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The Role of Facebook influencers in shaping the narrative of the Duterte Era

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Philosophy (PhD) in Political Communication

by

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“The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth.”

— George Orwell, 1984

To the Filipino people and our struggles as a nation

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Abstract

In 2016, 16 million Filipinos elected Rodrigo Duterte into the presidency. His campaign was founded on populist narratives and heavily used social media, especially Facebook influencers, who helped shape his political campaign. Similarly, Duterte critics also used Facebook to criticise his populist agenda. With the Philippines having one of the highest Facebook penetration, Facebook has been weaponised for implementing disinformation campaigns and discourse-hijacking campaigns for political agenda (Ong and Cabañes, 2018).

Using quantitative content analysis as a method, the purpose of this paper is to assess how Rodrigo Duterte, his main campaign platforms, and critical political issues like human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and Philippine-China relations were portrayed across Facebook pages of pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. The study looks at the most common rhetorical devices used by Facebook influencers, as well as the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech present in political discourse on Facebook from January 2019-December 2020.

This thesis makes three main contributions in the field of political communication. First, I contribute to the study of how social media is used for political communication and how it can impact political discourse. This is a field of research where non-Western countries including many in Asia, like the Philippines, have been understudied despite being early adopters of technology. My thesis forms part of a wider challenge to de-Westernize research in the field of media and communication, and particularly in respect of developing scholarship sensitive to concerns within and about the global South.

Second, my study contributes empirically through the application of quantitative content analysis to a specific case study and one that gives us an insight into a different political and cultural landscape compared to most existing research. By using this method, I have made significant findings such as analysing the main rhetorical devices used by the influencers in their permanent campaigns, in

presenting narratives that are politically divisive, and as well as in analysing the types of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech present in their posts.

Third, my study contributes to the conceptual framework on the topics of incivility and intolerance by creating a visualisation of the scales of political speech which has never been done before. This visualisation, while still in an early stage of development, can already be replicated in other studies of incivility and intolerance and has the potential to evolve if used in different contexts.

My analysis of the Facebook posts by the ten influencers show four main findings. One, using Benoit's functional theory, I found that attacks on character were the most prominent rhetorical device used by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers during the period of data collection, which includes the 2019 midterm elections. Second, using Aristotle's theory of persuasion, I found that both groups of influencers use rhetorical devices to talk to their echo chambers, with posts mostly catering to the people who already follow them and believe in their causes. Third, by using the scales of political speech visualisation that I developed for this study, I found that anti-Duterte influencers posted more uncivil and intolerant posts in general but that pro-Duterte influencers posted more intense forms of intolerance – incitements to violence, extremist views, and hate speech – that may threaten democracy. Fourth, by looking at the mean engagement of these posts, I also found that these incitements to violence, extremist views, and hate speech posts by pro-Duterte influencers have a disproportionately high mean engagement (reactions, comments, and shares).

Through these original contributions and my findings, my thesis contributes to the advancement of knowledge and discussions on the role of social media in the rise of illiberalism globally. My study also paves the way for future projects, both inside and outside academia, on the evolving landscape of digital media and how society can respond to the challenges posed by digital media in democracies.

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Foreword

*“There’s no such thing as a neutral position in academics.
As a human, you always have a certain position in society.
When you conduct research, it leads to findings, and often
those findings are not neutral.”*

-Sociolinguist Jan Blommaert

Many of my favourite novels are about dystopian futures – 1984, The Giver, Brave New World, Fahrenheit 451, The Handmaid’s Tale. One thing they share in common is how highly regulated media came to be in these new worlds. In these worlds, books were burned, women were no longer allowed to read or write, words were no longer used anywhere, pens and papers became contrabands, and cameras were installed everywhere to spy on what everyone was doing all the time. It’s a scary thing to think about, but in these new worlds where democracies have been curtailed, reigning governments know the power of media in promoting ideologies. Better to keep people ignorant than to get them thinking of how and why they should revolt seems to be the theme of every dystopian novel I have read.

What these novels failed to predict would be the rise of the Internet. No one would have thought back in the day, when these novels were written, that the future would be dominated by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tiktok, and that these channels would be crucial in political communication. Who would have thought that data could just be as valuable as oil?

Speaking of the Internet, I remember before Facebook, Instagram, and Tiktok, I used to be a member of certain forums and blog my way through high school life. After my parents separated and my mom left, I was left to navigate adolescence and teenage life on my own. How to put on make-up, how to deal with crushes, what do I do when I fight with my friends? I had the Internet to turn to. In these forums and through blogging, I found a community of teens who were going through the same

teenage problems as I did. In these forums, as in real life, there were the popular posters who everyone wanted to be friends with and whose advice everyone sought. I guess it helped that they were pretty as well, and that we somehow lived vicariously through them – the number of suitors they entertained, the auditions they went to for modelling gigs, the lives they lived which seemed so different from us more ordinary girls. They dominated the forum I was a member of, and I gladly devoured every single one of the posts and threads they created. It was the same thing for blogging. I followed certain blogs by some people who talked about their everyday life. I remember following one certain lesser known celebrity who was big in the blogging world because of how authentic she seemed outside of the limelight. I looked forward to her blog posts and I really felt a certain connection to her, even when I didn't really know her personally.

Back then, we didn't really have a term then for these people who had a following on the Internet. We just knew that they were famous in these communities that they belonged in. We loved them, and to a certain extent, we wanted to be them. And I guess before social media became a big thing, bloggers were the first group of people who had the power to promote certain products and would be invited to product launches and events. I definitely remember reading blog reviews about products I wanted to use and when I started working for campaigns in the nonprofit world, I started inviting them too to become our campaign ambassadors. So even before the word 'influencers' became mainstream to describe people with the ability to influence others, we already had a concept of how ordinary people with following, as opposed to typical A-list celebrities, had some influence over their audience.

While I can consider myself an early adopter when it comes to the Internet, my relationship with it has not been smooth-sailing all the time. My main motivation why I wanted to do this research was when I was subject to a barrage of hate in 2016, when I criticised Rodrigo Duterte for his anti-human rights policies. It started with comments and messages where I was criticised for my looks (i.e. 'you're so ugly') and ended with threats to my life (i.e. 'I know where you live, I will get you raped and killed you'). In 2016, I received a barrage of hate which led to death threats and incitements to violence after some of my posts criticising Duterte went viral on Facebook. This led to a criminal case which I filed with the help of human rights groups and lawyers who were invested in ensuring the Internet remains a safe place for voicing dissent. I also had an experience with an influencer who

posted about me and tagged me in her public Facebook page, making her followers harass me for criticising her for sharing disinformation.

My experience is not isolated. In the years of the Duterte presidency, we have seen an increase in vitriol in social media – from name calling to extremist views, how much incivility, intolerance, and hate speech can you find on Facebook? There have been many cases of online hate speech that have turned into real-world harassment and violence. This has led me to ask a few questions on how people behave online, especially when it comes to political discussions. Have our echo chambers become so polarised that seeing other perspectives have made us more intolerant with each other? How uncivil have we become in the presence of heated political debates and political divisions? How prevalent is hate speech on Facebook and are influencers helping create an environment of hate? These are things I look at in Chapter 7 of this research where I present the different kinds of uncivil, intolerant, and hate speech we found during our content analysis and the reach these kinds of content have among the public.

Before I undertook this research I had two choices: go back to the Philippines and continue with my activism or stay in academia and try to understand the “Duterte phenomenon.” The Duterte phenomenon is what led me to pursue my masters degree in the UK in the first place. After almost ten years working in the nonprofit sector on human rights issues, the election of Rodrigo Duterte into the presidency drastically changed the landscape of Philippine politics and democracy. Here was a strongman, elected by 16 million Filipinos, who vowed to kill anyone who stood in his way (McKirdy, 20016).

Suddenly, our collective experience as human rights defenders was put into question. It seemed like Duterte was always one step ahead of us and we were not prepared. His attacks on human rights were lauded, and our counter-attacks were criticised, even laughed at. It was a 180-degree turn — we were made to be the villains that coddled criminals and drug addicts, the reason the fabric of Philippine society was disintegrating.

Those of us who remained critical of Duterte were baffled. What made Filipinos believe in Duterte? What turned millions of Filipinos into blind fanatics? How did narratives on human rights, justice,

and democracy take a turn to mean “evil” and “abuse”? These are some questions we still ask to this day.

While I was thinking over the two choices I had, I came to a realisation that I had more questions than answers, and that some of these questions can only be answered by staying in academia and devoting a few years of research into it. I realised that while many sprung into direct action and activism, very few used research and data to support these actions. Borrowing from Paulo Freire’s (1972) *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, praxis — informed action, or practice combined with theory — is essential in transforming reality.

I chose to take the road of academia to generate a new body of knowledge to help understand one aspect of the Duterte phenomenon, specifically in the field of political communication, that can be used alongside practice, in the hopes that this new body of knowledge can contribute in the efforts of protecting and preserving human rights and democracy in the Philippines.

Before I present my research findings, I first reflect on my complex relationship with my research, given my personal experience as an activist who dealt with trolling, harassment, and threats from Duterte influencers and their followers. As a researcher, I am in constant struggle with my other identity which I left back home.

I. Positionality: Who am I?

Maher and Tetrault (1994, p.164) define positionality as "not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analyzed and changed" and includes “knower's specific position in any context as defined by race, gender, class, and other socially significant dimensions.” In addition, Louis and Barton (2002) define positionality as “the relational place or value one has that influences and is influenced by varying contexts (e.g., social, political, historical, educational, and economical to name a few).” Research by Manalansan (2000) and Bhattacharya (2007) argue that a researcher’s identity and positionality can shape the research from the theoretical framework to the methods used and its analysis. Feminists have also used positionality,

reflexivity, and locating oneself within one's research to bring about wider transformations (Maxey, 1999).

In reflecting my positionality, I find that I am positioned in different contexts. I am a Filipino migrant, pursuing my PhD in the United Kingdom. I started my academic pursuit in the UK back in 2017 when I took my masters degree, and have stayed in academia since. Back in the Philippines, my position is different — I worked with human rights organisations and am a known activist and critic of Rodrigo Duterte.

I started with my activism in university; a university known for producing activists and changemakers. I was exposed to different ideologies that were openly discussed inside and outside the classroom. Professors encouraged us to walk out from their classes and protest if we wanted to and discourse was always open to the full spectrum of left-wing and right-wing ideas. The university is the site where I developed what Freire (1973) calls critical consciousness (*conscientização*), gaining awareness of injustice and inequities through a critical analysis of the world and taking action against the oppressive elements to address these injustices and inequities.

Stemming from the era of the Marcos dictatorship, Philippine universities became the bastion of resistance. Students became active in movements that fought for democracy and social change. The tradition continues to this day where student movements remain a vital part of universities.

It wasn't a surprise that I joined an artist-activist group where I also found myself working full-time for a few years after graduating from university. It is in this organisation that I became more exposed to social justice causes, eventually leading campaigns and projects related to human rights. I found myself in front of protest lines, on newspaper spreads, and radio and television programmes talking about the things we were fighting for. This is where I found my voice, the voice that has allowed me to be heard not only in the Philippines but in other countries too.

Getting noticed internationally for my work was, surprisingly, quite easy. I was a young woman of colour from a vulnerable country. I simply ticked all the boxes needed when it came to equality and diversity that international organisations wanted. Many times I've joined an international panel where

I was the only woman, the only youth representative, and the only person of colour — as if I represented everyone else in these categories I've been put in. These were times when my identities and my position have led to restricting other voices. What about indigenous women, for example? I don't represent them and they barely get heard on the international stage. I was by no means Greta Thunberg, but I recognised my privileges — I still came from a middle class background, had access to private education, and was financially secure — many things that other activists don't have.

It is through this dilemma that I came across the concept of intersectionality, a theory used by feminist and critical race studies, that describes the interdependence and confluence of oppressions and structural barriers based on one's identities — gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality, etc (Cole, 2009; Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 2017). The way we experience the world is different depending on the different identities we have and the positions we occupy. I realised that if I were to continue working on social justice causes, I must learn more about the world around me and deepen my understanding of it through theory. Further, and maybe more importantly, I realised that I too have intersecting identities.

When I decided to leave my job to pursue further studies, it was because I wanted my activism to be guided by theory, but by doing so the identities I held were immediately put into question. No one seemed to understand where to place me. Was I an academic or an activist? Did I want to study theory or did I want to practice? It was as if a person can only choose one or the other and that a marriage of both academia and activism isn't at all possible. My question is, why can't I be both?

II. Activism and academia

Baumgardner and Richards (2000) describes some preconceptions the public has about activists — out of the ordinary, weird, benevolent. In the Philippines, activists face the stigma of being labelled as communists, aggressors, disobedient children, vandals, a disgrace to society. Both the media and the government are partly to blame for its portrayal of activists. Activists have complained to the media of crass sensationalism when covering stories of protests (Uy, 2009) and in 2018, United Nations

Special Rapporteur Michael Forst urged the government to stop the stigmatisation of activists which leads to harassment and violence against them (Gavilan, 2018).

But what is an activist, really? What makes us activists? Is it marching on the streets, fighting for what we believe in? Is it in trying to change society for the better? Is it in unionising and joining movements? The definition of activism varies. Social movement literature points to activism as being part of a collective action or social movement (Bobel, 2007). Other literature point to defining activism based on activity. Urietta (2005) defines activism as the active participation in advocating for issues while Diani (1992) defines activism as engagement with conflict. Kim and Sriramesh (2009), meanwhile, define activism as a coordinated activity that organises to solve problems that threaten the interest of the members of the group. Nichols (2003), paints a more negative image of activists — people who use pressure, intimidation, and pressure for their agenda. Ganesh and Zoller (2011) note that across perspectives and disciplines, definitions of activism have a common concepts of advocacy, conflict, and transgression.

There is one view of activism that is more inclusive than previous definitions mentioned above. Maxey's (1999) inclusive view of activism is one that views every individual as an activist, all engaged in producing the world; a product that often starts as a mental rather than a physical process. Further, Maxey (1999, p.201) says,

“...activism means doing as much as I can from where I am at. Where I am at, of course, varies politically, spiritually, emotionally, physically, and so on. Perhaps the central part of my understanding of activism is that it gives rise to a continuous process of reflection, challenge, and empowerment.”

Defining what and who activists are is important in creating the identity of an activist. These definitions create preconceptions and stereotypes, which are important in the way the public and different institutions see us. It does not come as a surprise that many see activism and academia as two spaces that are separate from each other and cannot be occupied by one individual at the same time.

The dichotomy between academia and activism is not new. Katz (1994, p. 71) notes that academics have theories about theory and practice but that “practice takes a beating in the high stakes of academia.” Mies (1983) criticises academia for being uninvolved, separated from active participation, where theory is not lived but remains disembodied. Blomley (1994), puts forward the same critique where academics teach students that everything is simultaneously theoretical and political, but the same academics have a hard time connecting the two outside the university. Similarly, Routledge (1996), criticises academia from being too distant from lived experience and where theory becomes just another commodity.

Routledge (1996, p. 411) identifies a “third space” where there is no opposition between activism and academia:

“Certainly no simple opposition exists between academia and activism. Rather, occupying a third space of critical engagement enables research to become a personal and reflexive project of resistance.”

This third space enables the disruption of both sites of academia and activism. This is similar to West’s (1991) fourth model of intellectual vocation where he identifies the role of the critical organic catalyst, an intellectual whose work is grounded both inside academia and outside academia, in progressive organisations. Routledge (1996, p. 106) also describes this third space as a space for “critical engagement”, a process where one attempts to “create a place within resistance from which to write, recognising the the voices of those involved in struggles are distinct from the social science literature that seeks to study and explain such struggles.”

However, occupying this third space must allow for continuous negotiation of identities to happen. Gecas (2000, p. 94) redefines identity outside our social locations and claims that identities are “anchored in values and value systems.” Bobel (2007) echoes this sentiment and argues that values shape the definition of who is or isn’t an activist and goes further to say that activists are anchored in key values of humility and rigour.

Navigating my identities can sometimes be difficult when there are preconceived notions about both identities. Drawing on Gecas (2000) and Bobel (2007), if the values I hold both as an academic and as an activist are aligned, then surely I can occupy that third space identified by Routledge (1996) with no disparity between my two identities. I am both an activist and a researcher.

III. Objectivity, neutrality, and bias

As I started this research I had one serious concern – will my activism and my beliefs make me biased towards it? Will I suffer from confirmation bias? Will my research be viewed as too partisan by others? When people ask me how I can be more objective towards my research when I occupy the position of an activist still currently engaged in Philippine politics, I always say I would let the data speak to me because data wouldn't lie. Of course, I learned pretty quickly that is not true. Although my methodology involves quantitative content analysis and the definitions I used for each variable were based on literature, how I analysed my data was still based on how I interpreted it. Which begs the question, can a researcher be truly neutral and does a researcher always need to work towards neutrality?

First, let us define neutrality. Johnson (2016, p.25) defines neutrality as “not having a position or not taking a side.” In the field of library and information science studies (LIS), many scholars have cautioned against partisanship and have advocated for neutrality. Foskett (1962, p. 10) says that objectivity “gives us strength” while Berninghausen (1972) believes that political bias compromises intellectual freedom. Macdonald and Birdi (2019) argues that this view of neutrality in LIS puts it in a positive light – it is professional strength, guards against censorship, and promotes political freedom.

There are of course critics of neutrality. In sociology, Blair (2004, p.250) says,

“...what often passes for neutrality in social research is no more than a mask which hides a taken for granted partisan notion of what constitutes ‘good research’. It is partisan because it ignores the possibility of diverse systems of knowledge production and multiple interpretations of a social phenomena... our interpretations are underpinned by our life histories and our investment (whether or not acknowledged) in

our personal and group identities. Neutrality in social justice research is therefore a myth, whether or not one declares one's value system."

Blair (2004, p.250) goes further to argue that neutrality silences black and marginalised academics in social justice research, especially when their work is seen as sensitive and emotive, hence the need for marginalised groups to continue to assert their place in knowledge production:

"It is not enough, however, to understand the role of subjective identities in the production of knowledge, but for marginalised and subordinate groups to actively assert our place in this process and challenge the canon of received notions of what constitutes legitimacy in academic work."

Lather (1986, p. 67), similarly argues for the need to accept that there is no such thing as neutrality:

"Once we recognize that just as there is no neutral education there is no neutral research, we no longer need to apologize for unabashedly ideological research and its open commitment to using research to criticize and change the status quo."

Once I acknowledged my positions and that my work is not neutral, it made it easier for me to work without fear of being called biased, or fear that other researchers will think I have become too invested in my research because of my personal experience, making me too attached to my data. Now, I think the opposite. Having lived through an experience that has become my research topic has allowed me to have insights I wouldn't have had.

IV. On my personal social media participation

As an activist, I too have been using my Facebook as a way to express my criticisms of the government and especially my criticisms of Duterte. I didn't think any of my posts would go viral as

they did, but suddenly my posts were shared thousands of times, and that's where the online violence directed towards me started.

One day after I posted on my Facebook that "Duterte is a lazy choice", my Facebook inbox was flooded with hundreds of messages, most from Duterte supporters, who sent me messages ranging from uncivil ("You're ugly and stupid") to intolerance and hate ("I hope you get raped"; "I know where you live and I will kill you"). I remember that morning very well, opening the messages one by one, my stomach churning at the violence I have received for expressing my opinion on a presidential candidate.

I took screenshots of the messages, sent them to my friends and colleagues, and posted them publicly on my Facebook page. I said if anything happened to me, these were the people threatening my life. My colleagues, who were human rights defenders, urged me to report the incident to the police, which I did. To my disappointment, the only response I got was, 'Stop posting on Facebook if you don't want to be a target.' It only showed me how backwards the Philippines is when it comes to protecting women, especially when the violence happens digitally. The Philippines, being a patriarchal society, had a culture of victim-blaming. Victim blaming happens when a victim of a crime is held responsible for the crimes committed against them (Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crimes, 2009).

A group of human rights lawyers approached to say that if I agreed to it, they wanted to take on the case for free to test the Cybercrime Law of 2012, which was passed by the Congress and Senate to protect the rights of people online. I agreed to file the cases with the help of the Disini and Disini Law Office and the Medical Action Group. My counsel, Atty. JJ Disini, is a top lawyer in the Philippines who deals with cybercrimes and digital law. He is the same lawyer who handles the cyber libel cases of Rappler journalist Maria Ressa. In the end we filed 12 criminal cases and 12 cases under three laws: the Revised Penal Code, Cybercrime Prevention Act and the Omnibus Election Code. During our press conference, Atty. Disini said (2016):

"Under the Revised Penal Code, it is considered grave threat when you threaten somebody of physical harm. In this case, there's threat of rape, threat

of physical injury. And because it's done online, it's also cybercrime under section 6 of the law.”

Under these laws, not only will the individuals serve jail time if found guilty, they will also not be able to vote. As of October 2022t, the subpoenas have been handed down to individuals and the Disini Law Office has been appearing in court to defend me while I'm here in the United Kingdom. In July 2022, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) has decided to pursue the case where I will be able to testify remotely. Should the law side with me, my case will be the first successful case of criminalising people for serious threats and harassment on social media over politics. However, I recognise too that the justice system in the Philippines is known to be very slow in resolving cases, so I will not be surprised if my case takes 10 or 20 years to resolve.

I have noticed my friends also do the same in the comments sections of public pages -- mocking and name calling Duterte supporters. Thankfully I have not seen any of my friends or family using intolerant and hate speech. But this leads me to ask: is incivility the only way people from different political spectrum engage with each other online? There are, to some extent, people who I've seen have civil exchanges with each other on Facebook while discussing political issues, but from my observation, these are exceptions rather than the norm. Is polarisation making it more difficult for civility to happen, and is social media highlighting our political differences more than in real life?

