**tweet…tweet…tweet and the Twitterverse**

**[Initial Title]**

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1. **Introduction**

The popularity of social media and networks has become ubiquitous. Numerous articles has been written about the relation and influence of social media and networks in business, education, journalism, health, politics, activism and the way people communicate. Its impact is so vibrant that it is hard to ignore its presence in the physical world. In general, it is intertwined with our physical and virtual world.

Twitter is one of the leading social media service. It is an online [social](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_networking_service) microblogging that allows users to post anything through a 140-[character](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Character_(computing)) messages called "tweets". A tweet can be in a form of text, photos, vines and links which expresses your idea, or anything you want to share to the world. This capability can also be extended through the use of other applications such as twitlonger, ubersocial, twitvid and similar applications.

To contextualize twitter among social media or social networking websites, it is necessary to at least define the context to which twitter has emerge and develop into what it is. Jack Dorsey, the co-founder of twitter, originally proposed it as an SMS based platform to Odeo – a podcasting company where he is connected. The intention was to let group of friends keep updated on what they are doing using their mobile phone (MacArthur, n.d.). It is specifically designed to broadcast short but regular burst of content to particularly large audiences beyond the direct social network of the user (Murphy, 2013). This makes it different among social networking websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and myspace. Posted messages or “tweets” in twitter is by default public, although recently it supports the restrictions of the posted tweets to followers. The default setting of posted message means that even if you are not part of a person’s network, you can still view their tweets. Moreover, since twitter limits the characters, the time required to post a tweet is minimal compared to publishing a blog over the internet. This short and update concept became the power of twitter among social media and networking platforms.

* 1. **Developers Tagline and User Innovation**

One helpful perspective of twitter evolution is by looking at how the developer changed its tagline and welcome messages. Examining the tagline of twitter has an important implication to the way it was conceived by the developers. It showed its purpose and intention to users of social media which shapes how tweets responded to this tagline and welcome message.

It started with a space of text field where user can type the tweets which allows the rest of the network to read. This idea allowed the global community of friends and strangers to check your status and to share to them yours. On November 2006, twitter introduce the tagline “What are you doing?” (McFarland, 2012). This tagline encourages the users to respond to the questions which allows user to share something in an individual perspective. Twitter release explanations on how to use this tagline through “About” section of the website. The current tagline is “What’s happening”, with further statement of “Connect with your friends – and other fascinating people”. McFarland (2012) presented this changes in summary in his article “What is twitter, as explained by its evolving tagline”.

It is apparent that the tagline introduced can be interpreted as sharing from the individual perspective to sharing what surrounds you. It seems that the microblogging service shifted from the ordinary tweets of individual to community level or their environment. This changes can be attributed to the way in which users use the service and the way developers intend it to be.

On the other hand, user also contributed to the development of twitter. Initially, there is no way to reply to others post because twitter is just like a big bulletin boards where users post their messages. As the need to address specific user, they use @ symbol to identify a reply or reaction from another user. The practice became prevalent which triggers the developer to support and integrate it as part of the platform. This same idea for the hashtags had happened (MacArthur, n.d.). This user driven functionality is also true with retweet function.

* 1. **Twitter as a Phenomenon**

Twitter has been described as one of the largest and most popular social media platforms. Although it encounters problems in terms of downtime early in the implementation, it just showed an overwhelming response from users. In this microblogging service, network of contacts is a system which allows users to follow another users which is termed “following” at the same time can be followed by other users called followers without requiring authorization. This relationship between actors (following and followers”) creates a directed connection. It is different from the concept of “friends” in Facebook social networking site in the sense that the relationship is not mutual. That means, the relation is one way. Messages posted by the user on timeline are automatically published on the users' front page. Any user may answer (reply) or forward (retweet) a tweet, in this way generating public debate and conversation. In addition, links can be added to the tweets in order to give additional information beyond 140 characters.

