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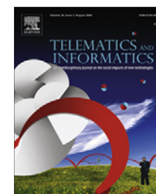

The arts of indigenous online dissent: Negotiating technology, indigeneity, and activism in the Cordillera

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The online communicative environment is expected to revolutionize political discourse as it expands to cover underrepresented groups and ideas. In this platform, marginalized groups such as indigenous communities from the developing world can articulate claims, strategically mobilize and participate in the forms of meaning-making that constitute them. However, there is skepticism on the actual value of online spaces in effecting agency in an internet-mediated environment. Using James Scott's notion of 'hidden transcripts' and Andrew Feenberg's 'democratic rationalization of technology', the paper explores strategic approaches and historical, social, and political conditions embedded in the construction, negotiation, and transformation of indigenous online activist media. In-depth interviews and textual analysis of online spaces were conducted to understand the experiences and online articulations of two indigenous groups based in the Philippines, Tebtebba and Cordillera People's Alliance with specific attention to the: (a) forms and characteristics of online struggles, (b) dynamics and strategies behind the production and distribution of online dissent, (c) process of negotiation of technological use, and (d) perceived implications of online mediations on group identity, culture and struggle. Problematizing the complex interaction of technology and indigenous identity, the paper finds that indigenous activists' online media engagement constitutes a sustained balancing act between accommodation and resistance and online spaces are used creatively with reflection on the dangers and benefits of online spaces to the organization and the struggle.

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1. Introduction

Scholars have predicted that digital technologies will revolutionize the dynamics of political discourse by promoting a democratic culture where "*individuals have a fair opportunity to participate in the forms of meaning making that constitute them*" (Balkin, 2004, p. 3). In this platform, marginalized groups such as indigenous communities from the developing world can articulate claims, express their identities and aspirations, strategically mobilize, and solicit broader support. Many anticipated that with this opening of the communicative environment to previously underrepresented groups and ideas, a more vibrant arena for representation, exchange, and reflection, especially in multicultural societies will follow (Papacharissi, 2002; Dalhberg, 2001).

However, related to the debate on the communication agent's true ability to resist power, domination and control (Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1980), there are important concerns on indigenous media productions that are relevant in confronting indigenous online activism. The question of whether the global character of online media can be used to articulate local agendas and allow the meaningful production of indigeneity is tied to views that global technologies can challenge, distort, or undermine locality's production (Landzelius, 2006, p. 293). Based on previous studies exploring indigenous media in radio, video, and print news, concerns have been raised over issues of authenticity and actual authorship (Ginsburg et al.,

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2002), the consequences of 'emphasizing on exoticism' (Prins, 2002, 1997), the exploitation of indigenous rituals that lead to "strategic essentialisms" (Himpele, 2008), and the contradictions entailed in the use of media to advance indigenous agendas (Brooten, 2010). In the context of indigenous online media, these concerns are accompanied by queries on technological challenges to identity and the implications of digital politics for equations of power and subversion (Landzelius, 2006, p. 2–13). These are accompanied by fears that indigenous dissent would be helpless with ever-increasing state controls and the persistent commercialization and commodification surrounding the use of online spaces.

How do the seemingly powerless carve out discursive spaces for expression and control through the online medium? For what purposes do indigenous groups use online spaces and how is technology 'localized' or 'indigenized' in the process of use? In what ways do they negotiate the opportunities and challenges of the online communicative environment? Using James Scott (1990) notion of *hidden transcripts* and Andrew Feenberg (2002) 'democratic rationalization of technology', the paper explores strategic approaches and conditions embedded in the construction, negotiation, and transformation of indigenous online activist media, based on the experiences of two indigenous groups based in the Philippines, Tebtebba and Cordillera People's Alliance. The forms and characteristics of online struggles, the dynamics and strategies behind the production and distribution of online dissent, the process of localization and negotiation of technological use, and the perceived implications of online mediations on group identity, culture and struggle are explored.

Across Southeast Asia and in the Philippines specifically, indigenous communities have been overlooked by government policies and have also been affected by ongoing processes of economic and social change and development initiatives (Clarke, 2001, p. 419). By virtue of their remote locations or their discriminated identities, indigenous groups are often marginalized from markets and government services and have limited access to mainstream media to articulate their causes. They are underrepresented politically at local, regional and national levels and stereotyped as backward and inferior others.

Interestingly, there is recent dynamism in the use of online media by indigenous groups to widen the reach of advocacies and engage a wider support base for the struggle. Although Internet penetration in the Philippines remains low at 21.1% of the population[1] and still skewed in the more urban areas, a wide variety of indigenous online spaces are now in existence, some created by non-government organizations or activist groups and others by indigenous diaspora communities.[2]

However, we still know little about indigenous groups especially from developing Asia and their everyday online engagements. Internet use by marginalized communities in developing countries is often seen simplistically as an agent that can "give a voice to the voiceless", rendering the emergent experiential dimension delimited by online media under-theorized. In the realm of media studies on indigenous groups in the Philippines, they are often seen as passive actors and past studies focus on the forms and politics of representation of indigenous people by others in mainstream media. There is a lacuna of local media studies on indigenous people as activists finding a voice to articulate themselves, primarily because they have limited access to and control of traditional media forms. In the mountainous region of the Cordillera, for example, the indigenous groups' active use of online spaces is a more recent phenomenon which coincided with technological and call-center development that created the demand for more affordable and faster telecommunications and internet access to the communities.[3]

This entry of indigenous groups from the developing world into online communicative spaces can imply new ways of use, expression, and activism that demands important attention if we are to gain a better understanding of the relevance of new media for social change.