During the 2022 national elections, this polarisation in politics only became more visible. People even coined the term *bardagulan* which means online bullying, online fighting, or online shit-posting. One of the more known personalities to engage in *bardagulan* is Rowena Guanzon, former COMELEC commissioner, who now holds office as a representative for the partylist P3PWD. Guanzon has been known to fight back against trolls and purveyors of disinformation, through personal attacks like calling them ugly or stupid, earning her the monicker *Bardagulan Queen*. Her Facebook page has grown thanks to this kind of engagement, and her followers seem to enjoy what she does. In fact, during the national elections, the campaign team of Leni Robredo allowed her to take the stage, where she comes out with boxing gloves seemingly ready for a fight. In these “performances”, Guanzon always takes the house down, crowds cheering for her.

And I too have done the same with Facebook profiles who supported the Marcos presidency. During the campaign season, as in the 2016 elections, I was posting criticisms against Bongbong Marcos and his family, for the many crimes they have done when Ferdinand was a dictator, which they have never paid for. It was like *deja vu*, I was once again targeted by trolls and supporters of Marcos, leaving comments on my posts that attack me as a woman. I resorted to *bardagulan* as a means of fighting back. Looking back, it might not have been the best way to deal with trolls, and it only made me feel more angry with every comment and reply. When emotions run high, it might be better to let them simmer down before engaging.

Just recently, in June 2022, my lawyers in the Philippines contacted me to say that the Commission on Elections is going through with the cases I filed and will officially be charging the individuals who sent me death threats in 2016. It has taken six years for this to happen and I am glad that the case is moving forward. Any hate speech that leads to threats and incitement to violence must have consequences. Having worked with human rights organisations for years, I know that my rights online are the same as my rights offline.

To this day, I continue to ask many questions about Duterte's rise to power and the way Filipinos have continued to support him and his illiberal policies throughout his six years in office. Why would a president who has admitted to murder and rape have an 80% approval rating and why would people cheer him on? Why would people mimic the way he speaks and acts? Has populism trumped our core values?

I do not have the answers to these questions, but I hope the data and analysis I have gathered and presented in this thesis could partly explain the behaviour of Filipinos on social media.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Communication, it is said, is the lifeblood of society. It is vital to the functioning of human social order. Communication is constitutive of culture. No culture can breathe without communication. If so, why have we, as communication scholars, so far focused our attention and energies solely on exploring Western theories of communication? A deep understanding of Asian approaches to communication will serve to widen the field of communication and extend its discursive boundaries. It will also help communication research to be contextualized more productively. Unearthing and redescribing Asian approaches to communication is as fascinating as it is complex. We have to proceed cautiously and operate on a number of fronts simultaneously. (Dissanayake, 2003, p. 17)

Euro-American centrism in research, including in the field of political communication, is the norm in knowledge production. However, as Asante (2003) points out, it “imposes its cultural particularity while denying and degrading other cultural views.” But what does dewesternisation mean? The word bears many meanings. Dewesternisation decenters research from the Euro-American perspective to research that cultivates analytical thinking coming from local, regional, indigenous perspectives (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014).

Chakravartty and Roy (2017), for example, have criticised the Eurocentric approach to researching mediated populism, whereby conclusions made about the rise of populism have been generalised and refer to the same enabling conditions regardless of the context of each country. Chakravartty and Roy (2017, p.4076) rightly criticise the assumptions made by Western research that the rise of populism across the globe can be attributed simply to “passive voter-media consumer” who consume

fake news and who are uncivil on social media. Chakravartty and Roy (2017, p. 4076) also criticise current scholarly research that is presentist, where the rise of populism is seen as sudden and out of the ordinary, disregarding the “lineages of populist politics that stretch before and beyond the immediate and presentist moment elections.” The Philippines, for example, have long had populist leaders, before the so-called rise of global populism, thanks partly to its long history of patronage-based politics. My research hopes to contribute to reframing the current global populist discourse by situating Duterte’s populism into the Philippines’ political history, which will be explained further in Chapter 4.

One way to dewesternise research is to reassess and expand knowledge by analysing and studying issues that are understudied or absent in Western research (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014). For example, the majority of existing research on the use of social media for political campaigning has focussed primarily on Europe and the United States, with Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines underexplored. By foregrounding objects of study beyond the West, we are able to “probe the conventional analytical parameters of Western-based scholarship” (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014, p. 364). Additionally, by using non-Western case studies, we are able to challenge universalistic assumptions which, more often than not, are based on small Western-based evidence. Using evidence from non-Western countries refines theories and allows for the production of more complex and stronger conclusions (Waisbord and Mellado, 2014; Downing, 1996; Thussu, 2009).

In this research, I challenge the hypotheses put forward by existing studies that use Benoit’s (2005) Functional Theory (a theory that examines the rhetorical devices commonly used in campaign communication strategies, which will be explained more in Chapter 2) using evidence from the Philippines. Conclusions made using this theory have so far been based on Western democracies whose politics and culture are different from countries like the Philippines, wherein political processes have been influenced by colonisation and personal relationships are deeply intertwined with politics.

Current research on the Philippines’ use of social media for political participation mainly tackle mediated populism and disinformation through paid trolling and fake news and looking at recent practices of disinformation campaigns using different ethnographic methods (Ong and Cabañes,

2018; Cabañes and Cornelio, 2017; Ong and Tapsell, 2022). So far, there has been no research looking at the role of mega and macro Facebook influencers in shaping the narrative of the Duterte era, particularly in looking at how they aid in permanent campaigning, using rhetorical devices to discuss important political issues, and their role in perpetuating incivility, intolerance, and hate. Given the big role of Facebook influencers in the national and local elections in 2016 and 2019 in the Philippines, this paper tries to fill in this gap in research.

There are many debates surrounding the use of social media in politics in the Philippines, and there have been different arguments on how to engage in especially polarising political discourse on the Internet. Should people remain civil and observe kindness, or should people “fight fire with fire” and allow themselves to be uncivil at times? For example, Dakila champions kindness in their Facebook page (Ong, 2022) but influencer-politician Rowena Guezon has found her own following by engaging in uncivil discourse or “giving them a taste of their own medicine” (Malasig, 2022). Curato (2022, para 21) however, argues that historical distortions cannot be fought with the same fire, citing that those who do this are “so-called defenders of truth and human rights” who “are bullies and spiteful losers who cannot accept that they have been fooled by liberal elites.” Should influencers be cancelled on the basis of their political beliefs or is cancel culture also undemocratic? This is another important question that is being discussed, as calls to cancel influencers like Mocha Uson have been abound. In fact, in March 2020, Uson’s page was mass reported and calls to report her for spreading disinformation went viral on Facebook. Other influencers and celebrities who have shown support for Duterte and Marcoses have likewise been cancelled. According to research by research company Milieu Insight, one in five Filipinos said they have participated in the “cancel movement,” with the top two reasons as having been involved in cultural appropriation and their political stance (Adobo Magazine, 2022). The research also found that Filipinos engage in cancel culture to ask for accountability from individuals (Adobo Magazine, 2022). However, as Jusay et al. (2022) found in their study, cancel culture can also quickly lead to online harassment and bullying.

Using quantitative content analysis as a method, the purpose of this research is to assess how Rodrigo Duterte and his main campaign platforms are portrayed across Facebook pages of ten Facebook influencers. This thesis hopes to inform the different civil society groups in the Philippines, including non-profit organisations working on human rights and democracy, the media, and other academics

who have been working on the different issues that have emerged in the use of digital media in politics. Through this study, I hope to shed light on the online behaviours of Facebook influencers and add to the debate on whether specific rhetorical strategies used in the discourse of political issues are effective or not.

Facebook has become an important channel for political communication especially in a country like the Philippines where the social media company has monopoly over the internet and its interpersonal and networking features are used by the government for propaganda. By using the populist tactic of discrediting traditional media, Facebook influencers are increasingly becoming agenda-setters. The Philippines is at a critical juncture in the present time as current events happening in the country will dictate the future of its democracy.

1.1 The political conditions informing this thesis

I developed my approach to this research with regard to three current political conditions: the role of social media in political communications, the election of Rodrigo Duterte into power in 2016, and the concepts of echo chambers and highly polarising politics in the rise of populism globally.

First, the role of social media in political communication. Social media has no doubt changed the landscape of political communication. In the early days of the Internet, scholars argued that it has become a tool for liberation (Diamond, 2010; Saleh, 2012). Castells (2007) saw the potential of social networks and their role in political debates and mobilisations. Gil de Zuniga et al. (2014) also argued that social media encourages more political participation and Penney (2017) believes that low cost actions on social media like sharing a post is a first step for the public to do something more meaningful. In addition, social media has allowed for a more personalised kind of communication (Neubaum and Kramer, 2017), where politicians can easily reach out to the public through a simple reply feature. Perhaps one of the most used, influential, and controversial social media channels that has been used in political communication is Facebook. Bode's (2012) study found that engaging with Facebook communities facilitates behaviours that spur political actions. In fact, we have seen the impact of Facebook in the election results in different countries in recent years. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, the parent company of Facebook, had to face the US Senate for Facebook's

embroilment with Cambridge Analytica, a company that acquired personal data from millions of users to help Donald Trump in his presidential campaign (Confessore, 2018). Facebook had to pay \$643,000 (£500,000) to the UK's Information Commissioner's Office but no admission of liability (Zialcita, 2019). The case of the tech giant and how it has been involved in the spread of disinformation holds true in other countries aside from the US. During the 2019 elections in Portugal, Baptista and Gradin (2022) found the prime minister and the left political spectrum were subject to disinformation attacks. In Cameroon, Nounkeu (2020) found that a large number of Facebook posts on the Anglophone crisis, a conflict between separatists calling for complete independence which has led to thousands of civilians killed, were unverifiable and unreliable. Ong and Tapsell (2022) found that clickbaits and coordinated inauthentic behaviours were present in the Philippines and Indonesia's Facebook pages as practices of political disinformation. These examples only demonstrate the influence of the tech giant in politics globally.

Second, the election of Duterte into power last 2016 was partially-powered through the use of social media. In fact, there is evidence to show that Cambridge Analytica helped in the Duterte presidential campaign in 2016. According to Cambridge Analytica's Christopher Wylie, the Philippines became their 'petri dish', experimenting on tactics and techniques that paved the way for Brexit and Trump campaigns (Occinola, 2019). In the same interview with Rappler's Maria Ressa, Wylie said that the Philippines became their experimenting ground because of different factors: 1.) A lot of people are online and are using social media; 2.) Other countries have more robust law enforcement and there is no fear of getting caught in the Philippines; and 3.) Philippine politics is very similar to American politics. Ong and Cabanes (2018, p.18) have argued that social media channels like Facebook have been weaponised for political gains and that PR and advertising companies "have strategically weaponized populist publics' anger and resentment with the establishment, by taking tried-and-tested techniques in corporate marketing to the extreme in digital political campaigns." But it is not only trolls and fake accounts that were mobilised digitally. Sinpeng, Gueorguiev, and Arugay's (2020) study suggest that Duterte's digital fanbase was a reflection of offline, grassroots political support. Ong and Cabanes (2018) show in their study of the 'architects of networked disinformation' that paid propagandists like trolls initiate bandwagon effects that would later on drive real grassroots supporters to openly support a politician. Contreras (2020, p.52-53) even asserts that, "the battle-ground for defending and attacking the President as ideology is in the simulacra of the digital

world of Facebook.” Meta has acknowledged the problem and has since implemented interventions including the removal of Facebook pages and accounts that have been linked to inauthentic behaviour (Calonzo, 2022).

Third, the concepts of ‘echo chambers’ and the highly polarising politics in the rise of populist agendas and illiberal policies which have been topics of current research. According to Menczer and Hills (2020), people’s inherent confirmation bias leads to homophily – a phenomena where like minded people to connect with one another and social media, through features that allow us to choose our network, amplifies this homophily resulting to people becoming “segregated into large, dense and increasingly misinformed communities commonly described as echo chambers.” In his experiment which created echo chambers dividing Republicans and Democrats, Centola (2020) found that echo chambers did not make people more polarised in egalitarian networks where people have equal influence among their network. Rather, Centola (2020) found that influencers, who have a centralised echo chamber that puts a few people in the centre of a group (the influencers), allows for an exertion of power and influence over those at the periphery (their followers), amplifying differences that lead to increasing polarisation. This increasing polarisation can lead to incivility and intolerance and why political discussions can become an ‘us versus them’ confrontation (Ciampaglia and Menczer, 2018). Duggan and Smith (2016) found in their US case study that many Americans view political discussions on social media disrespectful, angry, and uncivil. In the Philippines, Curato (2016) notes that online political discourse has become vulgar and brash, a reflection of Duterte’s manner of speaking.

These three – the role of social media and political communication, the rise of Duterte into power with the help of social media, and the creation of echo chambers online leading to more political polarisation – are the foundations where my research stands on. The remainder of this chapter serves as an introduction to the overall context of this thesis: social media influencers in politics, why Facebook influencers, the Philippines as a case study, and the concepts and frameworks used in this study. The chapter ends with a guide for each of the next chapters.

1.2 Social media influencers in politics

Globally, social media influencers have played an important role in political campaigning. For example, German Youtube Rezo, who has millions of followers, started doing videos tackling issues like climate change and the German elections (Schuetze, 2019a). His 55-minute video telling his viewers why they should not vote for Angela Merkel's party, complete with references to academic journals and scientific literature, garnered 15 million views in ten days, and became a public relations crisis for the Christian Democratic Union, the governing party (Schuetze, 2019b).

During the Biden-Harris campaign in the US, ordinary people like nurses, teachers, parents, and truck drivers who were small-scale or nano influencers were used by the campaigners to distribute Instagram stories. This was a success, receiving 305% more click through rate than traditional celebrities (Campisis, 2021). In Colorado, influencers were paid \$1,000/month to post about COVID19- dispelling disinformation, posting about their own vaccine experiences, and encouraging others to get the vaccine (Anderson, 2021). Even the White House teamed up with Tiktok influencers, also local micro-influencers, to encourage young people to get vaccinated against COVID-19, a repurposing of the influencer marketing tactics of the Biden-Harris campaign (Lorenz, 2021).

Elsewhere in the world, influencers are also being used by governments for political campaigning. In Taiwan, during the presidential campaign season, President Tsai Ing-Wen invited 20 influencers to stay at the presidential office where they shared content about her and where she participated in different videos (Cheng, 2021). In Singapore, the government has used influencers to bring more attention to climate change projects (Cheng, 2021). Of course, while influencers can help spread information about politics and political issues better, we must also take caution. As Goodwin and Wooley (2021) put it: "Some political influencers might be paid to spread content that is beneficial to society, akin to public service announcements. But they can just as easily be organized to sow hate, vitriol, and confusion."

There are many examples where social media influencers have been used in popularising far-right ideologies. In the US, groups like QAnon have helped spread disinformation that has led to the riots at the US Capitol. In this particular case, Conner and MacMurray (2021) found that there are three kinds of influencers in the QAnon group: true believers, purveyors, and political actors. True

believers create content like memes and videos and spread information to their local spheres of influence but do not seem interested in gaining followers; purveyors are influencers in the QAnon group who profit from content; and political operatives seized ways to garner votes for their own campaign for the elections. According to Conner and MacMurray (2021), the ability of these QAnon influencers to direct their members to share and engage with content has allowed for the creation of an echo chamber among believers.

In the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, some problematic influencers have spread disinformation that has proven to be dangerous. For example, the anti-vaccination community relied on influencers' content to share disinformation on Twitter (Germani and Biller-Adorno, 2021). Baker (2022) found that alternative health influencers spread misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic by fostering trust and intimacy among their followers, presenting themselves as "censored" by institutions and authorities, and exploiting their followers to defend "truth, freedom, and justice" by giving them the illusion of agency to choose health alternatives. Many of these influencers created content that was anti-mask and anti-vaccine. Baker (2021, p. 21) says, "Paradoxically, a movement originally intended to empower marginalised groups risks disempowering those already disproportionately at risk of severe illness from the virus."

In more recent years, the Internet has been used as a tool for political campaigning and has proven to be controversial with how users' personal data were used to manipulate information they see in their newsfeeds. For example, in 2018, it was revealed that Cambridge Analytica helped Donald Trump win the US presidential elections by using data from Google, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube by targeting US voters with tailored and personalised messages (Lewis and Hilder, 2018). Similarly, it was revealed that the Philippines was Cambridge Analytica's petri dish, with 1.2 million Filipino Facebook users' data were used to target them for political campaigns (Occinola, 2019). This leads us to the context of why this research specifically focuses on Facebook.

1.3 Why Facebook?

In 2016, 16 million Filipinos elected Rodrigo Duterte into the presidency. His campaign was founded on populist narratives and heavily used social media, especially Facebook influencers, who helped shape his political campaign. Duterte critics are also actively using Facebook to criticise his populist agenda and organise mobilisations against the president. In 2020 the Duterte administration passed an “Anti Terror Law,” allowing for easier arrests of dissenters who post criticisms on social media, masking as a law to counter terrorism.

Facebook has become a crucial tool for political campaigning, especially with 67 million Filipino users spending an average of four hours everyday on Facebook. The Philippines also ranks number one out of 246 countries analysed by We Are Social (2020) in terms of time spent on social media. With the Philippines having one of the highest Facebook penetration, Facebook has been weaponised for implementing disinformation campaigns and discourse-hijacking campaigns for political agenda (Ong and Cabañes, 2018). Survey data from Pulse Asia (2021) conducted last September 2021 shows that 99% of Filipino internet users own a Facebook account and its prevalence is present across geographic divisions and socioeconomic statuses.

The ubiquitousness of Facebook in the Philippines cannot be ignored. Nobel prize winner and journalist Maria Ressa, who has been a target of harassment by the Duterte administration, in an interview with Time Magazine (2019), said that Facebook is “a key engine behind the wave of populist anger that carried Duterte all the way to the presidency.” She has also asserted that Facebook is “biased against facts” with its algorithms prioritising “the spread of lies laced with anger and hate over facts”. Ressa (2019) also says of Facebook’s impact in the Philippines,

For all the recent hand-wringing in the United States over Facebook’s monopolistic power, the mega-platform’s grip on the Philippines is something else entirely. Thanks to a social media-hungry populace and heavy subsidies that keep Facebook free to use on mobile phones, Facebook has completely saturated the country. And because using other data, like accessing a news website via a mobile web browser, is precious and expensive, for most Filipinos the only way online is through Facebook. The platform is a leading provider of news and information, and it was a key engine behind the wave of populist anger that carried Duterte all the way to the presidency.

A report by Article One (2021, p.5), commissioned by Meta, looked at Facebook's impact on human rights found that "the platform exacerbates existing tensions and risks, including misinformation and disinformation, online harassment, incitement to violence, surveillance of vulnerable groups, sexual exploitation of minors, human and organ trafficking, and terrorist organizing." In the same report, Meta has acknowledged that Facebook has played in promoting political disinformation during the 2016 and 2019 Philippine elections. In addition, the report found that disinformation on Facebook about the Dengvaxia vaccine contributed to the decline in confidence in vaccines among Filipino parents (Article One, 2021). Article One (2021) also emphasised that online harassment particularly of journalists, political dissidents, LGBTQ+ users, and ethnic Chinese users have become a common occurrence on Facebook.

Facebook has clearly enjoyed a stronghold in the Philippines, and it is one of the reasons the Philippines as a case study is important in understanding the role of social media in democracies. While there have been many studies that have looked at Facebook as a campaign tool, very few have focussed on countries outside the global north. The next section outlines why the Philippines as a case study is critical in understanding how Facebook can be used as a tool in countries like the Philippines whose values are entrenched in deep personalistic ties and whose politics remain entrenched in personality politics.

1.4 The Philippines as a case study

The Philippines is an interesting case study, to say the least. It is a combination of a conservative, patriarchal, Catholic culture combined with a love of show business and pop culture. It is a country where people go to mass every Sunday quoting the Bible but at the same time cheer and applaud every time Duterte has pronounced killing people; where senators become product endorsers and TV celebrities; where celebrities can become the next president of the Philippines. It is a country where entertainment reigns in political campaigning more than political platforms.

In fact, there's a particular campaign jingle I couldn't quite forget. It used mnemonics to campaign for a senatorial slate for the 2001 Philippine elections. It was a hot summer, I was 11, and in the silence

of the Holy Week, me and my childhood friends ran around our village singing, “*Iboto 13-0, VOT FOR D’ CHAMMP!*” while our parents scolded us for being too noisy while Jesus is supposedly dead. The heat of that summer paralleled the heat of the elections, with former president Joseph Estrada recently having been ousted due to corruption allegations only four months before the elections. VOT FOR D’ CHAMMP is the mnemonics used in the jingle to remember the last names of the senatorial candidates of one party. Everyone sang it, it’s the song everyone would sing out loud or in their heads without knowing they were doing it – in the kitchen while cooking, or while having a shower, or just while sitting down sipping a cup of coffee. No one could stop this jingle from being played all over, not even the aunties chanting the Passion of Christ over Easter could drown out the simultaneous singing of VOT FOR D’ CHAMP. And here we are two decades later and those of us who were alive then can still remember the full senatorial slate of that campaign. It was, arguably, the best campaign jingle that has ever been made. A few would follow its popularity, such as Manny Villar’s *Nakaligo Ka Na Ba sa Dagat ng Basura?* (Have you ever swam in a sea of rubbish?) but many actually criticised it for being insulting to the masses. In addition, Manny Villar’s jingle wasn’t a jolly song but an exaggeration of the poverty he experienced very few believed in. VOT FOR D’ CHAMP still reigns supreme in the best-of-the-best collection of campaign jingles I have ever heard.

This kind of political culture, where performance reigns supreme, is only reflective of the culture of celebrity politics and the highly personalistic politics of the country. Tony La Vina, a political analyst, says in his interview with Agence France Presse, “People have a sense that in this brief moment, they are the boss, to be wooed by suitors whom they demand sing, dance, act as clowns.” To be wooed by suitors is perhaps a fitting description of how voters and politicians build relationships with each other – at a very personal level. Hutchcroft (2014) has argued that the Philippines being a patronage-based state has led to the personalisation of its politics. Soon (2012) believes that this personalistic relationship between politicians and the electorate goes as far back as the Spanish colonisation and is a manifestation of the Filipino values of kinship and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude). The strong familial values and significance of personalistic ties in the Filipino culture have been criticised for helping in the rise of nepotism and corruption (Miralao, 1997).

