The Dream that Refuses to Come True

- About Internet and its Possibilities to be a Medium for Public Spheres in the Philippines

Stefan Lindblad
ABSTRACT

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The purpose with this thesis is divided. First, it is to examine the online information traffic trends related to political communication and if the Internet is considered to be under surveillance. Second, it is to examine if the Internet can be regarded as a medium for Public Spheres. The thesis only focuses on the Philippines and takes the approach of the Internet users with focus on young Filipinos that are engaged citizens in the society.

The method of the study has been qualitative semi-structured interviews. A total amount of eight interviews have been conducted.

Using Bordewijk’s and Van Kaams model and terminology, the study’s results show that the users exhibit strong allocution and consolation trends but vaguer conversation and registration trends. The Internet was not thought to be under surveillance or monitored. Internet does not work as a medium for creating one holistic, or several smaller, Public Spheres in the Philippines today – foremost due to the harsh Internet environment that for example includes cyber bulling.

Keywords: Internet, Public Sphere, Offentlighet, Jürgen Habermas, Bordewijk, Van Kaam, Trends, Philippines
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Appendix 1

Appendix 2
1 Introduction

In the summer of 2013 a worldwide surveillance debate accelerated when Edward Snowden showed international newspapers how the USA kept a wide range of actors under online surveillance, spanning from the headquarters of the United Nations to specific students in Hong-Kong, with help from their National Security Agency (Dagens Nyheter-Reuters, 2013, 12 June; Svenska Dagbladet, 2013, 12 June).

The news about how the world’s only superpower, the USA, monitored people and organizations was a surprise. Although the debates about laws that give governments larger opportunities for Internet surveillance have been going on regionally and nationally in different parts of the world for years. For example the laws regulating Försvarets Radioansalt (FRA) has become well known and widely debated in Sweden and the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) has created big headlines in several parts of the western societies.

The issue about the surveillance has been debated and questioned in eastern societies as well. For example in the Philippines a new law called the Cybercrime Prevention Act has caused fears of restricted freedom of expression online. Whether the actual Internet surveillance has increased or not is a technical question, but this thesis questions whether the Internet users feel more monitored and questions how the Internet users considers the Internet as a medium with actual or possible free expression – with a focus of the Philippines.

1.1 The Philippines

The Philippines is an island-nation in the southeast Asia that with more than 90 million inhabitants spread over more than 7000 islands. The nation’s history is variegated and includes being a Spanish colony from the 16th century until the 19th century, when it instead became occupied by the USA until the end of the second world war. In the latter part of the 20th century the country has suffered from several authoritarian presidents but since the middle of the 1980s the country has been a relatively strong democracy (Nationalencyklopedin, w.y).

The freedom of expression and freedom of speech is well protected by law. Despite this though, the Philippines is considered to be the world’s most dangerous democratic country to work in for journalists – especially critical journalists on the countryside risk to be attacked and assaulted. In 2009, 32 journalists were executed in a massacre in the southern parts of the country (Regeringskansliet, 2010:7). The international organization Freedom House (2014a) classifies the press in the Philippines as partly free, but the Internet as free. They report that 36 percent of the population can access the Internet and classify the Internet as free since no content, blogs or social media are being blocked (Freedom House, 2014b).

However, the Freedom House mentions the 2012 Cybercrime Prevention Act as somewhat alarming to the Internet freedom. The Cybercrime Prevention Act included several respected elements, such as tackling issues about online identity theft, but it was also widely criticised since it contained a part
about, for example, libel. The law against libel was unclear and raised remarks about the line between criticism and actual libel. The act would also allow the government to monitor private person’s Internet use and therefore fears of censoring and limited Internet freedom arose. People protested in large scales against the law which therefore has not yet been implemented (Freedom House, 2014b).

With this in regard it is interesting to see how the very users of the Internet in the Philippines considers the Internet today.
2 Theoretical Framework

This study initially questions which information traffic trends on the Internet that can be distinguished amongst the Internet users and if the Internet works as a medium for free political communication, and in extension if the Internet is a medium for a Public Sphere. However, to be able to define the research questions – and answer them – this section will present theories and previous studies that the latter sections rely upon.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This thesis will derive its theoretical framework basically from two theoretical models – firstly from Jan L. Bordewijk and Ben van Kaam’s model about information traffic trends and secondly from Jürgen Habermas’ theory about the Public Sphere - although with some related theories from the early 1990s about the Internet and its relation to the Public Sphere.

2.1.1 Information and Communication trends

To understand if the people feel monitored and if they de facto do communicate about political issues online Jan L. Bordewijk’s and Ben van Kaam’s 1986 information trend model may be helpful. In 1986, Bordewijk and Van Kaam stated that “Tele-information systems, based on an alliance of digital telecommunication and computer technology, will play an increasingly important role in inter-human communications. They are in fact ready to enter almost every area of human communication activity” (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:576).

They also discuss how the new technology may promote democracy by offering more information, but also how the new technology then will earn a very strong power that they mean may lead to a surveillance society where the individual has no privacy at all. With this in retrospect, they offer a model that classifies the information traffic patterns from “social power relations” (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:576).

2.1.1.1 Allocution

The first trend presented is the one where the information is given from a centre to individuals; this is called the allocution trend. The provider is in charge of the information in the allocution trend and decides when and which parts of the information the consumers will get. There might be some space for feedback, but it is most often very limited (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:576f).

2.1.1.2 Conversation
The second information traffic trend distinguished in the model is the conversation pattern. The conversation pattern holds at least two actors, possible more. On quite equal terms they both own the information and the handling of it. Often, the conversation trend is based on an “information service centre”, located in between the actors, this may very well be some kind of medium such as the telephone (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:577f).

2.1.1.3 Consultation

The third trend, consultation, holds that there is an information service centre who owns all the information but that the information service consumer decides which information to take part of and when. Examples of the consultation trend would be most newspaper reading but also when one is consulting an expert per telephone or looking something up at the computer (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:578f).

2.1.1.4 Registration

In the fourth and last information traffic pattern, the centre’s task is not to provide information – but instead to gather it. Examples of this trend are opinion polling by telephone or civil registration centres. The task may not only be to collect the information, but also to process it (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:579f).

In the registration trend, the consumers own the information but the provider decides when and what information it wants. The registration trend is the very opposite to the consultation trend (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:580).

Denis McQuail claims that the opportunities for the registration trend to occur have become much more likely due to the growth of computers (McQuail, 2010:147).

2.1.2 Habermas’ Public Sphere

The second theory that will be presented in this thesis is Jürgen Habermas’ idea about the Public Sphere, that includes important elements such as free communication and therefore can be useful to define and understand the concerns about freedom of speech and expression online.

Habermas gathers central values for his theory in earlier works from, for example, Immanuel Kant.

“Certainly one may say, ‘Freedom to speak or write can be taken from us by a superior power, but never the freedom to think!’ But how much, and how correctly, would we think if we did not think as it were in common with others, with whom we mutually communicate” (Immanuel Kant in Habermas, 1989:104).
A Public Sphere according to Habermas is a sphere where private and autonomic individuals can discuss and debate matters concerning their own life situation without any limitations from authorities (Habermas, 1989:27) – it is a social constructed network where individuals can express themselves in the subject of politics (Habermas, 1996:360). As the quote above states – communication and debate is thought of in Habermas’ theory as something essential for the conciseness and life of a citizen.

Up until the 17th century there was a lack of Public Spheres in history since people were not able to debate freely, that was a benefit only accessible to authorities of different kinds (Habermas, 1989:7ff). Despite this, in the 17th century a Public Sphere started to evolve, although it eroded already in the 18th century (Habermas, 1989:140).

2.1.2.1 The Private Sphere and the Public Sphere

A central part in the understanding of Habermas’ theory about the Public Sphere is the difference between the Public Sphere and the private sphere.

The private sphere is the parts of life that involve private consumption, work and the family (Habermas, 1989:30). In the private sphere everyone was considered to be self-ruling individuals that could chose whichever paths one wanted in order to find a good life (Habermas, 1989:107).

The Public Sphere consisted upon these self-governing individuals who came together to discuss and debate different issues (Habermas, 1989:51).

Laws such as freedom of speech, expression and opinion safeguarded the Public Sphere while laws that guaranteed equality in front of the law, equality to vote and protection of personal freedom safeguarded the private sphere (Habermas, 1989:83).

2.1.2.2 The Institutions and Media of the Public Sphere

The most important institutions, or meeting-places, for the Public Sphere were coffeehouses in England and salons in France. These meeting places differed from each other in style and size and were visited by citizens of all kinds but had in common that they all provided private persons to debate, no matter of their status (Habermas, 1989:36). Habermas writes “sons of princes and counts associated with sons of watchmakers and shopkeeper” (Habermas, 1989:33).