2. Subordinated groups, agency, and democratic rationalization of technology

2.1. Hidden transcripts and the agency of subordinate groups

James Scott (1990), in Domination and the Arts of Resistance, challenged theories of ideological hegemony which claim that subordinate groups are resigned to domination. He argues that members of subordinate groups are continually engaged in resistance to domination, although these may be disguised through the use of symbolic and low profile forms of dissent. Scott's views support the 'duality of agency' argument (Giddens, 1974) that while agents are affected by structural constraints, actors have the capacity to improvise, interpret, bend and negotiate their experiences within structures.

Scott's important innovation is the distinction between "public" (open interactions and presentations of the subordinated) and "hidden" transcripts (discourse that takes place offstage). Criticizing theories of ideological hegemony, Scott contends that what is believed as hegemony or *"ratifying the social ideology of the dominant group"* (p. 35) is in fact only an uncritical observation of the public transcript. On the contrary, subordinate groups are perfectly capable of formulating their own criticisms of the social relations in which they find themselves in. According to Scott:

> "a combination of adaptive strategies and behavior and the dialog implicit in most power relations ensures that public action will provide a constant stream of evidence that appears to support an interpretation of ideological hegemony...(the) aim is to clarify the analysis of domination in a way that avoids 'naturalizing' existing power relations and that is attentive to what may lie beneath the surface" (Scott, 1990, p. 70).

[1] From the Internet World Stats http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm#asia.

[2] An online search of Philippine indigenous organizations conducted to select the case studies for this research returned 31 indigenous organizations with online spaces (websites, blogs and social networking sites).

[3] Personal interviews with Tebtebba, May 2010.

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This implies that passivity and acquiescence, or ''public transcripts'', are sometimes used as strategic facades behind which subordinates conceal their subversive activities. Through this contention, Scott highlights the importance of probing deeply about people's ability to control what can be publicly spoken of (and what to be kept hidden), or how they creatively plan small ways of lifting themselves from subordination or challenging the dominant. As argued by Eliasoph (1996, pp. 284–286), ''*the control of the public transcript-what is to be spoken publicly and what not, is power in itself*'', and therefore, an explicit expression of agency. Hidden transcripts are designed to be invisible or to be ambiguous as to be capable of multiple interpretations and discernible only to those with good understanding of the folk culture of the subordinate group or those who probe it (Scott, 1990, pp. 158–166).

There is considerable debate over what constitutes resistance and critical theorists have contended that only large-scale changes in material conditions count. The value of ''low-profile techniques'' and hidden forms of resistance in bringing about change in existing power arrangements had been contested (Mitchell, 1990). Scott's analysis, however, can be read as part of the process of collective action which represents the ocean of possibilities that lie between acquiescence and revolt (p. 199). It is through such discreet forms of resistance that groups with little means are able to amass strength capable at certain historical moments of catalyzing more dramatic oppositional movements.[4]

Indigenous people, unlike slaves used in Scott's conceptualization, are able to communicate some of their opposition publicly through printed publications, newsletters, and sometimes in rare exchanges through government or internationally – initiated fora. In certain contexts, however, some indigenous groups still operate in hostile environments where their resistance can be met with forced disappearances or military retaliation. What this paper explores, in bringing Scott's notion of hidden and public transcripts, is not only the dissent articulated in the online space, but the process that the indigenous groups experience in negotiating the use of Internet technology on the one hand, and the adaptive strategic behavior in determining how (and how not) to represent themselves and their struggle in a public online space, on the other. Indigenous groups' online spaces may appear to represent an unquestioning stance towards technology use and its implications for indigenous identity and struggle. By giving emphasis on the meaning-making of their online political mobilization strategies, this paper seeks to understand what constitutes everyday forms of resistance taking place at the backstage of online media production, based on the intentions, ideas, and language of those who actually practice it. Further, observing how indigenous groups are acting according to their understanding of who they are and what they want to achieve in the online space, can help in coming up with a more adequate understanding of the practice of everyday life of indigenous groups (Escobar,1992, p. 70).

2.2. From technological determinism to democratic rationalization of technology

Earlier assumptions of technological determinism underlie much empirical research on technology use in the developing world. Initially, it was very common to find studies arguing that the Internet empowers formerly disempowered groups. Later on, research took on a more critical stance to argue that the Internet does not empower nor democratize. It was contended that the Internet would reinforce the same structures that determine offline participation and deliberation (Bimber, 2003; Hill and Hughes, 1998) and that Internet use will only help facilitate the active political mobilization of those already represented and politically active offline (Bimber, 2003). In the context of minority use of online media, some fear the debasement and displacement of organic folk culture as the expression of resistance and production of culture becomes subject to the processes of industrialization and the market forces (Lister et al., 2003, p. 69; Mc Callum and Franco, 2009, p. 1246). What may be problematic in both perspectives is that they view technology to work on its own and take for granted human purpose, experiences, creative uses, and negotiations of various technologies, including the changes occurring in the way individuals and groups communicate (Yang, 2010, p. 10).

Moving from technological deterministic viewpoints, the perspective of social construction of technology had been put forth to emphasize the ways in which users of technology ''*are able to overcome the narrowness of the communication channel to create personal images and actively appropriate it given existing cultural resources, in unexpected ways*'' (Feenberg and Barney, 2004, p. 16). Using this perspective, scholars have found that participants are able to create dynamic and rich communities by inventing new forms of expression and through interactive negotiation of meanings, norms and values not governed exclusively by the technical characteristics of the technology but socially constructed by user appropriation of the technology (Bakardjieva, 2003, p. 121–141; Feenberg and Barney, 2004, p. 15–16).

