Butil ng Buhay (Seed of Life): A "Micromentary" Journey into the Social Involvement of Paulinians of St. Paul University Manila

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Abstract

This study aimed to document the social engagements made by active Paulinians of St. Paul University Manila in social issues through the creation of a micromentary or a short documentary audio-visual material in video format. It also shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of students' social lives in the digital age. This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, used narrative inquiry and qualitative methods involving in-depth exploration of complex phenomena. Unstructured interviews with three socially active participants were conducted virtually and recorded, with filming at St. Paul University Manila, provided insights for the micromentary's development. Surveys gathered audience feedback via social media and Google Forms. The study found that interviews with Paulinians uncovered five themes: Collaborative Efforts, Evolving Participation, Building a Movement for Positive Change, Maintaining Motivation, and Fostering Personal Growth, illustrating the transformative impact of social engagement despite academic challenges. Respondents emphasized the importance of addressing societal issues and participating actively in community initiatives, underscoring the micromentaries' role in inspiring social change and fostering leadership among viewers at St. Paul University Manila.

Keywords: Micromentary, Social engagement, Narrative inquiry, Qualitative methods, Student activism

Introduction

Student political and social engagement has sparked a debate between social media optimists and pessimists. However, proponents of social media see it as a growing extension of a political and social environment where the right to free speech in public, exposure to political and social knowledge, and socialization are all becoming more accessible to all. According to Bennett (2012), we are in an era where there is a defining change in our political culture. 'Social fragmentation and the decline of group loyalties have given rise to an era of personalized politics in which individual expression displaces collective action frames in the embrace of political causes' (p. 20). The rise of personalized politics has been possible through the emergence of digital technologies.

According to Ladia & Rogelio (2023) based on an exploratory survey of undergraduate students forced to take classes online because of pandemic restrictions, it was discovered that the youth were motivated to investigate online platforms as a place for political articulation because they were tired from the pandemic. The results also clarify the relationship between youth civic engagement and well-known predictors like political knowledge, interest, and efficacy. Specifically, it was discovered that whereas external political efficacy only encourages online political engagement, internal political efficacy was found to be strongly correlated with all three types of political engagement.

Youth involvement in various forms of society engagement is a vital and dynamic part of modern civic life. The younger generation's involvement presents itself in a variety of unusual ways as they learn to navigate the complexity of the modern world. Some young people are partially contesting the growing array of alternative engagement methods. There is proof that youth-led projects promote more peaceful societies worldwide, acknowledged by the UN in Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, which describes youth as a component of the solution to the numerous conflicts that exist in the world (Youth4Peace 2017).

Young people actively shape society through their innovative initiatives and traditional civic duties. This engagement takes many forms, including environmental, cultural, social, political, advocacy, community service, and cutting-edge strategies

like youth organizing. Understanding the complex nature of youth participation is crucial for determining its importance, influence, and potential for promoting positive change.

According to Amao,(2019), one novel and unconventional approach is represented by youth organizing. This method centers on the identification of challenges within the local community by young individuals. After receiving education and training, they devise a localized solution aimed at fostering sustainable and peaceful societies. Examining youth organizing proves especially valuable when delving into the objectives of youth participation, as it empowers them to independently determine suitable actions, providing an opportunity to analyze the activity's substance and comprehend its goals. The primary aim of youth organizing is to positively influence local communities by fostering collective activities.

Great hopes in this direction are associated with the student youth, that today declares itself louder. These are mass actions aimed at protecting their rights (to work, to earn a decent salary, to professional development), the volunteer movement, and participation in the activities of public organizations and charitable activities, etc. (Popova & Selezneva, 2018). However, a certain part of the youth does not aspire to interact, and another, not finding satisfaction in it for various reasons, reduces it to a minimum (Fatykhova & Mingazova, 2016; Shilyaeva, 2018). Fatykhova (2020) revealed the competitiveness, ambition, and power aspects of a person's personality, which collectively determine their orientation toward themselves, are demonstrated to be the limiting factor of students' social engagement.

Digital media serves as a powerful tool for bringing issues to light, inspiring communities to act for social change, telling stories, and elevating the voices of the voiceless. The modern role of social-issue documentaries in civic practice is embodied in parallel community engagement, or the active role of individuals, communities, and civil society. This has dynamically evolved over the past few decades against the activism backdrop of the participatory networked culture. Personal documentaries shed light on intricate realities and tales that challenge prevailing cultural narratives. They also offer fresh perspectives and avenues for public discussion on social issues,

shedding light on the inspirations behind and impact of some of the most celebrated and thought-provoking tales of the documentary genre (Chattoo, 2020).