The coffeehouses became so many that the only way to keep a functional relation among them was through journals of different kinds, such as the Tatler or the Guardian. Among other topics these journals wrote about culture, moral issues, education, tolerance and gambling – which was read by the citizens and later discussed in the coffeehouses (Habermas, 1989:42f). Habermas writes that “The public that read and debated this sort of thing read and debated about itself” (Habermas, 1989:43).

The relationship between the journals' authors and the public was equal and based on
communication (Habermas, 1989:50). The press also stimulated the citizens to “seek after truth”, which they would later debate and present to the power holders (Habermas, 1989:101). Since writings coordinated the Public Sphere, but also presented the public opinion to state authorities, it was an extremely important medium to the Public Sphere (Habermas, 1989:30).

Fundamental for the journals to work as a medium for the Public Sphere was freedom from censorship, which had been a fact in England since the middle of the 17th century (Habermas, 1989:58). In the press’ early days it served authorities and therefore was not a tool for the Public Sphere, this changed when the press developed and critical journals arose that served the general citizens (Habermas, 1989:16ff). Another fundamental part for the written word to work as a medium to the Public Sphere was that more people learned how to read, which happened around the turn of the 17th century (Habermas, 1989:23).

2.1.2.3 The Public Opinion

Habermas describes the debates in the Public Sphere as rational and critical. The debates’ aims were to transform the different private arguments into a consensus about what was needed for the society and public as a whole (Habermas, 1989:83). The public opinion thus refers to the opinions reached through debates in the coffeehouses and that were expressed in the press (Habermas, 1989:98).

Liberal theorists have often taken a less optimistic view about the public opinion and regarded it more as a force to reach consensus, rather than as a critical and rational element in the society (Habermas, 1989:182ff).

2.1.2.4 The Descent of the Public Sphere

When capitalism became more organized it also affected the media-institutions. The newspapers became stock companies that were advertiser-financed with economic interest rather than to foremost be focused on serving the public (Habermas, 1989:177ff). This would lead to that the papers lost their trustworthiness with diminished opportunities for a rational-critical debate – instead the newspaper risked to manipulate the public opinion. Consequently the very important medium of the Public Sphere disappeared and caused the Public Sphere to erode (Habermas, 1989:163).

The insight into public affairs also diminished. Habermas claims that even the debates in the parliament are only a part of a structure nowadays – without any aim to reach an agreement or persuade the opposition. The real political matters are instead solved behind closed doors (Habermas, 1989:205).

Media such as the television and radio contributed to diminish the Public Sphere since they do not offer any way to interact or response to its contents (Habermas, 1989:170). Instead of debating what they read, people listened to other people debating on the television or radio (Habermas, 1989:64).

Habermas also describes how the state developed new institutions that took over social and
political functions that earlier had been associated with the Public Sphere’s institutions (Habermas, 1989:32). Large enterprises would supply elements that had earlier belonged to the private sphere, for example homes and cultural experiences (Habermas, 1989:153ff).

And at the same time private persons could be delegated public tasks. Therefore, the private and Public Spheres disappeared and were substituted by one “social sphere” (Habermas, 1989:142).

### 2.1.2.5 A Further Theory About the Public Sphere

Habermas’ theory has been widely used and discussed since he presented it. Of course, it has also been broadly criticised. This has lead Habermas to develop his theory.

In the developments Habermas still claims that there are not any private and holistic Public Spheres today as earlier – but instead suggests that a strong civil society can create several “liberal” Public Spheres that are accessible to common people. Although these Public Spheres do not have the same power as in the 18th century since they do not pass the barriers into the power holders’ debates to the same extent as in the 18th century (Habermas, 1996:371f).

The Public Spheres of today can be regional or international and are often gathered around specific topics or subcultures – such as the environment or a special religion (Habermas, 1996:373ff). About Public Spheres on the Internet Habermas points out that “The publics produced by the Internet remain closed off from one another like global villages” (Habermas in Curran et al., 2012:168).

### 2.1.3 Internet as a Medium Affecting the Public Sphere

Even if Habermas is critical towards a holistic Public Sphere enabled by the Internet other theorists set high hopes in the beginning of the 1990s on the Internet as a medium that would affect the elements of the Public Sphere in a positive way (Curran et al., 2012:3ff).

Theorists thought that Internet would create a new type of democracy that would remove sovereign leaders by empowering the citizens through enabling free communication and access to information. The communication and dialogue would also create a better global understanding and therefore be a tool for peace. Moreover, it would be an equalizer since private persons of different kinds as well as different sized companies would be on the Internet on the same terms (Curran et al., 2012:3ff). Free and equal communication are obviously core elements of the Public Sphere, as described above.

The communication would be freer since traditional media’s gatekeepers would not be present and since everyone could discuss news, with each other and with the news author (Curran et al., 2012:18f). To that, censorship would be harder to put in practice on the Internet compared to traditional media. Out of these presumptions theorists claimed that Internet would create a large international Public Sphere where an international public opinion could be created (Curran et al., 2012:8ff).

The Internet offers forums, such as different social media that may have several millions active
users where there is possibilities to discuss, share information and find others with similar interests and ideas (Curran et al., 2012:123). In spite of this, it has been showed that it is harder for individuals to be heard in the social media compared to large companies (Curran et al., 2012:134). There is often a clear bias in the ones who are producing material – for example 10 percent of the Twitter users create percent of the content (Curran et al., 2012:124). This indicates a rather unequal relationship. The people getting heard is most often highly educated and seldom wish to change the news agenda (Curran et al., 2012:138); the traditional media still dominate the agenda concerning political issues (Curran et al., 2012:180f). The Internet – and social media especially – is instead mostly about self-expression and entertainment where the users show little hope or effort to change society as such (Curran et al., 2012:180f).

Since there is not any accordance on the Internet, Currant et al. questions how fragmented and small, sometimes oppositional, assemblies could work in synergy towards a public opinion and remind that the Internet may as well lead to disagreements as to consensus (Curran et al., 2012:166ff).

To that, governments have found ways to control the Internet and mark or censor critics if they wish to do so. Curran et al. writes that “in many parts of the world people cannot, without fear, interact and say what they want to online” (Curran et al., 2012:11). Even if Internet regulation seldom is achieved through direct censorship or control it can still be achieved through outsourcing the regulation to Internet providers and such (Curran et al., 2012:103).

The authors claim that the theorists of the 1990s and forward often miss to take a society’s structures and practises into account (Curran et al., 2012:179). They also stress the fact that a medium such as the Internet does not have to lead to better, more equal, discussions just because it is possible (Curran, 2012:169).

### 2.2 Previous studies

Much research has been done about whether the Internet promotes a Public Sphere or not, although the focus has basically been on a macro scale level or on technological matters. Research about Internet trends is somewhat harder to find and is also foremost focused on macro scale levels. The studies about Public Spheres are foremost tackling Europe whilst the studies about information trends are somewhat more global. Both these types of studies are altogether foremost qualitative in their character.

#### 2.2.1 Information and Communication Trends

In *Web-use Patterns for Civic Discourse* Undrahbuyan Baasanjav has written about different communication and interactive trends on civic webpages in Mongolia with the aim to understand the role that Internet plays for the political and social civil life and how Internet can be a democratic force (Baasanjav, 2011:592).
Baasanjav uses a wide theoretical framework and for example discusses Habermas’ Public Sphere (Baasanjav, 2011:593), as well as Van Kaam’s and Bordewijk’s information traffic model (Baasanjav, 2011:596). Baasanjav has used a quantitative method and completed content analysis of 157 webpages in his study (Baasanjav, 2011:597).

Baasanjav’s findings are that allocution was the most obvious trend, thereafter consolation, conversation and lastly registration (Baasanjav, 2011:599). Organizations connected to the government were more likely to follow the allocution-trend (Baasanjav, 2011:601). Baasanjav claims that Mongolian organizations adopted the Internet into their already established social routines and that the web reflects the traditional media. This means that there are strong trends of allocution and consultation, but much weaker trends of conversation and registration (Baasanjav, 2011:602-603).

In the study ICTs in political engagement among youth in the Philippines, Clarissa David present her research originating from unstructured individual and group interviews about how Filipino youths’ political engagement and citizenship can be considered to have changed and developed when new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have entered their lives (David, 2013:323-326).

David doesn’t use Van Kaam’s and Bordewijk’s trend model as Bassanjav but instead discusses theories such as Lippman’s – and later Price’s – idea about mass engagement and public opinions (David, 2013:323). However, David writes that the Filipino political leaders and government uses ICTs to communicate with citizens (David, 2013:325). She also finds that her interview persons foremost use the Internet as a tool for networking, finding information and entertainment but also for following local news – mostly about famous people, fashion and sports (David, 2013:328). If Van Kaam’s and Bordewijk’s trend model would be applied on David’s results it is likely that conversation would have been the most visible trend followed by a consolation trend. Nevertheless, her research says little about the allocution and registration trends.