Twitter is a phenomenon that demands to be viewed as the virtual community that takes on a different perspective with each subsequent reading (Gillen & Merchant, 2013). That means, content is so dynamic because of the interactions of individuals. This phenomenon can be describe in terms of its characteristics as public, information flow and social being representing the physical world.

Posts or tweets are considered public by default. This is also the reason someone will create an account in twitter, otherwise, other social networking sites might be appropriate. Being public enables an idea of creating your own identity and expresses your ideas and observation which allows other to stalk or monitor your activity. Moreover, following an account, and to be followed created a small network which is a parcel of an entire public sphere as described by Habermas.

Perhaps what makes twitter more pervasive is the concepts of information flow within the network. Instead of viewing information through inbox from the idea of email, you are presented with information from your followers which allows you to select and dig into what caught your interest. The adoption and diffusion of ideas can also be attributed to this flow of information. It avoids the constraints of mutual relationship in other social networking sites. This enables information to flow through openness of users which resulted to a more expanded networks.

Lastly, accounts represent an entity as a social being which usually present in the physical world. Having followed someone creates a connection and updates about that entity. This connection allows you to keep updated, creating a notion of knowing that account. In google, if you search for an item, you are responded by results generated by the machine but in twitter, if you post or search for something, you will be responded by actual reaction of human beings. This sociality encourages interactions.

The pervasive adoption and emergence of the different uses to individual and organizations of twitter has become an interesting phenomenon in twitter. This paper argues that the emergence is a result of interaction of opposing forces in the use twitter as a social media. It focuses on the intertwined of individual and communal tweets and the concept of connectedness from the logic of participation and domination. These intertwined are then discuss in different context such as politics and democracy, business, journalism and disasters. The last section proposes a transformation for possible grassroots peacebuilding using twitter and revolution of education.

1. **Framework for Analysis**

In understanding the phenomenon in the context of twitter, it is good to recognize the complex intertwined between humans and technology. This is to avoid the emphasis of the two opposing perspectives of technological determinism and the social shaping of technology. Technological determinism argues that technology drives the development of society such as its social structure, economy, polity, ecology and cultural values. On the other hand, social shaping of technology believes that technologies are socially shaped because practices, assumptions, beliefs and language reflect political, economic and social circumstances in their development (Sobreperez, 2012). By avoiding the dualistic view of technology, we can focus instead on the emergence of the different context of the applications of twitter. Moreover, the analysis is also guided by Fuchs (2007) which emphasize on identification of movement in the society that negates dominant structures (Fuchs, 2007). This approach will be adopted as much as possible in discussing the major topical areas in terms of cooperation, competition, power, and capitalism. The discussion emphasizes cases in the Philippine setting.

Although twitter in general can be regarded as a tool for communication, we did not ignore that it is not separated from social. This social media service provokes us to communicate and use our cognition, communication, and cooperation which Fuchs (2013) described as forms of sociality. Hence, there is an interplay between twitter as a communication tool for humans and human activity as triggered by twitter.

Tweets are a voices of an individuals in twitter world (also called twittersphere). This is the way an individual portrayed himself. However, I consider tweet as an object based on the concept of actor network theory. Tweets are viewed as dialectics of individual and community (twittersphere in a larger context) whether it is considered ordinary or event driven. Figure 1 shows a frame of analysis as basis for discussion in the different applications where twitter exists. It comes from the interaction or flow of of tweets coming from individual accounts. Individual accounts develops into a stream of tweets out of mundane post or from interactions. This is the essence of individual perspective of using twitter. Essence here represents a revealing aspects of an individual. This is in reference to the term used by (Heidegger, 1977). The following and follower concepts creates a streams of tweets which allows individual to select the information posted in his timeline. This is opposed to the idea that a certain group has controlled over what news you will be receiving. Hence, twitter is used as expressing the essence of individual in the virtual world.