However, it is these same values of kinship and personal ties that have helped in the popularity of texting and later on, social media, in the country. Through these technological advances, personal

within Filipino society can only be deepened. For example, with over 1.77 million overseas Filipino workers (OFW) and 59.6% of which are women (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022), mobile phones have become a tool of mothering across time and space (Uy-Tioco, 2006). But mobile phones are not only a tool of mothering for OFWs, it can also be seen as a tool of resistance. According to Uy-Tioco (2006, p. 253), “this use of cell phone technology can be read as both a form of resistance against and repression from the political economic reality that has led these women to leave their families in the first place.”

Speaking of resistance using mobile phones, Filipinos were able to oust a president in 2001 with the help of mobile phones. In 2001, former president Joseph Estrada was ousted thanks in part to a viral text message that circulated, encouraging people to gather and protest (Montealvo, 2012). Virality, from campaign jingles to text messages, seems to be a feature that has been present in defining political moments in the country. The increase in Internet penetration alongside the availability of low-cost devices (Lorenzana and Soriano, 2021), as well as allowing for more interconnectedness, has helped in the rise of social media in the country.

It is not surprising that the Philippines, dubbed as the social media capital of the world, came to embrace the influencer culture which has now permeated into politics. Currently, there is a strong influencer community that has been engaged in political campaigning and in spreading disinformation.

1.5 Three defining issues of the Duterte era

During Duterte’s six year stint as president of the Philippines, there were three issues that have polarised the public: human rights, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations. These three topics have created a clear division between Duterte supporters and Duterte critics. In this thesis, I analyse the use of rhetorical devices by the ten influencers in presenting the narratives of these three issues. David (2014) asserts that how language is used by politicians can show an assertion of power and using linguistic strategies can be an influential tool in persuading different audiences into different political actions. This thesis hopes to understand how the ten Facebook influencers in this study used rhetorical devices to talk about the three issues outlined below.

Throughout his term, human rights have been vilified by Duterte. “Your concern is human rights, mine is human lives,” he said in his 2018 State of the Nation Address (Villamor, 2018). Duterte, who believes that human rights is a western concept of liberal democracy (Juego, 2018), ran his presidential campaign by creating an enemy out of drugs and drug lords, exaggerating their impact on the crime rate of the country. Punongbayan (2018) points out that during his campaign, Duterte said there were three to four million drug users in the country when the official figures according to the Dangerous Drug Board was only at 1.8 million. The drug war brought about thousands of extrajudicial killings, perpetuated by the police. Duterte has successfully made an enemy of narcotics and during the end of his term, 82% of Filipinos supported the war on drugs (Flores, 2019), due to a perception of less drugs in the country (Reuters, 2019). The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020) estimates 29,000 Filipinos have been killed in this war. There have been other controversial policies under the Duterte administration including the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility, the anti-terror law which allowed for repression of dissent, and shoot-to-kill orders.

The COVID-19 pandemic shook the Duterte government like no other crisis. Bad governance, corruption, and mismanagement of the pandemic has led to more criticisms of the president and calls to oust Duterte have been made. During the lockdown #OustDuterte trended on Twitter and became viral on Facebook. Calls for mass testing and vaccination were made popular on social media. Hapal (2021) argues that Duterte’s response to the pandemic relied on draconian measures, promoting a war-like narrative, making an enemy of the *pasaway* (stubborn) who do not adhere to the rules. Hapal (2021, p. 224) believes that the *pasaway* “became the target of disciplining and policing.” The militarisation of the COVID-19 response also made #solusyongmedikalhindimilitar (#medicalsolutionsnotmilitarysolutions) a trending topic on Twitter and heated debates between two camps ensued. On one side, there were calls for the government to make use of military personnel to enforce ‘discipline’ among Filipinos and on the other side, calls to instead use the military to be given medical training and equipment to help prevent the virus from spreading (Estrella, 2020).

“I cannot afford at this time to go to war. I cannot go into a battle, which I cannot win and it would only result in the destruction and probably a lot of losses for our armed forces,” Duterte said in one of his speeches. There is an ongoing dispute between China and the Philippines on a territorial claim to

the West Philippine Sea. The Philippines has won the case at the international tribunal but the Duterte administration has defended China's aggressions in the Philippine territory. Duterte has also defended its close ties with the Chinese government, insisting on the economic investments the country stands to gain benefit from. In 2017, Philippine defence secretary Delfin Lorenzana warned Duterte about the ramifications should China start building man made land features in the disputed sea territory (Maritime Executive, 2017), but Duterte remained unperturbed throughout his term. This issue has divided many Filipinos where on the one hand, Duterte critics believe the government should take a stand against China to defend Philippine territories and sovereignty and on the other hand, Duterte supporters believe that it is wiser to avoid conflict with China as the country does not have the capacity to go to war.

By looking at rhetorical devices used by the influencers to talk about human rights and law and order, China-Philippine relations, and COVID-19, I explore how these influencers have tried to persuade their audiences guided by *ethos* (the credibility of the speaker), *pathos* (appeal to emotions), and *logos* (the argument itself). Aristotle's classic, the *Ars Rhetorica*, has been widely used by different scholars in analysing political rhetoric. In this research, we specify different rhetorical devices under *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Under *ethos*, this research looks at the influencers' use of quotes to lend credibility to their arguments. Under *pathos*, this thesis looks at the influencers' use of personal appeal and collective appeal. Under *logos*, I then look at the sources of information and knowledge used by the influencers to support their arguments. Combining all three *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, I also analyse the use of calls to action by the influencers. By investigating the use of rhetorical devices in discussing the three defining issues of the Duterte era, this thesis aims to look at how influencers speak to their audiences and whether the rhetorical devices were used to appeal to the public outside of their echo chambers or whether they only served their audience's existing political bias.

1.6 Benoit's functional theory

What does it take to win an election and how does it persist into a permanent campaign? Blumenthal (1980) has argued, through his concept of permanent campaigns, that politicians are no longer bound by electoral campaign periods in the way they think about how to behave. The notion that everyday

endeavours can sustain an elected official's popularity can be seen especially in the Philippines where image-making and name recall become two of the most important factors in deciding the next set of elected officials in the country. As absurd as an outsider might think, we have in our country senators who are movie stars, noon time show hosts, broadcast journalists, and a boxing champion. With social media, permanent campaigns have only become easier, especially in the Philippines where politics is highly personalised and where interpersonal connections are highly valued. Today, we can see politicians form a personal bond with their followers on Facebook and Twitter, where they can directly reply to comments or directly answer questions from the public. While seemingly a small act, these everyday interactions can help build their public perception and trust among voters.

William Benoit's (2005) functional theory looks at acclaiming, attacking, and defending as rhetorical devices that help in winning political campaigns. According to Benoit (2017), acclaims emphasise a candidate's strengths, attacks expose a candidate's weaknesses, and defenses respond or refute attacks. The theory posits that voters make choices by calculating the benefits (acclaims) versus the costs (attacks). Many studies have used Benoit's theory to analyse political campaigns. For example, Cmeciu and Patrut (2010) found that Romanian presidential debates focused on attacks and defenses of character rather than acclaims and policies. Benoit and Braziel (2002), in analysing the Bush vs Dukakis 1988 presidential debates, established that contrary to popular belief that the campaign heavily relied on negative narratives, the candidates relied heavily on acclaims. More recent studies have used functional approach theory in analysing social media content on political campaigns. Chen and Chang (2018) found that male presidential candidates in the Taiwan presidential elections used character attacks against female candidates while female candidates used more defenses to refute these attacks. Gerodimos and Justinussen (2015), using the functional approach to analyse Obama's Facebook campaign, found that the campaign avoided polarising or negative attacks and focussed on acclaims.

Duterte enjoyed high approval ratings in his six years in office, hovering around 70% or higher (Sarao, 2022). This high rating held on despite controversial issues that hit the government, including the failure of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of his term, Duterte was said to be the most popular president, ending his term with 87% approval rating (Pulse Asia, 2022). Nearing the 2022 national elections, it seemed that Filipinos wanted more of the Duterte brand to be in power as

calls for Sara Duterte, Rodrigo Duterte's daughter, to run for presidency became popular. Sara Duterte eventually ran and won the vice president seat. So while Rodrigo Duterte can only hold a term as president, his popularity was able to help usher in her daughter to hold the second highest office in the country.

Using Benoit's functional theory, this thesis hopes to explore the use of acclaims, attacks, and defenses by the ten influencers and how it might have helped in the unwavering popularity of Rodrigo Duterte throughout his six years as president of the Philippines.

1.7 Incivility, Intolerance, and Hate

Incivility, intolerance, and hate have seemingly become a common occurrence in political discourse in social media. One of the features of social media is that it allows its users to filter the content and the people they follow. Unfollowing the people whose opinions differ from us allows for the creation of echo chambers that lead to more polarisation (Menczer, 2016). Tewksbury and Rittenberg (2009) see these filter bubbles as one reason for the increasing incivility and intolerance online. According to Chen (2017), social media creates perfect conditions for incivility and intolerance to spread online – including the lack of conversational cues that are usually present when speaking to someone in person, and the speed at which content can travel online. Scholars like Yachysen and Mather (2022) give a reminder that the increase in incivility, intolerance, and hate speech online is based on real-world divisions.

Influencers, with their number of following, can perpetuate incivility, intolerance, and hate. Earlier in this chapter I mentioned findings by Centola (2020) who found that influencers have a centralised echo chamber that amplifies differences that lead to increasing polarisation. This is supported by Ciampaglia and Menczer (2018) who argue that this increasing polarisation can lead to incivility and intolerance. According to Kenny (2020), there is an absence of political polarisation in the Philippines. Kenny (2020) analyses political parties in the Philippines (or lack thereof) to come to his conclusion. "As a result of the marginal role played by parties, most measures of polarization, such as the ideological distance between parties or legislative roll call voting, would imply the near absence

of polarization,” Kenny (2020, p.86) says. In addition, Kenny (2020) cites that the fact Duterte has enjoyed high approval ratings prove that the country is not polarised. In this thesis, I challenge Kenny’s assumption and show that the prevalence and intensity of incivility and intolerance on Facebook posts of influencers are a reflection of the polarising effect of Duterte and his illiberalism.

This thesis presents a new scale of visualising incivility and intolerance based on current definitions of the two concepts. The visualisation attempts to create a tool that will help researchers visualise both the prevalence and intensity of incivility and intolerance when doing a content analysis. Specific to the case study, I analyse the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech found in the posts of the ten Facebook influencers identified in this study. I also look at the possible damaging effects of these kinds of content by looking at the mean engagement (number of shares, reactions, and comments) that these content get relative to the number of posts that were found to contain any kind of incivility, intolerance, and hate.

1.8 Thesis Structure

This last section of the chapter serves as a guide to the following chapters of this thesis.

In Chapter 2, I dive deeper into the theories and current studies on political communication, illiberalism, and the role that digital media has played in democracies. The first part of the chapter presents theories in political communication, particularly theories and studies on digital media and the Internet and their role in politics. The second part defines the concepts of populism and illiberalism and briefly touches on the rise of populism and illiberalism across the globe thanks partly to the nature of social media. The next part of the chapter presents the evolution of influencers from the early days of the Internet to the present and how they have been used in political propaganda in the context of celebrity politics. The last part of the chapter reviews rhetorical devices used in political communication.

In order to understand this research, there is a need to deeper into the Philippine context. Chapter 3 is a review of literature that focuses on the Philippines. Here, I present the Philippine context – its political history, media history, celebrity politics, and how presidents like Duterte come into power. The chapter starts with understanding the Philippine context through its history of democracy, civil

society, and mass media. Chapter 3 also dives into the country's culture of celebrity politics, patronage politics, and clientelism. The chapter then focuses on the rise of Duterte to power and his use of populist rhetoric. The last part of the chapter reviews recent studies on how social media and influencers have been used in political campaigning in the last few years.

Understanding communication content is important to the science of communication, with a goal of predicting, explaining, and controlling phenomena (Reynolds, 2015). In order to develop communication science, there needs to be a method of assessing communication content in a logical way (Riffe et al., 2019). Riffe et al. (2019) believes that quantitative content analysis is the only way to do this and enables researchers to see patterns in communication content reliably and validly which then helps in revealing content causes or predicting content effects. This research uses quantitative content analysis to answer the research questions about how influencers have shaped the narrative of the Duterte era. Chapter 4 presents the methods used for this research. It outlines the techniques used for data collection as well as the framework for the code book and the steps done to ensure its validity. The first part gives a brief overview of quantitative content analysis, the method used in this research, and introduces the research design including the method of sampling and the development of the code book. Here, I present the variables and the definition of each variable, (the full code book is presented in Annex A). The next part of the chapter presents the method in which I visualised incivility, intolerance, and hate speech. This part of the chapter introduces a political speech scale developed from different definitions that see incivility and intolerance as speech that scales from least uncivil to extreme speech, where civil speech is on one end and speech that promotes extremism is on the other end (Syndor, 2018; Chen, 2017). This visualisation is what I used to visualise the data in Chapter 7, which looks at the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech in the posts by the influencers. Chapter 4 then takes a quick look at the profiles of the ten influencers I studied in this research and proceeds to present the data collection process and the ethical approval by the university. I also reflect on the pilot study and how changes were made to the code book and the data set after the pilot study has been conducted. Last, the results of the intercoder reliability test are presented, followed by the assumptions that are being investigated in this thesis.

While the 1987 Constitution introduced stricter term limits to avoid the mistakes of the dictatorship era (Ferdinand Marcos won two four-year terms and then declared Martial Law), the image of a president during their six year term can usher in regimes that are either affiliated or opposed to the sitting president. Teehankee's (2016) analysis situates Duterte's rise to power in a political landscape where Filipinos have been disenfranchised from the preceding government's 'elite democracy' which failed to promote social equity. Duterte, in his vulgarity and brashness, was seen as the antithesis to the 'decent' Benigno Aquino III – for many Filipinos, Duterte spoke their own language. In Chapter 5, I analyse how pro-Duterte influencers may have helped in playing a role to ensure that Rodrigo Duterte's positive image has been maintained even amidst controversies and how, on the contrary, anti-Duterte influencers sought to attack this image. I look at the Facebook posts of the ten influencers and use Benoit's functional approach to analyse how acclaims, attacks, and defenses are used in permanent campaigning as a strategy to help build or maintain, criticise and damage, as well as protect the image of certain political personalities, and the work that they do.

Chapter 6 looks at three important topics and how the ten Facebook influencers shaped the narratives around them using different rhetorical devices. These topics - human rights, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations – have been highly polarising and have had an impact on Philippine democracy. I look at the ways ethos, pathos, and logos have been used by the ten influencers using different rhetorical devices that were found were mostly used in their Facebook posts. Under logos, I look at the use of sources of knowledge/information in presenting arguments. I further break this down into the different sources of information that the influencers used to support their arguments – sourced facts, firsthand experiences, proven facts, and probable information. Under ethos, I look at how influencers use quotes and who they quote to aid credibility to their ideas. The use of quotes was categorised based on who was quoted – other influencers and celebrities; government and political organisations; journals, reports, news, books, and other experts; personal quotes (people quoting themselves), and fake quotes. Lastly, to demonstrate pathos, the influencers' use of personal appeals, collective appeals, and calls to action as rhetorical devices was looked at and how they were used to gain support for political figures or policies. Chapter 6 investigates these different narratives that have been used by the ten influencers and how these narratives were facilitated by rhetorical devices to effectively communicate to the public.

Chapter 7 looks at the prevalence of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech in the posts by the ten influencers. It also breaks down the different types of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech that I found in the posts. I used the incivility-intolerance model which I presented in Chapter 4 to plot the data for incivility and intolerance. The mean engagement (comments, shares, and reactions) for uncivil, intolerant, and hate posts were also presented, and where the potential damage, especially of hate speech, when engagement is high despite being a minority of posts, will be seen.

Chapter 8 provides a summary of key findings and the contribution of this thesis to the field of social media and political communication. It also presents some recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Theoretical background

There are many theories and studies about political communication and the use of media for political campaigning and agenda setting in different countries/regions globally. In this chapter, we review literature that is relevant to the current context of the Philippines, a country whose population is one of the most active social media users in the world, averaging a total of 10 hours and 27 minutes of time spent on the Internet (Data Reportal, 2022) and whose political debate is now dominated by discourse online (Arugay, 2022). This literature review will focus on the use of social media for political communication, the concepts of illiberalism and populism, influencers in politics, and rhetorical devices in political communication.

There are two trajectories that have been taken by researchers on the role of the Internet in civic and political life: the manner in which it is used as a communications tool by campaigns, candidates, and causes; and understanding and explaining its effects on civic and political behaviour (Carlisle and Patton, 2008).

2.1 Deliberative Democracy, Political Communication, and Social Media

2.1.1. Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy as a theory suggests that deliberation is crucial to decision-making, and if the process is free and equally accessed by all participants, rational debates can persuade people's preferences and therefore a rationally-motivated consensus can be reached (Habermas, 1984; Dryzek, 1990; Chambers, 1993). Benhabib (1994, p. 27) summarises the definition of deliberative democracy as legitimacy that "results from processes of collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals."

Critics of deliberative democracy have pointed out to its idealism and believe that it is utopian to think discourse can have the power for people to have a rational consensus. Posner (2004) for example, believes that the public is too confused, inconsistent, and ignorant for a deliberative democracy to succeed. Shapiro (1999) also argues that deliberative democracy ignores the reality that politics is not about creating better arguments but about interests and power. Sanders (1997) also points out that deliberation excludes voices of women, the poor, and minority groups whose ways of speaking depart from what can be considered “rational” forms of discourse that usually privilege “dispassionate argumentation, logical coherence, and evidence-based claims as practiced in the most exclusive kinds of scholarly debates, parliamentary procedures, and judicial argumentation” (Curato et al., 2017, p.31).

Proponents of deliberative democracy have responded to criticisms and scholars like Iris Young (2002) have proposed a model with normative values that ensures voices of the “other” are not excluded and that other forms of communication like rhetoric, humour, and story-telling are also considered as deliberation. New scholarship in deliberative theory also acknowledge that instead of seeking consensus, pluralism should be recognised – recognising the different values, preferences, and judgments of participants (Curato, 2017; Young, 2002). In the words of Spicer (2010, p.18), “value pluralism is the idea that our moral values or conceptions of the good are many and varied and that we often find they come into conflict with one another in ways that do not permit any easy reconciliation or solution.”

There have also been questions about the relevance of deliberative democracy in the time of populism, disinformation, and polarisation. Are incivility and intolerance part of a deliberative democracy? And can discourse on social media channels be considered deliberative when it information is filtered via algorithms? These questions will be answered in section 2.1.2 Social media and political communication and section 2.4.2 Incivility and intolerance.

In this research, I recognise the value of deliberation in a thriving democracy. Deliberation is crucial, not only to reach an end, but as a process of including everyone’s voices in decision-making.

2.1.2 Social media and political communication

Social media and technology have changed the communication landscape in different fields including politics. For example, the Internet has become a platform for debates while mobile phones have become a tool for political mobilisations (Castells, 2007). Bennett (2012, p.37) argues that social media has allowed for a rise in personalised politics and personalised forms of political participation where “individuals are mobilized around personal lifestyle values to engage with multiple causes.” In addition, Gil de Zuñiga et al.’s (2012) research shows that social networking sites (SNS) exerted a positive impact on individuals’ political action through a.) information distribution; b.) discussion of this information with an individual’s social network, allowing an individual to make more sense of the information; and c.) its high interactivity component allowing information exchange, helping build trust and increasing social capital.

Scholars have argued about the role of social media in deliberative democracy. On one hand, a few studies have found social media to facilitate rationality and reflexivity in argumentation (Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2010; Dahlberg, 2001). On the other hand the Davis (1999) and Sunstein (2018) argue that people who participate in online discussions only do so within groups that already share their own views, and therefore perpetuate confirmation bias. However, studies have found a positive relationship between the size of a network and participation in political discussions. As one network becomes larger, interactions between people also increase, discussions are more stimulated, and participants also encounter more opposing views which can help open their minds to new perspectives (Eveland and Hively, 2009; McLeod et al, 1999; Nisbet, 2004; Levine and Russo, 1995). These are all elements of deliberation which brings about egalitarianism and participation (Halpern and Gibbs, 2012). Following this argument, social media influencers with a big following can help promote deliberation about political issues. This will be discussed further in section 2.3 Influencers in politics.

Social media encourages political expression and participation (Gil de Zuñiga et al., 2014) but also attracts a fair amount of adverse commentary. The terms “slacktivism” and “clicktivism”, for example, were born of criticism directed at young people who only participate in politics online (Penney, 2017) which Morozov (2009) dismissed as “lazy” “feel good online activism that has zero

political and social impact”. However, Penney argues that although social media activity may seem superficial and shallow, these low cost actions can be the first step for citizens to do something more meaningful. The same scholar further argues that networked peer-to-peer influence is the core of persuasive communication in the digital age and that social media activities may help invigorate democracy “by casually injecting the political into everyday spaces and places for popular culture” (Penney, 2017, p.7). Others sympathise with this including Bennett and Segerberg (2012) who coined the term “connective action” to describe loose networks of like-minded individuals who share the same concerns and share based on personal expression, and engage with each other in the digital space. They posit viral memes as an example of how like-minded individuals engage among each other — easy to imitate, adapt to personally, and share broadly with others. Campaigns such as #MeToo and #BringBackOurGirls which became viral are campaigns that amplify the reach of political messages by publicising them to peers (Penney, 2017).

