

FAN NATION: HARNESSING FANDOMS FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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ABSTRACT

In the Philippines, schoolchildren consider celebrities as heroes. During elections, adults elect actors-turned-politicians in public office. Former artist Joseph Estrada, for instance, is now mayor of Manila after having been senator, Vice President, and President of the country. Boxing champion Manny Pacquiao, meanwhile, is now in congress representing his home province, Sarangani. Currently, two of the icons being heavily marketed by the country's largest media conglomerate are comedian Vice Ganda and the romantic tandem of Daniel Padilla and Kathryn Bernardo, dubbed as KathNiel, which both target the youth segment. The three personalities appear in television shows every day and have Facebook pages that have now garnered more than 12 million and 890,000 'likes', respectively.

What if the youth are as passionate in political and civic concerns as they are about celebrities? The notion that political apathy characterizes the present generation rose due to the seeming preoccupation of the youth with such inconsequential affairs. Research studies, however, say the political engagement of the youth today simply differs from the traditional expressions of political involvement. Mass demonstrations, for instance, are no longer just limited to the streets; they are now also present in cyberspace. The youth's informed participation in political and civic affairs is crucial to the life of a functioning democracy. The new phenomena of political engagement among the youth merits in-depth exploration because of the sheer size of Filipinos aged 15-25. It is high time to look into the interaction of political participation and the fan-culture landscape that permeates the young generation in the Philippines.

This study aimed to describe the landscape of fandoms in the Philippines in terms of the attachment of fans with celebrities and the fans clubs' virtual and geographical reach. It also probes the demographics, motivations, and gratifications of fans; and the extent of the political participation among youth fans. The study uses a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative approaches, including content analysis, focus groups, and a survey to discover how Filipino fandoms, which also happens to be a niche of the youth, can be harnessed for political participation.

INTRODUCTION

A. Fan Phenomenon

In an evening news program aired at the flagship channel of ABS-CBN, the Philippines' largest media conglomerate, an anchor once said, "*Walang malaking artista... kung wala ang kanilang fans* (There will be no big names if there are no fans.)" (ABS-CBN News, 2014). In a country where entertainment is a common topic in conversations

(Celdran, 2001), celebrities figure in the list of people schoolchildren consider heroes (The Manila Bulletin, 2013), and actors and actresses are elected in public office, citizens seem to share a common characteristic -- being fans.

The rise of the fan phenomenon is linked to technology, and is attributed to the complex notions of self-formation and intimacy in the modern era (Cavicchi, 2014). Fans are not merely “hysterically screaming teenagers, crazies or fanatics” (Jenson, 1992) who are “caught in unexplainable frenzy” (Evangelista, 2013); fans are individuals who patronize particular celebrities in varying degrees through actions that involve “meaning-making, meaning-sharing, poaching, collecting, and knowledge-building” (Baym, 2007; Evangelista, 2014). These activities- include fanfiction writing, consumption of products endorsed by celebrity idols, and formation of fans clubs.

The varying sense of intimacy or perceived intimacy of fans with their celebrity idols may be explained by the concept of parasocial interaction, which states that fans process media texts as interpersonal interactions (Caughey, as cited in Click & Holladay, et.al, 2013). The onset of social media has intensified parasocial interaction, resulting in fans considering social media interactions as “actual social relationships” (Caughey, as cited in Click & Holladay, et al., 2013). It gives them the illusion that they are able to engage in a face-to-face interaction with celebrities they soon consider friends, siblings, or mentors because of a perceived “set of shared experiences, which create a bond” (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

To measure parasocial relationships, scholars have devised a Parasocial Index composed of 10 items (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985; Laken, 2009). The respondents answer by stating if they strongly disagree, disagree, are neutral, agree, or strongly disagree with the given statements. The statements, modified according to the topic of a particular study, are:

1. I feel sorry for my favorite celebrity when he or she makes a mistake.
2. My favorite celebrity's personality makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.
3. I see my favorite celebrity as a natural, down to earth person.
4. I look forward to watching my favorite celebrity on television.
5. I would watch programs that featured my favorite celebrity, even if I didn't regularly watch the program.
6. When my favorite celebrity is interviewed, he or she seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
7. If there were a story about my favorite celebrity in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.
8. I miss seeing my favorite celebrity when he or she is not in the media.
9. I would like to meet my favorite celebrity in person.
10. I find my favorite celebrity to be physically attractive.

To collectively refer to the fans of a particular celebrity, scholars use the term “fandom” (Bainbridge, 2014; Cavicchi, 2014) despite its dictionary definition as the mere state of being a fan (Merriam Webster, n.d.). Fandoms create hierarchized communities “where people can be unselfconscious about loving something” (Bainbridge, 2014) and are typically formed online.

B. Political Participation

There is no single definition for political participation, which is also known as “political engagement” or “public involvement in decision-making.” (Li & Marsh, 2008) To further understand the term, Conge (1988) laid out six arguments that political scientists discuss concerning political participation:

- (1) Is it Active or Passive - Is participation expressed in actions such as voting, or emotions such as patriotism?
- (2) Is it Aggressive or Non-Aggressive - Does it include civil disobedience and political violence or is it limited to more “conventional” activities?
- (3) Is it Structural or Non-structural - Should it include efforts to change or maintain the form of government or is it to change or maintain governmental authorities and/or their decisions?
- (4) Is it Governmental or Non-governmental - Is it limited to behavior inside the realm of government?
- (5) Is it Mobilized or Voluntary Actions - Does it include behavior guided by the government, or should it be behavior initiated by the people pursuing their own interests?
- (6) Is it Intended or Unintended outcomes - Should the consequence be intended or unintended?