Interactions through tweets (twitterverse)

**Individual (Essence)**

**Community (Participation/Hashtags)**

Grassroots Democracy

Citizens Journalism

Customer Involvement

Update Culture

**Physical World**

**(Influence)**

Figure 1: Framework of Analysis

On the other side, from the interactions of the individual accounts are the possibility of the formation of a community. The community is characterized by the used of hashtags and the participatory nature of individual members. Some group of accounts with common interest will form into another account which becomes a community. The essence of community is the connectedness or belongingness of individual account to certain hashtags or account. It is this individual tweets that defines an individual presence in a community. Thus, a tweet has duality. It can function as an individual and also part of a collective whole. In metaphor, a tweet can be compared to the physical structure of ants where individual ant composed the colony. A colony cannot exist without the ants. In another way, it is also similar to the people and the government.

The structure of twitter as networks of followers and following create a notion of individuals creating their own networks and participatory environment. The existing structure of twitter is surrounded by accounts dominated by the concept of influence. That means, every individual are trying to create a network of their own like the network building process of actor-network theory. However, by using the lens of actor network theory in analysing twitter tends to emphasize the concept of competition rather than cooperative as well as the essence of individual accounts.

Lastly, it is also apparent that domination and capitalism is the prevalent structures in twitter. This can be attributed to the influence of the existing physical world which traverse into twiterverse. However, there is an emerging possibility that twitter can be an instrument for cooperation and grassroots ideas. This can be observed in the different context where twitter is used.

* 1. **Politics and Democracy**

The discussion of political aspects in relation to society is focused on the relation of economy and politics. In the Philippine context politics can be seen as matters of popularity and power. Popularity can be attributed to issues, programs and appearance of political actor to media such as television. Moreover, because the society has been influenced by the entertainment industry, endorsement from a celebrity to gain popularity and acceptance are common among politicians. In fact, the country has intertwined politics and showbiz which resulted to confuse credibility with popularity and genuine endorsement with mere advertisement (Agting, 2013). This can be seen with the 2013 election in the case of Coco Martin and Sarah Geronimo for Sen. Sonny Angara, Kris Aquino for Pres. Aquino, Susan Roces for Grade Poe, and Iza Calzado for Risa Hontiveros to mention a few. The political situation showed the prominence of popularity as strategy of political actors to convince the people during election. It is apparent that the used of celebrity is practical because they are popular to the masses.

The democratic practice in the country has also been viewed as a paradox. It was described with high vibrant of democracy practice such as high turnout of votes, high society engagement and theoretical promotion of accountability yet elite dominance, institutional weakness, and widespread abuse of public office were common (Dressel, 2011). This can be seen in family clans holding an office for a certain province or political territory for periods of time. A form of oligarchy dominated the political situation in the Philippines as majority of the places can be equated to territories of few people in the political arena. For instance, Duterte for Davao, Dimaporo of Lanao del Norte, Jalosjos of Zamboanga del Norte, Marcos of Ilocos and a lot more of provinces and cities.

Twitter has been used by celebrity and politician during campaigns. Celebrities endorsed their chosen candidates using the social media site. This gives more power and influence to the candidate because of the publicity that it creates. Even if there are negative aspects, some said that “bad publicity is still publicity”. This will create a name in the society that might cause the unconscious society to vote for it.

The situation described above showed the prominence of domination both in the objective and in the virtual world. The objective world by oligarchy and virtual word by celebrities. However, social media movement through twitter has been seen as potentials for a true democracy and credibility of a politicians. Twitter can be used as a venue to express the true essence of people. Since political actors have their corresponding accounts, they can already post and call for attention of this politics.

* 1. **Business**

The economy in relation to twitter is an antagonism between promoted tweets and tweets coming from ordinary activity of thoughts shared by an individual. This is of interest to us on how twitter became a business model for influencing individual accounts. There are 3 (three) types of ads in twitter. These are promoted tweets, promoted accounts, and promoted trends (<https://support.twitter.com/articles> /20170451). Although they have advertisements, twitter makes it sure that users have an option to turn off ads and also displayed an indicator that certain accounts are promoted.