Feenberg and Barney (2004) offered social constructivism a more critical edge through the concept of ''*democratic rationalization of technology*''. Democratic rationalizations occur when technology users challenge harmful consequences, undemocratic power structures, and barriers to communication. According to them, ''the type of democratic rationalization that has played the biggest role on the internet is creative appropriation, the process in which users innovate new functionalities for already existing technologies'' (p. 16). Congruent to 'democratic rationalization' is Feenberg (2002) concept of instrumentalization of technology. According to this theory, essentialist insights and social constructivism are not necessarily competing or incompatible, but instead must be seen as analytically distinguishable fields. Feenberg (2002, p. 190) points out that,

> we need to know in what way humans will confront the limitations they meet. We need only gain insight into the form of the process of mediation. As the structure of a new social practice, the mediating activity opens infinite possibilities

[4] For example, see Ileto's (1979) analysis in *Pasyon at Rebolusyon* where religious songs and poems represented the way illiterate masses articulated feelings of oppression during the Spanish occupation, which later paved the way for the formation of a revolutionary movement.

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Table 1
Case study indigenous organizations.

	Cordillera People's Alliance	Tebtebba
Website	www.cpaphils.org/ (started 2004)	www.tebtebba.org (started 2006)
Founding	1984 by indigenous leaders in the Cordillera region	1996 by indigenous leaders from different countries
Scope and location	Philippines-based, functions as an alliance-network of about 120 grassroots-based organizations and 11 major NGOs in the Cordillera region	Philippines-based, composed of 9 member organizations representing indigenous peoples from 5 continents (Latin America, North America, Asia, Europe, and Australia-New Zealand)
Nature	• Indigenous activist organization leading the Cordillera indigenous peoples movement for self-determination • Activist in orientation and has antagonistic relationship with Philippine government; has partnerships with some international organizations	• Indigenous policy advocacy and research organization; capacitates indigenous people to participate in policy advocacy • Has partnerships with national and local government agencies such as census offices, human rights commissions, environmental and development departments, as well as international bodies
Issues	Defense of ancestral domain and self-determination; struggle against dams, mines and other 'development impositions'; promotion and protection of indigenous peoples rights; other peasant struggles; tribal wars; union with all anti-imperialist groups	Promotion of indigenous peoples rights; popularization of issues affecting indigenous communities globally (i.e. Climate Change, social justice)
Other media	• Newsletters in English and Cordillera's commercial lingua franca (Ilokano) • Publications of popular materials, issue statements and workshop proceedings • Music CDs and cassettes, t-shirts, and posters on struggle • Occasional radio programs • Video documentaries on IP issues	• Printed and digitized book publications (e.g. Indigenous people and Climate Change); training modules (being translated in different languages) • Tebtebba magazine • Printed briefing materials • Video documentaries

rather than foreclosing the future in some preconceived utopia. Adaptation maintains the formal character of the modern concept of freedom and therefore does not reduce individuals to mere functions of society. Freedom lies in this lack of determinacy.

Indigenous representation in websites, online forums, or e-groups can represent an information age version of creative resistance through daily practices. Using the framework of democratic rationalization and instrumentalization, the paper probes what constitutes indigenous activist agency within a technological discourse and examine how indigenous culture and knowledge are articulated into political discourse and guide the formation of agency.

3. Methodology: The setting, case studies, and sources of data

According to Clarke (2001, p. 415), indigenous people are "*autochthonous, or descendants of the earliest known inhabitants of a territory*. There are over 100 indigenous and ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines and central to their struggles is the assertion of identity and defense of ancestral domain and their space against the established order.

This research engaged a two-case study design of how indigenous groups use online media for political mobilization. An online search of indigenous groups in the Philippines was undertaken using a variety of search engines as well as Friendster and Facebook, the two most heavily subscribed social networking sites in the country. Tebtebba, Inc. (Tebtebba) and Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA) were chosen as case studies based on relatively higher levels of online activity (websites were rich in archived materials ranging from historical background on the organization, news and reports, position and petition statements, documentation of projects and activities, electronic publication of books, magazines or newsletters, and videos); recency in updating of online spaces; and agreement to participate in the study (see Table 1 for a comparative summary of the organizations' characteristics).

The CPA is a federation of people's organizations, most of them grassroots-based among the indigenous communities in the Cordillera region of the Philippines. Founded in 1984, it seeks to promote and defend indigenous people's rights, human rights, social justice and national freedom and democracy (CPA website, www.cpaphils.org, 2010). CPA was selected for its activist roots and strong linkages with other Cordillera civil society and grassroots organizations, having the historical association of leading the indigenous movement that successfully led to the halting of the World Bank-funded Chico dam project in the 1980s. CPA's past lobby works have exposed it to international discourses on indigenous rights through mobilizations at the United Nations, although its attachment to its grassroots alliances allows it to remain more grounded on local indigenous issues such as extractions, dams, and 'forced disappearances'[5] (Hilhorst, 2000). CPA provides relief and rehabilitation activities for disaster-affected areas in the Cordillera, allowing it to retain enclaves of support from the ground.

[5] An example is the disappearance of James Balao, a CPA activist-member and who suddenly disappeared in 2008 after confrontations with government military and never surfaced. Another is the abduction of the 'Morong 43, supposedly rural health workers but were suspected by government to be members of the Communist Party. These extra judicial killings and political disappearances rendered the Philippines as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists and activists. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/04/world/asia/04iht-phils.1.9721867.html.

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The CPA launched its website in 2004 with financial assistance from a Swedish partner, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation. CPA's banner tagline carries its core advocacy, '*for the defense of ancestral domain and for self determination*'. Prominently placed in the website with large headers are CPA's "Campaigns" projected through video documentaries (left hand side), "Indigenous issues" captured through mostly a list of downloadable statements, press releases and position papers (center), and "News in photos" (on the right hand side of the site), a photo documentation of recent activities and landmark events, such as the formation of the 'Philippine indigenous movement for self-determination'. Managing its website internally provides CPA more control in keeping updates on time, in editing the postings, as well as in maintaining security over the site's content. All CPA officers and members in the head-office in Baguio city have laptop computers that share a wireless connection; on the other hand, many of its grassroots organizational partners have at least 1 computer in the office but have to travel to internet cafes (distance of about 1–7 km) to access the internet.

