevating social media as a platform for expressing our thoughts. A participant had an interesting experience when encountering the new trend of changing pronouns:

Yes, because it contradicted my understanding of pronouns, which I believe are essential for clarity and respect in language. I place a strong emphasis on using pronouns correctly—not only as a matter of grammar but as a fundamental aspect of effective communication. Misusing them undermines their significance, especially within the education system, where clear language and respect for individual identity are vital. It goes against my principles and diminishes the value I attribute to pronouns as an important figure of speech. (Jessica Hidalgo, in-person interview, May 07, 2024).

For her, established norms of pronouns in English represent a longstanding tradition, and any further confusion could devalue them. She also questioned the logic of the current education system if there is a sudden paradigm shift in such an established truth—pronouns in this case. She strongly stood her ground in this belief. However, her stance shifted when the researchers asked if she would uphold this belief beyond the online platform, through traditional activism. She stated, *"I think it is too tiring offline. I do not think I need to. I will just share it online, but I think that is where it ends. I prefer online activism because it is less hassle."* Her statement aligns with the narrative of a typical slacktivist who finds traditional activism too demanding, preferring the former over the latter.

Cynicism

Leonard, who had previous experience with traditional activism and actively participated in such movements, shared that he was nostalgic for something he once had. His firsthand experience with traditional activism provided insights into how activism is perceived from a more conservative standpoint, given his actual involvement in such activities. He said that engaging in slacktivism requires minimal effort. Its effects are highly superficial. It makes one feel doubt, distress, and hopelessness about achieving social change. Leonard shared:

Unlike before, when I was physically engaged in the community, my morale has dwindled now, with fewer activities due to school and academic responsibilities. It feels like I'm losing touch with the true essence. We have the internet, yes, but there's a different feeling when you engage face-to-face (Leonard Castillo, focus group discussion, May 07, 2024).

The study uncovered that while slacktivism can spread awareness, it can also create a false sense of accomplishment or contribution. Slacktivists may start questioning the efficacy of such actions, wondering if they truly make a difference. This doubt can lead to feelings of futility and helplessness when faced with the magnitude of social issues that require more substantive action. Similarly, they may experience distress when they realize their online actions do not translate into tangible outcomes or real-world change. Issues like poverty, climate change, or systemic injustice are complex and require sustained efforts beyond digital gestures. The gap between the perceived impact of clicking a button and the actual systemic changes needed can lead to disillusionment and a sense of hopelessness about the possibility of effecting meaningful change. The participant shared:

Yes, I have experienced it before. Now, mostly engaged online, I start questioning myself: Am I doing enough? Am I really making a difference? It creates this notion of false satisfaction. It depends on how you perceive it. At least this way, I am helping online, but it feels incomplete. (Leonard Castillo, focus group discussion, May 07, 2024).

His sentiments confirmed the researchers' suspicion of his longing for a deeper connection—something that being a slacktivist alone could not fulfill. He added, *"But when you're in a community, sitting with them, hearing their voices, experiencing their struggles, it's something entirely different."*

The human connection of being with a group of people, feeling and understanding their experiences, and sharing their struggles is something that online interactions may never fully provide. His perspective on navigating the online landscape is indifferent compared to the passion he once had for traditional activism. He elaborated further:

Yeah, I consider myself a slacktivist now, given my previous engagement with the community. Now, due to environmental limitations, especially

safety concerns, the digital platform does not end my idea of being a safe place. However, after sharing digitally or on different platforms, there is still a false sense of security. It is still a safe space for me online; there are just a few risks. They will not see you right away; they will just stalk you first. There are many ways to protect your online identity so you can advocate and voice your opinions. (Leonard Castillo, focus group discussion, May 07, 2024).

Leonard highlighted the risks of online activism, cautioning that while the internet provides a means of expression, it also exposes individuals to potential attacks, presenting them as targets for those who oppose their narrative. This suggests that despite one's desire to advocate online, the platform, while enabling expression, is a double-edged sword—it gives meaning and a sense of action but also provides adversaries with tools to dismantle efforts.