Twitter has also been used by companies or organization to promote their products or events. They persuade the users to follow by introducing the latest promos or updates. This is the practice of @CebuPacificAir as the number one twitter accounts based on brands.

Emerging to the business side of twitter, are accounts that are used to advertise or to gain more reach and later will be used as promotion. There are accounts that has a lot of followers that function as an influencers. Example is the #KapagLove trend, was promoted by an account with millions of followers. These idea of domination over twitter, overpowers the ordinary accounts that expresses their true feelings.

However, business can also be used to engage directly to customers. Customer can directly mention (@mention) an organization that they want to comment or suggest such as @StarbucksPH. Starbucks posts new offers and also participates in threaded discussions of these offers to their followers (Smarty, 2008). This makes the customer influenced directly the products that they are consuming or using. Furthermore, it can also be considered as alternative customer support. This creates a direct engagement of customer to producers.

* 1. **Citizens’ Journalism and Mainstream Media**

The tagline of twitter, “What’s happening”, denotes a signal for individual to share what they have observed. It is a call for a form of citizens’ journalism. It encourages twitter user to report what is happening around them to be shared to the world.

Twitter has been seen as an alternative media. The news agency such as television and traditional media such as newspapers websites still dominate the market as a reliable source of news. They have the power to withheld or select headlines and issues protected by selected individuals. They also select interesting topics to be featured or given attention. In fact, it can be seen that even in the social media, these influential television network, is using twitter to influence what will be the trending topic in the Philippines.

In my monitoring of twitter trend, it is apparent that entertainment related tweets are the common category of trending topics. It seems that these mainstream television media still influenced a lot even in the twitterverse.

Looking at the other side, twitter became a source of breaking news. Before it will appear in the mainstream media, someone might tweet it already.

It also changes the journalist practice because people can react and verify the report and post their observation or reaction to the journalist. This trigger for the accountability and transparency of national television or news journalists (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). One example is the conflict of reports between international anchor and Korina Sanchez. They are even subject to criticisms such as the tweet of Maki Pulido about Philippine General Hospital (H, 2014).

Observance from update and reliability are two characteristics that combines the nature of news. New updates can be seen in twitter and later it will be produce by mainstream media. Criticisms that twitter only produce temporary content emerged which resulted to mainstream media as a reliable source of information for confirmation.

However, twitter can also be used for bad purposes. Islamic State of Irag and Syria used twitter to communicate and spread its message (Whitney, 2014). According to Costolo (CEO of Twitter) information sharing tool such as twitter can be used for good but also "to try to use it for nefarious purposes".

An interesting phenomenon is that a tweet can become communal. From a simple post, it will emerge as a trending topic that will influence mainstream media. This type of posts become a promising environment of twitter as a self-organizing medium for journalism. In this situation, a tweet might be posted by an ordinary individual. Through the cooperation of the followers and the use of hashtags it can become a trending topic that might catch the attention of mainstream television network such as the case of AlexofTarget which trended because of tweens community.

* 1. **Tweets and Disasters**

It is during disasters or extreme events that some aspects of social life will become visible which cannot be seen in mundane activities of a community. Examining twitter during disaster events can help us understand further the cooperation and influence of popular accounts.

It is evident that disasters becomes a trending topic in twitter. #Haiyan becomes a worldwide trend during its time. It is also similar to other disaster happening such as Japan or Pakistan where hashtags has been generated. The response of individual tweets and to be part of the event by including hashtags (#) in your tweets can be an expression of support or participation in the creation of twitter trends. It was also used by survivors to ask help and coordinate relief operations. An account @TyphonHaiyan was created and introduced hashtags for people to use during recovery process such as search for missing people (#TracingPH) and Resource Coordination (#ReliefPH). It was also used by other organizations to announce the need for donations or volunteers such as Red Cross World Food Programme. It showed that participation can be facilitated through the use of this social media site.