Social media blends interpersonal communication and mass media, facilitating both interpersonal messages (e.g. private discussions) and mass media messages (e.g. news articles) (Neubaum and Kramer, 2017). Neubaum and Kramer (2017, p.467) argue that social media challenges the “linearity of media effects”: where before there might only be one stimulus affecting the audience like a newspaper article, today it is also affected in the context by which it is presented (e.g. comments accompanying the article). The simplicity of digital participation (e.g. liking, sharing, retweeting) transforms interpersonal interaction to enable wider dissemination of messages (Fogg, 2008), making it an ideal platform for opinion leaders (Neubaum and Kramer, 2017). Penney (2017, p.31) puts forward the idea of the “curatorial agency” of social media users – curatorial in that people are able to select what information to pass to their peers, allowing them to have more influence on the kinds of information are being shared instead of relying on traditional gatekeepers like mass media. Jenkins (2009) said that “materials travel through the web because they have meaning to the people who spread them.”

Facebook is a hugely significant social media platform due to its reach. Moreover it offers users particular features to express themselves: affirming by pressing the like button, showing how they feel by pressing other reactions (love, haha, wow, sad, and angry), voicing their opinion by commenting on posts, or sharing information to their network. According to Gerodimos and

Justinussen (2015), these metrics can be studied in order to understand what types of political engagement on Facebook attracts and engages people vis-a-vis its implications for public policy and offline political participation. They further argue that Facebook's usability allows users to engage in a lower-level form of participation and citizen dialogue that is less costly than offline participation but in certain cases has proven to be potentially impactful. In addition, social media allows for reaching a large-scale audience defined by its publicness (size and composition of the audience) and persistence of communications (Fogg, 2008; Boyd, 2010). This opportunity also has its limitations. Neubaum and Kramer (2016) argue that due to the wide reach of social media, people can be silenced from voicing their opinions on a controversial issue, in fear of other people negatively judging them for what they say. Conversely Rojas (2010) asserts that when people perceive mass media coverage as biased, social media users believe it is in their duty to correct wrong media reports or representations and counterbalance journalistic inaccuracies.

Central to thinking about the role of journalism is the classic agenda-setting model that explores how news media gatekeepers influence public discourse by selecting which stories to cover (McCombs and Shaw, 1979). This gives importance and priority to some issues more than others, and impacts on both citizens and politicians alike. In the digital era academics have also identified a reverse agenda setting whereby the (online) public brings wider attention to an issue and in doing so increases media coverage and its public profile (Penney, 2017). Linked to this Meraz and Papacharissi (2013, p.141) coined the term "networked gatekeeping" which they defined as "the process through which crowd-sourced practices permit non-elite and elite actors to co-create and co-curate flows of information." This practice allows for what is called "information democratisation" where it is no longer elite media that have monopoly over gatekeeping but rather citizens increasingly deciding which stories are important, and thereby influencing what information is exposed via the news (Tewksbury and Rittenberg 2009, p.197) .

While a potentially welcome development, information democratisation can lead to polarisation and decreased social cohesion. Some citizens who are exposed to polarised news and partisan issues shared by like-minded peers are increasingly not prepared to debate and act on important issues (Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2009). Gainous and Wagner (2013) warn of this one sided information flow helping reinforce a single ideological viewpoint. Politicians can send out information for the

benefit of their own agenda and which can easily be done in a polarised network. Without traditional fact-checking by journalists, strategic misinformation can proliferate and do damage to an informed public. As such, fake news has proliferated in this environment where digital media platforms are used to advance partisan ends. Citizens like and share inaccurate material because it aligns with their ideological biases and can be used to reinforce their political agendas (Penney, 2017). Satire has also become a popular form of information sharing which Penney (2017) attributes to the broader trend of popularisation in politics, blending the political with pop culture and entertainment.

2.2. Illiberalism and Populism

The rise of negative social media activity in the political sphere has occurred in a period which has seen a marked increase in illiberalism around the globe in recent years. This section examines the inter-relationship between these phenomena. Laruelle (2021) defines illiberalism as

“...a strain of political culture, a set of institutional reforms (such as assaults on an independent judiciary) and broader societal processes (such as declining trust in liberal democratic institutions) that, over the past two decades, has emerged in response to liberalism as experienced by various countries.”

The same expert further describes illiberalism as being perpetuated by people who believe that liberalism has gone too far and that national sovereignty must be re-asserted.

In another article exploring the concept of illiberalism, Laruelle identifies four features of the ideology:

“...1/illiberalism is a new ideological universe that, even if doctrinally fluid and context-based, is to some degree coherent; 2/ it represents a backlash against today’s liberalism in all its varied scripts—political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational—often in the name of democratic principles and thanks to them (by winning the popular vote); 3/ it proposes solutions that are majoritarian, nation-centric or sovereigntist, favouring

traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity; and 4/it calls for a shift from politics to culture and is post-post-modern in its claims of rootedness in an age of globalisation (Laruelle, 2022).”

Laruelle distinguishes illiberalism from populism in that former doesn't necessarily require a charismatic leader and is also not anti-intellectual. However, one can argue that there have been iterations of populism and illiberalism that combine the two.

Pappas observes several states have turned away from liberalism “under the spell of charismatic leaders allegedly acting in the name of an oversoul people, turning to illiberal politics while remaining fully democratic.” (Illiberalism.org, 2021). Scholars like Chambers (2017) also argue that populism, an ideology that champions ordinary people against the elite or the establishment, has taken an illiberal turn. Charismatic strongmen (and they tend to be males) championing illiberal ideologies have been elected in recent years across the globe. This can be seen in many different countries who have elected presidents with illiberal ideologies such as the United States and Donald Trump, Brazil and Jair Bolsonaro, Hungary and Viktor Oban, the Philippines and Duterte. According to Csaky and Schenkkan (2018), in Central Europe and Eurasia, illiberalism has established itself as the new normal where countries like Poland, Serbia, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, and Georgia have been governed by people who have rejected checks and balances and attacks on critics. In the United States, Lilla (2016) and Brownstein (2016) argue that Donald Trump's rise to power was thanks to nostalgia, a nostalgic vision of 1950's America, as reflected in Trump's slogan, “Make America Great Again”. This is also in line with Chambers' (2017) argument that illiberal populists' strategy includes convincing voters through the narrative of an “imagined greatness of the past.”

According to Chambers (2017), today's rise in illiberal populism is similar to the rise of fascism in the 1930's – economic stagnation and unemployment, financial crises, high levels of inequality between the rich and the poor – have all helped strongmen get into power with rhetoric that champions isolationism, incites hatred against minorities, and a circumvention of democratic policies. However, the same authority also notes some differences of present-day illiberal populism from the 1930's fascism especially in the way mis/disinformation are spread via social media and how political

opinions are formed in “narrow forums” where one’s audience are people who are like-minded, creating echo chambers instead of critical debates.

Gerbaudo (2018) notes the entanglement between populism and social media partly thanks to its nature of mass networking which appeals to the mass politics characteristic of populism. This nature, alongside the context of a global economic crisis, allowed populists to use social media in a way that challenges liberalism (Gerbaudo, 2018). Hopster (2021) adds that social media’s decentralising tendency, making the media landscape less elitist, served populist leaders well by being able to directly address the masses. Hopster (2021) also notes the symbiotic relationship between populists and social media channels, where social media channels benefit from populist campaigns by contributing to the popularity of the platform.

Kauth and King (2021, p.398) argues that while social media did not create illiberal ideologies it helped create a community of people who believed in these ideas and helped spread it widely:

“The rise of social media and massive tech companies such as Facebook and Google, which are driven by profit-based algorithms to maximise “user engagement” (that some allege includes a willingness to accept uploads of fake or hate based news stories) fundamentally conflicts with liberal procedures. Online media reportage did not create illiberal ideology or anti-democratic ambitions. But it has enabled like-minded purveyors of these beliefs and values to meet and reinforce each other, diffuse their arguments more widely than ever before, and to do so liberated from opposing views.”

In the next sections, I present how social media and influencers have been used by the state for propaganda and how illiberal ideologies and rhetoric such as neo-nazism have come to find a home in online communities.

2.3. Influencers in politics

Social media influencers were defined by Freberg et al. in 2011 (p. 1) as, “independent third party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media” with the recognition that these influencers can help promote brands. In business and marketing literature, it is said that influencer marketing helps brands drive their message to reach their target audience (Lim et al, 2017). Talaverna (2015) argues that social media influencers are deemed to be more reliable and compelling and consumers are likely to follow the recommendations of the influencers they follow. In a study by Berger (2016), influencers are seen as more trustworthy and knowledgeable because of the rapport they build with their audience.

In the late 1990's to the early 2000's, blogging became a popular form of communication which allowed regular people to have a following and engage with their audience (Burns, 2020). In the United States, mommy bloggers like Heather Armstrong amassed a following of 8.5 million readers a month and was named as one of the most influential women in media by Forbes in 2009 (Lieber, 2014). When social media like Facebook and Twitter launched, it became easier for bloggers to get their posts shared (Burns, 2020) and people started to prefer consuming visual content (Bailey, 2018). YouTube also became a popular platform for ordinary people to create a big following using video blogs or vlogs. Ryan Niga, for example, was the first YouTuber to reach two million subscribers in 2010 (VandeGraph, 2016) and who currently has over 21 million subscribers. Since then, Higa has launched a podcast in 2018, was listed in Forbes Top 30 Under 30, has published a memoir, and has appeared in two feature films. Aside from Higa, another influencer that was able to build a following on YouTube was Michelle Phan, the first woman to achieve one billion views on YouTube and has since successfully built a fashion and beauty empire worth \$100 million (Sawyer and Jarvis, 2015). Instagram, Vine, and Tikok are similar, relatively newer platforms that have also been used by ordinary people to gain a following.

According to de Vries et al. (2012), advertising in partnership with influencers on social media channels like Instagram has become more desirable for brands, as it looks more authentic and credible. Abidin (2016) argues that this kind of advertising is similar to word of mouth, and appears to be more seamlessly integrated to the everyday lives of influencers as compared to the usual paid advertisements on televisions or magazines. Jin et al. (2019) also found that followers empathise

more with Instagram influencers more than traditional celebrities. Other studies also show that sharing this personal content around their lifestyle helps create this brand of authenticity that influencers want to perceive as (Casalo et al, 2020; Lou et al, 2020; Audrezet et al., 2018; Ki et al., 2020). In turn, they are able to build trust and connection among their followers, who then come to view influencers as similar to them (Jin et al., 2019; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Childers et al., 2019). De Veirman et al. (2016) found that the number of followers usually indicate that an influencer is more likeable and credible to their followers, and therefore can help increase a brand's popularity.

However, the landscape of influencer marketing is also fast changing. In an article by the BBC authored by Hallett (2022), Gen Z (people aged 18-25) are said to be calling for more authenticity on social media – for example, seeing real skin instead of highly filtered and manipulated images. Consumers have also become more savvy in knowing whether a post has been paid for by a brand or not and in fact, in a bid for more transparency, influencers now post a hashtag #ad in sponsored posts (Brenner, 2021). Micro and nano-influencers, those with over 10,000 followers and those with over 1,000 followers respectively, are now seen as more authentic than influencers with larger following, and are seen as able to connect to their followers better (Brenner, 2021). Similarly, Cheng (2021), CEO of iKala, and AI marketing company, found that, “Unlike well-known celebrity influencers, these micro-influencers—whether they're customers, employees, or people within the community—are great storytellers, generate higher engagement rates, and are generally better at building trust.” Goodwin et al. (2020) similarly found that these micro/nano influencers can be more effective in sending out messages than their counterparts who have millions of following:

“The political appeal of harnessing nano-influencers—accounts with fewer than 10,000 followers—and other small-scale influencers is manifold. Unlike celebrity accounts, such small-scale influencers are normal individuals whose primary occupations are not being influencers, but rather being active members of their local communities who have connections to their followers offline. Noted for their close relationships with their followers and significantly higher levels of engagement, as they devotedly respond to questions and comments, these influencers are more likely to evoke the trust that people feel towards recommendations from friends and family. Moreover,

small-scale influencers have the benefit of highly targetable audiences, who share traits such as location, age, or a niche passion, which makes it easy for political actors to reach specific sects of voters to encourage or dissuade. Lastly, small-scale influencers are inexpensive, enabling the mobilization of multitudes in order to target highly specific audiences with “authentic” political messaging.”

There are a number academic literature about how influencers are shaping politics and political communication. One study by Ong et al. (2019), found that micro-influencers (influencers with a following of 10,000-100,000) and nano influencers (with a following of less than 10,000) were used as a campaign tool in the 2019 local election in the Philippines. Their ‘contrived authenticity’, sounding authentic or sincere, makes it easier to infiltrate organic communities. Similarly, Goodwin et al. (2020) found that during the 2020 US elections, micro influencers and nano influencers have become more political, posting more politicised content especially during the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd. Goodwin et al. (2020) also found that the currency of these influencers is their “authenticity,” which allows them to create intimate relationships with their followers, and in turn, earning the loyalty and trust of their followers.

Also in the United States, alt-right groups like the Proud Boys, a far-right, extremist, anti-immigrant group, have a history of inciting violence through spreading ideologies that promote racism and white supremacy. In the Netflix (2022) documentary series, “Web of Make Believe: Death, Lies, and the Internet”, an episode tackles how the Proud Boys were able to create a community and created personas that would later become influencers in different social media platforms like 4chan and Discord, where they would later spread far-right ideologies that would lead to violent actions such as the Charlottesville white nationalist protest. The Charlottesville event led to the killing of a counter-protester when he was ran over by neo-nazi James Alex Fields, Jr. (Villareal, 2021). Fields was later on convicted to two life sentences after pleading guilty for 29 federal hate crimes (Ingber, 2019). The group’s leader, Enrique Tarrio, was also charged with seditious conspiracy in relation to the US Capitol riots, although he was not present at the riots. According to the complaint, Tarrio conspired with others “to corruptly obstruct, influence, and impede an official proceeding, the

certification of the Electoral College vote.” (Ceballos, 2022). Other Proud Boys influencers like Ethan Nordean and Joe Biggs have been charged with conspiracy and violence and according to prosecutors, the ability “to incite fellow Proud Boys and others to commit violence” (Dreisbach, 2021). The group was also accused by the Colorado Information Analysis Center to have been a source of COVID-19 conspiracy theories, saying that the vaccine was a tool for population and mind control, a narrative which the group spread on Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram channels (Wilson, 2020).

There has been a point of discussion in the media, especially after the 2020 US elections and after the COVID pandemic has shifted in-person organising to online. Citarella (2021), in her article in The Guardian argues:

“The key difference between mainstream celebrities and niche influencers, is the potential for social media to form hyper-specific and hyper-dedicated communities. Viewers feel a strong connection to the content creators they follow and to the communities they participate in. These audiences yield higher than average conversion rates when called upon to take action. Today there are no casual fans – everything is a cult following. In most cases, these political influencer channels are unearthed over the course of months (or years) of exploring. Social media are forming accidental “pipelines” to political education and it’s time to start thinking about what these pipelines lead to.”

Using famous people for campaigning and propaganda is not new. Celebrities have been often used by different organisations to help gain support for their campaigns. Street (2004) has identified two kinds of celebrity politicians: first, politicians who emerge from show business and those who use popular culture strategies to get elected into office and second, celebrities who want to influence politics through their fame. In the first category, there are examples like Arnold Schwarzenegger, who leveraged their celebrity status to get into politics, and Barack Obama, who cleverly used entertainment and social networking sites to go from being a little-known state senator to winning the US presidential elections twice (Wheeler, 2013). In the second category, there are celebrities like Angelina Jolie and Bono who act as ambassadors for advocacy organisations like the United Nations.

The culture of celebrity politics or the celebrification of politics is contentious for many scholars. For West and Orman (2003), it helps reinvigorate politics by allowing for new ideas. Marsh et al. (2010) says celebrity politics can help the public be aware of causes that they were once unaware of and help make these issues more accessible to more people. According to Marsh et al. (2010),

“Celebrity politics may thus provide an unorthodox, but potentially effective, way of breaking the hold of established elites on political agendas and public discourse about policy. Celebrities have a unique capacity to reach out to and mobilise otherwise apathetic publics, and sometimes manage to give powerful voices to the disenfranchised in society and on the world stage. Where legislatures and other institutional watchdogs may be fully co-opted by executive dominance, celebrity-led initiatives can help ‘keep the bastards honest’.”

Others would disagree. For example, Kellner (2010) argues that celebrities create spectacle that trivialises the complexities of policies and other issues and promotes style over substance. Louw (2005) sees celebrity politics as a form of ideological control whereby politically disengaged publics are merely sold prescriptive ideas. Similarly, Drezner (2007) points out that in-depth analysis about political issues are being replaced by more shallow events like concerts.

While there is a deliberation among scholars whether celebrity politics is largely positive or negative, we cannot deny that this culture has allowed for influencers, themselves having celebrity power over their followers, to have influence over politics and political campaigns. Landsberger and Martinez (2020), in their study, explained that social media influencers have explained that the celebrification of social media influencers happens thanks to the confluence of different things: 1.) their recurrent social media representations (Driessens, 2013); 2.) the use of algorithm to data that allows them to know which posts grab the most attention and engagement (Cotter, 2019); and 3.) posting regularly to ensure they remain relevant. Brooks et al. (2021) also identify three processes with which influencers acquire celebrity capital - generative practices, collaborative practices, and evaluative practices. Generative practices initiate an influencer’s celebrity capital where they build their following and

produce niche content; collaborative practices expands this celebrity capital with the deepening of connections between them and their fans and the advertising industry; evaluative practices legitimises this celebrity capital by placing value on the influencer based on their reach and ability to gain online community buy-in (Brooks et al., 2021). Brooks et al. (2021) also put emphasis on the role of advertising agencies in the celebrification of social media influencers, playing a part in every process. In the generative practice, advertising agencies act as talent scouts; in the collaborative practice, the advertising industry act as “creative concierges” helping create opportunities for the influencer; and in the evaluative practice, the advertising industry acts as “impact analyst” who evaluate the influencer’s relevance and success (Brooks et al., 2021, p. 535).

With the rise of the influencer culture and their celebrification, the power of influencers in politics should be recognised. Because of their online following, influencers have also been called digital opinion leaders (Bause, 2021). De Veirman et al. (2017) defines digital opinion leaders as those who “have built a sizable social network of people following them”. Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955) theory of opinion leaders argues that opinion leaders have a high influence on others although they do not necessarily have formal positions of power or prestige. Opinion leaders discuss issues and relay information to other members of their personal networks (Katz et al., 1957). Riedl et al. (2021) emphasises the need for influencers who post about politics to remain authentic to maintain credibility among their followers:

“It is important to note here that a crucial factor for political influencers is not only the coverage of political topics in isolation but rather the way this content is represented. Despite meaningful content, political influencers still focus on a casual, down-to-earth appearance to maintain high credibility among their followers.”

It is not surprising then that much like celebrities, influencers have become a go-to for politicians and advocacy organisations to spread political and advocacy campaigns to the public. The study by Suuronen et al. (2021) showed that over 90% of the social media influencers they analysed brought up political issues in their posts at least once. The same study showed that social media influencers who have a higher number of following and already have many ongoing collaborations with different brands mentioned lifestyle-based politics – “personal experience, interest, issue, or topic in general to

society, and then secondly connects it to the wider society” (Suuronen et al., 2021). Suuronen et al., (2021) believes that this could be due to the fact that these influencers are already established and would therefore have more opportunity to address political issues with less concern about potential risks. A study by Schmuck et al. (2022, p. 755) found that young people have increased interest in political issues posted by social media influencers which can be attributed to the “motivating and exciting” presentation of these political issues in the content they produce.

Seeing how influencers can have this kind of impact on their followers, it is no wonder that political groups have been paying for influencers to campaign for them. Goodwin et al. (2020) have seen a rise in political influencer marketing, with political campaigners particularly using ‘small-scale’ influencers, or those with fewer than 10,000 followers, who they believe are more authentic and who affect their audience’s behaviour (Goodwin and Wooley, 2021). In their interview with one political strategist, the use of these micro or nano influencers allows them to target more specific audiences: *“I can deliver to you a more credible messenger, who talks like you, acts like you...I can be really specific in sourcing suburban women in Detroit and African American men in Detroit, and show that content, those ads to each of those populations”* (Goodwin et al., 2020).

In this section I presented how influencers evolved along with the evolution of the Internet, from a one-way relationship of early influencer-bloggers with their readers, to Instagram influencers who engage with their followers to gain more trust and form more intimate relationships with them. I also presented different kinds of influencers and how the landscape of influencer marketing has shifted from a numbers game to a search for who is the most authentic – from getting influencers with big following as brand ambassadors, to employing nano and micro influencers who have less but more engaged followers. Last, I showed how influencers can have influence not only in what people consume or buy, but also in promoting ideologies that can sometimes lead to harm and violence in the real world. In the next section, we look at how influencers have become vital in promoting certain candidates in elections as well as in helping governments and politicians with their agendas. I also discussed celebrity politics and how this culture has allowed for influencers to have influence over politics as well. From traditional celebrities to micro and nano influencers, political campaign strategists are able to reach a wide range but at the same time very specific audience by tapping into small-scale influencers and their immediate spheres of influence.

2.4 Rhetorical Devices in Political Communication

This study is aligned with more recent developments in deliberative theory that looks at different forms of expression like rhetoric and emotions as relevant expressions for deliberation (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012). In this section I present the different concepts that served as my theoretical framework in my research.

There have been many studies that look at rhetorical devices used by different political figures, particularly in speeches. Aristotle himself believed in the power of language to persuade the audience and postulated that the three ways to appeal to the public include ethos (credibility of the speaker), pathos (appeal to emotions), and logos (appeal to logic). David (2014, p.164), points out that to influence and persuade the public, politicians must use linguistic strategies and rhetorical devices at the “phonological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and textual levels in their political discourse.” Thomas and Wareing (1999) believe politicians who are skillful public speakers cleverly use language to influence people’s views and even make people believe in lies and make them support policies that are in conflict with their interests. According to Atkinson (2015), the most commonly used rhetorical devices in political speeches are alliteration, allusion, lists, parallelism, and repetition. As mentioned earlier, most studies on the use of rhetorical devices usually look at speeches. However, public speeches have become highly mediated through mass media and also highly personalised through social media. Gerodimos and Justinussen (2014), for example, found that Obama’s 2012 presidential campaign used Facebook to promote their key campaign messages and mostly depended on appeal to emotions (pathos). In this research I analyse Facebook posts through Benoit’s functional theory of political campaign discourse; different rhetorical devices that fall under Aristotle’s ethos, pathos, and logos; incivility and intolerance; and hate speech.