In a third study called People’s media and communication rights in Indonesia and the Philippines Ubonrat Siriyuvasak compares Indonesia and the Philippines in aspects of communication rights and communication developments through interviews and literature studies examining both countries’ media history (Siriyuvasak, 2006:259).

Siriyuvasak does not discuss Van Kaam’s and Bordewijk’s trend model either but instead discusses different theories about alternative media’s social empowering and political impact on citizens (Siriyuvasak, 2006:246). However, he distinguishes a different kind of trend by saying that “There is a shifting of roles, a constant reversal and spiral of cycles that empower and extend the communication rights of the people” and “Obviously, if people’s media continue to grow and advance in this direction they would be a real threat to the media industry” (Siriyuvasak, 2006:259).

What Siriyuvasak refers to is the “people’s media”. People’s media differs from traditional mainstream media since it is “mostly small, independent, non-commercial and non-profit” (Siriyuvasak, 2006:145). Siriyuvasaks presents how media in both Indonesia and the Philippines long served political or commercial goals and were heavily censored, until the people’s media grew strong and the traditional gatekeepers were avoided,
something he thus believes can continue to be a strong media trend in Indonesia and the Philippines (Siriyuvasak, 2006:256-258).

2.2.2 The Internet as a Public Sphere?

In his doctoral thesis *Offentlighetens nya rum* Lars Ilshammar describes the Public Sphere as a place free from both governmental control and commercial control, where citizens can discuss matters and form decisions, but also where politicians are legitimized and can be held to their promises. His aim with his thesis is to examine how the Public Sphere has changed in Sweden from 1969 to 1999. His focus is basically to examine what have been the driving forces or actors to the change (Ilshammar, 2002:16). Ilshammar’s method has been foremost qualitative, since he has studied accurate literature and conducted interviews (Ilshammar, 2002:55).

Ilshammar, just like Baasanjav, uses Habermas' theory about the Public Sphere but also relies on theories that captures the more technological elements of the changes in the Public Sphere (Ilshammar, 2002:33).

Ilshammar claims that the Public Sphere in Sweden has decreased during the period he examines, despite new technologies that – in theory – should have flourished the democracy and Public Sphere. This paradox is the core focus in Ilshammars study (Ilshammar, 2002:16).

His results are that the politicians and experts seldom have problematized the development of Information Technology (IT) and that they rather have seen their decisions and adjustments as naturally required due to the technology’s needs. Since the political view has been that IT questions are unproblematic IT has been developed without any discussion or input from the public itself (Ilshammar, 2002:307-308).

Ilshammar also concludes that the Internet is a weak Public Sphere, mainly because the support for the political system that legitimate the Public Sphere has decreased whilst at the same time the access to the Public Sphere has been made tougher because commercial and private technological tools have excluded citizens to access IT due to economic or geographical reasons (Ilshammar, 2002:310f).

The Internet is not based on the idea of citizenship where everybody should have access, but instead of principles of the economic market. This, Ilshammar claims, means that the IT is a commercial Public Sphere where economic recourses is regarded as more important than the social and political rights (Ilshammar, 2002:311). Ilshammar means that the state has taken less responsibility for the access and insight to the Public Sphere when IT is regarded (Ilshammar, 2002:312).

Relevant to Ilshammar’s results and the Internet as a Public Sphere is the result of Clarissa David’s study, mentioned above. David (2013:323) writes that “dramatic drops in the cost of access and hardware have broken down many barriers to entry”, about cell phones and the Internet, but that the broken barriers have not lead uninterested persons to participate in the debate if they consider the society to be corrupt or non-working (David, 2013:335). What is more, she claims that Filipino youth consider online expressions as a
political act and that they use ICTs to gather attention – foremost from politicians, friends and other traditional media, such as the press (David, 2013:330-331). To express yourself online is considered a political statement since it is a way of trying to build an opinion that would challenge the local politicians or government. Also, through ICTs, persons living in the periphery can be more engaged and influenced (David, 2013:330). To express yourself politically online is one of the core assumptions for using the Internet as a Public Sphere and thus relevant here.

2.3 Theoretical Framework Conclusion

In this theoretical framework theories, and previous studies, about Internet trends and Internet in relation to the Public Sphere has been presented.

The theoretical framework has presented the original theories concerning the Information traffic trends and the Public Sphere and also more developed and modern thoughts about the Public Sphere.

The previous studies showed strong trends of allocation, consolation and conversation online, but not that strong registration trends. The previous studies also showed that the Internet by automatic does not lead to a Public Sphere.

I am going to use the previous studies to discuss and compare my results in the analysis. The theory about information traffic trends will be used to distinguish which trends the Internet users exhibits. This can tell if there is a lot of communication or a strong registration trend – that is, if the people feel monitored. To understand how the possibilities for a free political communication work on the Internet I intend to use the different elements of the Public Sphere theory to analyse the results.

By using the theory in this way I will at the same time see if the theories are applicable on the Internet today.
3 Purpose

3.1 Problem Discussion

The previous studies show that research very seldom take the user’s perspective when trends or the Public Sphere is examined – instead the focus is often on a macro-level, concerning organizations or structures in the society – like the above mentioned Baasanjav, Ilshammar and Siriyuvasak. No one really examines what the users they are talking about think themselves. When the research takes the user’s perspective it more often relates to the total patterns of the individual web-use, like David’s study mentioned above. The questions of the factors behind the web-use, though, are often lacking.

For example Clarissa David states that Filipino youth considers it to be a political act to share expressions online (David, 2013:330), however it is unclear if people actually do express themselves and thus act political. Since the Philippines is regarded the world’s most dangerous democratic country to work in for a journalist (Regingskansliet, 2010:7) it would not be very intangible to suspect that there may be a “soft fear” to express “too” critical views, as mentioned in theory (Curran et al., 2012:11).

It would be a harsh conclusion to state that it does not really matter if society’s structures and laws show that a Public Sphere is fully possible, if you do not know the opinions and regards of the medium’s users. However, it is an important thing to keep in mind since the medium’s users are the ones who are creating possible Public Spheres.

While previous studies have claimed that the ICTs rather have decreased the Public Sphere in European countries (Ilshammar, 2002:16), where the traditional media have been quite objective, there is no comparison to how the Internet may have had impact on the Public Sphere in a country like the Philippines – where the traditional media have been very biased (Siriyuvasak, 2006:258).

3.2 Purpose

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine the users’ opinions about Internet trends and on the Internet as a medium for creating Public Spheres, amongst society interested Filipino youth. The purpose is also to investigate the Public Sphere online in a country outside Europe.

3.3 Research Questions

1. According to the Filipino youth, which online information and communication trends can be distinguished? Is the Internet thought to be under surveillance?

2. Do the Filipino youth regard the Internet as a place with free, equal communication? How is the
relation compared to traditional media?

3. According to the Filipino youth, can the Internet be regarded as medium for creating Public Spheres in the Philippines today?

### 3.4 Delimitations

Internet is a meta-medium and includes functions and contents on a very wide scale. Despite this I will not focus on special parts of the Internet in this thesis, because I do not want to miss out on something that may be relevant to a Public Sphere. By doing so the interview persons themselves will be able to associate freely to what can be regarded as Public Spheres. For example someone might comment a lot on newspapers articles online, while someone else is debating a lot in social media while a third person may be a blogger.

With this thesis I do not wish to generalize about youth, the Philippines or anything else. I do not wish to say that Public Spheres online exist or declare it dead. I simply want to understand the perceived online trends and the opinions about the possibilities to create Public Spheres online in today’s Filipino society.
4 Method

In this chapter the collection of data, analysis of data and ethical reflections will be presented. The method, and the thesis’ dependability and conformability, will be further discussed in chapter 7, Discussion.

4.1 Collection of Data

The data that this study relies upon has been gathered through qualitative individual semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview means that the interview is centred around some core topics, but that the interview is open to follow-up questions (Dalen, 2007:31). These kinds of interviews are good for exploring and understanding the informants themselves and also their opinions about specific matters (Östbye et al., 2004:41; Dalen, 2007:11) and therefore it is a suitable method for this thesis.

4.1.1 Interviews

An important element of the semi-structured interview is the interview guide that presents the core themes (Östbye et al., 2004:103); this study’s interview guide is attached as appendix 2. The interview guide is structured so that it starts with more general questions and then focused on the most central areas, which is recommended (Dalen, 2007:31). Before the interview session began the interview guide was tested in a pilot interview and thereafter modified. The interview guide has been used as a support in the interviews to guarantee that all information that is needed for the study has been gathered in every interview. However, all questions have not been asked in all interviews, since follow questions may already have given the information to some questions in the interview guide. Thus, the interview guide has to some extent instead been used as a checklist to make sure that nothing has been missed in the interviews.