However, there are critics that the creation of hashtags were facilitated and influenced by more influencing accounts such as celebrity of television news (Murphy, 2013). Although, the author focuses on the influence of celebrities on other disasters such as earthquake of Haiti, it is still true in the Philippines.

* 1. **Event-Driven and Update Culture**

The sections on disasters and citizens journalism and mainstream media can be an evidence of an event driven and update culture that twitter is influencing the society. Twitter has become pervasive because of the “breaking news” style posted by ordinary accounts that captured and influenced by the networks that surrounds it.

Twitter is influenced by happenings in the physical world. It is the product of cognition and communication of the socials. In this context, events in the physical world will also be reflected in twittersphere. An example is the fight between Manny Pacquiao and Chris Algeiri. They created a temporary trend through a hashtag, #PacAlgieri. This means, that trends are a reflection of events in the physical world. In the context of individual tweets, it is intriguing how a certain hashtag have been agreed by the community. In case of #PacAlgieri, it was started by FanVsFan account five months before the fight2. Based on its profile description, this account is a “Sports journalism platform and Ad network.” It is then followed by tweets influential accounts such as BoxingHype and other related media accounts1. Even the disaster tweets on typhoon Yolanda #Haiyan has been started by an influential agency account UNHCRNews while the hashtag #YolandaPH was started by an account coming from a television network, [@JojoMalig](https://twitter.com/JojoMalig). The #KapagLove was started by an ordinary account with just 13 followers 2 years ago1. This creates a notion that with cooperation between conscious individual accounts, cooperation and the true expression of individuals has its potentials.

The update culture created by twitter has been termed ambient awareness in one of the office blog. One of the definitions by [Leisa Reichelt](http://cyborganthropology.com/Leisa_Reichelt) in her blog that ambient awareness "is about being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn't usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible”. This feeling augment the physical presence or create a perception of closeness or awareness of the activity (Murphy, 2013) of the account your following.

The twitter supports the eagerness of a social being to be updated of what is happening to certain individuals and also supports your self-expression. It creates an egocentric and “to be stalk” idea because of its public availability. Somehow, every individual wants to be followed. However, this update culture has created an accumulation of information about an account. Mundane posts such as picture of your breakfast when accumulated creates a sense of yourself. It therefore creates your personality within the twitterverse.

1. **Grassroots Peacebuilding and Collaboration**

The potentials of twitter as a venue to strengthen participation to build relationships and improve collaborative learning is discussed in this section. It shows possible transformation of social media in peace building and higher education.

* 1. **Grassroots Peacebuilding in Mindanao**

Conflict in Mindanao has been a four decayed problem of the Philippines. Formal negotiation for peace in Mindanao started since the Marcos administration through GRP-MNLF (Government of the Republic of the Philippines - Moro National Liberation Front) 1976 Tripoli Agreement, followed by Ramos Administration Peace by signing a Final Peace Agreement in 1996, including MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front). The negotiation continued even after the creation of ARMM (Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao). Stages of negotiations have undergone until the recently signed Bangsamoro framework. However, the unrest situation continued until the present.

One perspective why the current agreement between government and different insurgents is difficult to achieve was the lack of participation from the community (Lingga, 2005). The current negotiations try to create a general solution to the problem, ignoring the variant characteristics of the different ethnic groups or community in different regions of Mindanao. This differing needs and demands to the government is difficult to be generalized and tends to favour other groups over the others. Example of this is between MILF and MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) where MNLF negotiated for ARMM and now MILF headed for Bangsamoro. The existing participation framework focuses on leaders and negotiation with major stakeholders which resulted to domination of demands from a certain group. The resulting solution therefore creates an exclusion of some of the minority within the group. These minorities again will form another group of insurgents.

The use of technology to encourage public participation for peacebuilding that will answer the unique problems of a community is therefore necessary. This grassroots idea must be supported by technology such as twitter to understand and propose solution to the problem. Some studies also found out that community based development has the potential to address problems of the community in terms of participation because they have the concept of owning the process. Hence, they are responsible for maintaining it.

