Politics, The Hunger Games and the Filipino Youth: Political Participation through Readings of Dystopian Literature

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ABSTRACT

Using Melissa Ames’ framework, specifically the use of dystopian literature as a form of political participation, this research sought to know and understand the effects of reading dystopian literature like The Hunger Games on the Filipino youth’s perception of contemporary Philippine politics. This paper discusses how readings of dystopian literature serve as a medium through which political interest and political participation transpire. Through the utilization of in-depth interviews of select youth, the study found out that the youth are not apathetic as some scholars believe. As such, to look at the youth as disinterested may not at all represent their political characteristic as both political interest and participation are channeled through a different medium. This definitely has serious implications to the study of youth political participation.

Keywords: Youth political apathy, political participation, dystopian literature, The Hunger Games

INTRODUCTION

One inescapable reality in today’s world is that people do not have the tendency to develop comprehensive ideas about society and politics, resulting to the lack of public participation in the political process, giving those in power the freedom to engage in pursuing their own goals [32]. Political participation is a very broad term, which often refers to the different activities that citizens use to engage in the political arena. There are different ways in which citizens get involved: it may be through voting, reading newspapers or watching television news programs, participating in election campaign activities, or becoming members of political parties or similar organizations [39,12]. A number of studies has been conducted in relation to the decreasing political participation of the people, especially the youth today in relation to electoral involvement, political party membership, and engagement in youth organizations among others [39,41,12,18,15]. The Independent National Electoral Commission and The Friedrich-Ebert-
Political participation and political apathy goes hand-in-hand. Political apathy is regarded as one of the most significant evidence of the decreasing political participation, which is characterized by the decreasing involvement in the different social and political organizations and the electoral process [16,24,40,32]. Political apathy as a subset of political behavior is defined as the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from public obligations, and refraining from political activity. Some studies attributed to political apathy and decline in political efficacy the decrease in political participation [21,12,18,33] The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. In a similar way, van Deth explained that it can be manifested in the systematic distrust of institutions, which causes people to be less civic-minded, less well-informed about current events, and less inclined to vote or otherwise participate in political life. However, the growing number of discussions and researches about the increasing youth political apathy among the academics and laypersons in the recent years has caused an alarm about the future of democracy [39,22,15,2,1].

Political apathy affects both old and young alike. Accordingly, young people have comparatively lower levels of political knowledge than their older contemporaries, and have a distinct lack of interest in politics. Compared with older adults, they are less likely to be politically active, display comparatively weaker commitments to political parties, and are less likely to be members of such organizations [41,22,1]. In the same manner, Russell et al. mentioned that the young people’s levels of political participation in general are in deterioration, and at a faster rate than is the case for older adults and also for previous youth cohorts. The justification for labelling the young as apathetic or apolitical usually comes from the different researches related to civic responsibility which were often indicated by studies on voter turnout, and knowledge current affairs [2]. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) mentioned that the youth political apathy is not only limited to developing countries; instead they emphasized that it has emerged as a major problem in both established and evolving democracies, stable and unstable societies, sizeable and flourishing economies, as well as small and troubled ones.

This rapid increase in number of apathetic youth and their decreasing political participation causes a major concern, which can be heard from numerous sectors of society, governments, the media, and political and social researchers. The citizens’ political participation is an important aspect of the democratization process, if not the improvement of the quality of democracy, as it provides legitimacy to the actions of the government, which is an essential element of democracy. The lack thereof not only affects legitimacy of the political system, but also the full institutionalization of democracy. Forbig [12] supported this when he emphasized that political participation plays a crucial role for the development of democracy, both in shaping its institutions and in embedding and legitimizing them socially. INEC and FES echoed this when they mentioned that there is an increasing global realization that political participation constitute a major factor in democracy, democratization and good governance for it plays a vital role of ensuring representation of popular will and, subsequently, help to secure legitimacy of the political system.