Tebtebba[6] or Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education's work focuses on bringing indigenous people together for policy advocacy and campaigns and collaborates with indigenous activists in multilateral processes (www.tebtebba.org, 2010). Tebtebba's website banner tagline, '*Working for the recognition and protection of indigenous peoples' rights*' reflects the importance of the rights discourse in Tebtebba's work. Placed in Tebtebba's website is a "Menu" (left hand side) of information about the history and causes of the organization. In the center is, 'What's New', a rundown of current issues Tebtebba is involved in as well as issue statements. Based on recent review (January 2011), all issues and position statements identified are related to Climate Change meetings. In the right hand side of the website are links to other portals maintained by Tebtebba (i.e. the Indigenous Climate Change Portal), as well as announcements, video documentaries, and a downloadable section of Guidebooks, newsletters, brochures, training materials and other publications produced by Tebtebba. The website is updated monthly but during particular events, several posts are made on the same day.

Tebtebba is an interesting case because while most of its members were from CPA, the organization is international (with an International Advisory Board) and its advocacies are more slanted towards global issues. In contrast to the CPA which has antagonistic relations with the state, Tebtebba works actively in partnership with the national and local government agencies. Tebtebba's head office is in the Philippines where they manage and maintain the organization's website, as well as two other websites that represent their causes: the Indigenous Climate Portal and the Asia Indigenous Women's Network. Two members maintain these websites, supervised by a Head Information officer. Typical of many non-profit organizations, all three members multi-task and are in charge of all other communication and publication functions of the organization. They also maintain several e-groups representing salient indigenous issues such as climate change, waste management, mining and extractive industries, and human rights. These e-groups were aimed at providing updates and discussing pressing issues of indigenous people in other parts of the world, and to build a stronger network among its community.

It is the difference in the positionality of the two organizations vis a vis the state and international and local civil society organizations that I anticipated interesting insights on the way different cultural and political contexts may shape online political mobilization experiences. I generated case study evidence from in-depth interviews, textual analysis of organizational self-representation and mobilization in websites, and the wealth of secondary literature on the politics and dynamics of NGOs, political action, and social movement formation in the Cordillera region.[7] In-depth interviews were critical to understand the rationale, motivations, perceptions, and meaning-making of the indigenous groups in having their online spaces. Interviews with group leaders, information officers, and members of the two organizations were conducted in April and May, 2010. A thematic analysis of the groups' websites was conducted in August and September 2010 and again in January 2011 focusing on content relating to representation of the group and the struggle and forms and styles of mobilization.

Following guidance from Ryan and Bernard (2003), themes were generated from recurring topics that appeared in both interviews and online spaces, those that were important to the respondents, and those embedded from metaphors (i.e. "the internet is an arena of struggle"). Following Yin (2009, pp. 130–135) methods for case study analysis, I also laid down statements that support the study's 'propositions' as well as 'rival propositions or alternative explanations', or issues concerning indigenous media presented in earlier literature (see Table 2). Through a thorough process of coding, memo-writing and analysis, the thematic categories were laid down and rethought.

As Beaker (1998) argued, concepts are not boxed entities that we fit things into, "*but are relational and based on the system it belongs to*" (pp. 133–134). As developing concepts entails a continuous dialogue with empirical data, the concept of 'agency' and what constitutes a 'negotiation' and 'democratic rationalization of technology' were rethought in the context of the lived experiences and situation of indigenous groups and online media use for activism. Most of the quoted messages are excerpts of interviews in their original form, except for those that had to be translated from local language.

[6] Tebtebba comes from a word used by the indigenous Kankana-ey Igorots of Northern Philippines, refers to a process of collectively discussing issues and presenting diverse views with the aim of reaching agreements, common positions, and concerted actions.

[7] Prominent here are the studies by Hilhorst (2000) on the everyday politics of a Cordillera-based NGO which offered an insightful background on the state-civil society politics, the realities of social movement formation in the Cordillera, and the role of NGOs in democratization and development in the region, as well as by Casambre (2006) which discussed the role of political opportunity structures in the Philippine indigenous social movement.

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Table 2
Summary of issues on indigenous online media engagement.

Issues about minority/indigenous online mediations (rival propositions)	Propositions
• Groups "buy in the technology hype"; absence of clear purposes of use (Latufeku, 2006, p. 56) • Indigenous/folk culture may be "strategically essentialized" and exploited (Himpele, 2008; Prins, 2002; Landzelius, 2006, p. 13) • The use of online media (competing in the terms of media spectacle) may "corrupt the lifeworlds" of indigenous groups who value alternative processes of deliberation (Landzelius, 2006, p. 124–128) • The mechanisms of implementation are coercive, and the groups are forced or swayed to obey rules and laws or otherwise sanctioned, such as adoption of IT strategies, recruitment of a professional workforce, etc. • Indigenous groups are unaware of possible negative consequences of online media use and are unable to detect threats to its identity and community • The cultural nature of indigenous resistance will be altered with the predominant use of online media (Brooten, 2010) • Actual authorship is suspect and manifests power relations in the indigenous community (e.g. women) and members with limited or no access will be unrepresented and further marginalized (Belausteguigoitia, 2006, p. 110)	• Groups have a clear purpose for online media use • Romanticized indigenist images will be used to seek control over and correct common media representations (Brooten, 2010) • Indigenous groups will creatively project and protect its indigeneity in the process of online presentations • Groups deliberate and choose to carryout actions with regard to the adoption and use of online media • Groups carefully think through the development and distribution of online content • Indigenous groups are aware and able to negotiate its use of technology in consideration of the limits and threats it poses to organization, identity, and struggle • Indigenous groups challenge harmful consequences, circumvent controls and threats posed by technology use, undemocratic power structures and barriers to communication rooted in technological design • Online spaces are used to complement offline and traditional modes of dissent • Reflexivity is employed such that groups will speak with rather than for indigenous communities • Effort is undertaken to bring in the voices of grassroots communities