2.4.1 Benoit’s Functional Theory

Benoit’s functional theory of political campaign discourse examines the rhetorical devices commonly used in campaign communication strategies (Benoit, 2005). His theory is based on six assumptions: 1.) voting is a comparative act and each person decides which candidate is preferable based on whatever factors matter most to them; 2.) candidates must distinguish themselves from their opponents so that voters can tell how they differ from other candidates; 3.) political campaign

messages are important vehicles for distinguishing candidates and can help inform and persuade voters; 4.) candidates establish preferability through acclaiming, attacking, and defending which have the potential to increase a candidate’s preferability; 5.) campaign discourse occurs on two topics: policy and discourse; and 6.) a candidate must win a majority of the votes cast in an election.

According to Benoit’s theory, the rhetorical devices used by candidates in campaigning are acclaiming, attacking, and defending. Acclaiming tells voters about candidates’ good points, stressing about their desirable attributes; attacking is criticising an opponent and identifying their weaknesses or disadvantages; defence refutes any attack made by the opposing candidate to try and prevent further damage (Benoit, 2005). Given that campaign discourse occurs on the topics of policy and discourse, therefore, political campaigning rhetoric can acclaim, attack, or defend either or both policy (what they have done or is doing in office) and character (who they are) of a candidate or an opponent. According to Benoit (2005, p. 18) “when persuasive to the audience, acclaims increase a candidate’s benefits, attacks increase an opponent's costs, and defenses reduce alleged costs.” The functional theory has been used to analyse political campaigns shown in different media including television, radio, and web pages.

Additionally, Benoit (2017, p.197) distinguishes three forms of policy and three forms of character:

Functional theory also distinguishes from three forms of policy (past deeds, which facilitate retrospective voting; future plans (means); and general goals (ends); the latter two forms facilitate prospective voting). It also distinguishes three forms of character (personal qualities, leadership ability, and ideals [values, principles]).

	Policy	Character
Acclaim	“I will reduce inflation.”	“I will always be honest with you.”
Attack	“Job creation fell during my opponent’s administration.”	“My opponent cannot be trusted.”
Defend	“My opponent is wrong to say I raised taxes.”	“It is simply false to say I don’t care about people.”

Table 2.1 Acclaims, Attacks, and defenses in Policy and Character according to Benoit

According to Benoit (2017, p.198), functional theory has advanced several hypotheses about political campaign messages. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the following:

1. Political candidates will use acclaims more frequently than attacks, and attacks more than defenses
2. Policy comments will be more frequent than character comments in political campaign discourse
3. General goals and ideals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack
4. Incumbents acclaim and defend more, and attack less than challengers
5. Campaign winners discuss policy more, and character less, than do losers
6. Campaign winners attack more on policy and less on character, than losers.

2.4.2 Incivility and Intolerance

Definitions of incivility and intolerance have been explored in different ways over the years. In some definitions of incivility, intolerance and hate speech are included (Mutz, 2015). For example, Chen (2017) and Sydnor (2019) treat incivility and intolerance as a continuum, conflating behaviours that fall under politeness and impoliteness to speech that perpetuates racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. According to Sydnor (2019, p.16), we can think of incivility “as a continuum, with civil language on one end; moderately uncivil language in tone, such as sarcasm or eye-rolling, somewhere in the middle; and highly uncivil language, such as racial slurs and obscenity towards the end.” Chen (2017), similarly argues that incivility “is part of a larger continuum of aversive speech that both violates what is considered normal in conversation and also has the potential to cause harm.” Chen’s example would be calling someone “stupid” as being a mild form of incivility while Donald Trump’s assertion that Mexican immigrants are “rapists” would be on the more aversive side as a pejorative statement. For Chen (2017) incivility moves along the continuum from less to more aversive, depending on the intensity and harshness of the words.

This is perhaps why earlier literature discounted uncivil speech as part of deliberation. Warren (2006) believed that incivility desatbalises deliberation. Rosinni (2022) proposes the need to distinguish between incivility, which has to do with politeness and impoliteness, and intolerance, or speech that can be detrimental to society. I lean towards Rosinni's conceptualisation of incivility and intolerance, distinguishing between the two, while using using the concept of both having a scale from least to most uncivil and least to most intolerant. In this research, and as will be presented in chapter 4 of this thesis, I visualised the scale of political speech from incivility to intolerance and constructed categories under each concept without being exclusive of each other.

I use the following definitions of incivility: politeness and courtesy, respecting other participants in the debate and not harming their reputation or threatening their face (Papacharissi, 2004); speech that is threatening in tone and is disrespectful to the forum, its participants, or its topics (Coe et al., 2014). Kenski et al. (2017) lists the following under incivility: name-calling, vulgarity, lying accusation, pejorative, and aspersion. Based on the research of Coe et al. (2014) and Kenski et al. (2017), part of incivility also includes ad hominem attacks, especially derogatory remarks, and vulgarity.

I use Rossini's (2020) definition of intolerance. Whereas uncivil discourse are not threats to political discourse and democracy, intolerance discourse are more serious threats to democratic conversations that can undermine the value of political talk. It focuses on substance rather than the tone. Intolerance is defined as speech that promotes intimidation, hate, discrimination, (such as women, LGBTQ+, minoritised ethnic, racial, and religious groups) (Rossini, 2020). Intolerance also includes speech which may not be expressed as hatred but still violates democratic pluralism, such as "limiting people's rights, undermining or silencing their participation in the public sphere (e.g. people on welfare should not be allowed to vote), as well as speech that is discriminatory or derogatory" (Rosinni, 2022, p. 10).

The big question remains: are incivility and intolerance part of deliberation or are they a threat to deliberation? While intolerance is clearly a threat to and is incompatibe with democracy, distinguishing incivility from intolerance allows us to have a view of incivility as an important part of deliberation. Rosinni (2014) along with other scholars like Herbst (2010) and Mutz (2015) have acknowledged the value of rude political exchanges in deliberation and that it is a vital part of

democracy. Sydnor (2019) in her book *Disrespectful Democracy*, argues that incivility is an “intractable part of politics” and that “a world of civil agreement seems anathema to a pluralist society.” In her article published in the *Washington Post*, Sydnor (2018) says,

'But it can also be a way to assert political rights when traditional methods are ineffective and can rally supporters to your cause. Incivility can open up political debate, even as it makes us uncomfortable,' says Sydnor. 'Not all instances of incivility serve democratic ends. But civility can mask dissent and encourage people to avoid tough conversations. Agreeable speech can limit political discourse; at times, name-calling and vitriol can promote democratic discussion,' Sydnor adds.

2.4.3 Hate speech

With great political polarisation also comes the potential for increased levels of so-called hate speech. The Internet enables the latter to be disseminated more efficiently, to reach new audiences and to allow for a sense of community among hate groups (Bowman-Grieve, 2009). People who are targeted in this way are attacked on the basis of their ethnicity, class, physical appearance, sexual orientation and gender identity (Silva et al, 2016). Ibister et al. (2018) have identified public figures like journalists, politicians, artists as especially vulnerable targets of hate speech. There are consequences to being exposed to this kind of highly negative treatment including heightened feelings of fear (especially for marginalised groups, Hinduja and Patchin, 2011), withdrawal from public debate (Henson et al, 2013), and an avoidance of political talk more generally (Barnidge et al, 2019). Online hate speech can also lead to an increase in racial hate crimes (Chan et al., 2016) such as those against Muslims (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017) and refugees (Muller and Schwartz, 2019).

Hate speech is a rhetorical device used in political campaigning by populists. Hate speech usually gives emphasis on us versus the “other” (Yachyshen and Mather, 2020). On social media, where people are highly connected, hate speech easily proliferates and can intensify quickly (Johnson et al., 2019). Online hate speech is grounded in divisions created in the real-world (Pohjonen and Udupa,

2017) and has real world impacts especially in Black and Muslim communities (Williams et al., 2020). Luqman's (2018) study shows that Trump's hate rhetoric against minorities found a correlation with an increase of hate crimes and his use of Twitter has led other profiles to tweeting extremist content (Yachyshen and Mather, 2020).

According to Siegel, (2020) while there is no one definition of hate speech, it is considered to be "bias-motivated, hostile, and malicious language targeted at a person or group because of their actual or perceived innate characteristics." Waltman (2018) adds that hate speech "is an attempt to vandalise the other's identity to such an extent that the very legitimacy and humanity of the other is called into question." For Rosinni (2022), hate speech is the extreme manifestation of intolerance and aims at abusing, insulting, and humiliating a group and its members (Davidson et al., 2017).

Richardson-Self (2018, p. 2) adds this definition of hate speech:

"...hate speech is taken to express hostility to and about historically and contemporarily oppressed groups, and, in so doing, vilifies, degrades, discriminates, maligns, and so on."

Social media channels have different definitions of hate speech. YouTube's (2018) guidelines state that hateful contents include condoning violence against groups or individuals based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, religion, disability, age, gender, nationality, veteran status, or sexual orientation and gender identity. Twitter's (2018) guidelines identify hateful conduct as promoting violence against or directly attacking people based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or disease. Facebook's (2018) definition of hateful content is content that directly attacks people based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sex, gender, gender identity, disability or diseases. Facebook does not include incitement to violence.

The studies on hate speech take different approaches. Because there is no one definition of hate speech, there is also no consensus on the most effective way to detect it (Siegel, 2020). Some studies use binaries, identifying whether hate speech is present or not present (Davidson et al., 2017), some

use text mining or natural language processing (Fortuna and Nunes, 2018) through dictionary-based methods to identify hate speech (Liu and Forss, 2015; Isbister et al., 2018). Warner and Hirschberg (2012) used distance metrics to detect hate speech that may have been misspelt while Magu et al. (2017) have included code words alluding to out-groups in their dictionary. Most studies are also focused on English language content.

2.5 Summary

The purpose of this review was to have an overview of theories on social media for political communication, studies on influencer marketing in politics, and some theories on rhetoric used in political communication. Research on social media as a tool for political communication has shown how social media has both its advantages and disadvantages. It allows for direct communication to the audience, gives a platform for those with less resources, and bypasses traditional gatekeeping by the media creating more space for information democratisation. However, these can be abused and social media can become a platform for disinformation, polarisation, and an echo-chamber for the public. We also looked at the landscape of political influencers and how they are used by governments all over the world for propaganda or to help with campaigns and information dissemination. We also see how the influencer landscape has changed, where before it was a numbers game, today, importance is placed on authenticity, allowing for the rise of micro-influencers who are seen as more engaged with their community of followers.

In the next section, we focus on the Philippines, its political and media landscape throughout history and how celebrity politicians rise to power in a culture of political patronage. We also present recent studies on how influencers have become a crucial tool in political campaigning and propaganda.

Chapter 3

The Philippine Context

In the Philippines, the campaign season is a buffet of jingles and advertisements, most of them don't talk about platforms and social issues. It is all about the popularity, the name recall, the celebrity endorsements. Long before the Internet, the concept of something going viral was already embedded in Philippine politics. For example, during the corruption scandal of then president Joseph Estrada in 2001, a text message that said "Go 2EDSA, Wear blek" went viral and circulated among Filipinos, resulting in over a million people gathering and protesting in the iconic Epifanio delos Santos Avenue (EDSA) (Montealvo, 2012) – the same streets where people gathered in the 1986 to oust dictator Ferdinand Marcos. It was said that more than 70 million text messages were sent in one day (Johnson, 2009), prompting political analysts to say that the people power was fueled by emerging digital technology. Fast forward to 2022 where the Internet has become ubiquitous and there are 95 million social media users in the Philippines or 82% of its total population (Kemp, 2022), studies have shown that social media has played a prominent role in campaign strategies of candidates and in shaping political discourse of the country (Arugay, 2022; Ong, 2022).

In this chapter, I dive deeper into the influencer culture and situate it in the Philippines, a country who has had a long history of patronage politics and where celebrities become politicians and vice versa. First, I look into the history of the Philippines' democracy and civil society, which would help in the understanding of how the country has come to elect certain types of leaders throughout its history, from its colonisation to becoming an independent country. I then look into the country's history of mass media, which has played a crucial role in politics. The next section looks into Duterte's rise to power, the culture of patronage politics and clientelism in Philippine politics, celebrity politics, and how influencers have been used in electoral campaigns and political propaganda in the last few years. This chapter hopes to give a historical, political, and cultural overview of the Philippines to better understand how a politician like Duterte can rise to power with the help of social media influencers.

3.1. History of Philippine Democracy and Civil Society

The Philippine presidency is patterned under the American government, thanks to the American colonisation that ushered in a new system of governance. However, it is rooted in the practice similar to Latin America, characterised by regime instability and democratic breakdowns and where the presidency is given more coercive powers and fiscal prerogatives (Teehankee, 2016). Hedman and Sidel's (2000) analysis of the 1935 Philippine Constitution shows that the president of the Philippines controls decisions on the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, assumption of emergency powers, national finance, and constitutional amendment. The modern political system therefore revolves around the individual leader rather than the parliamentary institutions that characterises other states' governmental arrangements. Filipino political scientist Remigio Agpalo (1999, p.45; 60) coined the term "*pangulo regime*" where the presidency "operates on the principle of supremacy of the executive and puts a premium on the value of *pagdamay* (sharing with and caring for fellow persons). Agpalo (1999) traces the roots of this "*pangulo regime*" from revolutionaries Jose Rizal and Andres Bonifacio, institutionalised by the first president of the Philippine republic Emilio Aguinaldo.

The Philippine presidency can be divided into four distinct regimes: proto-regimes, neo-colonial regime, authoritarian regime, and reformist regime (Teehankee, 2016a). The proto-regime included three short phases: the revolutionary, late-colonial, and occupation eras that spanned from independence from Spain to World War II. The neo-colonial regime was the "foundational regime" in developing the nation-state. This was the post-war era and spanned five presidents, dominated by oligarchy, dependent on former colonial power, and challenged by local insurgencies from agrarian unrest. This was followed by Marcos' authoritarian regime from 1972-1986 and replaced previous democratic regimes with a new order he called "New Society." Marcos assembled technocrats, his cronies, and the military as his pillars and distributed political patronage to local political clans while dismantling the traditional agricultural elite from previous regimes. After the Marcos dictatorship came the democratic transition to "reformist regime" and a new constitution was written to dismantle the centralised authoritarian structure that Marcos created. The 1987 Constitution separated the powers and created checks and balances among the three co-equal branches of the government — the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary.

Teehankee (2016a) also divides Philippine presidency into political time, defined by Skowronek (2011. p.18) as “the medium through which presidents encounter received commitments of ideology and interest and claim authority to intervene in their development” or as Lieberman (2000) puts it, the pattern of regime change and the cycle of presidents within regimes. According to Teehankee (2016a, p.300), Philippine presidency can be a prequel or sequel to an ongoing regime narrative.

	Affiliated	Opposed
Vulnerable	Disjunctive Leaders Quirino, late Marcos, Macapagal, Macapagal Arroyo, Aquino III	Great Repudiators Roxas, early Marcos, Cory Aquino, Duterte
Resilient	Orthodox Innovators Magsaysay, Ramos	Preemptive Leaders Garcia, Estrada

Table 3.1 Philippine Presidents in Political Time (Teehankee, 2016a, p.293)

Skowronek (1997) identifies four structures of political authority. Teehankee (2016a) summarises this:

“(a) politics of reconstruction—when the president emerges from the opposition at a time when the prevailing regime is ripe for repudiation, (b) politics of disjunction—when a president is affiliate with a regime that has been put into question as failed or irrelevant to the problems of the day, (c) politics of articulation—when a president is affiliated with a resilient regime, and (d) politics of preemption—when an opposed president ascends to power within a resilient regime...”

The aforementioned characterisation underlines the conflictual nature of the country’s system. In Philippine politics, great repudiators are those whose rise to power is hinged on challenging previous regimes. For example, Manuel Roxas challenged conservative nationalism and welcomed alliance with the United States; Marcos challenged the oligarchs of the Third Republic and wanted to establish his “New Society”; and Corazon Aquino challenged the Marcos dictatorship and restored democracy under a reformist regime. Similarly, the rise of Rodrigo Duterte to power is seen as a challenge to Benigno Aquino III, who was branded as incompetent. Although Aquino’s regime was politically

stable and was marked with economic growth, Duterte’s campaign narratives included “anti-imperialist Manila” sentiments as well as “law and order” (Teehankee, 2016a).

Teehankee (2016b), further categorises Philippine presidency into four narratives: the “unfinished revolution” (nationalist), the “great nation” (developmentalist), the “good governance” (reformist) and the “*masa*” or “masses” (populist). The narrative of the “unfinished revolution” comes from U.S. colonialism and class conflict (Abinales and Amoroso, 2005). The narrative of the “great nation” comes as a continuity from the “unfinished revolution” in the 1970’s-1980’s which simplified the problems of underdevelopment to efficiency and manageability that could be solved by political will and planning (Magno, 1990). The narrative of “good governance” and reforms came after the Marcos regime where political reformists battle “evils” and good governance becomes a platform to gain trust, especially from the middle class, by projecting to be morally good (Teehankee, 2016b). The “*masa*” narrative emerged during the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and populism became the winning campaign of Joseph Estrada. Teehankee (2016b), also argues that presidents can fall under a single narrative presidency or a mixed narrative presidency, the first where presidents adheres to one story line and the second where presidents follow two or more story lines. For example, although Magsaysay’s main narrative was reformist, he also coupled it with his “man-of-the masses” image.

	Unfinished Revolution	Great Nation	Good Governance	<i>Masa</i>
Nationalist (identity)	Aguinaldo Quezon Osmena Laurel			Duterte
Developmentalist (modernity)	<i>Garcia</i> <i>Marcos</i>	Roxas Quirino Macapagal- Arroyo	<i>Ramos</i>	<i>Macapagal</i>
Reformist (accountability)			Aquino Aquino III	<i>Magsaysay</i>
Populist (equity)	<i>Estrada</i>			

Table 3.2 Narratives of Philippine presidents (Teehankee, 2016b, p.74)

Post-Marcos narratives in the Philippines have been a battle between reformism vs. populism (Teehankee, 2016b). According to Thompson (2010),

“The post-Marcos rise of the populist and reformist campaign narratives means that voters can no longer be simply divided into incumbent “ins” and opposition “outs.” Instead, they must also be seen as tending to fall into either a camp that stresses paternalistic promises to end corruption or one that favors (elite resistance notwithstanding) policies meant to help the poor.”

Teehankee (2016b) argues that Duterte’s rise to power does not follow the script of reformist vs. populist but rather revives the nationalist narrative from post-war Philippines, an anti-establishment and anti-colonial sentiment which Duterte may have gotten from leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines, Jose Maria Sison, who also happened to be Duterte’s lecturer in university. Duterte’s nationalist narrative is seen to challenge Benigno Aquino III’s liberal reformist, elitist narrative. In fact, Duterte was able to gain support from the communist left for his anti-U.S. colonialism sentiments and after winning the presidency, eventually appointed its leaders in cabinet positions in labour, social welfare, and agrarian reform. This support for Duterte given by the communist left was seen as ironic by civil society groups as the left was known for campaigning for human rights. Duterte does not only challenge Benigno Aquino III’s regime but challenges the elite democracy — the failure to promote social equity — that has been founded by Corazon Aquino (Teehankee, 2016a).

Thompson (2016) also underlines the importance of Duterte’s history as Mayor of Davao City, where he crafted a strongman, tough guy image where he claims to have saved the city from criminals and communists by ruling with an iron fist, and which he promised to do the same nationwide. Isaac and Aseron (2016) argue that the people of Davao have agreed to this kind of leadership in exchange for personal peace and security. This is not surprising given that according to the World Values Survey (2015), two-thirds of Filipinos said they favoured strong leaders.

3.2. Personality politics

From these analyses of presidential regimes in the country, one can see that Philippine politics is leader-focused and personality driven. It is not surprising that there is a very thin line between show business and politics in the Philippines that becomes so easy to cross especially in a country where patronage politics rules. The Philippines' electoral system can be seen as a major contributing factor to the country's patronage and personality-driven politics (Arugay, 2020). Hutchcroft (2014, p.54) finds that the combination of weak political parties and weak national bureaucracy makes the country a "patronage-based state." According to Martin Shefter (1993, p.283), patronage "involves the exchange of public benefits for political support or party advantage." While other scholars interchange the terms patronage and clientelism, Hutchcroft (2014, p.54), distinguishes clientelism wherein it is described as a "personalistic relationship of power" and so not all patronage politics are necessarily clientelism. In the Philippines, much of patronage politics can be considered a patron-client relationship which, according to Iletto (1999), is oppressive, manipulative, and repressive.

Hutchcroft (2014, p.66) identifies four major policies during America's colonisation of the Philippines that has led to a patronage-based state formation:

"...the promotion of local autonomy; greater attention to elections and legislative institutions than to the creation of a modern bureaucratic apparatus; the nurturing of provincial politicians; and the emergence of patronage-based political parties. Together they contribute to a process I have termed patronage based state formation... this type of state formation 1) occurs within settings that lack strong political institutions, notably effective bureaucracies and/or well-institutionalised political parties; 2) devolves important elements of state administrative functions to local power holders throughout the country; and 3) displays high levels of interconnectedness among the different territorial levels of government via a patronage system that has its apex in the national capital."