The language used in the interviews was English. English was not the author’s nor the interview persons’ first language – but everyone spoke and understood the language well. Since English is not the mother tongue it may have limited the possibilities for a more nuanced expression to some extent.

Although, the choice of English eluded the usage of an interpreter.

The author has a different ethnicity and comes from a different culture compared to the interview persons. This may have had some impact on the interviews. To narrow this impact down as much as possible the author has tried to keep an open and attentive approach and a low profile and instead let the interview persons talk as much as possible.

A total amount of eight interviews have been conducted, the pilot interview excluded. After about six interviews the result started to be recurrent and after eight interviews the result was considered saturated.

The interviews were made in solitary between November 25, 2013 and December 8, 2013 and each
interview lasted between 25 to 50 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed, but during the interviews shorter notes were also taken.

4.1.2 Sample

The persons interviewed in this study were all participating in a scholarship-program for young adults who want to develop their leadership skills and become society leaders. In the way that they are interested in society and want to be future leaders it is interesting to see how they think about using the Internet in their leader or citizen role – as a medium for debating and discussing. A total amount of approximately 50 persons between 18 and 22 are granted this scholarship-program. In the program they are divided into ten teams. The participants in this study were chosen from different teams so that the risk for too similar opinions would decrease – the sample was thus strategic (Esaiasson et al., 2009:179).

The very niched sample was chosen since the core of this thesis concerns political communication – something that this sample is more likely to be able to relate to compared to the general youth. The sample has affected the study to a large extent, although foremost in a positive way. Instead of leaving questions unanswered the interview persons have been able to give insightful and relevant information related to the thesis’ topic – even if their scholarship program does not handle this thesis’ specific questions.

That young people were chosen was foremost because they are the future, and therefore it is interesting to see what opportunities, and obstacles, they identify. To that, the young people of today have grown up with ICTs and they can therefore be thought of as having a more integrated relation to it, which make them not focusing on the history of the ICTs but on the accurate statuses of them.

All participants were between 18 and 22 years old and are also university students. Three men and five women were interviewed. The participants that were asked to participate accepted to do so and therefore the drop-out rate is zero.

4.1.3 Choice of Country

This study has been conducted in the Philippines and only focus on that country. To do this study in the Philippines is very interesting for several reasons.

The Philippines is – as mentioned – recognized as the world’s most dangerous democratic country to work as a journalist in (Regeringskansliet, 2010:7). To see if the Internet has helped to create a less dangerous forum than the traditional press is therefore interesting. At the same time, it is a country with a different culture from Europe and therefore it is interesting to understand differences in opinions compared to the western society where most research about the Public Sphere have been conducted.
4.2 Analysis of Data

The Interviews were as mentioned above recorded and later transcribed. Thereafter the material were coded according to the themes in the interview-guide and to what the participants of the study talked about. The analysis is structured according to the three research questions. The analysis builds upon the theories but also reflects and relates to the previous studies.

Of course, the results may be interpreted in different ways. To give the readers of this thesis the opportunity to judge how correct and fair the interpretation is the results and analysis have been given different chapters. By doing so the reader may do his or her own analysis and then judge if this thesis’ analysis seems fair. The author has also tried to keep a tight focus on the theoretical framework to guarantee a fair interpretation of the results.

In the interpretation the different ethnicity and culture between the interview persons and author may also have had some influence. Keeping a close relation to the theoretical framework in the analysis and trying not to put values into the interpretation have helped to minimize the impact of different ethnicity and cultures.

4.3 Ethical reflections

To guarantee a good ethical basis the information, consent, confidentiality and use requirements are often discussed (Östbye et al., 2004:126). The information requirement means that the participants in a study shall be given information about the study and its purpose. The consent requirement refers to the fact that all participants in a study participate out of their own free will and that they may discontinue from the interview whenever they want. The confidentially requirement says that the participants shall have the right to be anonymous if they wish to be so and also that the data they contribute to only shall be handled by the author or researcher of the study. The use requirement, lastly, means that there is a scientific use of the data and research and that it shall not be used for commercial purposes.

All interviews started with a shorter presentation of the thesis’ purpose and of the participant’s entitlements, such as being able to discontinue from the interview and study if they wished to do so. Thereafter the participants were asked to read and sign a standardised Consent Form found on the Internet (Boston University, w.y), which is attached as appendix 1. In the Consent Form this information was also given, thus the information and consent requirements are incorporated in this study.

The Consent Form also promises anonymity. Therefore, information that can identify the interview persons, such as their names or the name of the scholarship program they participated, is not mentioned in this thesis. Since the participants may know each other, their quotes are not signed so that they shall not be able to identify each other. For example, if one participant understands who have said one quote, the same participant cannot figure out which else quotes come from that other person. The data gathered has only been accessible to the author. Thus, the confidentially requirement is incorporated in this study.
All participants were also given the opportunity to write down their email-addresses so that they can take part of the thesis when it is finished, so that they can recognize its use. The data, and the thesis, has also contributed to the science and the data has not been accessible to anyone else. Thus, the use requirement is also incorporated in this study.
5 Results

The results’ main headings reflect the three research questions. However, the second headings under these three main headings captures the information that came up during the interviews. It is worth noticing that information under one main heading may be relevant to the other research questions as well. However the information is only mentioned at one time in this section but later analysed every time relevant in the Analysis section.

5.1 Information and Communication Trends

5.1.1 Contrasts in the use of Traditional Media and the Internet

All interviews started with that the participants in the study were asked to describe their media use habits, with a focus on traditional media (defined as TV, radio, newspapers) and the Internet.

The results showed that none of them used the radio regularly, one person used it to listen to music every once in a while and another person if a storm or something alike was occurring.

Television was used relatively frequently more, although three persons did not watch it at all. The other five persons watched it from two times a week to everyday. The purpose of the TV-use was foremost leisure and entertainment, although two persons emphasized the news value as well.

Newspapers were the most used medium of the traditional media. Only two participants did not read newspapers at all. One of the participants read it approximately twice a month and the other five participants read it on a weekly basis – at least four times a week. The purpose of reading newspapers was foremost to scan news. Several of the participants said that they were encouraged by their professors at the university to read newspapers, with a special focus on news concerning their majoring subjects.

All participants used the Internet on an every day basis, basically on the computer but some of the participants also used it on their smartphones, but only occasionally. Not all participants had Internet access at home, but the ones who did not would use the Internet at their university or go to Wi-Fi spots.

The Internet was used for several different purposes. All participants but one read news online, one participant motivated it with the fastness of the news online by saying “They send notifications about news even before it’s printed”. A majority of the participants highlights that they use the Internet to read news in their majoring subjects online as well.

Other purposes for using the Internet were leisure and social interaction. All participants high lightened the importance of the Internet as a place to interact socially and most of the participants also mentioned the importance of the Internet as a tool to educational purposes. About the Internet one participant said that “That’s where I read news, listen to music, meet my friends and (paus), we have online meetings, so that’s where I do my job, my extra activity”.
5.1.2 Credibility Online

The opinions about whether the Internet could provide more credible information than the traditional Media differentiated among the participants. Although when asked where they would search for information about a political issue, most participants answered that they would look for it at the Internet.

Some of the participants said that the information on Internet is credible since the information may come straight from the sources – since organizations and different actors can create their own webpages if they wish to. One participant thought the opposite of this matter and preferred not to get first-hand-information but instead read several articles about a matter – this to avoid seeing only the organization’s own opinions in different matters.

When comparing smaller and independent news outlets online to traditional media several participants raised remarks about that the information online easily can be manipulated and that traditional media were more credible. This since the traditional media due to larger resources and connections can interact directly with different sources and thus get the right information without manipulation. On the other hand, the participants also said that newspapers and traditional media often were very biased and that they easily could find more neutral information online. Several participants emphasised the independent online news outlet rappler.com, which they trusted very much.

5.1.3 Surveillance Online

All but one participant had heard about the Filipino Cybercrime Prevention Act but no one was familiar with the topic of the American National Security Agency (NSA) topic.

Regarding the Cybercrime Prevention Act, one participant said that “I think people feel more limited. That it builds a fear on the part of the writers that they might say something that’s against the act”. Most participants were afraid that it would lead to limitations of the freedom of expression, but few thought that it actually had and rather thought that citizens had become angered by the law rather then frightened to express themselves.

When met with the question if the participants thought that anyone collected information about their web use or watched their online activity, all but one participant said no. They motivated this with foremost two reasons, that they were invisible compared to the other Internet users and that the Philippines would lack the technology to collect information about someone else’s web use.