4. Locating the purposes of indigenous online presence: Making claims in the name of indigeneity

4.1. Building reputation and recognition

Both organizations' original motivations for going online is to generate external support from global partners and funders and build new networks with international and local organizations of like-minded interests. During the planning process of having an online space, the organizations thought that having a website will allow them to showcase the organization, its causes and campaigns, and updates on projects that will communicate a reputation of being credible and reliable indigenous organizations that external actors can build partnerships with. They wanted to optimize the opportunity of having a communicative space and make dynamic their information campaign of indigenous struggles to attract local and international support. Having a well-updated website with rich content is now a gauge for legitimacy and allows them to differentiate themselves from spurious and money-making NGOs, a problem now being faced by the community of development NGOs in the Philippines. The organizations noted that the rich content in their website shows that they are an active organization at the forefront of the Cordillera people's struggle. Having a website allowed them to save communication resources (i.e. mailing or faxing of reports and updates) and made it convenient for the partners to check the website for updates on projects and activities.

The image that the organization depicts online becomes critical when appealing to an external audience. The quality of website content, the level of substantive information, program explanation, or services, would in an information society show some proof of organizational capacity and legitimacy. Information on projects being undertaken, financial or operational reports, membership, resources, and linkages to other important organizations would serve as a vignette capturing an organization's capacity or legitimacy (Vedder, 2003, p. 54).

However, the literature on voluntary organizations has problematized this dependence on 'external support' by non-profit organizations and the implications to the local cause. Their commitment for social change and community empowerment may be rivaled by their need to survive as individual institutions as well as to establish themselves as a collective force in civil society (Bebbington et al., 2008). For example, some organizations, in an effort to stay alive, may compromise on their vision and institutional mission to accommodate projects that may be inconsistent with the needs of the community or their main advocacies. Further, some feared enhancing web presence, being seen as a tool to establish legitimacy in an information society like accreditation processes, would require additional resources, some degree of professionalization, or enhanced staff skills. This drive for professionalism across non-profits may undermine the spirit of voluntarism that the activists who pioneered this field brought with them, as well as the very essence of working for development or social change (Carino, 2002).

Tebtebba and CPA did not find it necessary to hire new staff exclusive for the management of the websites, also particularly because these organizations already represent the more educated bunch of the Cordillera.[8] Initially, both sites were

[8] Hilhorst (2000) and Lewis (1992) noted the intellectual slant of CPA's leadership and membership. In Lewis' book, he mentioned that the CPA was actually disadvantaged by the age and education of its representatives as some of the indigenous tribal leaders initially doubted that such group would be prepared to lead a political course (Lewis, 1992, p. 10).

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outsourced but due to bureaucratic delays, they decided to have members undergo some training and manage the website themselves.

While having a website would seem driven only by an accommodation of certain standards of professionalization and reaffirms certain representational processes required of developing country organizations, I found that the motivations for going online is based on the organizations' assessments of the actual value of the online spaces to them. The organizations admitted to the reality of the need to constantly attract external support. However, they argue that this clamor for 'external support' is less focused on the financial aspect but more on gaining strength through solidarity with indigenous activists and organizations in other parts of the world. As national minorities, the groups emphasized the limited authentic support afforded by government and other local institutions to indigenous causes, making it necessary for them to seek support from and be in solidarity with indigenous communities with similar experiences from outside. For example, CPA mentioned that because the issues they advance often attack multinational companies or government which have significant control of local mainstream media, the only way they can be given a platform to communicate their causes and claims that can reach a broader international audience, is through their online space. They target an external audience in order to project positions and views alternative to Philippine media or government press releases. Given the magnitude of claims that they make, the image that they create in the online space as indigenous activist organizations in terms actual projects implemented or of positions on issues, becomes critical.

The orientation to building solidarity with the international indigenous community also explains the dominant use of English in the websites. While this privileges those whose medium is the English language, CPA explained that indigenous groups in the Cordillera are also not homogenous and belong to different ethno-linguistic groups, and limited resources does not allow them to provide translations. CPA explained that those who have access to the online space in the Cordillera are also the ones capable of reading and writing in English, while most printed materials and local radio programs they maintain are given in the commercial lingua franca of Cordillera, which is *Ilokano*. Tebtebba, on the other hand, is considering the translation of its website into the languages of its member organizations, although many of its print publications have already been translated.

Over time, the motivations for going online increased when they began accumulating statements, position papers, features, and documentation of projects and activities. They realized that the website is also useful to organizational management by serving as an archive of its statements, position papers, documentaries and digitized publications. At a price the two organizations deemed reasonable (US$89–95 annual web-hosting fee), they were able to store materials useful to any member or supporter. The listserves also provided them an archive of discussions and issues brought up by their members that can be easily retrieved and reviewed. Having an online archive of organizational products and representations is particularly important to the organizations as office movement or disasters have previously led them to lose materials relevant to the organization.

4.2. Asserting the struggle, constructing identity

Weaved into this reputation building and recognition is the assertion of an indigenous identity. Analysis would show that the use of the indigenous mark is weaved into reputation-building and recognition processes aimed at enhancing support networks. Ethnic identity differentiates them and their causes from other civil society organizations. Indigeneity also easily arouses curiosity and attention, particularly because of cultural difference from the mainstream.