Sense of Empowerment

The study revealed that engaging in slacktivism can be contagious, largely due to the gratification theorem, as explored by Ralston (2022). This theory suggests that even a small action toward a cause triggers a microdose of positive emotional response, motivating individuals to do more and sometimes find contentment in that space. A participant offered a more optimistic view of how slacktivism—or what she prefers to call digital activism—works. She shared:

I started sharing things because I knew I was not yet capable of donating or physically doing anything. I also researched websites to find ways to donate. Even if I could not directly help, through me, others became aware of the advocacy and, if possible, helped too. (Karen Alcantara, in-person interview, May 06, 2024)

For her, it began with the belief that she could assist those she encountered on social media, making a difference in some small way. It appeals to her sense of humanity because she gradually adopted the lifestyle of aiding others with a click of a button. In her words:

Honestly, I felt empowered being involved in something that helps others, even if not physically. Not just in terms of money but also in involving others and making them aware that such advocacies exist, and this is how they fight. (Karen Alcantara, in-person interview, May 06, 2024)

Millennials use social media to meet various intrinsic and extrinsic needs. While they utilize multiple communication tools, no single social media platform supplants another (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). To explain the link between social media use and the user's sense of gratification, Ruggiero (2000) identifies three crucial attributes of new media technologies like the Internet: interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity. Interactivity refers to the extent of control individuals have over their actions and the speed at which communication technologies respond to user commands. Social media is highly interactive, allowing Millennials to control their messages instantly disseminated within and sometimes beyond their social networks.

Furthermore, Ruggiero (2000) explains that demassification enables users to choose from a wide variety of media. Millennials can selectively choose social media networks that best fulfill their individual needs. Asynchronicity, another attribute highlighted by Ruggiero (2000), means that messages can be time-staggered. This is particularly important for social media, as messages or images can remain on a user's homepage indefinitely, receiving multiple impressions over time. On platforms like Twitter, a tweet's reach is significantly expanded when retweeted by more social connections.

As previously described, the internet is an expansive realm where one can embody any persona. Through the participants' narratives, the research has explored the risks inherent in this medium. These risks, however, were superficial and easily mitigated by implementing encryption on social media accounts. In this part of the study, the researchers delve into how slacktivism actions affect not just the strangers they interact with online but also those they hold dear—family ties, peer groups, and others.

Indifference to optimism

Considering that we are in the 21st century, researchers initially expected that societal norms from our parents' generation would still bind us. However, this was not entirely the case. It is too optimistic to say they have completely dissolved, but it is equally inaccurate to say they hold no sway. The most accurate depiction is that we are in a state of flux, with a tentative effort to break free. Kim described it: *"No, I haven't faced backlash from my friends, family, or peers. Some are even proud of me, while others are indifferent."* To put it colloquially, some might express "meh," indicating a lack of significant concern overall. Charles echoed this sentiment, *"Not really, because they don't really care about (profanity), especially on social media. So far, no issues."*

Turncoatism

A participant presented a contrasting viewpoint of slacktivism. Having been a former traditional activist, he is judged by his former peers for not engaging as deeply as before, now confining himself to online activities such as liking, sharing, or commenting in forums. In digital activism, slacktivism has emerged as a term describing low-effort online participation in social causes. While it can serve as an initial step toward raising awareness and mobilizing support, slacktivism also introduces the concept of turncoatism—where individuals appear to superficially support a cause online but fail to engage meaningfully or consistently. Slacktivism provides individuals with a sense of participation and alignment with a cause without the demands of traditional activism, such as physical presence or substantial personal sacrifice. This ease of engagement can create a façade of activism without genuine involvement, leading to turncoatism when individuals exhibit inconsistent or contradictory behavior offline. Turncoatism in the context of slacktivism occurs when individuals publicly align themselves with a cause online but fail to uphold those beliefs or engage actively in real-world actions. The accessibility and anonymity of online platforms can contribute to this phenomenon, as individuals may feel less accountable for their digital declarations than their actions in physical spaces.