The participant who thought it was possible that someone collected web use information said that “I’ve heard about one webpage that, when certain individuals go to certain webpages, they sell that information to different companies”.

5.2 Free and Equal Communication Online
5.2.1 Online Interaction and News

Although news was read online widely, few of the participants used the function to comment on the news or contact the journalist. Only two of the participants had ever commented on news articles online and the one that had commented most times had done it three times. Several of the participants had shared articles they thought were interesting in social media.

Sharing news in the social media was regarded as poorly successful concerning interaction from others and most participants gave a rather unenthusiastic expression about sharing news online. For example one participant said that “I have shared articles, for example about the pork barrel. But I do not think people noticed it, a lot of people shared it”. However, several participants said that they shared articles online, but then talked about them to friends when they met physically, face to face.

Only one of the participants said that sharing news online lead to a discussion or comments: “It leads to a short discussion on what I share. For example I post something about a national concern that people would like, repost or (paus), put some comments there of agreement or disagreement. And it’s really nice to get their (paus), peoples opinions and ideas about special public concerns, that’s descanting from my opinions. It’s good.”

5.2.2 Political Journalism – in Traditional Media and Online

Two questions that were asked in the interviews were whether it was dangerous to be a political newspaper journalist in today’s Philippines, and similarly if it was dangerous to be a political writer or political blogger online.

Seven out of the eight participants thought it was dangerous to be a political newspaper journalist in the Philippines today, some to a larger extent than others.

The eighth participant thought that it was all right to be a political journalist in the northern parts of the Philippines but were more doubtful towards the southern part of the country where, for example, a journalist massacre that killed 32 journalists occurred in 2009.

One of the participants said that “I think it’s always dangerous to be a political media person, but (paus), it also involves courage. To be a political media person in the Philippines – we usually do not focus on being scared or about safety, but on the courage it brings. It will not make a person weak but strong.”

Most of participants thought it would be safer to be a political writer of some kind online, mostly due to the opportunity to be anonymous. One participant exemplified this by saying “I guess it’s safer online. You can hide your name under another account”.

One participant thought it was dangerous to be a political writer online too, saying that “What if your blog will trend on Twitter or Facebook? If you write anonymous it’s more OK, but I know that there are technologies that can track you”.
5.2.3 Choice of Medium for Political Communication

Related to being a political journalist in any medium, the participants were faced with the question where they would publish a critical text about something in the society that they find wrong. This question was in all interviews followed-up by the question if they would have felt safe with after publishing the critical text.

Seven of the eight participants would prefer being published online, to some extent thanks to the cheapness and easiness. One participant stated that “I’m a leader and I would like to influence others, but I do not have the contacts”.

Although most participants also found the options online larger; some wanted to post it on Facebook so that not so many people would see, others preferred Internet arenas of different types because they thought they would reach more people than in traditional media.

The participant that thought it was safe to be a political journalist in the Philippines today was the only one who would prefer to publish a critical text in the newspapers – with the concern that the Internet would foremost reach the youth while newspaper would reach a more diverse public. However, when asked if the participant would feel safe after publishing the text, the participant answered: “I would feel frightened. Because exposing the truth always come with a price, and the price isn’t that good”. When asked to define the price the participant talked about personal criticism from opposite thinkers and continued to even talk about threats towards life itself.

The other participants – who preferred to be published online – also expressed similar fears, foremost for being attacked as private persons. For example one participant stated that “[..] there’s a huge risk in publishing online. You will be reaching a lot of people so its sort of scary, because people have different ideas and different (paus). They can criticise what you write about - it’s fine to criticise your words. But some people do not criticise the writings but they criticise the writer”.

Another participant talked about the same thing and said: “[..]if you’re writing about an issue, the supporters of the opposite will disagree and maybe cyber bullying or something. Moreover, there is a possibility that you will be investigated. And at the worst, they would kill you. I think some people are as yet not aware of these circumstances (paus). I think that’s possible”.

One of the participants that were asked to talk about the lack of feeling safe with publishing critical texts online said that “The worst thing would be, might be, a threat on my safety, like, they would post, be careful. It’s happened already. Bullying is very rumble now. You share something online, then all of a sudden you’re being awaited outside and being punched or whatever. That’s very depressing. [...] Private persons against private persons. I believe we must join hands to be heard. But the sad thing is, we’re fighting each other because our thoughts clashed, it’s so sad.” With regards to this, the same person stated that “It’s not that I’m not interested, I just do not want to get involved in the mess”, about getting involved in debated online.

5.2.4 Internet as a Medium to Communicate with Politicians
A majority of the participants say that they would not use the Internet for contacting power holders such as politicians or state officials. These participants would prefer to deliver a regular letter because it is “more formal and serious”. At the same time, several participants expressed a fear of scams if they would try to contact politicians online and also that the government probably would not be able to handle much communication with citizens online.

However two participants had tried to contact state officials online, through e-mail. One of them did not receive any answer but the other one found it fruitful and said that “[..]usually I e-mail them, the press advisory or so. It’s very fruitful because I got to see what’s on their mind, and not only what I think is on their mind”.

5.2.5 Equal Communication Online

A question that was asked to all participants was if they thought that all people have the same opportunities to be seen and heard online. The participants took different approaches in answering the question.

Three persons thought that there were equal communication on the Internet, one exemplified this by saying “We all have a voice there”.

Two participants thought that there was equal communication online – for those who accessed the Internet. Although theses two participants referred to the Philippines as a country with large differences between the urban and the rural areas and therefore recognised an inequality in the communication online since not all can access it.

Two other participants thought that the Internet was unequal because well known people was thought to get more attention online – and thus being more powerful.

The eighth person was engaged in an international organization and took an international focus to the question by saying “Other countries do dominate. There are some issues that we cannot talk a lot about, because there’s different issues in different countries. And we know different much about the different questions”.

5.3 Internet as a Medium for Public Spheres

5.3.1 Internet as Tool for Extra Activities

All of the participants were engaged in some kind of organizational extra activity, such as the school government, student council body or volunteer organizations. They used the Internet as a tool in their work with the organizations, although in different ways. While some of the participants just received and scanned the information from the organization, others used to spread information or advertising about the organization whilst some used the Internet to have online meetings or discuss and debate questions
within the organization.

The participants perceived that they got a lot of information from the organizations they were involved in, but very little information from other organizations or from any kind of politicians.

The ones who used the Internet for spreading information seldom experienced that it lead to discussions or comments, one participant said that “I haven’t really got comments, but I would really love it if they commented on whatever they think about it”. On the other hand they rarely commented on adverts or information from others themselves. Talking about opposite political organizations in the same university another participant stated that “Sometimes they post in their walls, that they do not like us or, yeah. I just leave it. The more you hit on them, the more they will do it again and again.

5.3.2 Internet as a Debate Forum

The participants that used the Internet for meetings or discussions in their organizations arranged the forums differently. One participant used forums in social media to discuss and debate with friends and said that ”It’s fruitful because I got to see their points of views. We form a collaboration of thoughts”, and gave the example that they could discuss an issue and then decide how to act in different questions, for example deciding to use their consuming power and boycott certain products.

Although all participants used the Internet to interact with friends or their organizations, few engaged in debate forums or discussion groups concerning special matters. One participant explained this by saying that “I usually don’t go to debate forums. I just read through their opinions and debates but I do not engage – I find it not productive. I usually put comments on discussions with my friends on Facebook or with people I know but not with (paus) just random people who are discussing something. I do not think it’s productive”.

Another participant expresses similar thoughts by saying that “Sometimes there’s a tendency online, that the focus is not really what we’re talking about cause no ones watching you so you can probably click on other websites while chatting and (paus), like when you, meet in person you have a stronger foundation on what you want to achieve”.

When talking about why it’s easier to discuss and debate in person rather than online a third participant stated that “You can express your feelings in a more accurate way”.

5.4 Results Summary

This thesis’ results show that Internet is more used than the TV, radio and newspapers but that these traditional media instead are used on the Internet, which work as a meta-medium.

Moreover the result also showed that the participants in the study preferred not to interact or comment on news articles online, and that most participants also did not want to engage in debates or discussion forums online.

When asked to choose most participants wanted to publish a critical text online rather than in traditional media. Publishing online was though attached to different fears, such as the fear of being cyber
bullied. Most participants did not think they were surveyed by anyone online.
6 Analysis

The analysis is structured under three main headings. Each heading will answer one of the thesis’ research questions. Every main heading will end with a short and concise conclusion answering the research question.

6.1 Information and Communication Trends

Under this heading the first research question will be answered: Which online trends can be distinguished according to the Filipino youth and is the Internet thought to be under surveillance?