Both organizations accounted the lengthy process of website planning and how members debated on how to best represent the organization's indigenous mark through the online space. The process of presenting their struggle online aided the organization into determining 'what makes them indigenous' and 'how to present themselves and their struggles to the general public'. Their account reflected a process different from simply buying into the 'hype' of having an online space, but involved a careful rethinking of their indigeneity in the process of articulating their claims in the online medium. Inasmuch as the website 'represents' and 'constructs' them as a people and an organization, it has aided them to recollect from history and from present struggles what elements would constitute this indigeneity.

CPA members narrated that once, in a meeting, some members criticized why they retained the picture of Cordillera grasslands (*damo-damo*) in the banner. Those members joked that the website looked a bit too "basic". At the same time, someone designed their website with a very professional but futuristic design. That design was immediately dismissed by the collective because "*It was very geometric and it does not have a trace of being an IP website*". Even CPA's aspiration of enhancing its website is centered on maintaining its indigenous identity well-reflected in the online space:

> "What we would have wanted is that, once you open our website, you will hear our indigenous music. The tune of *gangsa* (indigenous musical instrument), wow! Then later a lady in *tapis* (indigenous costume) would come out... it would be nice if we can enhance our website but still bring in elements representative of our culture. Because that's how Cordillera is known... or banner song of the Cordillera Peoples Movement. It would have been nice if there is such a song in our website. Same with novels, progressive in content, songs of struggle and protest of the peoples of Cordillera".

One way of reading the passage above is to see "strategic essentialism" at work, or the abuse of indigenous identity to advance certain objectives. Interviews with the groups, however, surfaced a genuine desire and value attached to being able to project their identity and history in a way that it could aid the understanding by external actors of their current struggles.

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By presenting difference in identity, culture, and history, they argued, they are able to insist that certain 'development interventions' that may seem normal or acceptable to the rest of the country is contrary to certain indigenous rituals and practices. For example, mining or establishment of dams on indigenous ancestral lands have been heavily opposed by indigenous communities due to rituals and history tied to "ancestral land" in indigenous culture. This indigenous cultural context renders government offers for resettlement and compensation for displacements irrelevant. They also insisted that such "difference" allows them to justify certain claims, for example, advancing a discourse on indigenous peoples rights despite a Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

My interview with one of the organizations opened with a question by the leader, "*why are you interviewing us, these information technology stuff we do not know, don't you know that IPs are backward?*" This joke highlights the common stereotype of the indigenous or *katutubo* as backward and left behind by modernity. A leader of CPA argued that:

> having a website debunks this belief.... So our main objective is to put there the description of the Cordillera, its geography, its resources, its process, its people, the issues, and the struggle of the people. What do we aspire for...

In the process of crafting their online spaces, countering stereotypes about indigenous culture as dynamic and not static and of indigenous people as active and not passive actors in society eventually became an important purpose of having an online space. Having a website allowed them to debunk notions about indigenous communities commonly projected in national media and assert that indigenous people are well able to express themselves and struggles, if given the opportunity.

Connected with this self-construction of indigenous identity online is the dilemma attached to 'protecting indigenous culture' on the one hand and 'embracing globalizing technologies and modern technological means to express oneself' on the other (Landzelius, 2006, pp. 292–295). Maintaining indigenous culture and traditional ways of life while adopting the elements of modernization has been a long standing debate among IP communities. I asked if there had been concerns from among its network about being "too globalized" or "modern" as an IP organization because of online media use, to which CPA opined:

> ...Culture and consciousness, that is developed. It is not possible that whatever culture that has been there 1000 years ago can be preserved because that is not the reality now. What we see is that culture is dynamic. It evolves. As long as it is geared towards the plight of the wider public and it can contribute to the advancement of peoples' struggle, that is how we position the online space. In the history of CPA there had been debates on that, preservation of culture in its purest form. That is what we call indigenist or localist tendency. We condemn that thinking.

Social and political developments in the region could help explain the views of these organizations with regard to indigenous identity. In the late 60s and 70s, the indigenous middle-class students in the Cordillera (the type that comprise the two organizations' leadership) developed a sense of identity and pride based on competency, position, and professional achievements. This has stemmed from wanting to assert oneself from decades of minoritization and prejudice as subordinate, backward and inferior peoples from the rest of the Filipinos (Victor, 2008; Olvida, 2010, p. 82).

4.3. Enabling campaigns

Although different in focus, both CPA and Tebtebba have their campaigns and advocacies taking a prominent space in the websites. In the case of the passing of the UN Declaration on Indigenous People's Rights where Tebtebba played a critical role, legitimacy to the cause was obtained by being able to generate a significant number of signatures from indigenous organizations from different parts of the world, which the e-groups allowed them to do with limited funds. Not only were they able to secure support to the declaration but also strengthened ties with global organizations through shared experience. Consequently, these enhanced the legitimacy of the organization as a key actor in the social movement and as driver in realizing a long-standing goal. Tebtebba's list serve also facilitates an exchange in the situation of indigenous communities in its partner network, and enables mobilization of external support critical when internal country condition is too hostile to allow them to mobilize internally, for example in the case of political harassments or killings believed to be involving national governments.

CPA, on the other hand, mobilized online against disappearances and political killings, as some of CPA members have become victims of these disappearances. Their campaign to send letters of condemnation to the government through email and listserves proved useful in gaining external support from both indigenous and non-indigenous local and international communities, and even from citizen journalists and bloggers. CPA notes that being one of the first and largest local indigenous peoples' alliance in the country, it is important for them to be actively at the forefront of mobilization of such issues.