Consequently, a slacktivist in the modern era can navigate freely without receiving repercussions from family or friends. However, peers of a similar mindset may not be as forgiving in their judgment, drawing from their experiences with the slacktivist's methods and the stakes involved. They may perceive a lack of further action as tantamount to betraying the cause. A participant asserted:

Yes, there is such a notion. For example, in the community or organization I used to belong to, they remain actively involved while I am only sharing. There is this notion among people I know that 'he only talks the talk without walking the walk. (Jasper Gomez, in-person interview, May 06, 2024)

While we discuss how participating in slacktivism has profoundly altered a person's perception, it is crucial to remember that this is subject to change, and we are capturing only a snapshot of their memories. The study also presents an overview of how participating in slacktivism has changed students' socio-political perspectives.

Becoming politically woke

For these individuals, engaging in slacktivism

has heightened their awareness of issues around them. This awareness has made them more open and susceptible to influences from social causes; as Jessica noted, *“Perhaps in slacktivism, you can raise awareness because social media has a wider reach. So, it’s more about awareness, given how quickly information spreads.”*

The internet’s reach is unparalleled, a notion supported by Kemp (2024), Cooper (2023) and Petalla and Tatlonghari (2023). They assert that the majority of individuals in this age group have internet access and are assumed to be active on at least one social media platform. The data extracted from participants supports this assertion.

Slacktivism exposes individuals to a wide range of social issues that may receive limited coverage in traditional media. Platforms like social media and online forums amplify voices and stories from marginalized communities, shedding light on issues such as human rights abuses, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic inequalities. This exposure broadens individuals’ perspectives and deepens their understanding of complex societal challenges.

Moreover, slacktivism prompts individuals to reflect on their values, beliefs, and privileges. Through exposure to diverse viewpoints and experiences, individuals confront their biases, expand their empathy, and develop a more nuanced understanding of social justice and equity. This process of self-discovery often leads to personal growth and a strengthened commitment to advocating for positive change.

Developing critical thinking

Two words conspicuously absent in recent political discourse might be deemed asinine; however, that is not the case with our participants. With awareness comes the impetus to think critically—to avoid rushing to conclusions and instead gauge the extent of a problem or potential solution, a trait researchers observed in all participants. As one of the participants expressed:

Yes, it is more about critical thinking and observation. You cannot simply go somewhere to help without first understanding the situation. It is important to do some research or ask questions about the issue to assess your position and address it effectively. Otherwise, you risk jumping to conclusions without fully understanding the context. (Karen Alcantara, in-person interview, May 06, 2024)

By fully understanding the story behind a

situation, one can assess its severity and potential impact on oneself. Failure to engage critically in this sense negates all intuition, thus stripping away the essence of what one seeks to discover in the first place. To quote:

Perhaps, especially now on the internet, amidst all their cancel culture, I would still say it is part of slacktivism because you are just behind your device, talking a lot without actually doing anything. However, slacktivism may make or break you because some people act like activists online without researching why. To support your stance, you need to understand it. (Marcos Sarmiento, in-person interview, May 06, 2024)

While critics often highlight its limitations in achieving tangible outcomes, based on the data gathered, slacktivism can significantly enhance critical thinking skills among participants. Slacktivism exposes individuals to diverse social issues and viewpoints that may not be readily accessible in traditional media. Through online campaigns, individuals encounter narratives, statistics, and personal stories that challenge their preconceptions and expand their understanding of complex societal challenges. This exposure prompts critical reflection on personal beliefs and biases, encouraging individuals to question and reassess their views.

Finally, engaging in slacktivism requires individuals to navigate the vast information circulating on social media platforms. This process demands evaluating the credibility, relevance, and bias of sources, thereby honing skills in information literacy and discernment. By distinguishing between reliable information and misinformation, participants develop a heightened awareness of the importance of fact-checking and critical analysis.

Emerging Worldview of Student Slacktivism

Following Charmaz’s constructivist grounded theory approach (2014), the study introduces The Monday Afternoon Tree as a novel theory of Filipino slacktivism. The theory was crafted from the synthesis of themes formulated about student slacktivism. The conceptual paradigm was patterned from the works of Cristobal and Bance (2021). The theory contributes to existing knowledge of Philippine Politics and serves as a basis for further exploration of political behavior, particularly the sociopolitical dynamics of slacktivism.