In 1995, American political scientist Sidney Verba formulated a model of political participation patterned from American politics. In his model, he addressed some of the above-mentioned concerns that Conge pointed out. Verba defined political participation as voluntary, with an intent to affect government decision-making through creating and implementing policies or influencing people who makes policies. (Eremenko, n.d.)

Martiniello (2005) also asserts that political participation is an “active dimension of citizenship” in which “individuals take part in the management of collective affairs of a given political community.” It is not only restricted to “conventional” action but also includes less conventional ways such as demonstrations, protests, and boycotts. Martiniello (2005) stressed the overlapping categories of collective and personal participation, acknowledging that some actions are collective in nature while others are inherently individual actions (e.g. voting). Pattie, Seyd, and Whitely (2004) say that the political disengagement of young people is a result of too much individualization and not enough collective action. Pleyers (2005), however, believe that individualization, which has been caused by the youth’s disillusionment with traditional politics, is not a deterrent to participation, and that the trend of the deliberate exclusion of the youth from political institutions mobilizes another form of participation in which young people involve themselves in short-term and narrowed-down projects rather than long-term ones.

In the United States, for instance, Lady Gaga exercised her influence as a celebrity by encouraging her fans to speak up and demand the repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy that prevents gay people from outing while serving the military. Lady Gaga’s encouragement to her fans resulted in their calling up senators or posting videos of themselves asking for the repeal. “The Vampire Diaries” star Ian Somerhalder also exercised his influence by promoting environmentalism through his Twitter account, which had about 750,000 followers, and through a website he put up for this advocacy (Bennett, 2012). Fans have signed up for different volunteering programs, conducted donation drives as well as signed petitions for the cause.

In the Philippines, meanwhile, celebrities sometime join social causes such as visiting victims of recent environmental disasters (Osorio, 2012) but have not tried to influence policy-making yet.

C. Fan Phenomenon and Political Participation

This study looks at the interaction of the fan-culture landscape in the Philippines, which currently happens to be permeated by the young generation, and political participation.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

To understand the persuasiveness of celebrities on individuals, an integrated model of celebrity identification has been developed using concepts from Parasocial Interaction Theory and the Theory of Identification. (Brown and Fraser, 1996).

A. Parasocial Interaction

The term parasocial interaction, first used by Horton and Wohl in 1956, denotes a “one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer and not susceptible of mutual development” (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p.215). Auter and Palmgreen (2002) stated that parasocial interaction is similar to interpersonal interaction. The former, however, consists of weaker connections between the two parties and is often a one-way channel in the sense that it may not be reciprocated by the other party (i.e. the media figures or celebrities). This leads to the third concept of the theory which is “bond.” The bond, in this sense, is the way in which the audience develops a sense of imaginary connection with the media figure.

In this study, the parasocial interaction of fans was measured based on activities a fan engages himself or herself in, with regards to Vice Ganda and KathNiel. These activities include watching programs where they appear, and reading articles about them. These activities were derived from an updated Parasocial Index found in the above-mentioned Laker’s study.

B. Theory of Identification

Burke’s theory of identification posits that humans identify themselves with others by acknowledging shared interests with another (Burke, 1969). An individual’s search for identification through shared interests, attitudes, values, experiences, perceptions and material properties is an opportunity for other seekers to join, or more importantly, to persuade him or her (Quigley, n.d.). In media studies, identification with media figures involves the feelings of affinity, friendship, similarity and liking (Cohen, 2011). The process of identification is not complete without the audience’s rhetoric action which stems from the abovementioned feelings.

‘Identification’, for this study, is measured in how a fan emotionally connects with Vice Ganda and KathNiel through such as TV-watching and reading news about them.

C. Integrated Celebrity Identification Model

The integration of the theories provide an understanding on the persuasive influence of media figures on the audience. Although they overlap with each other, there are distinction. The parasocial interaction theory is only limited to the relationship formed by an individual to a media figure but the theory of identification extends to how this relationship

turns into a persuasion vehicle for the individual to adopt his or her interests, attitudes, values, experiences, perceptions, and material possessions – and act accordingly. The integrated model thus explains how an individual's one-sided relationship with a media figure persuades him/her to alter his/her actions.

D. General Incentives Model

Whiteley and Seyd (1996) introduced the General Incentives Model in the context of membership and active participation in political groups. In essence, it postulates that incentives are needed to ensure political participation.

The model defined two major types of incentives: (1) selective and (2) collective. Under selective incentives are three subtypes: (1) process incentives, (2) outcome incentives, and (3) ideological incentives. Process incentives are when fans participate simply because they find it stimulating and interesting. Outcome incentives are when fans participate to achieve private goals. Ideological incentives, when fans participate to express deeply held beliefs.

Under collectives incentives are also three subtypes: (1) expressive attachment, (2) positive collective incentive, and (3) negative collective incentive. Expressive attachment refers to the loyalty of a fan to his/her group of fans or fandom. Positive incentive, to the belief that they can contribute to improvement, while negative incentive, to the belief that they must oppose a different collective movement.

The study used mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches. It studied the online posts of the fans through content analysis, discovered the motivations of fans and dynamics in fans clubs through focus group discussions, and drew a statistical profile of the fans through an online survey that utilized snowball and accidental sampling.