This study aimed to document the social engagements made by active Paulinians of St. Paul University Manila in social issues through the creation of a micromentary or a short documentary audio-visual material in video format. It also shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of students' social lives in the digital age. To make sure that students' social engagement is meaningful and reflective of the various aspects of their social identity, the researchers fostered a sense of balance and consistency.

Methodology

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, acknowledging the existence of multiple realities shaped by individual experiences and social contexts. As argued by Carson et al. (2012, cited in Edirisingha, 2012), knowledge within this framework is socially constructed rather than absolute, and understanding is built upon perceived experience.

In this research, the interpretivist approach was reflected in the selection of participants. A diverse group was chosen, including professors, staff members, alumni, college students, and senior high school students of legal age. Each participant brought a unique perspective shaped by their background and experiences. The researchers aimed to enhance the micromentary's effectiveness by capturing these subjective viewpoints through interviews. The goal was to leverage the participants' knowledge of visual communication to ensure the final product resonated with the target audience.

Notably, this study is Narrative Inquiry Research focused on human experiences. These experiences were examined through interviews, biography, oral history, and other modes of human narrative. This method aimed to prompt the audience to reconsider their prejudices, views, and experiences. The researchers believed that a deeper understanding of the selected Paulinians' experiences with social engagement, coupled with the visual storytelling power of the micromentary, contributed significantly to the study's success. This research resonated deeply with

the researchers themselves. As Paulinian students, they were driven by a commitment to community service and social justice advocacy. They anticipated that the participants' stories, revealed through interviews, served as a powerful source of inspiration, enabling the creation of micromentary that ignited a positive ripple effect for social change.

The researchers employed a Qualitative Method for this study to better understand the responses and level of understanding of the respondents regarding their demographic references, which would be subjected to further in-depth analysis. Qualitative methods involve an in-depth exploration and understanding of complex phenomena and human behaviors. This research design was deemed appropriate for the study as it involved gathering data from interviews with selected socially engaged Paulinians, which served as the basis for creating the micromentary output.

Unstructured Interview. Without a predetermined list of questions, the researchers conducted unstructured interviews that allowed for open-ended discussions delving into participants' experiences, viewpoints, and contributions to social engagement. The collected data were instrumental in informing the development of the micromentary, providing a detailed understanding of the participants' social activities, and facilitating the identification of important themes and insights.

Survey. A structured tool for gathering data consisted of a list of questions meant to elicit feedback from the audience or viewers of the micromentary. Researchers utilized this tool to collect feedback from the audience and assess whether there was a discernible shift in their behavior toward active social engagement. The questionnaire was designed to solicit responses that provide insights into the audience's perceptions, attitudes, and potential changes in their social engagement patterns. Through careful analysis of the questionnaire data, the researchers gauged the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at encouraging active social engagement among the audience.

Interviews with the three selected participants actively engaged in social issues will be conducted virtually via Google Meet and recorded using Loom, a secure screen recording platform. To maintain consistency and showcase the Paulinian community,

filming for the micromentary took place at St. Paul University Manila. Feedback gathering occured via Facebook Messenger. Participants received an informed consent form and a secure Google Drive link to access the three micromentaries for viewing. Finally, feedback was collected through a dedicated Google Form. This approach ensured efficient data collection while maintaining ethical research practices.

Research Participants, Primarily, the researchers interviewed a set of three Paulinians who fit into distinct categories: (1) social participants/activists, (2) members of a social organization, and (3) individuals engaged in various social causes. These individuals were the featured subjects of the micromentary.

Following this, a total number of 10 participants were selected for the second set, consisting of teachers (2), staff members (2), alumni (2), college students (2), and senior high school students of legal age (2), all from St. Paul University Manila. These criteria ensured that the participants could provide valuable insights and experiences regarding social participation, which were utilized and featured in the micromentary produced by the researchers. Moreover, social media platforms were used to locate Paulinian students who actively posted about their social engagement activities. The breakdown of the selection criteria for each participant:

Participant 1: Education Sector Advocate. This participant is actively engaged in social issues related to the education sector, aligning with one of the study's goals – highlighting the effectiveness of the micromentary as a tool in promoting student engagement. The researchers selected a Paulinian student who consistently posts about educational issues, participates in organizations outside the school aimed at improving education, and volunteers their time in educational programs.

Participant 2: Youth Empowerment Champion. This participant focuses on empowering youth through social engagement, highlighting the micromentary's potential to inspire young people to become more socially active. The researchers selected Paulinian students who advocate for youth rights and opportunities, promote youth participation in social initiatives, or share experiences related to youth empowerment.