To answer this research question about which online trends that can be distinguished when it concerns political matters and if the Internet is thought to be under surveillance the analysis will start by applying Bordewijk’s and Van Kaam’s model of information traffic trends on the results described above.

6.1.1 Allocution

The participants interviewed in the study described scenarios where they would get much information from the organizations they were involved with – which is a typical example of the allocution trend (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:576). However, few participants experienced that they were exposed with information from power holders or the government, except in times of elections when they wanted to advertise themselves – this would also indicate an allocution trend.

The participants interviewed also showed a similar trend of allocution when they described their usage of the Internet for extra activities and when sharing news articles. A majority used the Internet to share information about their organizations’ stands and ideas – although with little interaction from other Internet users. While some participants just wanted to get attention drawn to their happenings and nominees to different elections, others wished for more interaction and comments from others, exemplified by one participant saying “I haven’t really got comments, but I would really love it if they commented on whatever they think about it”. Although another participant says that “Sometimes they post in their walls, that they do not like us or, yeah. I just leave it. The more you hit on them, the more they will do it again and again. These are examples of allocution trends since the participants just share their own news but do not comment on other internet user’s news or updates. The latter quote shows a pattern where everyone try to yell as loud as they can, without listening to each other – which also leads to people feeling invisible and able to disappear amongst each other.

About sharing political news articles the result is very similar. All participants had shared news of different kinds, but only one said that “It leads to a short discussion”, while the others again expressed that they missed or lacked the comments. One participant said that “I do not think people noticed it”, about sharing news online. The former of these two quotes would point somewhat towards a conversation trend
The latter though would again show an allocution trend where information is only given but no interaction received.

Differing from the typical allocution trend – where feedback is very limited (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:576) – it is worth to notice is that there often are possibilities to comment or interact on information and news that the participants share – but that other Internet users choose not to. Thus there does not have to be an allocution trend from the sender’s side, but it becomes an allocution trend since no one chooses to comment but instead share his or her own information and statements.

6.1.2 Conversation

The conversation trend can also be perceived in two other participants’ answers. One where the participant said that they have debates in social media and the other where the participant was involved in an international organization and discussed different issues there.

All participants high lightened that they use the Internet for networking and interact with friends. Of course that indicates a very strong consultation trend too, although not really relevant here since it is more a question of social interaction rather than interaction concerning political matters.

A trace of the communication trend can also be found when the participants are saying that they share information, such as news, online and then discussing it when they meet physically. However the actual conversation is not online and this must rather be seen as an allocution trend since they only give information online. David’s result, described above, showed that the Internet foremost was used as a tool for networking and communication, and thereafter to get information and entertainment (David, 2013:328ff). When it comes to information trends concerning political matters this thesis thus indicates that the pattern changes – even if the consultation trend still is strong the conversation trend becomes vaguer.

Concerning direct communication with power holders or politicians – the result shows that most participants in the study preferred not to communicate online – due to the lacking resources of the receivers to answer or due to a fear of scams. One person though had good experiences from communicating with power holders online. All taken together though – the conversation trend between citizens and power holders online must also be regarded as a weak. This contradicts Clarissa David’s result that political leaders and the government uses ICTs to communicate to citizens (David, 2013:325) and shows that at least the Filipino youth do not observe this communication, except when politicians want to advertise themselves. Although that is rather to be regarded as a one-way communication and therefore is to be seen as a type of allocution.

6.1.3 Consultation

If the conversation trend must be regarded as somewhat vague when it comes to communicating political
matters or communicating to politicians – the consultation trend (Bordewijk & Van Kaam, 2003:577) is to be regarded as stronger according to the participants. This is best exemplified by the fact that most participants would look for information about a political issue online, even if the online sources varied. While some expressed that they preferred information directly from the main sources, other preferred second hand information and whereas some preferred information about news from traditional media established online, other preferred independent or smaller news outlets.

Another incitement to a strong consultation trend is that all participants said that they used the Internet for study related research purposes, of course this does not have to be related to political issues though and thus not a relevant factor for trends related to the Public Sphere.

Compared to Siriyuyasak’s thoughts about the non-commercial and non-profit People’s media, that he believed had the chances to grow strong in the Philippines (Siriyuvasak, 2006:258), this study’s result rather shows how the traditional media has established themselves online and that the Internet users rather is concerned about the credibility and reliability of the independent and smaller-scales Peoples media. A strong consultation trend involving People’s media is hard to distinguish since the participants do not show any indication to think of People’s media as more reliable or less biased than the traditional media.

6.1.4 Registration and Surveillance

The registration trend can be the very same as surveillance, although it does not have to be. There can be a registration trend without being a question of surveillance. For example if a person gives anonymous information through surveys, as one participant claimed to often do to his or her extra activity organization.

However, no one except this above mentioned participant exhibited that anyone asked them for information online, which indicated a vague registration trend. There were also few who thought someone collected information about their web use or that they were surveyed online.

All participants took a national approach to the question and thought that the Philippines did not have the technology to survey their citizens, although thinking it would be more likely in other countries. Most participants were familiar with the Filipino Cybercrime Act Program and had an opinion about it, but no one thought that it actually had lead to more surveillance or registration. One participant though thought that the CAP had lead to that people were more frightened to express themselves online.

When confronted with the question about the American NSA surveillance discussion none of the participants was familiar with it – which to some extent could indicate a lacking international approach to the question – since it’s known that NSA has surveyed students in Asia (SvD, 2013).

One participant raised the question about how different webpages collected information and sold to companies for advertising purposes – which of course is a type of registration and surveillance trend, just like described by some theorists (Curran et al, 2012:129). Although that indicates surveillance caused
by economic interests rather than political interests.

While some theorists thought that the surveillance trend would increase (McQuail, 2010:147), the participants in this study had a different opinion and indicated a vague registration trend and altogether an Internet free from surveillance.

6.1.5 Conclusion of Trend Analysis

The trend analysis shows that the participants in this study exhibits an altogether rather strong allocution trend – from the organizations in which the participants are involved but also in the way the participants uses the Internet themselves. The consultation trend is also regarded as strong. The conversation trend is thought to be weaker just like the registration trend and the Internet is altogether not thought to be under surveillance.

Baasanjav found that allocution was the most visible trend, followed by consultation and thereafter conversation and registration (Baasanjav, 2011:599). His results match this thesis’ trend result well and thus indicate that private persons’ political usage of Internet matches the civil society’s and official organizations’ webpages and indirect web use. Of course, it is discussable if it is the webpages – as the supplier – that guides these trends or if it is the private persons – as users – that demands this trend developments.

6.2 Free and Equal Communication Online

This part of the analysis will answer the second research question: If the Filipino youth regard the Internet as a place with free, equal, communication and how the relation is compared to traditional media.

As just mentioned above, the trends that the participants exhibit on the Internet match the trends that Baasanjav found in Mongolian webpages. Baasanjav also concluded that the web reflected the traditional media because of the strong trends of allocution and consultation, but weaker trends of conversation and registration (Baasanjav, 2011:602). That the Internet reflects the traditional media could be true in this study too to some extent, but when it comes to how free and how equal the communication is online and compared to traditional media the picture is somewhat more complicated.

6.2.1 Free Expression Online

When the participants were asked where they would prefer be published all but one preferred to be published online instead of in the traditional media. The choice to be published online was basically motivated on the premises that the Internet felt somewhat safer since it provided an opportunity to be anonymous, but also that it was easier to access compared to the traditional media. This would indicate
that the communication can be somewhat freer online and also more equal since the participants find it easy to access and actually get published.

The concern to be anonymous would though indicate that the communication is not totally free; this is also indicated by the fact that none of the participants would feel safe if they would have published something online. The fear they have is on a wide scale including elements from cyber bulling to actual executions, from private oppositional thinkers as well as from different powerful politicians.

Several participants said that they were free to express themselves according to the law and that they knew their rights but still expressed the showed structural fears of being attacked as private persons. Early theorists thought that communication would be freer since the traditional media’s gatekeepers would not be instigated online (Curran et al., 2012:18f). Even if that is true, a new type of gatekeeper can be regarded as have arisen through the private persons that threats other people online so that, for example, this study’s participants do not want to debate and publish their political opinions online. This online climate of course tends to limit the free speech and expression online and is a serious obstacle to free online communication.

6.2.2 Equality Online

Concerning if the Internet has been an equalizer between private persons and different sized organizations, as early Internet theorist also thought (Curran et al., 2012:3ff), the participants thoughts were more diverse compared to the thoughts of the free speech.

While three participants thought everyone was on the Internet on equal terms with the same opportunities, other participants raised the questions about how all people could not access the Internet, that more well known people and organizations got more attention and that more powerful countries dominated online – just like Curran, Fenton and Fredman writes (Curran et al., 2012:134).