RESULTS

I. Fan Demographics

The members of the Kathniel and Vice Ganda Facebook groups were mostly 15-year-olds, indicating that the youth have a strong online presence (The Manila Bulletin, 2013). But on average, Vice Ganda fans were older than KathNiel fans by almost a month (Table 1).

Table 1. Average age of respondents

	<i>KathNiel Fans</i>	<i>Vice Ganda Fans</i>
Average age	16.20 years old	16.26 years old

The age of the respondents indicated their educational status. Almost all of the fans of KathNiel (96.2%) and Vice Ganda (92.3%) were currently studying, although the number of Vice Ganda fans who were not enrolled was higher by 4% than KathNiel fans (Table 2).

Table 2. Educational status

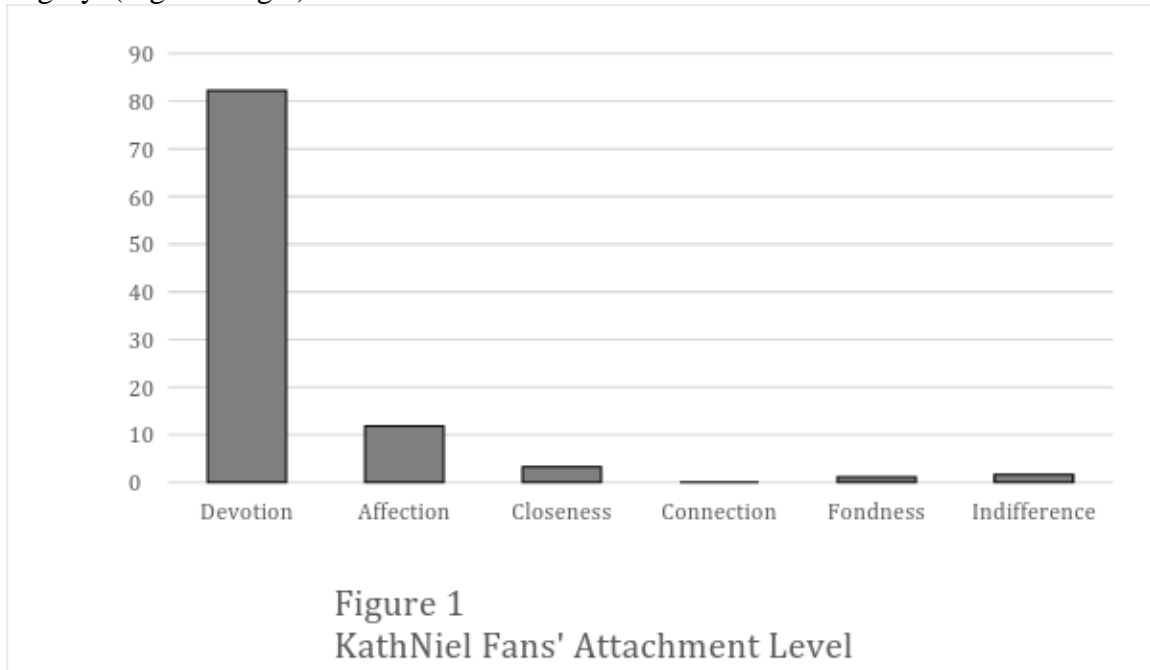
	<i>KathNiel Fans</i>	<i>Vice Ganda Fans</i>
Currently enrolled in school	96.2%	92.3%
Currently not enrolled in school	3.8%	7.7%
Total	100%	100%

II. Fan Expression

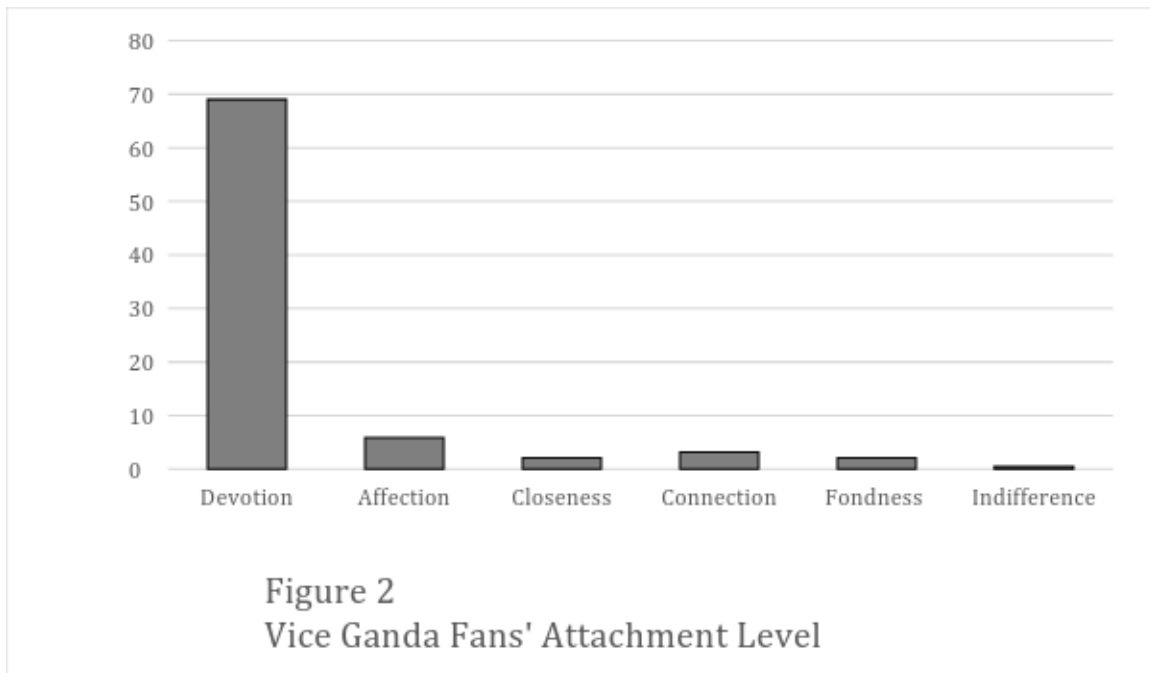
Most of the respondents from the Kathniel Fandom (82.3%) and Vice Ganda Fandom (83.2%) are considered devoted fans. All of the survey respondents from Vice Ganda Fandom in the devotion cluster are students. A college student, who is a participant of the focus group discussion, said that being a student and a fan is difficult because of the limited time and resources. A part-time employee, who is also a participant of the focus group discussion, agreed with the statement and added that having her own income would let her express the support she wants to give to her idol. Moreover, she said that she intentionally went to Manila to find work after finishing high school in the province to see Vice Ganda. To express their love and support for Vice Ganda, participants of the focus group discussion go to mall shows, collect photos, and purchase products endorsed by Vice Ganda.