The figure depicts a tree with a few blooming, wilted leaves, and a shallow root system. Its bleak and dreary appearance characterizes slacktivism as an unexciting and lifeless variant of activism involving

minimal effort or engagement of the slacker in socio-political causes. According to the results, the limited extent of political participation can be attributed to various barriers that hinder active involvement in the political arena. Key challenges include time constraints, physical limitations, and socioeconomic factors, all of which can prevent individuals from engaging directly in political activities. However, digital activism has transformed participation by offering a more accessible alternative. With the simple click of a button, individuals from diverse backgrounds can now support causes and advocate for change, making digital activism a more inclusive and far-reaching form of engagement capable of mobilizing a broader and more varied audience. This shift broadens access and strengthens civic voices in new and innovative ways.

The term ‘slacker,’ denoting someone who avoids work or effort, combined with ‘activism,’ highlights that this activity requires little time, energy, or personal commitment. The theory presents three metaphorical and empirical worldviews of slacktivism: the roots, which represent the foundational motivations and initial appeal of slacktivism; the blooming, symbolizing the height of engagement where participation appears most active and impactful; and the withering, which reflects the decline in engagement or the limitations that prevent slacktivism from achieving sustained, tangible outcomes. These stages encapsulate the life cycle of slacktivist behaviors, highlighting their potential to mobilize individuals and the challenges they face in fostering long-term social change.

The foundations of slacktivism lie in several key factors, including broad internet accessibility, active social media engagement, openness to political growth, and a political environment that permits or even encourages digital expression. Internet accessibility enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to connect with causes from anywhere, making activism more inclusive. Social media platforms, in turn, amplify this accessibility by creating spaces for quick and easy sharing, liking, and posting, allowing individuals to support causes without the need for intensive time or resources. This low-barrier engagement is especially appealing in politically charged environments, where people may seek safer, less direct ways to express their views. Together, these factors contribute to the “roots” of slacktivism, fostering a culture of online support that allows individuals to show solidarity, even if the actions remain minimal.

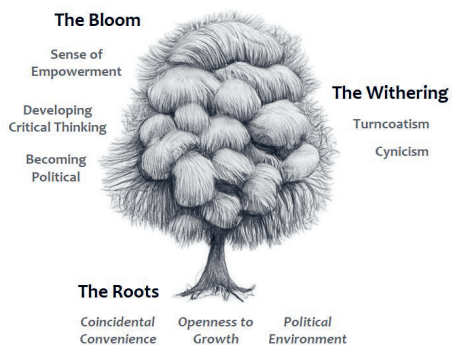
On the other hand, the blooming leaves symbolize the positive outcomes of slacktivism, such as empowerment, increased political awareness, and the cultivation of critical thinking. As individuals

engage in online activism, they often gain a greater understanding of social and political issues, leading to a heightened sense of agency and the belief that they can influence change. This sense of empowerment is further reinforced by sharing information and ideas within digital communities. Additionally, the accessible nature of online platforms fosters the development of critical thinking, as individuals are exposed to diverse perspectives and are encouraged to evaluate issues from multiple angles. While slacktivism may be seen as a low-effort form of activism, its potential to raise awareness and spark intellectual engagement can serve as a gateway to deeper, more involved political participation.

Finally, the withering leaves symbolize the drawbacks of slacktivism, such as cynicism and turncoatism. As individuals engage in digital activism, they risk becoming disillusioned, leading to a sense of apathy or detachment from the causes they once supported. This cynicism often arises when the limited nature of online actions—such as liking or sharing posts—fails to produce tangible change, leading participants to question the effectiveness of their engagement. Additionally, turncoatism, or the shift in allegiance to more convenient or less challenging causes, can occur as individuals abandon original commitments in favor of causes that demand less effort or align more closely with popular opinion. These negative outcomes reflect the limitations of slacktivism, highlighting how initial enthusiasm can fade without deeper, sustained involvement.

