

Impact of Social Media in Shaping Perceptions on Filipino Muslim Identity

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Abstract : Social Media plays a crucial role in influencing Philippine public opinion with regard to a variety of socio-political issues. This became evident in the massacre of 44 members of the Special Action Force (SAF 44) tasked by the Philippine government to capture one of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation's most wanted terrorists. The incident was said to be perpetrated by members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. Part of the online discourse within Philippine cyberspace sparked intense debates on Filipino Muslim identity, with several Facebook viral posts linking Islam as a factor to the tragic event. Facebook is considered to be the most popular social media platform in the Philippines. As such, this begs the question of the extent to which social media, specifically Facebook, shape the perceptions of Filipinos on Filipino Muslims. This study utilizes Habermas' theory of communicative action as it offers an explanation on how public sphere such as social media could be a network for communicating information and points of view through free and open dialogue among equal citizens to come to an understanding or common perception. However, the paper argues that communicative action which is aimed at reaching understanding free from force, and strategic action which is aimed at convincing someone through argumentation may not necessarily be mutually exclusive since reaching an understanding can also be considered as a result of convincing someone through argumentation. Moreover, actors may clash one another in their ideas before reaching common understanding, hence the presence of force. Utilizing content analysis on the Facebook posts with Islamic component that went viral after the massacre of the SAF 44, this paper argues that framing the image of Filipino Muslims through Facebook reflects both communicative and strategic actions. Moreover, comment threads on viral posts manifest force albeit implicit.

Keywords : communication, Muslim, Philippines, social media

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