As for the survey respondents from the KathNiel fandom in the devotion cluster, 81.9% are students. One of the respondents of the KathNiel focus interviews stated that her peers in school influenced her to be an avid fan of the power couple. To support KathNiel, their fans save money from their allowance to buy posters, albums, movie tickets, and go to their mall tours. Furthermore, the respondents see both Kathryn Bernardo and Daniel Padilla as their friend, and one is willing to fight for KathNiel when bashed.

There is no clear distinction between devotion, affection, closeness, connection, fondness, and indifference, aside from the scores assigned. However, the first cluster can be described because of the large number of fans that fall into this category. (Fig 1 & Fig.2).



Note. Devotion 1-1.5, Affection 1.51 -1.99, Closeness 2-2.99, Connection 3-3.99, Fondness 4-4.99, Indifference 5



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Three fan categories named as super fans, normal fans, and little significance fans were produced and differentiated in the frequency of the activities done by a fan for the celebrity they like. The clusters thus show different intensities of fandom.

Data indicate that majority of Vice Ganda fans (55.7%) and Kathniel fans (55.5%), who responded to the online survey, are normal fans (See Table 3). Normal fans, as defined by Rhein (2002), are fans with middle intensity of fandom expression, which means that they prioritize activities around one's fandom with enthusiasm but do not invest large effort in doing so. Normal fans engage in any of the activities mentioned in the figure above, ranging from frequencies of *rarely*, *sometimes* or *often*.

Table 3. Vice Ganda and Kathniel fans' degrees of fandom

Degrees of Fandom	Kathiel Fandom ¹	Vice Ganda fandom ²
Little Significance Fans	22.1 %	23.1 %
Normal Fans	55.5%	55.7%
Super Fans	22.6 %	21.1 %
Total	100%	100%

n¹ = 186 and n² = 156

Researchers took into account activities that fans perform to express fandom participation. The fifteen activities, done by a fan for a celebrity exist along the continuum of consumption and production, range from buying and collecting merchandise of Kathniel or Vice Ganda, watching their shows to writing fan fiction and creating videos about them (see Figure 3).

It is noticeable that both Kathniel and Vice Ganda fans engage more often in activities that are individual in nature. Findings show that Kathniel super fans very often (4.5 to 5) engage in buying CDs, attending concerts and mall tours, organizing fan meetings and watching shows, variety shows and commercials featuring Kathryn Bernardo and Daniel Padilla while Vice Ganda fans rarely (1.5 to 2) attend concerts and fan meetings. These indicate that Kathniel fans are more active in attending face-to-face group activities than Vice Ganda fans.

Vice Ganda super fans, on the other hand, engage more in mediated individual activities. They very often (4.5 to 5) watch content on television, such as shows, variety shows, and commercials featuring Vice Ganda (see Figure 3). Super fans, according to Rhein (2000), are said to be the “center” of the fan culture, their agreement to statements about interactions among fans and reception of information from their fan object is highly positive, and are considered the most active in different events and gatherings related to the fandom. The fans, in general, invest more in consumption than production.

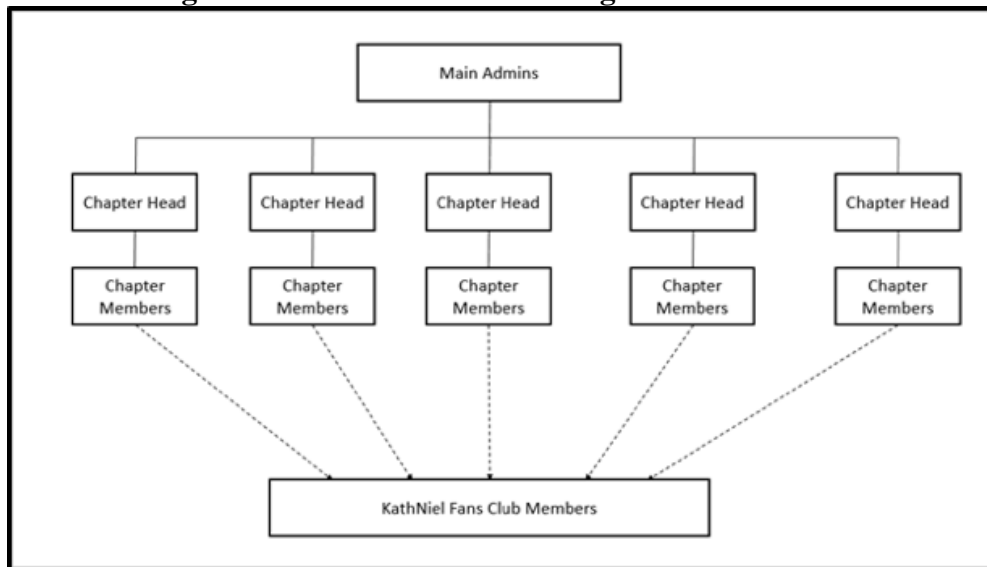
III. Collective Organization as a Fandom