Despite this, Forbig argued that the changing forms of youth political participation, away from conventional democratic institutions and towards other forms of youth engagement in public life, are becoming evident. He further explained that the arenas for youth involvement in political and, more broadly, public life appear to be more numerous than ever before, yet few would claim that these opportunities have resulted in the widespread and effective participation of young people. In a similar manner, Ames [2] argued that contrary to ample research and poll data that indicates that the youth has traditionally been uninterested in current events, global politics, environmental concerns, and ethical debates involving scientific invention, human trafficking, and social equity – the reading preferences of the youth of dystopian literature indicates that this label of “apolitical” may not be as fitting as some believe. She further added that the popularity of young adult dystopia, which is ripe with these political themes, suggests that this group is actually quite interested in these topics, although they often turn to the safe confines of fiction to wrestle with them.

Suzanne Collins’s “The Hunger Games” series, an example of this dystopian literature and is often credited for furthering the young adult (YA) dystopia trend [27]. The success of her books, and the YA dystopias following them, is believed to be more than just a mere marketing achievement. Goodnow explained that this genre is popular because it mirrors a world beset by some of the most frightening problems in recent memory, from climate change to terrorism, and the shredding of privacy and free will making it the “zeitgeist of the times”. The trilogy is one of many dystopian novels that give us an overview of the bleak and terrible future due to human actions itself [31]. In the study of Sar and Murni [31] they analyzed the dystopian aspects in The Hunger Games focusing on the political themes. Accordingly, there are five political dystopia that occurred in the novel: a) totalitarian government; b) political repression; c) dehumanization; d) restrictions of freedom and e) oppression which led to rebellion which gave credence to the fact that indeed political dystopia
occurred in the novels. This follows the study of Ames [2], which argues that young adult dystopian literature is rich in political themes and that reading such literature is also a small step towards engagement of the youth in social justice, and this would eventually result to a more overt political action as opposed to the ‘apathetic’ label given to the youth.

Given all these, the paper aims to characterize how readings of dystopian literatures, specifically, The Hunger Games, translate to youth political participation in the Philippines. The article is organized as follows: a survey of the extant literature on political apathy, political participation and dystopia is provided together with the exposition of the theoretical frame and methods the paper is anchored on; results and analysis follow; and the last part concludes.

2. Review Of Related Literature:
Theoretical Framework:
The paper is anchored on the study of Ames [2] of apolitical adolescents and dystopian literature. The study of Ames [2] argues that this label of “apolitical” is not as fitting as some scholars believe. Ames argued that the proliferation of dystopian novels, which is full of political themes, most especially among the youth, shows that they are interested in such topics. She further added it is a possible educational material, and a small step towards engaging the youth in different social justice issues, that may later result to an obvious political action.

Based on her study, the very fact that this population is enthralled with such tales suggests that the classification of “apolitical,” or at the very least “apathetic,” is inaccurate. Since this literary trend indicates that while these young adults may be disheartened by contemporary politics and under-informed in current events, they are not uninterested in the social problems that underlie both. The success of these novels implies that the youth are willing to entertain societal critiques. The “mismatch” between the reading interests of young adults and their direct political action suggests that young adults could easily be molded into more political engaged citizens. She concluded that rather than predicting a bleak future for the young persons of today, this dystopian trend may very well be pointing toward a more positive future, at least in terms of political engagement.

Review of Related Studies:
On the Youth’s Political Apathy:
The apathy that is connected to politics and political situation, which typically affects both young and old alike, that result in lower and lower voter turnout during elections is called political apathy. The supposed political apathy of young adults and teenagers has been a subject of discussion by the 21st century academics and laypersons alike which is a cause of concern about the future of democracy [25,2]. According to Dan this is apparent for those in the age group 18 to 24 years. Supported by ample research and poll data like the study of Pew Research in 2010, this age group has traditionally been uninterested in current events, global politics, environmental concerns, and ethical debates involving scientific invention, human trafficking and social equity.