Participant 3: Christ-Centered Leader. This participant embodies the values of St. Paul University Manila, demonstrating a commitment to both social service and faith. Their experiences will shed light on whether the micromentary resonates with the University's vision of forming socially responsible individuals. The researchers will identify Paulinian students who actively participate in parish ministries, volunteer in community service initiatives inspired by faith, or express their dedication to serving God alongside serving society.

This selection process ensured that the participants represented various facets of social engagement within the Paulinian community. Their diverse perspectives provided a well-rounded understanding of how the micromentary impacts viewers and contributed to the study's goals.

Data Construction Process. The facilitation of the engagement of the targeted respondents invested the researcher's dedicated time, effort, and cooperation in the development of both the questionnaire and micromentary. Subsequently, the research team sought approval from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at St. Paul University Manila to conduct data collection from relevant school officials Utilizing social media platforms for volunteer recruitment, the researchers employed purposive sampling techniques to ensure the inclusion of necessary participant characteristics.

Upon identification of suitable volunteers, the researchers extended invitations and provided free and informed consent, seeking permission for participation in micromentary recording and the analysis of collected data through the formal signing of consent forms.

Following the confirmation of participant consent, the researchers conducted unstructured interviews with the selected three participants, exploring their social interactions beyond the university setting and associated platforms. To ensure transparency and accuracy in the participants' responses, the completed interview transcripts were shared with them for review and validation, thereby corroborating the authenticity of their perspectives.

After acquiring interview data, the researchers developed a script aligning the micromentary's content with participant responses, guiding the creation of the

micromentary itself video files found in (https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/ [1mON4ia9w6Pv3MA6hb88uPv_UUbL8ziOq](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1mON4ia9w6Pv3MA6hb88uPv_UUbL8ziOq)). Also, the unprocessed video footage depicting participants' active social engagement underwent meticulous editorial refinement by the researchers.
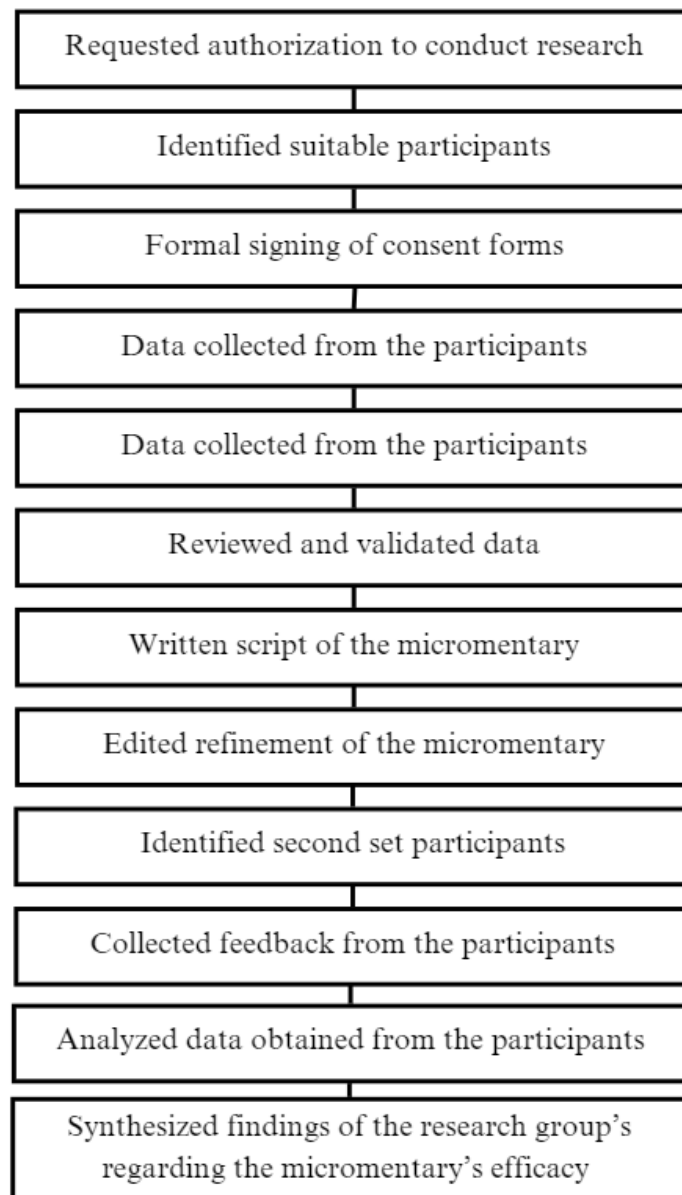

Figure. 3

Flow chart of the data construction process

To ascertain the efficacy of the micromentary in addressing the research question, the micromentary output and a feedback questionnaire were administered to a second set of participants. This questionnaire aimed to garner valuable insights, opinions, and perspectives from viewers, thereby contributing to a thorough and well-informed analysis of the obtained data. The feedback questionnaire served as a critical mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of the micromentary in achieving its research objectives, with participant responses playing a pivotal role in refining and augmenting overall data quality.