Hutchcroft (2014) points out that this patronage-based politics in the country has also led to the personalisation of politics which can be seen in the personal ties starting from the president's office down to the *baranggay* (barrio) level – where the allocation of funds can range from larger projects to a very personalistic level of exchange such as weddings and funerals. But this patron-client relationship can be traced as far back as the *padrino system* during the Spanish colonisation. *Padrino system*, literally translated to patron system, is a patron-client system based on kinship enabled by *utang na loob* and *hiya* (Wong and de Leon, 2020). In an interview with Elefante (2020), historian John Ray Ramos explains how this can be traced to the roots of patronage politics in the Spanish colonial administration:

“The top administrative posts were given to peninsulares, or Spaniards who were born in Spain,” Ramos said. “The insulares, or Spaniards who were born in the Philippines, held the next level of positions.”

“Under this system, the holding of high rank in the colonial administration was seen as a grant, reward or favor from the Spanish monarch,” Ramos added.

“This, in turn, led to the practice of buying appointments. An administrative position can then be given to the highest bidder. Position and rank were given as a favor or sold. The people had no choice in the matter.”

This personalistic relationship between politicians and their electorate can be connected to the Philippines' strong emphasis on the value of kinship and in the local values of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) even as far back as the Spanish colonisation (Soon, 2012). According to Iletto (1999), this *utang na loob* or indebtedness that the electorate have for politicians have created a reciprocal oppressive relationship. This does not mean, however, that the Filipino electorate simply bend to the elite leaders in positions of power. Soon (2012) argues that the electorate, or the “clients”, are critical of their patrons and air their grievances and their vision for a better society.

According to Rungduin et al. (2016) there is an expectation that the *utang na loob* for a good deed will be repaid and in reciprocating this kindness, it doesn't matter if the repayment is voluntary or involuntary, direct or indirect repayment to the benefactor. There have been many critics of how *utang na loob* has been used by politicians to make the electorate feel that they are indebted to them

for projects like building schools and other infrastructures, or helping them out on medical bills and other personal needs (Menguin, n.d.). During the 2022 presidential campaign, former vice-president Leni Robredo addressed this problem and said that one way to change this culture is through good governance. In article by Cos (2022), an interview with Robredo emphasises the role of good governance in taking away this feeling of *utang na loob* to politicians, allowing citizens to hold people in power more accountable for their actions:

“When there are not enough social services and programs and a voter needs help, they come to those who are elected. Those elected will help them, and so they feel indebted to the person. One indication of good governance is when people don’t have to beg anymore. When voters no longer feel indebted to politicians, they can better participate in governance. They feel that officials are only borrowing that authority. When mistakes are made, the people know it is their right to hold those in power accountable.”

Because of this culture of indebtedness and patron-client relationship in politics, it’s no wonder how politics in the Philippines has also become a popularity game for politicians. The term “epal” or “attention grabber” has been coined for politicians who use public projects and even small events to give attention to their names and credit themselves for the job. All over the Philippines you will see tarpaulins, billboards, stickers, logos, with a politicians’ face and name crediting themselves for any new infrastructures or simply greeting their electorates a happy Christmas and New Year.



Figure 3.1: A billboard of local politicians comparing themselves to the Avengers to greet the mayor of a city a happy birthday (Photo by: Rich Johnston, 2012)



Figure 3.2: A fire truck covered with politicians’ names and stickers; at the back, tarpaulins with politicians’ names and faces crediting them for projects like free therapeutic massage, computer training, housekeeper training, etc. (Anti-Epal Facebook page, 2017).

It is not difficult to see how the culture of patronage politics and clientelism has turned politics into a popularity contest – if people see your face and your name more often, especially if connected to certain projects that the people feel benefit them personally, the greater chances you will have of winning the elections. Combined with the Filipino culture of *utang na loob*, it is not surprising that popularity can win you a position in the government, that many celebrities become successful in becoming politicians and that politicians employ tactics that turn them into celebrities. Romero (2019), lambasts this culture and says, “No wonder our politicians are contortionists, acrobats, media-huggers, photobombers and selfie-natics.”

Further, Teehankee (2017), points out that inequitable social structures, poverty, underdevelopment, alongside the mass media have contributed to celebrity politics and populist campaigns to win

elections. Celebrity politics in the Philippines is merely a symptom of a deeper systemic problem of patronage politics and clientelism that has been entrenched in the country's political culture for centuries.

3.3 Illiberal democracy and Duterte's brand of populism

Illiberal democracy was a term first used by Zakaria (1997) to describe certain democratic countries that are limiting the freedoms of people, whose regimes are becoming centralised, eroding liberties, and increasing conflicts. Zakaria (1997) mentions the Philippines, along with Peru, Slovakia, Sierra Leone, and Pakistan as an example of a rising illiberal democracy in the late 90's.

Thompson (2018) attributes the rise of illiberal democracy in the Philippines with the failure of post-Marcos administrations to create strong institutions. With the rise of illiberal democracy in the Philippines also came the rise of populist leaders, beginning with Joseph Estrada in 1998, to Benigno Aquino in 2010, and Rodrigo Duterte in 2016.

According to Bryant and Moffitt (2019), there are usually two principles of populism: it must claim to speak on behalf of everyone and that these people stand in opposition to an elite establishment, stopping them from fulfilling their political preferences. Wren-Lewis (2016) describes populist policies that are either harmful to society although might be beneficial to a significant subgroup of a society or harmful to everyone.

Mudde (2017) in an interview with *The Atlantic*, describes populists as "dividers" rather than uniters and who say they are guided by "the will of the people" and split society between "the pure people" and the "elite" but who these people actually are is not based on position or money but based on values. In the same interview, Norris (2017) further describes populists as boorish to appear like "the real people" and use simple slogans and direct language.

Norris and Inglehart (2019, p.6) define another form of populism — authoritarian populism — where authoritarian values are combined with populist rhetoric, the "most dangerous threat to liberal

democracy.” Rodrigo Duterte is named as an authoritarian populist. According to Norris and Inglehart (2019, p.8):

“...authoritarian populists favor strong governance preserving order and security against perceived threat (‘They are sending rapists’ ‘radical Islamic terrorists’), even at the expense of democratic norms protecting judicial independence, freedom of the media, human rights and civil liberties, the oversight role of representative assemblies, and standards of electoral integrity. It is the triumph of fear over hope.”

Populism is not new to the Philippines. Former president Joseph Estrada and Vice President Jejomar Binay gained popular support through populist campaigns, but Duterte’s brand of populism diverges from what Filipinos are used to — Duterte’s populism is a performance, stylised for mass media and digital media (Curato, 2016). Filipino sociologist Randy David (2016) coins the term “Dutertismo” defined as “pure theatre” and “sensual experience” while historian Vicente Rafael (2016) described Duterte’s campaign speeches as “semiotic overdrive” — rambling, unstructured, sexist, and full of swearing. Curato (2016) argues that Duterte’s populism is consistent with the “global wave of populism”, performing a crisis to “save the people” from the “dangerous other”, which in his case, Duterte painted a Philippines with a problem of order due to illegal drugs.

According to Teehankee (2016a), Duterte’s rise to power comes after the failure of Aquino III’s administration to institutionalise reformism and the pent-up frustration and anger from the middle class who have been dissatisfied with good governance reformist agendas stretching back to Corazon Aquino’s government. While Corazon Aquino restored democracy, she failed to address issues of social equity which would prove to be a challenge to the presidencies succeeding her. Further, Teehankee (2016b, p.72-73), argues that the Duterte phenomenon was not a revolt of the poor but rather of the elite, the wealthy, the newly successful, the middle class who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of Aquino III’s good governance campaign but instead “suffered from a lack of public services, endured horrendous air and land traffic, feared breakdown of peace and order, and silently witnessed their tax money being syphoned by corruption despite promises of good governance.”

Different perspectives of Duterte's brand of populism have so far been presented here, as analysed by different Filipino scholars in the context of the Philippine political landscape that ushered the kind of theatrical populism that we have seen in the likes of Donald Trump ascend to power. Peetz (2021, p.247) says of Donald Trump's performance: "a theatrical construction designed to appeal to an idealised national community." A similar argument has been made about Duterte which reflects the celebrification of politics that was earlier discussed in this chapter. Pertierra's (2017) analysis suggests that it is Filipinos' love of melodrama that has elected Duterte into power — Duterte himself being charismatic and dramatic is a beneficiary of a political culture where entertainment and politics converge. Pertierra (2017, p. 227) looks at audience studies to take a closer look at the Filipino voter:

"Yet the melodramatic dimensions of Philippine politics cannot be dismissed as a sideshow in the national political scene; the melodrama of Senate hearings and other mediated political encounters is important to understand because these moments generate the emotional ties that push people to support politicians in times of tension and transition."

Hedman (2001) agrees, saying that "movie star" populists' strategy includes appeals to the poor whereby politicians act as heroes fighting for the poor against the elites. Joseph Estrada, for example, was an action star and campaigned with the narrative of "*Erap para sa mahirap*" or "Erap for the Poor." Fernando Poe, Jr., who ran for presidency in the 2004 presidential elections and who lost amidst cheating by Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, was also one of the biggest action stars in the Philippines and also used a similar narrative to that of Estrada's. What makes Duterte's populism different from Estrada and Poe Jr. was that his audience wasn't the poor, but the middle class and the elite or the "ABC voters" (Thompson, 2016).

3.4 History of Philippine Media

The close relationship between media and politics is not new in the Philippines. According to Coronel (2001, p.5), Philippine media are "products of a turbulent history" and that the "tradition that defines Philippine journalism is polemical and political," whereby the rise of media has been closely knit with political upheavals. Sussman (1990, p.36) argues that "it would be ahistorical and myopic" to

look at Philippine politics and press outside its history of colonisation and tutelage of the United States that ultimately led to the ousting of dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

During the Spanish colonisation, heroes Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, and Graciano Lopez Jaena, to name a few, used journalism to wage a campaign on independence which triggered the Philippine revolution. Similarly during the Marcos dictatorship, journalists helped in the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution who continuously wrote about the Marcos family despite risking their freedom and their lives. However, in the coming decades after, mass media chose to become primarily a chronicler of events, government watchdogs, and/or entertainment media (Rosario-Braid and Tuazon, 1999).

A. Pre-Spanish and Spanish colonisation

Prior to colonisation, indigenous Filipinos had their own ways of communication, writing on trees, leaves, and bamboo tubes using saps of trees as ink (Agoncillo and Guerrero, 1978). A town crier called the *Umalohokan* served as the announcer of important news such as new laws or policies enacted by the town's chieftain (Philippine Cultural Education, 2015).

According to Rosario-Braid and Tuazon (1999), Philippine free press has its roots in nationalistic newspapers aimed to raise consciousness about the oppression experienced by Filipinos at the hands of the Spaniards. These publications, such as the *La Solidaridad*, were elitist, started by the *Ilustrados* (Filipino educated class) who lived in Europe, like propagandists Graciano Lopez Jaena, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, and Jose Rizal who were facing censorship in the Philippines (Teodoro, 1999).

B. American colonisation

During the American period, nationalist newspapers such as *El Renacimiento* and *El Nuevo Dia* were threatened with suspension after publishing about abuses of the American government (Rosario-Braid and Tuazon, 1999).

Sakdal was founded in 1930 by Benigno Ramos and became a platform for the oppressed "and later helped establish an underground movement that soon primed itself as a revolutionary group against the American occupation" (Deyro, 2019). *Sakdal* became the

official organ of the *Sakdal Movement* that demanded immediate independence of the Philippines from the United States (Deyro, 2019). According to Deyro (2019),

“Readers were encouraged to share their copies with others. In the provinces, it was said that one copy was read by more or less 10 individuals. In communities with illiterate citizens, groups of 10 to 20 people would listen to the pages read aloud. An estimate of around 200,000 to 400,000 readers was recorded.”

Sakdal eventually became a political party called *Sakdalista Party* and won national and local seats in the 1934 elections (Rosario-Braid and Tuazon, 1999).

C. Japanese Occupation and Postwar Era

During World War II, all publications except those used by the Japanese — Manila Tribune, Taliba, and La Vanguardia — were closed, and all publications were censored by the Japanese Imperial Army (Rosario-Braid and Tuazon, 1999).

After the war, Philippine press was regarded as the “freest in Asia” and was said to be the “golden age of Philippine journalism. Most newspapers were wholly or partly owned by businesses, as it is today. These newspapers also owned radio stations and television channels. According to Rosario-Braid and Tuazon (1999, p. 301), this era saw Philippine media as “real watchdog of the government.”

D. The Marcos Years

Marcos declared Martial Law in September 1972. Right after the announcement of Martial Law, only one newspaper, one television station, and the government-owned radio station were allowed to continue business (Rosenberg, 1974). The press was highly controlled in this period, news reports were screened and censored by the newly formed Department of Public Information and the media that were allowed to operate became the ally of the government

while journalists and editors who continued to write against Marcos and his government were arrested and incarcerated (Rosario-Braid and Tuazon, 1999).

Alternative press began to emerge in the 1980's to counter the government's propaganda. Among these were *Veritas*, *Pahayagang Malaya*, *Business Day*, and *Inquirer*. "Xerox journalism" where censored news clippings from foreign press were also disseminated to the masses (Rosario-Braid and Tuazon, 1999). Campus publications like the University of the Philippines' *Philippine Collegian*, Ateneo de Manila University's *Pandayan*, and Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila's *Ang Hasik* became a medium for voices opposing Marcos (Rosario-Braid and Tuazon, 1999). During this period, although a chilling effect has taken over journalists, the nationalist tradition of the press was slowly rekindled. After opposition leader Benigno Aquino Jr. was assassinated in August 1983, mainstream media's coverage of the assassination and its aftermath became more balanced and opposition publications rose in number and popularity (Dresang, 1985).

Doeppers (1984), in an interview with Dresang (1985), notes a trend in the Philippines where media outlets have proliferated at crucial times in the country's history — in the late 1800's (revolution against Spain), in early American colonisation, and in 1945 (the end of Japanese occupation). In 1985, at the tailend of the Marcos regime, alternative media had gained more credibility than pro-Marcos media. According to Rosario-Braid and Tuazon (1999, p.316), "alternative media nurtured the democratic and freedom-loving spirit of the silent majority so much so that when the four-day revolution happened, the Filipinos were ready for the event."

E. Post-Marcos to present-day media

After the fall of Marcos, there was a boom in the newspaper industry answering to people's hunger for news. In the 1990's, television and radio had the most audience reach; newspapers still set the agenda and both TV and radio got their cues from newspapers (Coronel, 2001).

The two formats of Philippine newspapers are broadsheets and tabloids, with tabloids outnumbering broadsheets in numbers and copies sold (Estrella and Loffholz, 2019). According to a survey conducted by Nielsen in 2017, out of the top 10 most read newspapers

seven are tabloids and three are broadsheets. Tabloids are cheaper, smaller, and mostly in people's native language. Estrella and Loffeholz (2019) note that print media consumption provides a glimpse of the demographics of Philippine news readers who prefer tabloids with sensationalised content, the bizarre and appalling (heinous crimes and show business).

Radio remains to be the second most used media in the Philippines with 41.4% of the population listening to radio once a week (PSA, 2013). It reaches the most remote areas. According to the Media Ownership Monitor of Reporters Without Borders (2017), radio is "the most pervasive media" in the Philippines. Filipinos mostly listen to FM stations for music. On the other hand, AM stations deliver news and public affairs (Reporters Without Borders, 2017). Ninety percent of radio stations are privately owned and companies who also own television stations like ABS-CBN dominate the market. Television shows get their radio spin-offs and other television shows air simultaneously on the radio.

Television is the most used and most trusted media in the Philippines with 81% of the population watching television, 71.6% of which watch at least once a week (PSA, 2013). In a survey by Nielsen in 2016, 58% said television is their most trusted source of political information. There are more than 400 television stations nationwide dominated by the two biggest conglomerates, ABS-CBN and GMA, who have an audience share of 81%. Both operate nationally and regionally. Regular programming are similar across stations. It starts with early morning news programmes, followed by variety, lifestyle shows, or cartoons; entertainment shows for lunch; soap operas for the afternoon, followed by evening news; and another round of soap operas or reality TV for primetime (Estrella and Loffeholz, 2019).

3.5 Digital Media in the Philippines

In a country of 111 million people, 82% are social media users (Kemp, 2022). According to Meta, there were 83.85 million Facebook users in the Philippines in 2022, although not all profiles are considered to be unique (Kemp, 2022). Other social media channels that are popularly used by Filipinos include YouTube (56.5 million users), Instagram (18.65 million users), Tiktok (35.96 million users), and Facebook Messenger (55.15 million users) (We are Social and Kepios, 2022). We

are Social and Kepios' (2022) report also show that Filipinos spend an average of 10 hours and 27 minutes on the Internet, 4 hours and 6 minutes on social media, and 3 hours 35 minutes watching broadcast and streaming. Interestingly, We Are Social and Kepios (2022) also found that Filipinos use the Internet mostly for finding information, and using it to connect to friends and family only comes in second as a reason to use the Internet.

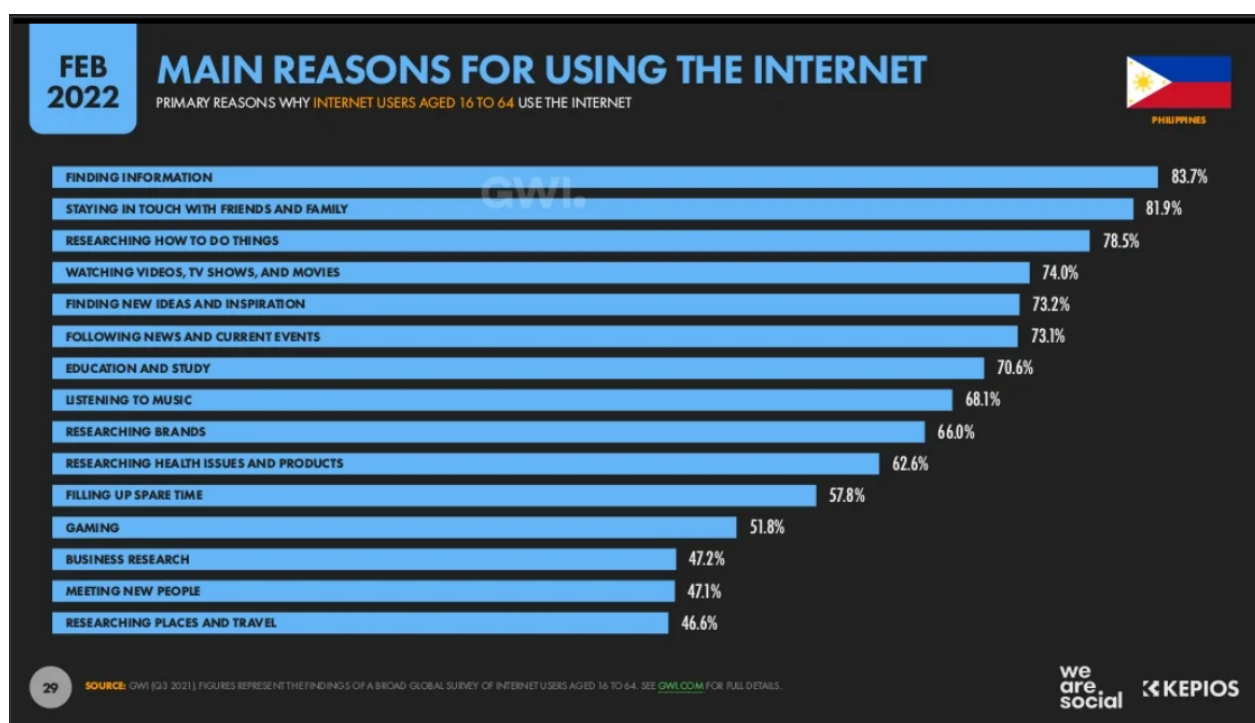


Image 3.3 Reasons why Filipinos use the Internet (We are social and Kepios, 2022)

Digital media play an important role in Filipinos' everyday lives and in socio-political situations. Filipinos' active use of digital and social media varies from being the "Selfie Capital of the World" (Time, 2014) to using \$200,000 worth of campaign funds employing social media trolls for political propaganda (Bradshaw and Howard, 2017). Even before the rise of the Internet, Filipinos have used technology to engage in socio-political activities. In 2001 former president Joseph Estrada was impeached, it was known to have been fuelled by a series of text messages used for mobilisations (Montiel and Estuar, 2006).

Nobel Peace Prize winner and journalist Maria Ressa (2019) once said in her piece in Time Magazine that "Facebook is essentially the Internet" in the Philippines, thanks to telecommunications

companies that allow users to access the social media app for free. Alba's (2018) analysis on BuzzFeed echoes the same sentiments:

“For all the recent hand-wringing in the United States over Facebook’s monopolistic power, the mega-platform’s grip on the Philippines is something else entirely. Thanks to a social media–hungry populace and heavy subsidies that keep Facebook free to use on mobile phones, Facebook has completely saturated the country. And because using other data, like accessing a news website via a mobile web browser, is precious and expensive, for most Filipinos the only way online is through Facebook. The platform is a leading provider of news and information, and it was a key engine behind the wave of populist anger that carried Duterte all the way to the presidency.”

One problem, of course, is how, in the words of Ong and Cabanes (2018, p.17), social media like Facebook have been “weaponised” for political gains. According to Ong and Cabanes (2018, p.18), the “architects of networked disinformation” (i.e. fake accounts, paid influencers, advertising, PR agencies) “have strategically weaponized populist publics’ anger and resentment with the establishment, by taking tried-and-tested techniques in corporate marketing to the extreme in digital political campaigns.”

The problem has in fact become concerning that Meta decided to intervene and removed 400 Facebook accounts and pages last April 2022, ahead of the national elections (Calonzo, 2022). According to Meta, they removed the pages and accounts due to inauthentic behaviours. There were also instances where pages changed their names and content, switching to election related posts (i.e. a page that usually shared dancing videos changed their name to “Bongbong Marcos news” and started sharing information about presidential candidate Bongbong Marcos). Aside from accounts and pages, up to six million posts that were considered disinformation or contained hate speech were removed by Meta also in the lead up to May 2022 elections (Strangio, 2022).