Sarfraz, Ahmed, Khalid and Ajmal [32] defined apathy as a state of indifference wherein an individual has an absence of interest or concern to certain aspects of emotional, social or physical life. They further added that it can be object-specific towards a person, activity, or environment. It is the lack of interest in things one does not consider important [35]. It is synonymous to passivity, submissiveness, and even numbness to social, economic, environmental and political issues as evidenced by lack of awareness, concern, social responsibility and action such as voting [32]. Similarly, Garcia-Albacete [13] supported this, as she explained that the concerns regarding the youth’s movement away from politics has been emphasized by different institutions and media that resulted to a number of national and international initiatives that confirmed the decrease of interest in politics of the citizens in general, and the young people in particular, as a result of their disaffection towards different institutions and their apathy regarding traditional forms of participation. Some of the usual explanations for the lack of interest in politics include young people’s belief that politics lacks relevance for them or their preoccupation with other interests and concerns, or the complexity of politics and the difficulties young people have in understanding political life and processes [41]. According to Kuhar (n.d.), the important barriers that prevent or even abstain from being active in politics are: a longer economic dependence on their family; unemployment pressures; a diminishing role of politically active autonomous peer groups; and the consequent retreat into petty, banal private shells. This was corroborated by a survey conducted by Centre of Civic Education (n.d.) which revealed that the problems in political structures, persistent instability of the democratic system, and disenchantment with the history of politicians and disrespect of youth’s ideas were some of the major reasons for apathy among the young population. Another study reported that most people consider politics a useless activity or a thankless job. In a similar manner, Sandoval, Mangahas and Guerrero of the Social Weather Stations (SWS) found out that the Filipino youth does not give much importance to matters of politics, for they think that they can do little about this. There are several barriers that cause loss of interest of the youth in politics.
Political disengagement of individuals, particularly the youth greatly affects democracy and democratization as evidenced by the lack of political participation for different modes of political participation – both formal and informal – help secure the legitimacy of the political system [9,20,11,10]. Political participation is defined as the manifestation of activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue. It derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of the government. It extends beyond parties, however. Individuals can also become involved in certain aspects of the electoral process through independent action – particularly at the local level and by joining civil society organizations. Professional networks, trade unions, NGOs, media and even literature can all provide avenues for political participation. The concept of political participation is not passive but has been recurring and changing with developments in social theory and research [18].

The UNDP (n.d.) found out accordingly that the young people between the ages of 15 and 25 constitute a fifth of the world’s population. While they are often involved in informal, politically relevant processes, such as activism or civic engagement, which are not formally represented in national political institutions such as parliaments, and many of them do not participate in elections, it has been found that in new emerging democracies, the inclusion of youth in formal political processes is important. Through their active contributions, democratic values can come to life, paving the way for the overcoming of authoritarian practices. In countries where the youth led protests have forced authoritarian regimes from power, significant frustration is likely to arise if the youth are not included in new formal decision making procedures.

Although the statement above showed the loss of interest of the youth in engaging in politics, it also shows how important the role of the youth in the political arena is. As with every action has an equal and opposite reaction, the growing importance of the youth in politics also led to the loss of interest in politics. As Hooghe stated, the claim that young people engage less intensively in political and social life is indeed substantiated by various empirical indicators, especially with regard to conventional political participation acts. In Canada for example, political engagement of people with the age of 35 and above proves to be stable, but shows a significant downward trend for voters under the age of 30 [3]. Similar results also showed in the state of Slovenia when it comes to political engagement of the youth. According to the findings of Mladina, as many as 56.6% of young people between 16 and 29 years of age stated that they had little or no interest in politics and only 8.9% stated that they had a strong or very strong interest in politics.

While this may be the case in the extant literature, according to the study of Ames [2], the label of “apolitical” may not applicable as what scholars believe as shown by the recent popularity of young adult dystopian literature like The Hunger Games. It is under this purview that the current study explores on how readings of dystopian literature translate to political participation. That is, those readings by themselves are a form of engagement.

**On Readings of Dystopian Literature:**

Utopia is a creation from human imagination of the perfect world of happiness and order. According to Claeys, dystopia is usually supposed to be an inverted, mirrored or negative version of utopia, the imaginary bad place as opposed to the imaginary good place. It is typically defined as literary accounts of places worse than the ones we live in. Aside from being anti-utopias, some are described as critical dystopias or flawed utopias, and various other subcategories are possible [7]. On the one hand, Sar and Murni [31] defined dystopia as a critique of social, economic and political issues in literature. Dystopias are explained through an exaggerated worst-case scenario to make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system. He further added that it is a futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control.