Additionally, questionnaires were retrieved on the same day as distribution to ensure a higher return percentage. Upon collection, the results were meticulously checked, interpreted, and analyzed.

Data Analysis and Synthesis. In-depth analysis of participant narratives formed the backbone of the research process. Following interviews and discussions, researchers meticulously transcribed the oral data. These transcripts underwent persistent review to glean critical information. Once identified, relevant sets of information were isolated and meticulously organized within an analytical matrix. Thematic analysis, reflecting both the gathered information and the study's objectives, was then employed to code the narratives into distinct themes. Subsequently, these individual themes were carefully integrated into the creation of a script designed for the visual output – the micromentary.

To ensure the micromentary's effectiveness, feedback was solicited from ten respondents within St. Paul University Manila. This diverse group comprised two professors, two staff members, two alumni, two undergraduate students, and two senior high school students of legal age. In accordance with ethical research protocols, informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to data collection. An electronic copy of the consent form were distributed to the participants via Facebook Messenger alongside a secure Google Drive link where they can access the three micromentaries for viewing. Utilizing a Google Form, the researchers gathered feedback on how the micromentary impacts the audience's perspective and motivates stakeholders to advocate for social engagement. The researchers read through all the feedback responses carefully and organized them by theme to identify common trends and areas of focus

Results

Upon the completion of the data gathering procedure and the analysis of the data collected, the following results were obtained:

Stories of the Paulinians involved in social participation outside campus.

Through the interviews with the selected Paulinians, the researchers were able to generate five themes: *Collaborative Efforts, Evolving Participation, Building a Movement for Positive Change, Maintaining Motivation, & Fostering Personal Growth.* All three participants highlighted the importance of social engagement for personal growth and positive change.

Respondent 1 planned activities to promote gender equality education, while Respondent 2 participated in a Youth Leaders Camp to discuss solutions for educational challenges, a medical mission, and online seminars. Additionally, respondent 3 volunteered at a feeding program for street children, providing both food and basic education. All participants emphasized the transformative power of their experiences, though they struggled to balance social activities with academic commitments, emphasizing the importance of time management. Overall, the interview showcased how participating in social initiatives outside St. Paul University Manila can be a rewarding experience that benefits both respondents and society.

Social engagement most suitable to be highlighted in the micromentary

Social change stands as a crucial factor, not only for the respondents or socially active individuals but for the entire community. Respondent 1 emphasized the necessity of addressing prevailing issues to usher in a better world. Active involvement and collective efforts are essential to achieve the positive changes we aspire for. Moreover, in the context of the Philippines, Respondent 2 highlighted the importance of voicing concerns on various issues, such as good governance, energy conservation, environmental protection, and youth empowerment. These voices serve as catalysts for progress and societal improvement. Similarly, Respondent 3 expressed a commitment to advocating for sustainable development goals, aiming to foster transformative changes in our world, including environmental preservation, diversity protection, and the eradication of hunger.

Social change stands as a pivotal endeavor. Engaging in organizations dedicated to addressing existing issues is paramount. Such engagement necessitates active participation and advocacy, aligning with the goals and objectives of these organizations. Social activism emerges as a powerful tool for effecting reformation and change. Activists play a crucial role in fostering accountability and transparency, pivotal elements in creating a more just and equitable world.

Stories that can be developed based on the narratives of the selected Paulinians

The researchers crafted narratives for three respondents, each showcasing their distinct advocacies and commitments based on the interviews. Respondent 1 was dedicated to promoting gender equality within the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction (WCCI), advocating for safe educational spaces despite facing personal challenges. Respondent 2's involvement spanned various organizations such as the South Manila Educational Consortium (SMEC) and the Western Batangas Leo Club, driven by a passion for youth empowerment and leadership development. As for Respondent 3, she exemplified commitment as a student leader at St. Paul University Manila, balancing academics with active participation in community initiatives such as the Parish Youth Ministry, fueled by a determination to serve and contribute to sustainable development goals. These micromentaries serve as inspiration for audiences to become socially engaged with their community and be active members of society.