Named ‘The Monday Afternoon Tree,’ it encapsulates the behavior of students returning home from university and engaging in social media scrolling, providing context for this phenomenon. The evolution provided by the theory underscores the transient nature and potential pitfalls of slacktivist activities.

Figure 1
The Monday Afternoon Tree of Student Activism



4.0. Conclusion

Conceptualizing slacktivism extends across various domains of social science and digital communication studies. Understanding slacktivism through a theoretical lens provides valuable insights into contemporary forms of civic engagement and the evolving nature of social movements in the digital age. Constructing slacktivism challenges traditional definitions of activism, which often emphasize physical presence, sustained efforts, and tangible outcomes. By recognizing digital forms of participation as a legitimate form of activism, scholars can expand their understanding of what it means to be an activist in the 21st century. This broader definition accommodates how technology has transformed public participation and advocacy.

The construction of slacktivism follows three fractions: roots, blooming, and withering. This suggests that as a political activity, slacktivism has driving forces, positive outcomes, and negative consequences. Although it may have a relatively small and indirect effect on the political process, slacktivism makes an individual political to social causes. Exploration and theory-building were limited to the data gathered from college students of the University of Southern Mindanao (USM) engaged in political discourse on Facebook and/or armchair political participation, thus restricting the study's generalizability. The scope of this research was also limited by participants' experiences and characteristics, ages 18 to 24 years, and studying in a rural setting. This development period, characterized by their occupation and university life, could have influenced the social dimension of the proposed model. Thus, future researchers are suggested to conduct sequential exploratory research on different groups to meaningfully demystify the phenomenon and statistically establish its underlying categories.

In conclusion, while slacktivism may be criticized as a diluted form of activism, dismissing it entirely overlooks its role as a catalyst for awareness and initial engagement. To harness its potential positively, there is a pressing need to complement digital activism with deeper, sustained efforts that translate online momentum into meaningful offline actions and systemic change. This balanced approach can ensure that slacktivism contributes meaningfully to the broader landscape of activism without overshadowing or undermining more traditional forms of advocacy.

5.0. Limitations of the Findings

Considering the research design used in exploring the concept of slacktivism, the study only offers analytic generalization, which can only guide the comparison of the case-specific findings of the research to the existing theoretical frameworks of

slacktivism. Further, the research was focused on college students from the University of Southern Mindanao (USM), aged 18 to 24, who engage in armchair politics or political discourse on Facebook. As a result, the findings may not apply to broader or more diverse populations, particularly those from different age groups, regions, or cultural contexts. Additionally, the participants' experiences and characteristics—shaped by their university life in a rural setting—may have influenced their perspectives on political engagement. These limitations suggest that the conclusions drawn from this study should be interpreted with caution and cannot be assumed to represent all individuals engaged in slacktivism.

6.0. Practical Value of the Paper

This study offers practical insights into the evolving landscape of political participation, particularly in the digital age. By conceptualizing slacktivism as a legitimate form of activism, it challenges traditional views emphasizing physical presence and sustained efforts. This broader definition acknowledges the impact of digital participation and provides a more inclusive framework for understanding activism in the 21st century. The findings suggest that, despite its limitations, slacktivism can catalyze awareness and initial engagement with socio-political causes. These insights can help scholars, activists, and policymakers better understand the potential of digital activism and its role in shaping civic engagement, both online and offline.

7.0. Directions for Future Research

In recent years, most of the research about slacktivism focused on unearthing the lived experiences of slacktivists, and none successfully bridged the analytical and statistical generalizability of empirical works on slacktivist behavior, especially in the Philippines. To address these gaps, future studies should adopt a sequential exploratory approach to exploring the social dimensions of clicktivism and expand the sample to include a more diverse range of participants. Future researchers may also correlate the concept with other social and political constructs, such as conventional political participation and civic engagement, to understand how online actions translate into meaningful offline activism and determine whether these digital efforts lead to tangible outcomes in the political process or not.

8.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research or the publication of this paper. No financial or personal relationships with other organizations or individuals have influenced the content or findings of this study.

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