According to Ames [2] it would be misleading to present political focus as entirely new in young adult literature for dystopian themes and political concerns have filled the pages of young adult novels since their beginning. Various recurrent motifs can easily be traced throughout the decades proving this point. As such common characteristics of dystopian societies include: use of propaganda to control the citizens of society; information independent thought; freedom is restricted; a figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens of the society; citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance; citizens have a fear of the outside world; citizens live in a dehumanized state; the natural world is banished and distrusted; citizens conform to uniform expectation; individuality and dissent are bad, and the society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.

Based on the study by Chantsev, dystopian literature appears when society becomes certain that the current situation will last a long time and will eventually worsen in the future, while at the same time an individual is surrounded by a sense of alienation from any involvement in history. The authors of dystopia fiction tend to use future dystopias to internalize present problems and provide a critique of political, social, and economic structures (Baccolini and Moylan, 2003). Other
previous scholars like Zipe [44] have noted that the contemporary dystopian fiction and the utopian fiction it derives from, often includes a critique of a ‘postmodern,’ advanced technological society gone awry and calls for a social change. The writers of dystopia get their inspiration from experience or they see it from the reality. Suzanne Collins is one of many dystopian authors who are afraid of the probability of bleak and terrible future as a result of the war and violence. Her successful “The Hunger Games” trilogy paved way for the popularity of the said genre. As such, for the purpose of this study, the researchers utilized The Hunger Games series by Suzanne Collins as the focus of the study.

Given these, the researchers assumed that the youth of today are not as apathetic as some scholars believe. Readings of dystopian literature, particularly The Hunger Games, show that they are interested in such topics. It was also argued that these interests are a step towards their participation in political affairs.

Methods:
To be able to describe and understand how readers of dystopian literatures, specifically, The Hunger Games perceive contemporary Philippine politics, and to be able to characterize its effect on their political participation as directed by Ames’ framework for apolitical adolescents and dystopian literature, the paper utilized the qualitative approach. This approach is often used to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness [26].

The corpus of data was gathered through an in-depth interview of sixteen (16) select students, herein referred to as the youth, of a Philippine college. Upon accumulating the data needed, after reading and rereading of the interview transcripts, commonalities and variations of the respondents’ answers were initially identified. Through coding and open coding, themes and categories were established, from which discussion of answers to the research questions on hand followed.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
There is an ongoing debate as to whether or not the youth of today are apathetic. Some scholars believe that the youth are politically apathetic, and have predicted the bleak future of politics, while others believe that the youth are not as disinterested as some scholars contend. The latter group of scholars argued that the youth have drifted away from the traditional modes of participation to other ways of engagement in the political arena. This is illustrated in the study of Ames [2] when she asserted that readings of dystopian literature are a form of participation. Based on the interviews, the assumptions of Ames were affirmed. The following present characterizations of the youth’s perception of, interest and participation in Philippine politics through readings of dystopian literature.

The Philippine State in a State of Panem: The Youth on Oppression, Inequality and Poverty:
Ames [2] mentioned that Collin’s trilogy can be read as a critique of the many different aspects of our society, specifically our entertainment choices. This has been affirmed in an interview of Collins, in which she shared “that her inspiration for the story came from channel surfing and being impressed by the televised images of the war in Iraq and the reality television shows.” Her family background, especially so that her father was an Air Force officer sent to many wars including those in Vietnam, affected her interests on war and violence, and the effect of both to humans and society. Dystopian literature also offers critiques in other areas as well, like an allegory for the state of our politics and government, capitalism and even education.

According to Ames, this literary trend shows that despite the lack of engagement of the youth in conventional modes of political participation, and lack of awareness in current matters of politics, the fact that the youth are interested in such genre shows that there is a hope for the youth to be molded into more politically engaged citizens.

When asked the question if there is any form of oppression present in the book and how it affects an individual’s exercise of freedom, all the fifteen interviewees agreed on the presence of this panacea.