The impact of digital media in the Philippines has permeated into both the personal and the political. With the seeming ubiquity of social media, especially Facebook, it is not surprising that it continues to be the main platform of choice for political campaigning and propaganda.

3.6 Influencer politicians and politician influencers

There have been many celebrities in the Philippines who became politicians, and politicians who became celebrities. Growing up, I saw popular television news anchor Loren Legarda shift from being a journalist to becoming a Senator. She even ran for presidency in 2010. Then we had another television news anchor, Noli de Castro, who ran and won as Vice-President of the Philippines in 2004. Other known celebrities who turned into politicians were comedian Tito Sotto, who became a senator; action stars Lito Lapid, Bong Revilla, and Jinggoy Estrada who also became senators; and who could forget Erap Estrada, who was elected president in 1998 and Fernando Poe Jr., who was robbed of the presidency in 2004? In our own local government, in the province of Laguna, we had a governor who used to be an actor in popular primetime soap operas. Back then, I thought, the normal path of people in show business was to become a politician next. It was so entrenched in Filipino culture that people don't think it's strange when celebrities decide they want to join politics. When Arnold Schwarzenegger won as governor of California, we all thought, what's so special about that? It happens all the time in the country. In their study, David and Atun (2015) find a number of variables that would determine why a Filipino voter would vote for a celebrity – lower economic class, lower education attainment, and high exposure to television are predictors that a Filipino voter would vote for celebrities. The study was limited, so more questions need to be asked and more variables need to be taken into consideration but the examples highlight the fact that the line between show business and politics is so blurred we don't even blink an eye when a pop star with no background in politics becomes a senator whose job is to legislate laws.

There are of course certain politicians who became celebrities too and who used celebrity tactics to gain more support from the public. Senator Chiz Escudero became an endorser for products such as a spaghetti sauce; former Philippine Chief of Police Bato dela Rosa had a biopic movie released nationwide in the run up to the Philippine midterm elections in 2019; and similarly, former presidential secretary Bong Go had an episode about his life on *Maalala Mo Kaya*, a popular drama

anthology show by ABS-CBN, also in the run up to the 2019 Philippine midterm elections. Both Bato dela Rosa and Bong Go subsequently won the elections, with Go ranking third and dela Rosa ranking fifth overall in the final voting tally (Rappler, 2019).

In the wider context, Moffit (2016) points out that populist leaders around the world have been known to use performance and style, like a celebrity, to appear more charismatic to the public. In chapter 2, I mentioned Curato's analysis that Duterte's performance was stylised and perfect for media and digital media. David (2016) calls this performance "pure theatre". In the Philippine context, I also mentioned that it is the Filipinos' love for drama that has endeared Duterte to the Filipino public (Pertierra 2017). I would also argue that influencers who have helped Duterte come to power, such as Mocha Uson and Thinking Pinoy, also follow the same kind of performance as Duterte, often using highly emotional language, as will be seen in the next few chapters. Ong and Cabanes (2018, p.13) also point out that similar to Duterte, social media influencers "discredit and silence dissent, and foster a culture of impunity, implicitly encouraging their grassroots supporters to digitally bully and 'troll' journalists and the publications they work and perceive to be critical of the current administration."

The Duterte administration relied on influencers to amplify the government's propaganda and disinformation. In a report by Rappler, they found that a company called Twinmark Media Enterprises Inc. hired celebrities and influencers, and paid them millions of pesos to promote propaganda and fake news (Elemia, 2021). Mocha Uson, an influencer with over five million followers, and one of the influencers that the next chapters will illustrate, was paid one million pesos (around \$18,000USD) in 2017 (Elemia, 2021). Facebook eventually took down some Facebook pages linked to Twinmark for exploiting these pages "for financial gain through the use of multiple fake accounts working together to mislead people about the origin of content." Facebook has also said these activities were illegal and unauthorised.

In their study, Ong and Cabanes (2018) found that the advertising and PR agencies in the Philippines who work on political campaigns would assemble a team of anonymous micro influencers whose pages turn from sharing pop/humorous/inspirational content to political content that favour their clients during campaign season. The study also found that these advertising and PR agencies often

collaborate with influencers in order for their messages to resonate and to look more authentic at the grassroots level which would gain their clients political support. Ong and Cabanes (2018) also found that these anonymous micro influencers are paid handsomely and are treated to luxuries like a five-star hotel suite or the latest iPhone model. The study also found that these influencers are driven by the opportunity to have a better financially rewarding job that also gives them more freedom.

In another study on the 2019 Philippine elections, Ong, Tapsell, and Curato (2019) micro and nano influencers were more present in the 2019 campaign due to several factors: 1.) macro influencers like Mocha Uson became more vulnerable to political scandal; 2.) macro-influencers were subject to take down because they were more visible; 3.) the pay per post for micro-influencers can be lucrative. Similar to what Ong and Cabanes (2018) found, and to what other scholars say about the importance of authenticity, the study by Ong, Tapsell, and Curato (2019, p.22) highlights the importance of authenticity in the way micro-influencers work:

“What micro-influencers lack in broader reach, they gain in manoeuvrability and ‘contrived authenticity.’ ‘Contrived authenticity’ is the term media anthropologists use to describe internet celebrities whose carefully calculated posts seek to give an impression of raw aesthetic, spontaneity and therefore relatability. This makes it easier for them to infiltrate organic communities and evade public monitoring.”

The study also found different types of micro-influencers who were paid for the 2019 electoral campaign: 1.) political parody accounts that use vulgar language, satire, and humour to criticise personalities; 2.) Pinoy pop culture accounts that post occasional political posts like politics related hashtags in between humorous and inspirational quotes; and 3.) thirst trap instagrammers who usually post lifestyle content but campaigned for a senatorial candidate and a party list (Ong, Tapsell, and Curato, 2019).

Ong and Cabbuag (2022, p. 1-3) also found the rise of what they call “pseudonymous influencers” or influencers that are “innocent-looking parody accounts, humorous meme pages, and romantic love quotes (aka *hugot*) accounts that occasionally slip in paid content for their political clients” have

“played a unique role in the disinformation economy as their media manipulation strategies are not confined to the narrow frame of ‘disinformation’ or obvious falsehoods that could be corrected by fact-checkers.”

In the 2022 Philippine elections, influencers once again helped in the political campaigning of different presidential candidates. Known influencers like Sassa Gurl, Pipay, Macoy Dubs, and Mimiyyuuuh, who usually post humorous content, came out to support presidential candidate Leni Robredo and branded themselves as ‘Kakampink’, the name used by Robredo supporters to call themselves after the word *kakampi* (ally) and pink, the campaign colour of Robredo. These influencers all have a big number of followers and following Suuronen’s (2021) argument, these influencers have already established themselves among their followers and the brands they work with, so the potential risks that come with endorsing a political candidate may be less. These influencers have also disclosed that they have not been paid by the Robredo campaign and are doing the work voluntarily.

On the other hand, Bongbong Marcos, who won the elections against Robredo in an overwhelming landslide, also used influencers, especially Tiktok influencers, for his campaign, but allegedly paid them especially to rewrite their family’s history (Pierson, 2022). In his Los Angeles Times article, Pierson (2022) interviews young people who supported Bongbong Marcos and found that their main source of information have been Tiktok videos and that they have come to believe the myths of the ‘golden era’ during the dictatorship. This kind of information, they said, has been hidden by mainstream media, which they no longer believe in. Of course, Tiktok is only one of the many reasons why the Marcos family has been allowed a second chance to seize power, but shows that the social media platform has had an impact on young Filipino voters’ decision on who to support in the last national elections.

In another example of how influencers have played a crucial role in Philippine politics, Leni Robredo, who again ran against Marcos Jr in May 2022 for the presidential seat, dealt with attacks from trolls and influencers during her six year term as Vice President. Robredo herself said that she regrets not standing up against all the disinformation which influencers and trolls used to attack her reputation, believing that it will eventually dissipate (Lalu, 2019). Her presidential bid, which hinged on ‘Sa

gobyernong tapat, angat buhay lahat (An honest government lifts everyone's lives), while it created the 'pink movement' and a groundswell of supporters, was not able to fully repair the years worth of damage on her reputation and people continued to believe the image sold to them that she was *'lutang'* or *'lugaw'*, terms to denote that she was inept and stupid. Facebook influencers, including the ones analysed in this study, constantly called her *'Leni lugaw'*, a branding that may have stuck to people's minds and might have cost her the presidential elections.

Bongbong Marcos also prefers vloggers and influencers than traditional journalists and has given them interviews while avoiding questions from journalists. After being elected as president, the Marcos team announced that they would be giving media accreditation to vloggers and influencers to cover press briefings of the president (Subingsubing and Corrales, 2022). In an interview with Buan (2022), veteran journalist Christian Esguerra explains why this is the case:

“Marcos Jr. avoids real journalists because they are expected to raise the real issues and pose the tough questions. He's allergic to them because they run counter to his disinformation narrative, which is at the heart of his election campaign.”

In the examples presented in this section, it can be seen how social media influencers have been used in Philippine politics to help campaign for electoral candidates and to help shape narratives, even to the point of revising history. There is no denying that social media and influencers have played a big role in the rise of Duterte and Marcos into power.

3.7 How Filipinos experience hate on Facebook

Meta reportedly removed 600,000 posts on Facebook leading to the 2022 national elections in the Philippines for containing hate speech and another 550,000 were removed for violating bullying and harassment policies (Strangio, 2022).

In this section of the chapter, experiences of Filipinos, who were subjected to hate speech which stemmed from engaging in political discourse on Facebook, will be presented. The data comes from

Karunungan and Jaminola's (forthcoming) study, as part of Facebook's Courage Against Hate Project. The report expands on Karunungan's doctoral dissertation findings on hate speech. The researchers were able to survey and interview Facebook users about their experiences on hate speech on the platform.

There were 110 respondents in the survey using a non-probability sampling technique. Convenience sampling was used to target Filipino Facebook users who engage in political discourse. The survey was distributed online to public Facebook groups that were primarily formed to discuss Philippine politics. Most of the respondents (62.7%) engage in political discourse on Facebook. When asked about how to engage in political discourse on Facebook, 62.7% said they shared news articles and opinion pieces, 40.9% said they post their personal views and opinions on their profiles, 24.5% engage in the comments section of news outlets, another 24.5% join and engage in groups that discuss political issues, and 5.5% engage in the comments section of political influencers.

Out of the 110 respondents, 68% of respondents said they were subjected to hate speech on Facebook. In this case, hate speech was defined as, "any kind of communication in speech, writing, or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group, on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, color, descent, gender, or identity factor." or "an attempt to vandalize the other's identity to such an extent that the very legitimacy and humanity of the other is called into question."

For those who were subjected to hate speech on Facebook, 85.7% believe it was politically motivated. Politically motivated was defined as, "hate speech is carried out in defense, in support, or in an attack of a government, administration, political party, government officials, or government projects and policies."

The researchers also asked the respondents how they experience hate speech on Facebook as an observer: 95.5% have seen other people become victims of hate speech on Facebook and 86.4% have seen other people perpetuate hate speech on Facebook. In terms of the frequency they see hate speech happening on Facebook, 31.8% said they see it often, another 31.8% said sometimes, 22.7% said always and 10.9% said rarely.

Following studies in other countries that show political polarisation online could lead to hate speech, the researchers wanted to know whether engaging in political discourse in the Philippines can lead to hate speech. The respondents were asked if they believed they were subjected to hate speech for engaging in political discourse and if the hate speech they received were politically motivated/

While there were instances where hate speech was a result of non-political posts, all of the interviewees reported that they were subjected to hate speech due to political issues. This includes the following: (1) expressing support or criticising government officials; (2) supporting candidates in the elections; (3) sharing information on political issues; and (4) opposing government policies or projects. Based on the interviews, most of the respondents received hate speech after criticising President Duterte and/or sharing information about Martial Law and the Marcos family.

Karunungan and Jaminola's (forthcoming) report shows that in their survey of 110 people, 54% experienced hate speech against women. Some of the examples from the interviews of comments or personal messages received by women include their sexuality being used against them, and being called 'irrelevant' for being a woman: "*Pokpok ka*" (You are a prostitute), "*Ang kakati ng mga puki nyo kaya ang tatabil na dila nyo*" (Your vaginas are itchy that's why you talk too much), "*Hindi naman relevant yung opinion mo, babae ka*" (You are a woman so your opinion is not relevant), and being called "attention-seeking whore".

But the hate doesn't stop online. Some of the respondents shared that the hate would quickly turn into real-world threats of violence. In fact, Karunungan and Jaminola (forthcoming) found that 29% of their respondents said that they received threats and incitements to violence as a result of or as part of the hate speech they received. Some of the threats received included getting killed: "*Saan address mo? Papatayin ko nanay mo*" (Where is your address? I will kill your mom), "*Babarilyn kita. May baril ako*" (I have a gun. I will shoot you).

When asked about the impacts of hate speech on their mental wellbeing, many of the interviewees noted that incidents of hate speech affected their mental well-being, from little impact to severe impact. Forty-nine of the respondents said there was little impact on their well-being, 34.3% said they

were moderately impacted and 8.6% said their mental wellbeing was impacted a lot as a result of the hate speech they were subjected to. Many respondents felt stressed over the situation. One respondent developed paranoia due to the threats received.

Finally, Karunungan and Jaminola (forthcoming) also asked the respondents about what they thought should be done by Facebook when it comes to hate speech. Ninety percent of the respondents said Facebook should implement stricter regulations regarding hate speech on their platform.

Most of the interviewees agreed that the automated detection of hate speech must be heightened and improved. They also suggested that human moderators should be widely employed. One respondent narrated that they have recently received hate speech with ampersand and characters like “ü” and “ø” that escapes detection and, as such, are not considered hateful language by the platform. Due to this, smarter detection and tracking of hate speech are needed. Another respondent also centred on the need to regulate influencers and deplatform them if found non-compliant with community standards. One respondent also gave more proactive suggestions like verification of identity upon sign-up and the detection of multiple accounts coming from similar IP addresses. A mechanism for verifying people will address anonymity on the platform. This is because, for the respondent, perpetrators of hate speech thrive on anonymity.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, I presented the political landscape of the Philippines throughout history that has contributed to the rise of populism and celebrity politics. I also showed that Philippine media has played a crucial role throughout the country’s turbulent political history. Politics and media are closely intertwined in the rise and fall of Philippine presidents. From Spanish colonisation to the present day, media platforms have been used by cronies, revolutionaries, and activists to push their agenda. While the Philippines has been ranked to have one of the freest media post-dictatorship, the country also ranks as one of the most dangerous places to be in as a journalist. In 2020, media freedom took a blow after the Duterte government ordered arrests of journalists and the shutdown of the country’s largest broadcaster. Existing research on Duterte’s rise to power shows how he

successfully used populist rhetoric while crafting a tough guy image. He has also extensively used social media for his political campaign including trolls and influencers.

The political and cultural context of the Philippines that allowed for celebrity politics to perpetuate were also presented – with the culture of patronage politics and clientelism and the culture of *utang na loob* has contributed to Philippine politics becoming a popularity contest. In the last section of this chapter, the ways different kinds of influencers have impacted Philippine politics and the roles they have played in electoral campaigns in the Philippines were illustrated. This chapter also looked into how influencers have been used in political campaigning and propaganda in the Philippines. Different studies by Ong and his colleagues point out the shift from paid mega-influencers to micro-influencers that has helped disinformation fly under the radar. The role of PR and advertising agencies in hiring these influencers to campaign for candidates during the elections also cannot be denied as the industry becomes more lucrative in a nation with 92.5 million social media users (Kemp, 2022).

Existing research on social media's role in politics and the rise of populist leaders have mostly focussed on the West while Southeast Asia, a region that leads social media use globally and which has innovated the use of social media for political communication, has been under researched. This research aims to help fill in this gap by looking at the role of Facebook influencers in shaping the narrative of the Duterte era in the Philippines, by looking at the rhetorical devices they used in presenting their arguments on different topics and in helping create an image of the Duterte presidency. This thesis analyses pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers, from mega to micro influencers, from known celebrities like Mocha Uson to pseudonymous parody accounts like Superficial Gazette. The next chapter presents the methodology that was used in this research.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This chapter gives an outline of the research methods used in the study. I also define and justify my research questions. The chapter also provides information about the influencers that were chosen for the study and the sample data that was collected; the research design that was used in the study, and the reasons behind the choices made. The chapter also details: the process of data collection, challenges faced in the data collection process, code book development, conducting of the pilot study, and the intercoder reliability test. Ethical issues and the ethics approval process for the study are also laid out.

4.1. Research Questions and Analysis Overview

The following are the research questions and sub-questions of this study:

RQ 1. What are the main political narratives used by Facebook influencers during the Duterte presidency?

RQ 1.1 What kind of rhetorical appeals and devices do influencers use on their Facebook posts?

RQ 1.2 What is the prevalence and to what intensity of incivility, intolerance and hate speech do pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers use in their posts?

RQ. 1.3 What is the impact of uncivil, intolerant, and hate posts in terms of engagement?

RQ 2. Which rhetorical appeals and devices are used more frequently to discuss human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations?

4.2 Quantitative content analysis in political communication studies

Different methods have been employed in media research, both quantitative and qualitative. Some of these methods, for example, include ethnography (and more recently, netnography), social network analysis, interviews, content analysis, focused-group discussions, surveys. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Qualitative methods' strengths include a view of homogenous exploration, raising more issues through broad and open-ended inquiry, and understanding of behaviours, beliefs, and values; while its weaknesses include results being difficult to objectively verify and processes can be more time consuming (Choy, 2014). On the other hand, quantitative research methods' strengths are: its reliability and methods can be done in a shorter period compared to qualitative methods; while their weaknesses include a lack of depth in understanding human behaviours, perceptions, and beliefs (Choy, 2014). Mixed methods research typically help in combining the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research. For example, a literature review by Snelson (2016) found that a trend in media studies research used mixed methods especially on research topics about social media.

For this research, I chose quantitative content analysis as a method. Initially, a mixed-methods study was proposed, combining quantitative content analysis with interviews (with the influencers), in order to gain a better understanding of how the influencers behave on Facebook. However, due to my positionality as a well-known activist in the Philippines, and having previously had negative interactions with some influencers observed in this study, I realized that not only was it going to be difficult to seek approval from some Duterte-supporting influencers to be interviewed by me, but also that if these influencers agreed for an interview, the data I would gather can be biased and untruthful. Therefore, any data I would gather from these influencers will not have integrity.

As my research focuses on the content of Facebook posts, quantitative content analysis was the best method of analysis. Other methods like social network analysis or ethnography were not appropriate for answering my research questions as the research questions aimed to analyse the content of political discussions on Facebook. With quantitative content analysis, I was able to answer my research questions empirically, with a method that is reliable, objective, and systematic (Berelson, 1952) and that can be validated (Krippendorff, 1980).

For communication researchers, typically quantitative content analysis has been used as a method to answer research questions about media content (ibid.). Riffe et al. (2019, p.25) defines quantitative content analysis as

“...the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption.”

Recent studies on social media and political communication have also used quantitative content analysis to measure their data. Skogerbø and Krumsvik (2015) looked at social media as an agenda-setter during local elections by gathering data from local newspapers vis-a-vis political candidates' posts on social media. Leccese (2009) coded political blogs to find out if their content is different or similar to mainstream media.

In content analysis, a text is reduced into units to measure that are justified by logic and theory to study human communication (Riffe et al., 2019). According to Riffe et al. (2019), there are five crucial steps in measuring content: 1.) develop research questions and hypotheses that will aid in identifying variables; 2.) examine existing literature that has used the variable or has discussed the measurement of the variable; 3.) use previous good measures and adjust measures where necessary; 4.) create coding instructions -- the more detailed, the higher the validity; and 5.) create a system for recording data that will go into a computer.

Content analysis studies have historically looked at written communication, particularly newspapers and magazines but with the advent of technology, verbal communication and visual communication like audio recordings, photographs, videos, films have also been used for studies (ibid). In all content analysis studies, it is important that the reader/coder must know the language as well as cultural expectations of the written text in order to understand the communication (Riffe et al., 2019). With the advent of social networking, it is not surprising that content analysis of social media posts has become a method of research in different fields, from business and marketing to social sciences to medical sciences. Shen and Bisell's (2013) study used content analysis to analyse beauty brands'

Facebook pages to understand which kind of content engaged their audiences the most. Carrotte et al. (2017) analysed content tagged #fitspo across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr to look at what body images were deemed as an inspiration to be fit. Brown et al. (2017) applied an intersectional framework to content analysis, looking at tweets with #sayhername to look at how the hashtag helps amplify black women's voices.

In analysing content, researchers define observable variables from the content that will answer the research questions and/or prove/disprove their hypothesis (ibid). Holsti (1969) identifies several requirements in writing coding instructions to define variables where it must: 1.) reflect the purpose of the research; 2.) mutually exclusive; 3.) exhaustive; 4.) independent and derived from one classification principle. There exists a variation of classification systems that have been used in past research.

Krippendorff (1980) set out steps for content analysis: formulating the research question/hypothesis, selecting a sample, defining categories for sampling, training of the coders, coding of the content, checking the reliability of the coding, and analysing and interpreting the data during the coding process. Further to this Riffe et al. (2019, p.41) believe that a good research design using quantitative content analysis "is an operational plan that permits the researcher to locate precisely the data that permit the question to be answered." Riffe et al. (2019) also underlines the importance of specificity in coding instructions to help in coding content that seems similar and allows other researchers to replicate the analysis. The instructions must also provide reliable and valid operational definitions in line with the theoretical definitions of the variables.