Twitter can be an instrument to these grassroots peacebuilding. It can be used to hear actual voices of the people in the community. For example, a lot of people supported Pres. Estrada in the conflict affected area during the declaration of all-out war in Lanao del Norte. However, for people coming outside of the areas such as big cities in the Philippines, it was a wrong move. In the spirit of peace process, the move might be wrong but the community believed it was right. Such an idea has not been heard and the reasons why the community supported for it. If twitter was used as an instrument to hear their voices, it was supposed to be a good discussion in the twittersphere and for government to address it appropriately.

Grassroots peacebuilding through the use of twitter has the potential to address this issue. It can be an instrument for reporting initial conflict which can be address early before it will explode. For instance, the unrest in Lanao del Norte last 2000 started with a military operation around the boundary of MILF controlled area. Tensions was known from the community because Philippine military operations are visible because of the search operation of one of the wanted criminals who believed to hide in the MNLF controlled area. If one of the communities has reported that situation to the monitoring team, the war must have been avoided.

If people will truly use the media such as twitter to propose for solution in their community and used this also to create voices to be heard by the government, nothing is impossible. It can also be used as information campaign for

* 1. **Higher Education and Mindanao State University**

Higher Education was one of the early adopters of social media especially twitter. It was used to disseminate information such announcements on holidays, events and important events. Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology is one of the schools who uses this facility. It is used to disseminate important announcements and activities to be attended by the public. Nevertheless, this technology has not been used as a tool for learning in higher education or for other purposes.

An important venue for the use of twitter is for collaboration of different campuses. One instance is for curriculum development or changes in the curriculum. Before changes will take effect, every campuses needs to be consulted. It is expensive to gather all of the representative from different campuses from Sulu, Tawi-tawi, General Santos, Iligan, Naawan and Marawi. It is helpful that discussions will be done before the actual meeting and approval of the University Council and will happen. A community can be created out of this need where followers are faculty members of a specific program and this will be used as venue for discussion. The public nature of tweets will support the idea of consultation or involving the community and students in curriculum development. In this way, cost and effort of core curriculum developers will be lessen.

In general, twitter can also open a discussion of any concern in twitter. This will enable every concern citizens to call the attention of the top management without going through the bureaucratic process. In an institution where the culture were influenced with the idea of Sultanates or Kings, voices of individuals will go to the bureaucratic process. With twitter, conversation with an institutional account is possible which is usually monitored by individual in the authorities.

Another aspects where twitter can potentially be used is in the area of learning process within the university. The use of networking site such as Facebook and the online learning environment of the school are the common technology support for classrooms. Twitter has not been part of the norm. However, looking at the platform and functionality it supports, there are interesting aspects it can support in learning. Twitter allows discussion outside of the classroom involving people directly affected or near or expert of the topic of discussion. Example, if discussion of the book of Fuchs on certain topics, we can mention Fuchs and create a hashtag for it. Because Fuchs (global communication)

understanding how to use these tools to bring authentic experiences to our students

expand beyond boundaries of learning.

Authentic conversation

[learning process]

1. **Insights and Concluding Statement**

Ordinary tweets that expresses an individual self, which uses hashtags to produce groups’ voices which can be an expression of feelings, concerns. This defines what a society is in 140 characters. This was describe as a new form of interaction because of the limited characters it allowed. However, the limitation of words has already been experience by the society. This can be seen in the power of haiku– is describing the real thought of society.

The entertainment and teen perspective seen in twitter reflects the true essence of society. The form of capitalism shown in the influence of celebrity of popular people of tweets does not necessary capitalism as a result of competition. It only expresses the true feelings of individual. It explicitly articulates the true feelings of an individual on how he views the world and its projection of himself.

Even if it was influenced of people, there are community that emerged as representative of the true interest of society.

Note:

1 Data generated from <http://www.socialbakers.com/>. It is a website that offers search and analyse the social web such as tweets, links, photos, etc.

2 Data generated from <http://topsy.com/>

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