As a response, an interviewee explained that:
“There is a lot of form of oppression in the book especially in the Districts. Everybody is categorized. They are made to work under the impression for the good of all but only one District is benefitting from this. Children are used for some sick enjoyment and those in the Capitol go crazy for it because they think it’s normal, they think it is okay. They’re so used to it that it becomes the norm.”

As to how it affects an individual’s exercise of freedom, a respondent claimed that oppression forces an individual against his or her will. The interviewee explained:
“They, the people of the Districts outside the Capitol, are unable to live their life as they wish. They are restricted to do this and that, unlike those who are able to enjoy their freedom to the fullest.”

In relation to this, another interviewee added in her response, that:
“They don’t have the opportunity to exercise their freedom since everything in the Capitol is controlled by President Snow. Every individual does not have the access to do or act based on his or her free will.”

Another respondent provided that:
“It (oppression) stifles and chokes you. You can’t do those things that you want. Oppression...
erases your identity. They force you into boxes, separating you from the rest. You can never truly express yourself even if it is not going to harm others.”

In a similar way, another respondent mentioned that:

“Being able to exercise their freedom like freedom of speech and expression serves as a source of life for an individual.”

When asked as to what President Coriolanus Snow, the president of Panem does in order to solve the different problems encountered by Panem like poverty outside of Capitol, three actions of President Snow and his government emerged the most, namely: (1) The (Annual) Hunger Games; (2) the usage of fear; and (3) the utilization of power.

A respondent explained this, in his response that:

“Each district has its own role, like the District 12 has the mines and coals, etc. They are also conducting The Annual Hunger Games to remind the people of Panem of what happened to District 12 after revolting against the Capitol. So clearly, President Snow is planting fear to solve poverty by the use of media.”

Another interviewee offered an explanation as to what President Snow does to solve the different problems of Panem, in her statement of:

“Nothing. He does nothing to solve the problems and instead instill more fear to the citizens outside the Capitol. He milks them for all they’re worth and leave nothing but dusts for them to live.”

A similar response was mentioned by another respondent:

“Actually he does nothing to solve these problems. He turns a blind eye to it and simply induces fear to make sure they (the people) don’t rebel against him.”

These responses of the interviewees were supported by a study conducted by Sar and Murni (2013) on the different aspects of political dystopia in Suzanne Collins’ The Hunger Games. There are five aspects of political dystopia that occurred in the novel, which includes restrictions of freedoms and oppression. The five aspects are: a) totalitarian government, b) political repression, c) dehumanization, d) restrictions of freedom, and e) oppression which led to rebellion. Based on their findings, freedom is impossible for people in the districts for there are many restrictions imposed by the Capitol in order to keep the districts in line: everything that they should do or say should support the Capitol rather than vice versa.

There are resemblances between Panem and the Philippines. This parallelism between Panem and the Philippines helped shape the views of the youth on Philippine politics, and later on constitute their political interest and political participation. Eleven out of fifteen interviewees affirmed the presence of similarities between Panem and the current state of our country. These similarities include the following: the presence of oppression, exploitation of the poor and marginalized sector by the rich and the government; the use of media as a form of distraction; and unequal distribution of wealth.

An interviewee explained, in her response that:

“It reminds me of many instances in our country. The oppression, the poverty, the way the people of the Capitol are blind to what is going around, outside from their own comforts and how this seems normal to them now because it is how things have been from before. Our opinions on things change on the way society dictates it. If we are not aware, then we believe what everybody believes in but it isn’t right just because everybody thinks it is right.”

Another response by another interviewee also echoes this:

“Yes. There are similarities. In Panem, the people of the Capitol live in comfort and luxury, while the people of the different districts are suffering. Like here in our country, those people who are suffering, specifically those involved in agriculture to provide our food are the ones who suffer.

In a similar manner, a respondent answered:

“They’re similar in a way that they both take advantage of their power. Panem’s government found a way to sustain, but not cure, the poverty. A very bad way, by the way. In the Philippines, the government’s sole purpose is just corrupt the people’s money for their own interests.”

A respondent added that:

“Both the government and politics in Panem and the Philippines are unfair, with rampant inequality in which the rich are living life to the fullest while the poor are left to suffer. It’s all about a person’s social status.”