Administrators of KathNiel and Vice Ganda fan clubs (KathNiel Devotees, KathNiel Princesses, and Vice Ganda Fever) were interviewed. However, the KathNiel and Vice Ganda groups analyzed in this section are limited to the affiliations of the informants. Nonetheless, they provide in-depth information of how these groups operate, online and on ground. To analyze and discover the usual contents of their posts. Status updates from January 2012 until March 2015 were randomly drawn from their Facebook pages (facebook.com/vicegandaofficialph and KathNiel, respectively) and Twitter accounts (@vicegandako and @KathNielArmy).

A. KathNiel fans

The KathNiel fans club has a chaptered structure of organization. These fan clubs have an administration branch composed of seven to eight head administrators, and then localized through multiple branches, led by a handler or a chapter head. Due to the sheer size of fan membership -- about 8,000 -- chapters were established. Figure 4 depicts the organizational chart of the fan collective.

Figure 3. Kathniel Fans Club Organizational Chart



Head administrators are assigned to create, oversee, and regulate posts. They are the only ones allowed to post announcements and appreciation messages. There are also chapter administrators, who do the same, although their reach is relatively smaller, and more localized to their respective areas. The head administrator has the task to disseminate information to the chapter heads, and information is then relayed to the local members. Interestingly, these administrators are not compensated financially. For them, the best reward is seeing Kathryn and Daniel appreciate the presents they give: by wearing the shirts they give, eat the chocolates, etc.

The administrators are selected through referrals. Thus, there is no way for an ordinary member to become one unless an existing administrator recognizes the capability of an ordinary member in taking up the responsibility.

The KathNiel fans club is represented by fans from all over the world, with very minimal restrictions -- so long as one is a fan of Kathryn Bernardo and/or Daniel Padilla, then he may be considered as a member, which perhaps explains the large membership of the club.

While there are other networking sites such as Twitter and Instagram, the KathNiel fans club choose to operate mostly on Facebook. This may be because of Facebook's Groups Feature that enables the fans to interact easily. Facebook interaction is the lifeline of these fan clubs. Thus, membership denotes that a member is part of a Facebook group. The channeling of being a fan has already shifted online.

Apparently, a fan club of a chaptered structure, such as these KathNiel fan clubs, is not just one Facebook group; it is a combination of several Facebook groups. Since their organization is broken down into chapters, subgroups are created. Chapter heads create their own Facebook groups exclusive for fans in their area.

In gathering information regarding the activities of Kathryn and Daniel, one member is in contact with a family member, manager, or handler of these artists. In this case, one of the informants was in a close relationship with the mother of Daniel Padilla, upon attending in the same school as Daniel's youngest sister. Hence, the informant was able to gain access to people who work closely with KathNiel. Having said connections also has perks, such as having seats during malls shows and event passes when the pair guests on a show.

The content of fan posts in Facebook and Twitter, which they utilize to air opinions but not to organize, vary. In Twitter, fans typically promote the pair's shows and movies, while in Facebook, fans typically play games started by the group or page administrators.

The most talked about topics of KathNiel fans in their social networking accounts were about the TV serials and movies they made, such as Got to Believe, Princess and I, Crazy Beautiful You, Must Be Love, Pagpag and She's Dating the Gangster (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The KathNiel Vocabulary



For their Facebook fan page, edited pictures of KathNiel, mostly with quotes, are posted. They use the social networking sites to get in touch with other fans and to share their fondness to the teen idols. The discussions mostly revolve around the chemistry of the teens, and their sweet photos together. Fans continue to root for their love team to take a step higher, and be a real-life couple.

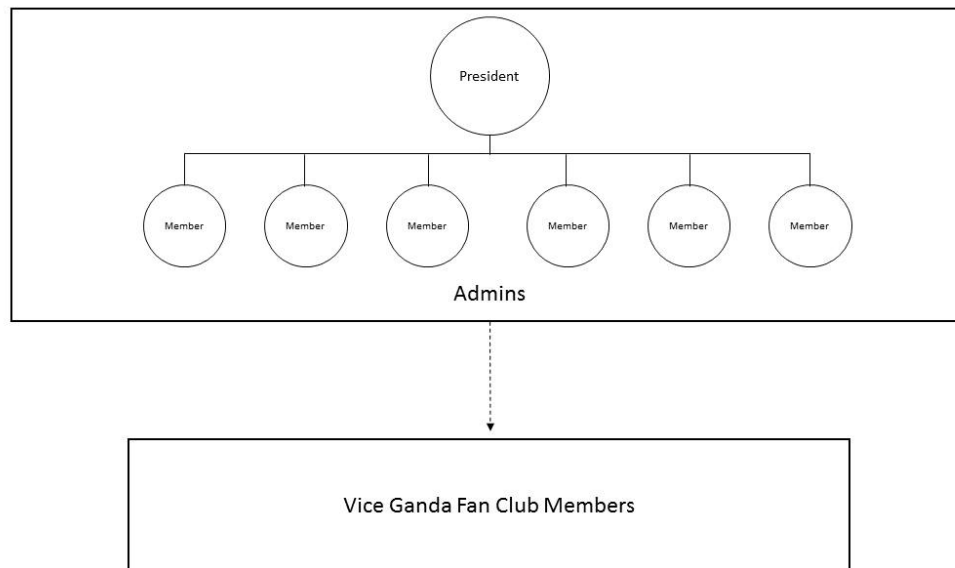
Also, their discussion also include games, such as guess this movie or acquiring the highest number of likes for a post or picture. Their prizes include edited fan signs from KathNiel, and prepaid mobile load.