At the same time, several participants did not want to publish themselves or debate online because they felt inferior to others, exemplified with the participant that said “I’m not a 100 percept media person”. This also indicates an unequal relationship between a normal person and a media person, in both traditional media and online.

The equality between journalists is also not present online – since most participants trusted the well established news outlets rather then smaller and independent – thus there is an unequal relation there as well. Although it showed that it was possible for a new player to enter the field – such as the independent and popular news site Rappler.com.

6.2.3 Conclusion of Free and Equal Communication

The political communication online can not be said to be free, not because of laws restricting the free expression or speech but because of structural fears of bulling and threatening that is well known amongst
this study’s participants. While some of the participants thinks that the communication on Internet is equal, others thinks that more well known actors get more attention and that the ones who cannot access the Internet also is an example of an unequal relationship.

This can be regarded as examples about how society structures are important to consider for understanding how the Internet can be regarded and used, as Curran et al. states (Curran et al., 2012:179).

While David wrote that the Filipino youth considers online expressions as political acts and that “dramatic drops in the cost of access and hardware have broken down many barriers to entry” (David, 2013:323), this study shows that these factors does not have to lead to more or better political acts among the Filipino youth since there is structures limiting their conduction of political acts online. Sadly it seems that the Philippines is a typical example of what Curran et al. thought about when they wrote “in many parts of the world people cannot, without fear, interact and say what they want to online” (Curran et al., 2012:11).

Although, it must be said that the communication online is regarded as somewhat more free and equal than the communication in traditional media.

6.3 Public Sphere

In this third and last part of the analysis the third research question will be answered: If the Internet can be regarded as medium for creating Public Spheres in the Philippines today, according to the Filipino youth?

6.3.1 Internet as an Institution or Medium for the Public Sphere

In the theoretical framework above two institutions of the Public Sphere were presented: the coffeehouses where people debated, and the newspapers that coordinated the debates and presented the public opinion to the power holders.

Theorists that thought the Internet would work as a new type of coffeehouses believed that the communication online would be free and equal (Curran et al., 2012:3f), as it was in the Public Sphere (Habermas, 1989:36). However, as mentioned in the section answering the second research question above, the communication is not regarded to be as free and equal as theorists had hoped.

A majority of the participants in this study also showed a lacking interest in getting involved in discussions and debates online – for example one participant did not “want to et involved in the mess” and another participant did not find it productive. They also found it less personal and expressive to debate online, and that it was easier to get unfocused if debating online.

Nevertheless three participants indicated that they used the Internet as some kind of debate forum. The first was the one who said that shared news in social media sometimes lead to shorter discussions, the second the one who debated and discussed in closed groups and the third the one who was involved in an international organization. To some extent this shows that the Internet can be used as a debate forum,
although worth pointing out that at least the two first mentioned of these three persons discussed or debated with friends, not with people that have gathered in a debate because of a specific issue, as Habermas meant would be the case with the smaller liberal spheres that he thought possibly could arise in today's society (Habermas, 1996:371).

Regarding the Internet's possibility to work as a coordinating tool for the Public Sphere, like the newspapers did in the 18th century, it seems that the Internet is too diverse to offer any kind of accordance, as thought of by some theorist (Curran et al., 2012:166ff). Even so some participants shared articles online and discussed them with friends, which could indicate a coordinating function. Although this was only occasionally and unstructured.

As mentioned above the conversation trend had to be regarded as weak and the allocution trend as strong. Instead of discussing or daring to take the debate the participants drew the picture of an online atmosphere where everyone online tried to yell their loudest without accordance. As one participant noted, it seemed to lead to that everyone disappeared somewhere in the yelling crowd, which would indicate a poor coordinating function.

Still, the Internet was considered to work as a coordinating force in some larger questions where there was little diverse opinions among the private persons and when they could rise towards the government, for example with the so called pork barrel where the private persons gathered together on the streets to demonstrate against the government. Although this was not debated online, it shows a somewhat coordinating function.

In the 18th century one crucial point for the newspaper to work as a medium for the Public Sphere was that people could read (Habermas, 1989:23). One similar important aspect to consider is that people can access and read on the Internet today, which some participants raised remarks about. While Ilshammar claimed the Internet to be a weak Public Sphere because people could not access it as easy as traditional media (Ilshammar, 2002:311), it is worth noticing that the participants in this study thought it was easier to be heard online compared to in traditional media. This would indicate that the Internet has enabled the people to again become active actors instead of only passive consumers of the media outlet, as Habermas meant was the case with for example TV-users (Habermas, 1989:170).

### 6.3.2 A Public Opinion Online

The aim with the debates in the Public Sphere was to reach a consensus or Public Opinion (Habermas, 1989:83). The participant in this study who debated with friends in online groups on social media stated that this was happening commonly — that they would reach a common insight and, for example, decide wheatear or not to boycott different products. The other two who can be thought of as discussing online did not mention consensus as the aim with the communication, but instead the communication as such.

Again it is worth stressing the point that the atmosphere on the Internet is regarded to be too diverse and uncoordinated to reach a consensus. A Public Opinion is obviously also hard to reach since
the participants do not want to involve in discussions and debates online and without the communication it is impossible to reach a true Public Opinion.

6.3.3 A Private Sphere and a Public Sphere?

In Habermas’ original theory about the Public Sphere, the difference between a Private and Public Sphere were fundamental; the Public Sphere consisted upon private persons coming together to form a Public Sphere (Habermas, 1989:51). Even if Habermas has marginalized the importance of the two differentiated Private and Public Spheres (Habermas, 1996:371), it is interesting to shortly analyse them here.

The participants clearly indicated that they thought of themselves as private and autonomous persons online, by saying that everyone de facto has a voice and that they are entitled to express themselves freely. Hence, a Private Sphere can somewhat be identified.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the point that the private and autonomous persons coming together to form a Public Sphere – the above mentioned factors disrupt this social formation. The private persons either want to discuss with friends – or discuss their opinions under anonymity. It could be said that people can be private persons with people they know, but otherwise want to be anonymous persons in a Public Sphere.

This tendency seems to be due to the fact that there is a very harsh environment online where the private persons do not aim to reach consensus but instead only fight each other – either online through cyber bullying or in real life through harass each other.

6.3.4 Differentiated Liberal Spheres

In the developing of his theory, Habermas thought that smaller and liberal Public Spheres would arise that consisted of people with similar interests (Habermas, 1996:371f). However – as mentioned above – only the participant that were involved in an international organization can be said to discuss or debate online thanks to a specific topic. This indicates that smaller spheres gathered around a specific topic is not the case online, according to this study’s participants.

Although the larger coordinating functions that the participants thinks the Internet can contribute to and that they also gives examples of can indicate a more holistic Public Sphere – in difference to what Habermas thought (Habermas, 1996:371f), where large amounts of the population stand up against the government.

6.3.5 Conclusion the Public Sphere

As the trend analysis above have indicated – with strong patterns of allocution and consultation and a
weak conversation trend – the Internet today cannot be understood as a medium for creating Public Spheres in the Philippines according to this study’s participants, even if there are some indicators that the Internet serve functions of the Public Sphere – for example having closed discussions with friends about news or coordinating community actions.

Even so – the communication online cannot be said to be overall free and equal and there are obstacles to forming a public opinion because people reserve themselves from participating in critical-rational debates and discussions online. These are crucial elements of the Public Sphere and without them it is hard to think of the Internet as a medium for Public Spheres.

While David concluded that the Internet has not made uninterested persons interested and active in politics (David, 2013:328), this paper may add that the Internet has not made interested youth more active either – because there is structural anxieties about using the Internet as a medium for debating and act politically.

Nonetheless – it is worth stressing that the Filipino youth in this study take a positive attitude towards the Internet and considers it as a possible medium for free, equal, communication, even if that not tends to be the case of as today.
7 Discussion

The discussion is threefold. Firstly the method discussion reflects upon dependability, conformability and transformability. Secondly the results are shortly discussed and thirdly the theories. Thereafter, further research questions are raised.

7.1 Discussion of Method

When quantitative studies are discussed the concepts of validity, reliability and generalization are central. Validity is a concept that among other factors includes the critical question whether the thing that is meant to be measured actually is measured (Esaiasson, 2009:63), reliability describes how careful and accurate the collection of data has been (Esaiasson, 2009:70) and generalization describes whether or not the studies result can be applied and explain similar issues (Esaiasson, 2009:26).

Although, when it concerns qualitative studies these concepts are less adequate since qualitative studies does not include statistics to the same extent, which is important to those concepts. Instead some scientist prefers to use the concepts of dependability instead of reliability, conformability instead of validity and transferability instead of generalization – even if the essence of the concepts is to describe the very similar elements (Östbye et al., 2004:120).