On the one hand there is an existing symbolic representation of the characters in the Philippine settings. This was affirmed by all the respondents. According to their responses, the people of the Capitol represent the elites – the capitalist, the rich, and the wealthy – and the corrupt politicians. These resemblances between Panem and the Philippines are not entirely a coincidence. As previously mentioned, dystopian literatures are by themselves a critique of social realities within which citizens, especially the youth, thrive.

Following the parallelism between the state of Panem and the Philippines, the literature gave rise to different sentiments or feelings that later on affected the perceived engagement of the youth in politics.
An interviewee explained why the state of Panem’s society made her angry in her statement that:

“...it angers me: the treatment of the citizens outside the Capitol, and the presence of oppression and slavery; the meaningless death of children every year for the enjoyment of others that can live vicariously. It opens my eyes to exactly where the world is heading if we are unable to change the current state of our world.”

A respondent explained why she felt it unfair:

“It is unfair. They all have the luxury and the will to do what they want because they have the money, they are rich. They don’t need to work unlike the other people in other districts who have to kill just to have something to eat.”

Another interviewee echoed this:

“I think it’s unfair as to why the people had to experience that. That only a few people have the power, and they’re getting even more powerful.”

A respondent explained his feelings:

“I feel bad knowing that these events have happened in the past and are still happening (in our country). People are not learning from our mistakes by still voting for the same egocentric politicians.”

A respondent felt fear in relation to the state of politics in our country:

“If things don’t change, we will eventually end up like Panem. Maybe without The Hunger Games but by economic and political terms and the like. The probability of ending up in an authoritarian regime is high.”

Majority of the respondents felt bad, as illustrated by the following responses:

“Our government is using the poor to get what they want. I felt sick that what happened to the book is somewhat similar to the present state of politics in our country.”

“Politics in the Philippines and Panem is the same because it is about the helplessness of those who are left behind.”

The above statements are a manifestation of the assessment of the select youth on Philippine society being characterized by oppression, inequality and poverty similar to that of Panem in The Hunger Games. Apparently, the youth are not as apathetic as noted by researchers since they were able to identify political themes reflective of Philippine society. Identification of these key issues is by itself a manifestation of knowledge of and interest in Philippine politics. The ability of the youth to point out similarities in the state of politics in both settings, specifically those of the usage of power and bad governance, reflects the inherent interest of the youth in current political affairs in relation to their perceived ability to influence the outcomes which the following section presents.

Impressions of Political Efficacy and Notions of Political (dis)Interest:

There are different reasons that account for an individual’s political participation. One reason is the perceived ability to influence different matters of politics. According to Schulz (2005), this concept has played a prominent role in studies on political behavior and political socialization. He further added that in the process of political socialization during childhood and adolescence, acquisition of political efficacy is often seen as crucial for future participation as an active citizen in a democracy, and this has received a lot of attention in studies on the political participation of adolescents.

In The Hunger Games, the youth perceived themselves as someone who will build, if not shape the future of the country. Twelve out of fifteen interviewees responded that it is important for the youth to be involved in politics as well.

One respondent contended:

“If you don’t have any interest in politics and government then you won’t be able to make good decisions that would benefit all. If you don’t have the interest (in politics), then of course, you won’t have the drive to go out and vote when needed be.”

That knowledge of and involvement in politics is significant was also highlighted in the interviews. As one respondent claimed:

“Yes, it is crucial that we are involved in politics. Since our future generation will be the youth, it is important for them to know what really is going on in the country—what are the issues and controversies concerning the government and how to identify possible options that can be used to solve such.”

Another respondent argued that before participating, it is important for the youth to first have the sensibility (knowledge) of political affairs when he claimed that:

“Yes, it is important, that we as part of the nation have to have at least the sensibility with regards to politics.”

This was also supported by another respondent in her claim that:

“For me yes, it is significant to be involved in politics. Not in a way that they have to enter in politics immediately. But first just to have a background (about politics). Because it seems that the youth today can’t answer anything if you ask them about politics for they are too focused on technology and gadgets.”