From insights shared by the two organizations, the effort to build credibility within 'this system of legitimation' seems to have allowed them to move towards meaningful work and accountability. Vulnerable to losing their name and credibility, they exerted effort to live up to certain standards, they became more active in publishing position statements, organizing activities and document them, call for petitions, or read up and monitor related issues of indigenous people in other parts of the world. Some of the work that they were now able to do, such as mobilizing support for their causes and petitions, they note, were made possible through the online spaces. Tebtebba shared that since the online mobilization work for the indigenous peoples' rights, it has become easier for them to mobilize and organize for succeeding projects.

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5. "Use them, don't let them use us": Negotiating online mediations

> What we want is advancement of society and civilization as long as it will serve our purposes. What I mean is, use them, but don't let them use us.

The literature has laid down potential threats and consequences that online media engagement might have for minority groups or indigenous communities. This section will discuss processes by which indigenous groups' deal with the challenges and threats of online mediation.

5.1. Negotiating commercialism

> There was a time one of our members suggested to try putting up an online forum. But when we conducted a brainstorming session, we looked at that format, we learned that Google will put its ads in the page. Of course we will lose the integrity of our website. So we don't have ads because we do not know who will suddenly advertise in our website. We said, if there are comments or feedback, maybe just email us a feedback note...

One of the issues about going online for indigenous groups is that it can be suffocated by the trappings of commercialism that surrounds much of the Web. In cyberspace, indigenous struggles and identity representations can be placed side by side commercial advertisements that can distort the nature and image of the organizations. CPA, with its radical activist nature and history of fighting "all forms of imperialism and commercialism" (CPA website, 2011) that encroach on indigenous ancestral domain found itself in a dilemma with such risks. CPA is concerned of having website advertisements which can distort the organization's image as an organization staunchly anti-imperialism and capitalism. Even Tebtebba is cautious of website advertisements and also avoids calls for donation in the website as it may affect the credibility and image of the organization.

5.2. Negotiating content and medium

Hughes and Dallwitz (2007) warned that allowing important cultural material publicly accessible in the web could be culturally unacceptable for indigenous communities wishing to restrict access to local cultural knowledge. Although Tebtebba's website content is generated from its partners and indigenous communities, the information group retains control to insure awareness of ground developments and conduct due diligence on matters of more sensitive nature:

> Anything that has to be uploaded in the website, especially if it's related to a specific situation in the community or a specific concern they want to raise, we need their consent. Do you want this? Do you need this? What are the implications if we upload this issue... There are critical information that requires FPIC (free prior and informed consent). The editorial judgment of Tebtebba is needed if putting it online will help or worsen the situation.
> Interviewer: What was this case?
> It was generally about abduction and killing. So they said that since their government is paranoid about that...they can be put to harm. So there was consideration on our part that FPIC was really needed and it was not put online.

They also recalled an instance when community consultation was conducted to determine the appropriateness of posting indigenous knowledge online:

> ....On making a decision about traditional knowledge, for example...xxx...if we publish, it can be obtained by anyone and be patented. So to reconcile those conditions we consult them. Would you allow us to put this online or not? It has to come from the community themselves—what do they want to be published or come out and be considered in the public domain and what should be kept secret or within the community. Usually the communities have protocol already. Which kind of knowledge is for them alone, which ones must be protected, which ones can we bring out...xxx... It was very effective and they are still practicing it. So we discussed, do we publish? Is there community approval? But the community said that those are sacred knowledge that should not come out. So we did not publish it. Yes the community has a system for determining what is good and not good for them. This is sacred. There is ritual involved here. Outsiders should not know. We all know it is possible to steal so those knowledge stays in the community.

CPA also has similar experiences about having to manage and control what kind of information they share in the online space. As an activist organization, they always assume that their conversations, whether offline or online, are monitored, their phones bugged and website filtered. This is why they take caution in discussing sensitive matters online. Matters that are not critical to be known by the public are not posted in the website. They shared that some of their yahoo-based emails may have also been hacked and as this is the primary medium they use for exchanging views on issues, they had to invest in more secure email addresses. Even the e-group of the CPA Core Committee is currently being rethought because of "visitors" posting unwanted comments in this supposedly exclusive group.

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5.3. Whose voice gets heard online?

It has been a concern that offline issues of material access to technology such as class, access, and ideological divisions, capacity to communicate, and norms of right and wrong, are weaved into the dynamics of online media use. This implies that in the context of organizations, the authenticity of representation and voice projected in the online space is suspect as the online space can be restrictive in its use by members and leaders with skills and capacity (Bimber, 2003; Barber, 2003). Tebtebba explained that it tries not to function "*as a mere sounding board but seek(s) to enhance the IP's capacity to speak, if they see the need*". They offered writing seminars to help their local members to speak and write for their issues and contribute more in producing website content or present their experiences in international fora. However, Tebtebba members admitted that this is a challenge faced by the team and while they managed to have a few grassroots leaders to write in their own words their sentiments towards their conditions, they also battle with having to uproot their members from their daily work in the fields. Because of irregular training and practice, it becomes difficult for grassroots members to be tapped to contribute actively in the website. Tebtebba also has an ongoing initiative to produce videos on indigenous communities' views and understanding of the impact of Climate Change to their localities, which they plan to upload into their website.

5.4. Managing organizational adoption of technology

The CPA believes that the Internet has vast potential advantages to the organization, provided that it is not abused. One important element of 'proper use' emphasized is making sure that the human connection among the organization's members is not lost and that opportunity for face to face meetings is maintained:

> ...Because the danger there is that it might replace the other more efficient and effective means of communication. For example, if we abuse email, it might replace the organizational mechanisms where you are supposed to call a face to face meeting and make decisions face to face. That is the danger, It is like the connective and human nature is lost and you are like a robot in front of your laptop"
> Interviewer: Is it changing the dynamics of the organization?
> Not yet, it has not yet reached that, but there is the tendency. Let's just email. Imagine in this floor, we still email each other. Sometimes I will say, let's stop this and talk about this face to face!