The dependability has been granted firstly form a interview guide without leading questions and later using it as a support in calm and perceptive interviews. Later the interviews were also carefully transcribed which also helped the dependability.

The conformability has also been granted by the interview guide that contains elements that are relevant and gathers information that can answer the research questions. To guarantee a better conformability I have also tried to avoid the so called elite-bias (Dalen, 2007:121), that is not focusing too much on the informants that differs from the rest, by instead focusing on the actual understanding of the sample more general.

I am very pleased with the sample of participants in this study. The society engaged Filipino youth should be some of the people that would best need and want a medium for political debate and communication. Since the participants are interested in these matters the sample may also help the conformability to some extent.

The result cannot, and is not aimed to, generalize. Still it can be questioned if the result can be transformed to other contexts. The result for this study cannot be transferred or applied to any other culture or country than the Philippines. Since the sample tends to be rather specific it is not sure that the result can even be applied on the common Filipino youth, even if these changes are larger.

For both quantitative and qualitative studies the concept of ecological validity is worth mentioning. Ecological validity questions how the context and situation for the study affects the results of the study. To exemplify the ecological validity questions how the interviewer or a recorder affects the informant during interviews (Östbye et al., 2004:121). Related to this is also that people often try to make a good
impression on each other (Östbye et al., 2004:47), which is important to think about when it concerns deep interviews since the informants may try to make as good impressions as possible on the interviewer.

My perception is that the ecological validity is high. The interviews have been unpretentious and calm. The interview questions have been open and not leading. I also think that the interviews have been smooth thanks to the small difference in age between myself and the sample and I have not noticed any particular obstacles due to our different cultures.

The study could have gained further dynamics if it would have been triangulated with interviews with focus groups and it is possible that the result then would have flourished, although the method used without problem answered the research questions. The choice of a qualitative research method rather than a quantitative method seems like the only possible method – since we did not know what kind of answers that could have been expected and since the purpose was foremost to understand the interview persons’ opinions.

Regarding the gender representation in this study the women are somewhat overrepresented. Amongst the informants’ answers though no difference can be sought depending on gender and therefore I gladly can say that I do not think the inequity in representation matters.

### 7.2 Discussion of Results

The factors behind the result are probably structures in the society – and these probably depend on the political climate. Therefore, my guess would be that results similar to this study’s would most likely be found in countries with similar a political climate – probably in young democracies with high corruption and a lacking history of discussing political issues in Public. Of course, these are my own opinions. Even though the transferability of the result is small, it contributes in a valuable way to foster the understanding that there is more to free communication than just formal laws.

To my surprise, the results of this study showed that the participants in this study thought little that online surveillance was widespread – or even possible – in the Philippines. Sadly though, the result also showed the clear tendency that the free speech online was limited by other factors than surveillance – namely the fear of being attacked as private persons. In that way, this thesis helps to understand how different Media have different conditions in different contexts and therefore do not work as one may hope in theory. Connected to that, this study could possibly also be useful in the debate about social constructivism and technological determinism.

The results that were gathered answer the research questions. Except helping to understand Media in different contexts it can also be useful for others who wish to compare Internet trends or conditions in different countries or among different targets. It can also help to get one aspect of understanding to what must be done to free the online communication.
7.3 Theoretical discussion

The theories of this study have been fruitful. Bordewijk’s and Van Kaam’s model was used to analyse the user’s perspective and Habermas’ theory about the Public Sphere helped to examine crucial elements such as the free communication. Thus, Habermas’ theory was useful outside Europe as well since it helped to understand deficiencies and strengths in the topic of political communication.

Further, this study has showed that the questions about freedom of speech online has evoked in the Philippines as in many other countries around the world – much because of the Filipino Cybercrime Prevention Act. Despite this, the participants of this study did not think that surveillance online was common in the Philippines, much because of the opinion that the Philippines lacked the technology to monitor the Internet.

The trend analysis of political communication and information patterns showed strong allocution and consolation trends but weak conversation and register trends. The weak conversation trend was foremost caused by a reluctance to discuss or debate online due to the fear of being cyber bullied or attacked because of your opinions expressed.

This reluctance of speaking politically online lead to the conclusion that it cannot be said that there is free online communication in the Philippines today, even if the formal laws says that there is freedom of speech online. The opinions about weather the communication was equal differed, some participants found it free whilst others raised remarks about how some people cannot access the Internet and others get more attention online – leading to an unequal Internet. Compared to the traditional media though the communication online was thought to be somewhat more free and equal.

Since the communication is concluded not to be free the Internet cannot be regarded as a medium for creating Public Spheres in the Philippines today, since the free and equal communication is one of the very core element of the Public Sphere.

Despite this, the participants express faith in the opportunities that the Internet may have for being a medium for Public Spheres in the future, just as early theorists dreamed about in the early years of Internet’s expansion among common citizens. To sum up though, this study must conclude that when it regards being a medium for the Public Sphere as of today – Internet is the dream that refuses to come true.

7.4 Further Research

The results of this study have arisen new questions that can be answered in further research. It can be questioned whether these results are true for the general Filipino youth, or if it is even general for the Filipino society on a macro scale level. A more quantitative study would help to answer that. It would also be interesting to see what society structures this thesis’ results relate to, and see if the same result would be found in countries with similar society structures. It would also be interesting to see how professional
journalists in the Philippines exhibits the Internet and the obstacles to a free online communication, compared to the traditional media.
8 References


Appendix 1

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! The study will take place from October 28, 2013 to December 25, 2013. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is:

• To examine the exhibited Internet trends of and if it has lead to an accessible Public Sphere in the Philippines.

The benefits of the research will be:

• To understand if people considers the Internet to be a medium for debate in society (i.e. widen the Public Sphere).

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:

• One-on-one interviews.

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at anytime (e-mail address available).

Our interview will be audio recorded to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The recordings will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time.

You also have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

Insights gathered by you and other participants will be used in writing a qualitative research report, which will be read by my professor and presented to my class at Jönköping University. It will also be available online on DIVA.

Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

By signing this consent form I certify that I __________________________ agree to the terms of this agreement. __________________________

(Please print full name here)

___________________________     ______________

(Signature)     (Date)
Appendix 2
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Trends:

Can you please describe short how often and for what you use the TV, radio and newspapers?

Can you please describe how often you use the Internet, and for what?

Do you visit TV- radio or newspaper’s sites online?

Do you have Internet access on your phone?
   If yes, how much do you use it, for what?

Do you take part of any information from the government or power-holders online?

How would you try to communicate or contact the power holders or government if you would want to do so?

If you want information about a political issue – where do you look for it?
   What sources of information do you trust the most: the TV, radio, newspapers or Internet? (Why?)
      If Internet: which source on the Internet?

Do you think that the government or some other actor gathers information about your web-use, or can see what you do online?
   If yes: Who? Why?
   If no: Do you have anything to say about online surveillance?

What do you think about political journalism in the Philippines today?
   Do you think it’s dangerous to be a political journalist in the Philippines today?
      If yes: Why?

What do you think about political bloggers or writers on the Internet in the Philippines today?
   Do you think it’s dangerous to be a political writer online in the Philippines today? If yes:
      Do you know of any political blogs or nongovernmental political webpages?

Have you ever conducted a political act online?
   If yes: please tell me about if.
   If no: why not?

Are you familiar with the Filipino Cybercrime Act Program?
If yes, what do you think about it?
Do you think it has lead to more self-censoring online?
(Are you familiar with the NSA-surveillance topic?)

What is our opinion about censoring material of any kind of material online?
Do you think it’s okay to register people online to be able to find this material?

**Free Communication and Public Sphere:**

Are you engaged in any discussion or debate forum of any kind online?
If yes: please tell me a bit about how you use it?
If no: why not?
What is your opinion about discussions and debates online?

Do you at any times read articles online and comment on them or discuss them with your friends?

Do you think that all people have the same opportunities to be seen and heard online?
Why? / Why not?
Do you think it’s possible to discuss an online article with a journalist online?

If you would write a critical text about something in the society that you find wrong – where would you publish it?
Why?
Would you feel safe if you revealed it online? Why / why not?
Where do you communicate about (SPECIFIC RELEVANT TOPIC).

Do you think it’s possible for citizens in the Philippines to express themselves and their opinions freely (online / in TV, radio, newspapers)?
If no: Why not?
Are there any obstacles to the free expression online?
If yes: What obstacles?

Do you think the Internet is free from censorship in the Philippines today?
Have you ever censored yourself online?

Do the Internet has the potential to work as a place where people can communicate, debate and form opinions in the Philippines today?
Why / why not?

Do you think it’s possible to reach a political goal through forming oppositions and opinions online?
Why / why not?

Is there anything you would like to add?