These responses affirm the fact that before the youth, or anyone for that matter can participate in the political arena through whatever means or media,
they must first have the awareness of different political concerns.

The youth also acknowledge that the government’s response to and prioritization of the problems encountered by the populace affects their perceived influence on politics, and hence their degree of interest and participation.

Some interviewees answered that the government is responding but is inefficient and ineffective. Following this, a respondent answered:

“They (the government) are responding but it seems to be inefficient.”

A respondent also echoed this:

“They (the government) make little efforts, but it is not enough.”

In a similar note, another interviewee explained that:

“The government is not entirely deaf to the plight of the youth, most especially since they know that in the upcoming election having their votes would make a big difference but it is still not enough. If they do respond to these problems, they only do so because they need something in return from the youth.”

One respondent explained that:

“I don’t think so. Because if the government is really responding, or even cares, why are there many people in the streets?”

Another respondent, who seemingly looked at the government as powerless, corroborated this:

“No. They can’t do anything.”

One respondent explained that:

“The government was created to help its constituents by creating opportunities for all... So I believe the government is doing its part in helping the people, especially the youth through education.”

The perceived interest of the youth today affects both the youth’s perceived role in politics in general, and their political participation, in particular. Nine of out fifteen respondents affirmed that the youth of today are interested in politics.

Accordingly, one claimed that:

“Yes. I think a large number of college, and even high school students are used to expressing their opinions regarding politics and social issues. Thanks to social media.”

Another respondent also affirmed this:

“Yes, the people I know both online and personally are all advocating awareness in issues that involve politics. They talk about the upcoming election and the candidates they’re going to vote for and about the current government especially the current issues the country is facing.”

On the other hand, six out of fifteen respondents answered that the youth is not interested, if not only few are interested. Based on the response of an interviewee, she explained that:

“Based on my observations, only few are interested in politics. Because their minds have been isolated in technology and gadgets.”

This was also supported by another interviewee:

“No (they are not interested). They are too engrossed and focused in Facebook, COC (Clash of Clans, an online-based game), etc. “

Similarly, one respondent claimed that:

“The youth are not interested. Because the youth are too busy to even care. I’m too busy with my life, why should I care about politics?”

From these responses, social media plays an important role in shaping the youth’s interest in politics today. It can be either a tool for the youth to be more aware of the different matters of politics and an avenue of participation where they can particularly voice out their opinions or it can also be the cause of the lack of, if not declining, political interest of the youth. Nonetheless, what was highlighted in the interviews was the fact that the youth’s notions of political efficacy and political interest are crucial in political participation and the fact that they acknowledge it means that they are not as apathetic as some observers contend.

Discussion:

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers have found out that readings of dystopian literature does affect, if not contribute in the promotion of political interest. It also enforces and encourages the students in political discussions – either online or personal – and to participate in the political arena. Out of the fifteen (15) interviewed by the researchers, majority agreed that dystopian literature, specifically, The Hunger Games encouraged them to voice out their opinions in matters concerning Philippine politics. As cited in the previous section, the different interviewees pointed out that the hardships experienced by the protagonists in relation to the different hardships seen in our country encouraged them to join different political discussions and somehow participate via different social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. More importantly, the youth’s political efficacy, that is, their belief in their ability in nation-building, was evident in the interviews.

The study adds credence to Ames’ [2] study of the apolitical adolescents and their political engagement—that the youth are not as apathetic as some scholars perceived when it comes to the different discussions and participation in the political arena. In this light, the study showed that the youth are not passive as some scholars argue. What the study showed is that readings of dystopian literature are by themselves a channel through which interest
and participation are shown. As such, to look at the youth as disinterested may not at all represent their political characteristic as both political interest and participation are channeled through a different medium.

As Forbrig and Ames [2] claimed, this changing form of youth political participation, from conventional and overt to non-traditional and implicit, is becoming evident. Thus, the study of youth involvement and of political participation at large, must consider other arenas of engagement in public life. Although the youth may turn to the safe confines of the pages of dystopian fiction to show political interest, what was evident was that the reading preferences of the contemporary youth of this literature indicates that the label “apolitical” may not be as fitting as some believe today.

REFERENCES