Feedback of the selected audience members of the produced micromentary

Surveyed among the second batch of respondents, which included selected Professors, Staff Members, Alumni, College Students, and Senior High School Students of legal age from St. Paul University Manila, the researchers were able to gather feedback on the produced micromentaries. These micromentaries highlighted the experiences and social engagement of three Paulinian activists/advocates. The following feedbacks were acquired:

After viewing the micromentary, respondents underwent personal reflections. They emphasized the interconnectedness of individuals and communities, recognizing the ripple effect of social issues and the importance of social engagement.

Respondents highlighted the micromentary's success in conveying messages of gender equality and social engagement, as well as its ability to inspire hope and motivation for positive change. Feedback from respondents provided valuable insights into the micromentary's effectiveness and suggestions for improvement, indicating its potential to raise awareness and inspire action among viewers.

Additionally, feedback from SPUM College and Senior High School students emphasized the importance of social engagement and the potential for students to become leaders in addressing societal issues, highlighting the micromentary's role as an effective educational tool and source of inspiration.

Discussion

The value of micromentaries in enhancing social engagement among youth is multifaceted, as evidenced by data gathered from interviews and feedback on the produced micro-documentaries. The research on Paulinians' social participation outside campus revealed five key themes: Collaborative Efforts, Evolving Participation, Building a Movement for Positive Change, Maintaining Motivation, and Fostering Personal Growth. These themes underscore how youth can work together to achieve common goals, adapt and grow their involvement in social causes over time, contribute to larger social movements, find and sustain their drive despite challenges, and experience personal development through their social engagements.

The individual stories of subjects further illustrate the transformative power of social participation. For instance, Respondent 1 organized activities for gender equality education, demonstrating leadership in advocating for safe and inclusive educational environments. Respondent 2 engaged in various initiatives, such as youth leadership camps and medical missions, showing versatility and commitment to addressing educational and health challenges. Respondent 3 volunteered in feeding programs and provided basic education to street children, highlighting grassroots involvement

and direct community impact. These narratives reveal how youth can significantly contribute to addressing various social issues.

The micromentary format is particularly effective for highlighting social engagement because it allows for concise and impactful storytelling. By focusing on individual stories, micromentaries foster a personal connection between the audience and the subjects, making social issues more relatable and urgent. The visual and emotional appeal of this medium helps convey the passion and commitment of the activists, enhancing the overall message.

The broader societal benefits of social engagement were also emphasized by the participants, who stressed the need to address prevailing issues to bring about positive change. Their involvement in various organizations and advocacy for issues such as good governance, energy conservation, environmental protection, and youth empowerment highlight the significant role youth can play in societal improvement. These elements are crucial for raising awareness and inspiring action, as micro-documentaries effectively showcase real-life examples of youth making a difference, thereby encouraging viewers to engage in their communities and contribute to social change.

Audience feedback, including from professors, staff members, alumni, and students, indicated that the micro-documentaries were successful in several ways. Viewers reflected on their roles in society and the interconnectedness of social issues, and the micro-documentaries inspired hope and motivation for positive change. Especially for students, these micromentaries served as effective educational tools, demonstrating the potential for youth to become leaders in addressing societal issues.

The importance of youth engagement in political and social activities is supported by the broader literature. Bennett (2012) describes a shift towards personalized politics facilitated by digital technologies, where individual expression displaces collective action frames. Ladia and Rogelio (2023) found that the pandemic motivated youth to explore online platforms for political articulation, with internal political efficacy strongly correlating with various forms of political engagement. Youth involvement in society presents itself in innovative ways, promoting more peaceful societies as acknowledged by the UN in Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security

(Youth4Peace, 2017). Youth organizing, as described by Amao (2019), empowers young individuals to devise localized solutions to community challenges, fostering sustainable and peaceful societies. However, some youth do not engage or find satisfaction in social activities for various reasons, as noted by Popova and Selezneva (2018), Fatykhova and Mingazova (2016), and Shilyaeva (2018). Fatykhova (2020) revealed that certain personal traits can limit students' social engagement.

Digital media serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness, inspiring communities to act, and telling stories that elevate the voices of the voiceless. Chattoo (2020) emphasizes that modern social-issue documentaries play a crucial role in civic practice by shedding light on intricate realities and offering fresh perspectives for public discussion.

This study aimed to document the social engagements of active Paulinians at St. Paul University Manila through the creation of a micro-documentary. It also shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of students' social lives in the digital age, highlighting the importance of fostering a balance and consistency in their social engagement to reflect the various aspects of their social identity.

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