These interactions are not supervised by the tandem itself. However, fans mention Kathryn Bernardo and Daniel Padilla's twitter accounts to send them greetings or congratulatory messages.

B. Vice Ganda fans

The Vice Ganda fan clubs are classified as centralized in terms of structure. These fan clubs have a single set of administrators overseeing a single group. They have defined positions, such as the President or Head, who leads and decides what the members should do; she is also the person closest to Vice Ganda herself. Under the president are administrators who manage the group activity by regulating comments, and posting announcements. It is interesting that the head administrators of the group, apart from the President, may be changed based on their activity on Facebook. This is probably because the more active a person is online, it somehow shows one's commitment and determination in the delegated tasks. Members are also able to handle the fan clubs' social media accounts, depending on their set schedules. Thus, there is a way for an ordinary member to elevate and become a head administrator. To visualize, Figure 5 exemplifies the organizational chart for the Vice Ganda fan clubs.

Figure 5. Vice Ganda Fever Organization Chart



However, the members also have responsibilities, aside from commenting or liking posts. They are required to pay Php 200 per month to fund their on-ground activities such as block screenings, not only for the movies of Vice Ganda, but also those of her friends, and the various gift items which Vice Ganda willingly posts on her own accounts. There was one instance where the group paid for the block screening of *Crazy, Beautiful You*, starring the KathNiel love team, because the lead actors are close friends of hers. Therefore, the members of these fan clubs also pay importance to the close friends of Vice, as a form of support for Vice Ganda, herself.

The Vice Ganda fan clubs included in this analysis has a small membership size—with only 50 members. This is because the members are meticulously screened through an official questionnaire. The questions include some personal details about Vice Ganda, and the projects she belonged to. The questionnaire serves as the screening process to ensure that aspiring members are willing to commit themselves to the different events organized by the fan clubs or Vice Ganda’s management.

Aside from Facebook, these Vice Ganda fans also use Twitter. As mentioned, those who are the most active on each social media account are assigned to be handlers of each. Therefore, being a member of these Vice Ganda fan clubs also entails membership in online groups. Since their structure is centralized to one administration branch, there is only one Facebook group and Twitter account for the whole fan club.

In terms of propagating information, the president is informed by Vice Ganda’s manager or friend about her activities such as guesting, mall shows, and the like. The president then informs the members through Facebook and Twitter, and oversees the number of attendees as specified by Vice Ganda’s Management.

With about 11 million Facebook likers and more than 5 million followers from all over the world on Facebook and Twitter, respectively, Vice Ganda utilizes her accounts not only to promote activities related to her career, but also to engage closely with her fans and supporters.

Posts commonly include promotion of her television shows, such as the late-night talk show *Gandang Gabi Vice (GGV)*, and *It’s Showtime*, the noontime variety show she co-hosts with a couple of other celebrities. Photo and video teasers are often posted at the start of the week to hype the audience. Come December, Facebook pages are flooded with updates of her movies that are included in the annual Metro Manila Film Festival. Tags related to the movies, such as *#AmazingPraybeytBenjamin* which trended worldwide and the telecast of her concert, *I-Vice Ganda Mo ‘Ko sa Araneta*. The trending list during Sunday nights is also dominated by Vice Ganda, through *GGV* where the featured guests and their funny antics trend not only in the local web, but even worldwide. Words used by Vice Ganda in her shows are also adopted by her *Little Ponies*, a term she coined to call her fans and by the madlang people, or the general audience of *It’s Showtime*. “Unkabogable” denotes one’s undefeatable character, or “boom panis,” that

shows one winning an argument over the other are some of those that are commonly used by fans in their physical and online discourses. These terms however, are purely made up by Vice Ganda herself. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6. The Little Ponies' Vocabulary



Product promotion is also rampant in the said pages. Several times, Starmobile, a phone brand, the famous cola drink, Coca-Cola and doctor-to-the-celebrities Vicki Belo, all of which she has endorsement contracts with, are mentioned in some of her status updates. Hash tags, such as #ShareACoke were also used to trend the said product placements. Both Facebook and Twitter accounts have served as her online diary where she is able to chronicle her daily life in the entertainment industry, as well as her travel experiences as she does one show after the other not only in Ais, but in other continents such as Europe and North America.