Managing the adoption of technology is a critical issue for CPA which is an alliance of geographically marginalized grassroots indigenous communities in the region. Thus, an important consideration is making sure that members with no Internet access are not left out. CPA relies on Quarterly newsletters (*Hapit*) and still distributes them regularly to local partners via mail or messenger. They deem that these printed materials are more effective communication tools for their local network as grassroots members would read them once they see them.

CPA explains that the website targets more their external partners because very few have good access from among its internal network. Thus, online communication has to be complemented by the use of short messaging service (SMS) via the mobile phone, a pervasive technology even in rural Philippines. When the office communicates statements through email, they would send their local partners an SMS to retrieve the email message from the nearest internet cafe. They explained that for those members who have to travel kilometres to access the internet, they would instead send messengers by bus to deliver important documents or communicate important messages. Ordinary memos and publications would always still be sent by mail or fax and critical issues are discussed face to face.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The study finds that online political mobilization for indigenous activists constitutes a sustained balancing act between accommodation and resistance. The groups began to use online media primarily to build credibility through professionalization, a norm enforced by international partners and embedded in the dynamics of survival and quest for sustainability characteristic of developing country NGOs. Yet this image-building, as argued by the groups, functions to present perspectives and issues alternative to those offered by mainstream media, and allows them to reach a broader audience which they could not previously reach. This image-building also functions to challenge 'dominant stereotypes' of indigenous communities as "backward and passive", and of indigenous culture as "static" or "archaic". They emphasized the importance of highlighting ethnic identity in differentiating themselves in the online space not as a 'strategic essentialism' as others fear, but because it is by highlighting such difference that they contextualize the cultural and historical basis of their political claims.

While the two groups initially treated the Internet like other technologies available to them—a tool to articulate an indigenous voice, the use of online technology for these indigenous activists entailed a complex negotiation of opportunities and challenges on the part of the users, to the extent that the Internet in itself is considered as "an arena of struggle". Symbolic forms and creative techniques are engaged within an interesting negotiation of production and distribution processes that take advantage of technology while accentuating indigenous identity and challenging the forces that undermine indigenous culture and knowledge. As they resist the usual forces that undermine indigenous people's rights, they also artfully and covertly resist state surveillance, technological abuses, commercialization, "loss of human touch", patented local knowledge, and other online dangers to their community.

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As organizations representing indigenous communities which primarily struggle for the protection of their traditional cultures, both organizations are careful about their online uses, concerned that as they endeavor with active internet use they are not undermining their own communities or their image as indigenous organizations. CPA seemed significantly concerned that its identity as an activist IP organization is well-reflected in its online space. They ensure that their websites are advertisement free. The organizations exert an effort to maintain human interaction despite the use of technology and that members with no Internet access are not left out of the struggle. They balance sophistication of site versus ease of access by members with slow connection. They also implemented membership and access controls. They sacrificed some losses such as not having a forum in the website and attractive web content such as indigenous knowledge in order to protect it from being used by commercial interests.

These can be seen as 'hidden transcripts', to borrow from Scott (1990), because while the online spaces carry public presentations of indigenous articulations, an active appropriation and negotiation of technology use takes place behind the stage. From the eyes of observers, indigenous groups are swept into the hype of technological development and externally-imposed norms of professionalization. At the backstage, indigenous groups are rational actors carefully planning and thinking through their online mediations to negotiate technological, state, or capitalist controls. Credibility – building would seem too donor or externally – driven, but it was shown to be useful for these issue entrepreneurs who build moments of contestation through the use of basic resources, ideas, and commitment to their cause. Through their online spaces they widen the reach of issues, organize petitions and campaigns, and stabilize existing support networks and expand them. As these are small, yet dedicated organizations, they alter the terms of public debate by mobilizing a democratic public to support indigenous causes.

These organizations' everyday online presence would seem plain and mundane for analysis, but by uncovering these experiences, we see the democratic relevance of the Internet surfacing through the ways organizations working for social justice are able to not only work their way through the Internet, but localize it. These experiences debunk the notion that individuals are helpless with the force of technology, state controls and capitalist hegemony, a finding alluding to Feenberg's concept of "democratic rationalization" of technology. By looking at the practice of actual participants, we find that users can be rational actors able to weigh the dangers and benefits of online spaces, challenge harmful consequences and barriers to communication, and work towards what they think is beneficial to them and their cause. These artful forms of resistance communicated online can serve as the backbone for organizing larger scale mass mobilizations that can advance the causes of their communities.

The two case studies also showed the ways in which a grassroots-based and an international organization both achieved organizational growth through their online experiences. The websites and e-groups offered a basis for launching online mobilization while online mobilization has become a means for organization building too. The groups learned to manage their use of technology in ways that they can construct their indigenous identity, build solidarity, and strengthen their impact, while being cautious of its possible dangers to the organization. This in a way would imply online discourse shaping practice. The process of engaging technology for social and political mobilization also showed that the need to establish credibility and image that comes with having a website also drives the organization into more action–whether by rethinking its identity and causes, by accumulating an archive of indigenous statements and productions, by living up to one's proclaimed standards, by showing proof of its achievements from the ground, or as a result of more activities generated from new partnerships and solidarity with the external community.

By uncovering actual experiences of spontaneous creativity, we find that such creative appropriation of technology by indigenous activist groups must be taken as a source of significant innovation of technology use. A multitude of social contexts seem to be aligned for a democratic appropriation of technology to take place. In the case of these indigenous groups, it is the commitment to promote and protect indigenous identity, rights and knowledge, progressive yet cautionary thinking of its leaders of technology's benefits and dangers, skills combined with deep indigenous activist roots, and fight for their belief and future which seem to determine the emergent structures.

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