As both social networking sites are means of direct communication with Mother Horse, Vice Ganda, fans are eager in replying to status updates made in the said pages. However, it is apparent that Vice Ganda replies to fans on Twitter more often than on Facebook. This is probably because she personally manages her Twitter account, whereas her staff members have access to her official Facebook account. In fact, there was almost no post on Facebook where she replied to the comments of her fans, unlike on Twitter where she actively retweets and replies with enthusiasm to her fans (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Vice Ganda (@vicegandako) retweets



Despite not replying to fans on Facebook, fans still get to interact with each other through a #captionthis activity, where funny photos of Vice Ganda and her friends are posted and the task is simple, fans will comment their own witty captions. Fans are also thrilled whenever Vice Ganda's posts include status containing messages of appreciation, such as thanking the fans for their continuous support, or for the extra efforts they exerted, such as the events they have organized for her. While most of the comments posted are in support of Vice Ganda, as it is expected that moderate and super fans dominate the fan page, bashers or simply put, non-fans can also be found to be posting comments opposing the well-wishers of Vice Ganda. Non-fans who only aim to promote their businesses, such as multi-level marketing companies or online shops are also pervasive in the fan page.

IV. Socio-political involvement of fans

In relation to the discussion about the fandoms' online activity, the researchers asked the question: Do KathNiel and Vice Ganda fans exhibit socio-political interests? To answer this, the researchers analyzed official Facebook accounts to discover content that are potentially inclined towards political and socio-civic activities.

A. KathNiel

As for the KathNiel's Facebook page, fans shared posts about the country's current issues. In Figure 10, the issue about the Filipinos entrusting the Philippines to the Americans became the topic of a discussion in the post's comment box. Even though the number of comments about the issue are not as many as when the topic of the post is about their idols, it is still notable that fans did not just ignore the post but engaged in the discussion by sharing insights.

Regarding elections and voting, one of the fans said that Kathryn Bernardo and Daniel Padilla supported an electoral candidate in Cabanatuan. The interviewee also said that there are fans who actually went there not for the politician but to see their idols. The idols can call the attention of the fans to actually support a person, which in this case, a political candidate. Despite being on in the voting age that time, she was aware that KathNiel was supporting a candidate for elections.

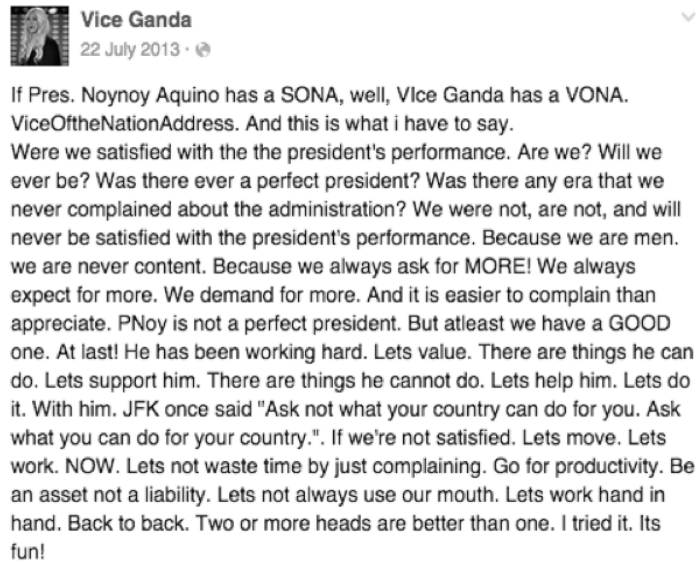
However, when asked if she would be voting someone endorsed by KathNiel, the interviewee emphasized that the decision of voting for a candidate doesn't depend only on KathNiel's influence. There is still the consideration of the politician's performance and records before voting for him or her. Also, KathNiel's support doesn't assure that the fans will also support the politician, there are still fans, who have the consciousness to discern whether the candidate is worth of his or her votes.

B. Vice Ganda

For the Little Ponies, aside from being one of the most popular comedians of today's generation, Vice Ganda is also known to be vocal of her opinions, regardless of the personalities she might be going against. Hence it is not surprising to find posts in her fan page about some political issues, and socio-civic concerns. In some of the status updates, she expressed his support for the current administration, and despite of all the issues the government is facing, she considers the Philippines her home.

In fact, after the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA) in 2013, she posted a message she termed as *Vice of the Nation Address* (VONA), where she expressed about how the citizens may never be content about the performance of the nation's leader, and a call for support for the administration.

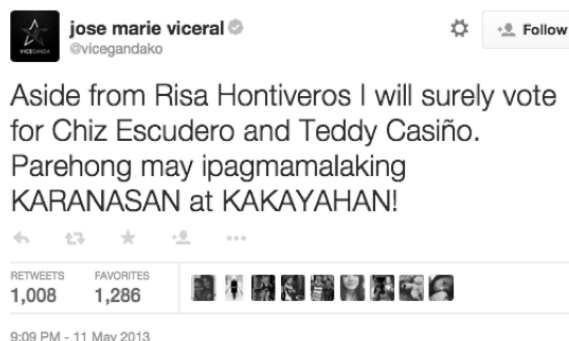
Figure 8. Vice of the Nation Address



There has been many times when Vice Ganda became controversial because of her political opinions. She has been a known critic of then senatorial bet Nancy Binay when she ran for office after having no background in public service. Binay became the topic of jokes and punchlines Vice Ganda says in her shows and interviews. She also had an exchange of tweets with Teddy Casiño about the struggle of the Filipino masses. Incidentally, in the national elections held in 2013, Vice Ganda released a list of senatorial candidates she claimed to support in the elections that were to happen a few days after her status update. While the endorsed candidates expressed their gratitude to her, some Twitter followers, perhaps non-fans, doubted whether she actually voted for the candidates.

Although she is vocal with her opinions, the Little Ponies seem to not reflect this trait of hers. They would express their agreement through comments online, and fans attest that Vice Ganda would not endorse candidates she does not believe in.

Figure 9. Vice Ganda's endorsement of senatorial candidates



Hence, they would likely consider voting personalities Vice Ganda endorses, but there is no clear action from the fans.

However, fans' reaction on the issue on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community seems to be different. Fans claim they are more open-minded and welcoming to members of the group because Vice Ganda is one herself.

The fan page also consists of posts for public service purposes such as publicity materials of emergency hotlines during calamities. Vice Ganda also capitalizes on the idea of "giving back" to those people who support her by inviting them to become guest personalities in her television shows or by publicly giving them gifts such as cellular phones, expensive shoes, and even pet animals. This way, she is able to project herself as seemingly ordinary and human, no different from her other supporters despite the overwhelming affection fans render her. x

CONCLUSION

The expression of being a fan has shifted online. The term "fan club" or "fandom" connotes online activity of the fans since it would be impossible for a fan to be updated with events regarding KathNiel or Vice Ganda without social media accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter. Since beforehand information is very important in attending events, these fan clubs are comparable to stepping stones for being "authentic fans"—attending mall shows and participating in other events.

In terms of structure, there is a difference between the administration style of the KathNiel and Vice Ganda fan clubs. This may be influenced by the number of members each group has. The KathNiel fan clubs that were analyzed have almost 8,000 members while the latter only has 50. Their style of recruitment is also different—the KathNiel fan clubs accepts anyone who chooses to join their group while the Vice Ganda fan clubs has a screening process for its members, identifying which of those who join them are "authentic fans". Compared to KathNiel, their way of identifying "authentic fans" are more observed in events—the administrators present observe their members whether they are more of a fan of Kathryn or vice versa. Nevertheless, it can be observed that both fan clubs has their own way of identifying authentic fans from the non-fans.

The responsibilities of the administrators of the fan clubs are the same for both KathNiel and Vice Ganda: they post announcements and regulate comments of their members. However, they vary in terms of having member responsibilities: the Vice Ganda fan club analyzed requires monetary contributions from their members every month to fund their activities, whereas the former relies more on sponsors—whether it may be brands or individual persons.

Moreover, the upward mobilization of being a fan to being an administrator vary among the KathNiel and Vice Ganda fan clubs. The KathNiel fan clubs do not provide any official means for a member to be promoted as an administrator—only when they know an administrator personally can they have a chance to become administrators themselves. The Vice Ganda fan clubs differ: they really assign schedules to when their members should manage the club's social media accounts, aside from assessing the members' activity on Facebook and Twitter. It can be said that the Vice Ganda fan clubs are more open to division of responsibilities amongst the members, compared to the other. However, their different styles of defining member responsibilities may also be influenced by their membership size.

In terms of online activity, the Vice Ganda fan club also manage Twitter accounts, and the KathNiel fan clubs do not. But in all of these fan clubs, posting of content on their Facebook and Twitter accounts (in the case of the Vice Ganda fan clubs) are only limited to administrators for the purpose of regulation. Thus, there is no way for an ordinary member to post content. This limits an ordinary fan in expressing his or her sentiments online, since all they can do is comment or retweet.

As seen in the Facebook and Twitter accounts of both Vice Ganda and KathNiel, there are times when fans engage in discussions of political issues. When their celebrity idol voices out his/her opinion, there are fans who would comment in agreement to what was said. However, the participation and discussion is not limited to the posts that were made by their idols. Specifically in KathNiel's Facebook page, there is one post about political issues which engaged the fans in discussing their opinions about the issue. The said type of discussion however occurs very seldom, and is still outnumbered by discussions about their idols.

Despite the disconnect between the political issues and the celebrities, what binds the fans together in the discussion is the fandom itself, and the platform they use, the social media that allows them to freely express themselves and engage in active discourses.

The celebrities, Vice Ganda and Kathniel have their own issues that they raise--for Vice Ganda, it is her open opinions about political candidates and her being a part of the LGBT community, while for KathNiel, it is their support for a political candidate in Cabanatuan city. Fans accept the advocacies and political stands their celebrity idols are raising, but it is not sufficient for them to take action for the cause. They are able to consider and evaluate

their choices and steps based on the statements of their idols, but fans still value their individuality. Fans tend to ponder on the stand of their celebrity idols, but the decision on engaging in political or socio-civic activities still lie in the fans.

The study integrated three models: the Celebrity Identification Model, General Incentives Model, and the Symbolic Convergence Theory, in analyzing the relationship between participation in fandoms and political participation. The Celebrity Identification Model is a combination of Parasocial Interaction Theory and Burke's Theory of Identification. This model posits that high parasocial interaction leads to high identification. In the case of KathNiel and Vice Ganda fans, celebrity identification manifests in their ability to place themselves in their idols' shoes given specific circumstances.

Participation in political and socio-civic causes is theorized by the General Incentives Model as incentive-driven. Although there is no overt participation observed in the fans of KathNiel and Vice Ganda, they somehow move beyond conversations about fondness of their celebrity idols to conversations about national issues just as long as their idols are involved. These conversations are situated within a rhetorical community (the fandom itself). Thus, it is an outcome incentive--their personal goal to make their celebrities feel loved.

In retrospect, the celebrity is the central figure to motivate fans in political participation. Future studies could use theories that explore the concept of the fandom as a group, and how group-related initiatives can become catalysts for political participation.

The study has found that fans of a particular celebrity can be engaged in political participation if the celebrity advocates it and it aligns with the convictions of the fan, whether these convictions have been held before the fan liked the celebrity or it has only been inculcated through a strong parasocial relationship.

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