Of course, quantitative content analysis as a method has its own weaknesses. Most of the weaknesses point to potential bias in researchers' values and interests in the process of selecting texts to be analysed and the development of categories in the code book (Insch, Moore, and Murphy, 1997; Sepstrup, 1981). Krippendorff (1980) also warn that quantitative content analysis extracts sparse data from a rich context, which leads to missing non-verbal cues, the inability to read irony and sarcasm, as well as the inability to read truth and intent. For this research, I tried to mitigate the potential weaknesses of method by working with a Filipino researcher to test the codes to ensure it can be as objective as possible, as well as to ensure that the context of the Facebook posts are taken into

consideration when coding the data. For the reasons mentioned above, the strengths of quantitative analysis surpass its weaknesses, and is a reliable method of research that best answers the research questions of this thesis.

4.3 Research design

The research is a case study of the role of influencers in political discourse, particularly in the case of the Philippines during the Duterte regime. The research uses quantitative content analysis as a method and a multistage sampling was done to get the data.

A. Sampling

A systematic random sampling set was used to obtain the final data. The steps that have been taken to obtain this data set are outlined below.

First, a list of influencers was created. This list included Facebook influencers who were both supporters and critics of Duterte and the Duterte government, with followers ranging from 30,000-5 million. Influencers with official pages and influencers who use their own personal profiles were also listed down. A total of 20 (10 supporters and 10 critics) influencers were on the initial list.

Second, the influencer list was narrowed down based on the following:

1. The influencers must be a mega or macro influencer, or influencers with followers over 100,000 (Park et al., 2021; Zarei et al., 2020; Rahman, 2022). Mega and macro followers were chosen for the study specifically because of the role they played/are playing in political discourse on Facebook in the Philippine context.
2. The influencers must have their own public pages. Influencers who use their personal profiles to post cannot be included in this study due to Facebook rules. Facebook does not allow data from personal pages to be collected by Facepager, the software which is used in this study.
3. The influencers must have posts on Philippine politics, especially on human rights and law and order, Philippine-China relations, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

From this selection criteria, Facebook pages were eliminated from the sample because of the following reasons: a.) they did not fit the mega or macro influencer category; b.) they did not have an official Facebook page, therefore the researcher is unable to collect data from them; and c.) they stopped posting about the three main topics being looked at in this study. Given the capacity of the researcher for manual coding, the researcher decided to narrow down the list to 10 influencer pages -- five supporters and five critics.

Most of the influencers chosen for this research are influencers in the traditional definition of influencers: “everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in digital and physical spaces, and monetize their following by integrating ‘advertorials’ into their blog or social media posts” (Abidin, 2015, para. 1). Most of the influencers chosen for these study started engaging in political issues and gaining their following through blogs. Mocha Uson blog, Pinoy Ako Blog, Thinking Pinoy, For the Motherland – Sass Sasot, and Luminous by Trixie Angeles and Ahmed Paglinawan all started as either web blogs or Facebook pages with commentaries on politics when Duterte decided to run for office. While Mocha Uson started as a B-list celebrity, her fame heightened when she became a political blogger and has earned the moniker “Queen of Fake News.” News outlets and the public categorise her as an influencer rather than a celebrity. Other pages like Mindavote, Superficial Gazette, and Silent No More are considered pseudonymous influencers, or influencers who hide their identity.

Two of the influencers chosen for this research do not fit into the traditional category of influencers. One of them is Chel Diokno. Diokno, a well-known human rights lawyer, ran for senate in the 2019 elections, but lost. Part of his campaign was to use strategies commonly used by influencers and he has since attracted a following especially among young people in the Philippines. As evidence of this, on his Facebook page, Diokno can be seen posting about winning mock elections in different universities in the Philippines. Diokno can be considered as a politician influencer, similar to Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez of the United States who was named by Vogue as one of 2018’s biggest Instagram influencer (Read, 2018) and who, according to Rivera (2020), achieved what most politicians have failed at – acting normal. Acting normal, or being authentic, has become an attractive feature for consumers of digital media and perceived authenticity has become favourable

for audiences (Poyri et al., 2019). Diokno's digital campaign has employed this strategy of being authentic.

Another influencer that does not fit into the traditional definition of influencers is Dakila. While it is a non-profit organization that works on human rights issues, they have long been using campaign strategies that use the power of celebrity and influencers in campaigns. Dakila's celebrity and influencer power can be seen, for example, in their climate justice campaign with Oxfam in 2009, where over 50 celebrities and influencers from different fields have come together to campaign for the passage of a climate deal. Dakila's network of micro-celebrities and influencers is wide and varied – from rock stars to comedienne, social media influencers to filmmakers.

While Chel Diokno and Dakila are not traditional influencers, their following, strategic use of digital media to talk about important political issues, and the engagement they get from their followers make them a suitable case study for this research.

For influencer content, the chosen sample in this study were Facebook posts of the ten influencers ranging from January 2019-December 2020. Systematic random sampling was used to pick 500 posts from each influencer. This timeline was chosen to capture the political discourse of the Duterte regime in his last half of term in office, as well as to capture discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highly impacted the Duterte regime.

B. Development of coding scheme

Operationalising concepts need to be objective and systematic. In order to do this, it is crucial to develop a coding scheme that is measurable, clear, and well-defined. Nominal measures were used for the variables. Multi-variable and one-variable approaches were both used for coding. While a one-variable approach was mostly used, for example, in specifying rhetorical devices used in the Facebook posts, a multivariable approach was used in some variables where rhetorical devices can no longer be detailed (see section VIII for the full code book).

B.1 Profiling Facebook Pages

The first two variables were used to identify the profiles of the pages. The first variable, **Page name**, identifies the name of the Facebook page while the second variable, **Page type**, divides the pages into two categories: **pro-Duterte or anti-Duterte**.

B.2 Content

The next variables look at the content of the posts. Variable 3 and 4 looks at the **main topic** and **secondary topic** of the post: human rights and law and order, COVID-19, China-Philippine relations, and others.

Variable 5 looks at the **language** of the post: **Tagalog, English, Bisaya, a combination of languages, and others**. Tagalog, English, and Bisaya were specifically identified as they are the most used by the influencers identified. However, some influencers would occasionally post in other languages like Ilocano, Kapampangan, Ilonggo, etc.

Variable 6 and 7 look at the **originality** of the post. Variable 6 identifies whether the post was **original** or **re-shared** from other sources. If it was re-shared, variable 7 specifies where it was re-shared from: **government, other influencers or celebrities, news or journalistic content, or troll content**.

Variables 8 to 16 gathers data from Facebook on the engagement of the content: **total comments, shares, reactions (likes, love, wow, haha, sad, and angry)**.

B.3 Rhetorical devices

Variables 17 to 19 analyses the data based on Benoit's functional theory of **acclaim, attack, and defend**. **Acclaims** are utterances that are intended to enhance the reputation of the speaker. Benoit defines acclaims as positive self-presentation. Facebook posts may use acclaim by crediting government officials with desirable policy stands and by attributing positive character traits to candidates (e.g., honesty, integrity, experience). Benoit and Wells (1996) discuss the nature of persuasive **attacks**. Like the use of acclaims, persuasive attacks in political advertising may address

policy or character. This usually falls under attacking a policy or attacking a character. **defenses** are themes that explicitly respond to a prior attack on a character or policy.

Variables 20 to 24 analyses the data using different rhetorical devices most commonly found in political communication. This list of rhetorical devices is partially based on Gerodimos and Justonussen's (2012) study on Obama's 2012 Facebook Campaign.

Variable 20 looks at the **source of knowledge/information/claims/data**. It identifies the source of information used by the influencer when making a claim. This is broken down more specifically:

1. **Sourced fact** - facts from books, news, articles, websites, television, podcasts, studies etc
2. **First Hand experience** - facts based on experience (i.e. 'In my experience, rehabilitation is better than criminalisation for drug users)
3. **Proven facts** - facts that everyone accepts as universally true (i.e. The Earth is round)
4. **Probable information** - information that might be reasonable to believe is a fact but you are not sure because you have no access to the information, usually statements from officials (i.e. president announces he has no more funds for covid). Although they are probably true, there is a chance that they might be wrong, either because a mistake has been made or because someone lied. Because this doubt exists, probable facts must be attributed to the people who provide them.

Variable 21 and 22 considers the use of pathos or sympathy by looking at **collective appeal** and **personal appeal**. Collective appeals use the pronouns 'we', 'us', 'our' to include the reader in the process. This does not include general "we" statements that seem to refer to a collective entity excluding the reader. **Personal appeal** are posts that are directed at the reader, using the word 'you.'

Variable 23 looks at **quotations**, either made explicitly in quotation marks or without but appearing to be spoken by an individual person. I specify this further by looking at who was quoted:

1. **influencers/pseudonymous influencers/celebrities/movies, political figures/organisations**
2. **journals/articles/studies/reports/news/books/academics/philosophers**
3. **Fake quotes (disinformation)**

4. **Personal quotes** - If they're quoting themselves, for example sharing a personal experience, quoting something they wrote, or what they said in an interview

Variable 24 looks at **call to action**, the use of imperative mood in the sentence structure toward the reader, prompting some sort of action in response to the post. Again, I further specify what kind of call to action was posted:

1. **Non-violent actions online** (i.e. share, like, follow, use hashtag, watch video)
2. **Violent actions online** (i.e. silencing -- go to this profile and report; bullying; harassment)
3. **Non-violent actions offline** (peaceful protest, donate)
4. **Violent actions offline** (i.e. Duterte ordering the public to shoot to kill drug users; ending NPA insurgency)

Variable 25 looks at **Incivility**. Papacharissi (2004) defines civility as politeness and courtesy, respecting other participants in the debate and not harming their reputation or threatening their face. Coe et al. (2014) defines incivility as speech that is threatening in tone and is disrespectful to the forum, its participants, or its topics. Kenski et al. (2017) lists the following under incivility: name-calling, vulgarity, lying accusation, pejorative, and aspersion. Based on the research of Coe et al. (2014) and Kenski et al. (2017), part of incivility also includes ad hominem attacks, especially derogatory remarks, and vulgarity. I also borrow Sydnor's (2019) definition where incivility is equated to impoliteness rather than substance. In her example of a restaurant owner, a "polite racist", who would deny African Americans service using politeness and apology (e.g. "We would like to help you but we cannot serve you here"), are not considered uncivil.

Emojis in the post can also indicate whether the content is uncivil. According to Na'aman et al. (2017, p.137), one of the uses of emojis is multimodal - "characters that enrich a grammatically-complete text with markers of affect or stance, whether to express an attitude ("Let my work disrespect me one more time... 🙄"), to echo the topic with an iconic repetition ("Mean girls 🎬", or to express a gesture that might have accompanied the utterance in face-to-face speech ("Omg why is my mom screaming so early 😱")." Hu et al. (2017) supports this argument and says emojis, especially facial emojis, are used to express sentiment, strengthen expression, and adjust tone.

In our data analysis, I further distinguish different forms of incivility, from what I considered as least to most extreme forms of incivility (1 being least and 4 being most extreme):

1. **Sarcasm and mockery** - conveys contempt (i.e. You're not very smart, are you?), including emojis that may come off as sarcastic
2. **Ad hominem and personal attacks/insults** - personal attacks that are not relevant to the argument (e.g. name-calling, calling someone 'ugly,' 'stupid', 'fat')
3. **Vulgarity and using profanity, curse words**
4. **Denigrating remarks at political ideas/policies/politicians** - attacking the reputation; defame, belittle, deny their importance/validity. This is different from ad hominem and personal attacks as the denigration should be related to their position in government or their political ideas.

Variable 26 looks at **Intolerance**. Rossini (2020) distinguishes intolerant discourse from incivility in that whereas uncivil discourse are not threats to political discourse and democracy, intolerance discourse are more serious threats to democratic conversations that can undermine the value of political talk. Intolerance is defined as speech that promotes hate, discrimination, (such as women, LGBTQ+, minoritised ethnic, racial, and religious groups) (Rossini, 2020). Also, a post was coded as intolerant when it encourages violence, physical harm on others, extremism of any kind, and militant coups to overthrow a liberal democratic regime. Political intolerance can also be liberalism being intolerant of right-wing ideologies and their supporters (Crawford and Palinski, 2014).

Similar to how I analysed incivility, I analysed the data from least to most extreme forms of intolerance (1 being least extreme and 6 being most extreme). The kinds of intolerance I looked at in this data analysis include:

1. **Intimidation** - using their position to frighten/threaten someone
2. **Shaming or stigmatising a group of people for bigger problems** - remarks that stigmatises a group of people that can lead to discrimination or racism (i.e. 'the Chinese created COVID'; 'the oligarchs caused this problem')
3. **Demonising political opponents/opposition/other organizations/ personalities** - to portray (someone or something) as evil or as worthy of contempt or blame, to dehumanise someone or a group of people

4. **Calling for a coup ousting, resignation, protests, shutting down of organisations**
5. **Inciting violence or physical harm on others** - any post that incites violence or harm, such as wishing someone get killed or raped,
6. **Extremism** - extreme views and ideas (e.g. ‘all drug lords must be killed’; ‘death penalty should be reinstated for criminals’)

Hate speech

In the incivility-intolerance continuum that was developed for this research (see figure 4.1), hate speech could be found anywhere between civil and extremist speech. In this chapter, I identify the different kinds of hate speech using definitions from different groups:

1. Women

Gender and misogynistic attacks include name-calling women for their sexuality and patriarchy-enforcing speech that hurt women and has a goal to shut them down, shut them up, and get them to shape up (Richardson-Self, 2018). The Council of Europe (n.d., p.3) also counts the following as hate speech: “victim blaming and re-victimization, slut shaming, body shaming, brutal and sexualised threats of death, rape, and violence; offensives on appearance, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender roles; false compliments or jokes, using humour to humiliate and ridicule the target.” For example, statements like ‘All women are sluts’ and ‘Women activists deserve to be raped’ are considered hate speech.

2. LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ hate speech occurs when members of the group are threatened, abused, harassed, trolled based on their gender identity and sexual orientation (Galop, n.d.). It is speech that incites hostility, discrimination, and/or violence (Article 19, 2013). Outing, disclosing someone’s gender identity, sexual orientation, and HIV status without consent, and doxing, publishing private information without consent, are also considered hate speech by the LGBT community (Hubbard, 2020).

3. Persons with Disabilities

The denigration of people with disability include slurs like ‘retard’, ‘spastic’, ‘tards’ and other terms that denigrate people with disability (Sherry, 2019).

4. Race/ethnicity

Hate speech that attacks ethnicity directly incites violence or hatred against an ethnic group. In the context of the Philippines, this could be seen in extreme regionalism where people from different ethnic communities attack each other (i.e. Tagalogs vs Bisaya) that result in inciting violence and/or perpetuating stereotypes that harm the group identity. Historically, the Bangsamoro and Lumad have been a target of hate speech because of their alleged connections to terrorists and communists, accusations made by police and military (Minority Rights Group International, 2014). Racism also occurs in the Philippines, most notably against Chinese and black people. Anti-Chinese speech was on the rise when COVID 19 started (Rubio, 2021). A post must be coded as hate speech against ethnicity or race when racial slurs are used, as well as calling for violence against these groups, stigmatising the group as the cause of a larger problem, attacking their physical features to discriminate.

5. Religion

Religious hate speech in the Philippines involves an attack on minority religions -- protestants, muslims, and other denominations. Catholicism remains to be the major religion of the country. Hate speech against religious minorities also include “incitement to hatred against other believers or atheists in the course of what they consider as preaching for their own religion” (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.). Hate speech against other religions or non-believers include stereotyping, promoting hatred, and incitement of violence against people of those faiths.

4.4. Scales of political speech: A new visualisation

In this section, I introduce a proposed new visualisation of the relationships between incivility, intolerance, and hate speech. The sections below explain incivility and intolerance as scales, how I developed the sub-categories of incivility and intolerance, and the cultural specificity and contextual

dependence of the visualisation. Finally, the last section shows the actual visualisation of political speech, ranging from civil to extremist speech.

A. Incivility and intolerance as a scale

In Chapter 2, incivility and intolerance were defined based on current literature. Given these definitions of incivility and intolerance, I therefore look at these two concepts as a scale of political speech. On one end, is least incivil speech and on the other end are categories of hate speech like extremism. Based on the definition by Rossini (2020) I identify incivility as speech that does not threaten democracy while intolerance is speech that threatens democratic conversations. Incivility and intolerance are not exclusive of each other, a post can be neither, either, or both. In the data set, there are posts that are both uncivil and intolerant at the same time. Therefore, when coding the data, I used two separate scales for incivility and intolerance. When a post is deemed both uncivil and intolerant, they are coded as both, and placed on a scale for each category. For example, a post that says “*Putangina, ipapapatay ko kayo*” (*Motherfucker, I will get you killed*) will be coded as vulgarity in the incivility scale and at the same time inciting violence and harm in the intolerance scale.

I have tried to find an existing visualisation that shows the scale of political speech but have found that no existing research in the field of political communication. Using the different definitions of incivility and intolerance, I propose a visualisation that shows the scale of incivility and intolerance in the context of political discourse. The proposed visualisation looks at degrees of incivility and intolerance. I categorised the level of incivility along a polarity from left to right, with the former the least threatening through to the latter representing the most threatening to democracy. In this visualisation, civil speech is at one end while inciting violence and harm and extremism are considered as the categories of hate speech and the most extreme forms of intolerance. I put a line in between incivility and intolerance to distinguish the two, noting that posts can be both uncivil and intolerant at the same time. Oh’s (2022) conceptual framework for analysing incivility and intolerance on Twitter also acknowledges that some posts can be classified as both uncivil and intolerant. Where does hate speech lie in this visualisation?

B. Developing the sub-categories of incivility and intolerance, their cultural specificity and contextual dependence

Different factors were considered in the development of the sub-categories of the scales of political speech visualisation. First, a literature review was done to find existing definitions and categories of incivility and intolerance based on other case studies. Second, the data set was analysed to find the types of incivility and intolerance present in the Facebook posts of the influencers observed in this study. Third, in arranging the degrees of incivility and intolerance on the visualisation (from least to most), the cultural context of the Philippines was considered. What is considered uncivil and their degrees of incivility is culture-specific, depending on the norms and values of a culture (Ghosh, 2017). For example, in the Philippine culture, personal attacks are seen as more acceptable than profanities and cursing. As an example, body shaming comments such as, “You’ve gotten fat!” are deemed as normal especially among family and friends, while the use of curse words are banned in many households.

1. Categorising incivility

As defined in chapter 2, incivility is speech that is threatening in tone and is disrespectful to the forum, its participants, or its topics (Coe et al., 2014). Kenski et al. (2017) lists the following under incivility: name-calling, vulgarity, lying accusation, pejorative, and aspersion. Based on the research of Coe et al. (2014) and Kenski et al. (2017), part of incivility also includes ad hominem attacks, especially derogatory remarks, and vulgarity.

According to Rossini, “In other words, what makes a uncivil is a particular feature, such as the use of a vulgar word, name-calling, or potentially offensive language that, if removed, would make the same “civil” without changing its substance.”

Emojis in the post can also indicate whether the content is uncivil. According to Na’aman et al. (2017, p.137), one of the uses of emojis is multimodal - “characters that enrich a grammatically-complete text with markers of affect or stance, whether to express an attitude (“Let my work disrespect me one more time... 🙄”), to echo the topic with an iconic

repetition (“Mean girls 🗣️”, or to express a gesture that might have accompanied the utterance in face-to-face speech (“Omg why is my mom screaming so early 😬”).” Hu et al. (2017) supports this argument and says emojis, especially facial emojis, are used to express sentiment, strengthen expression, and adjust tone.

Categories of incivility from least to most uncivil:

1. **Sarcasm and mockery:** Speech that conveys contempt (i.e. You’re not very smart, are you?), including emojis that may come off as sarcastic
2. **Ad hominem and Personal attacks/insult:** Speech that attacks or insults the person, but the attack is not related to their position in the government, their political stance, or their behaviour as politicians (i.e. “You’re stupid/ugly/moron”;).
3. **Vulgarity and Using profanity, curse words:** Speech that uses any kind of profanity, both in Filipino or in English (i.e. fuck, putang ina, gago etc)
4. **Denigrating remarks at political ideas/policies/politicians:** Speech that attacks the reputation of a person; speech that defames, belittles, or denies their importance/validity.

2. Categorising intolerance

Rossini (2020) distinguishes intolerant discourse from incivility in that whereas uncivil discourse are not threats to political discourse and democracy, intolerance discourse are more serious threats to democratic conversations that can undermine the value of political talk. It focuses on substance rather than the tone. Intolerance is defined as speech that promotes hate, discrimination, (such as women, LGBTQ+, minoritised ethnic, racial, and religious groups) (Rossini, 2020). Intolerant speech also encourages violence, physical harm on others, extremism of any kind, and militant coups to overthrow a liberal democratic regime. Political intolerance can also be liberalism being intolerant of right-wing ideologies and their supporters (Crawford and Palinski, 2014).

Categories of intolerance from least intolerant to most intolerant:

1. **Intimidation:** Speech that intimidates, such as using their position to frighten/threaten someone.
2. **Shaming or stigmatising a group of people for bigger problems:** Stigmatising,

discriminating, stereotyping, a group of people (i.e. ‘the Chinese created COVID’)

3. **Demonising political opponents/opposition/other organizations/ personalities:** to portray (someone or something) as evil or as worthy of contempt or blame (i.e. they are ‘spawn of the devil’; branding a group or individuals as ‘terrorist’). Demonisation is a propaganda technique that paints the enemy as evil, inspires hatred towards them, and demoralises them.

4. **Calling for an ouster, resignation, protests, shutting down of organizations:** This kind of speech calls for a specific action to be done that directly impacts democratic processes and in a deeply polarised country, can lead to more violent outcomes such as the United States Capitol Attack.

5. **Inciting violence or physical harm on others:** This kind of speech directly incites violence and physical harm on others and can be considered as a crime in Philippine law. Examples of this include encouraging someone to kill themselves or encouraging people to attack others. This kind of speech poses direct physical harm to others.

6. **Extremism:** This is speech that threatens a wide population and are fully intolerant towards certain groups. (i.e. ‘all communists must be killed’; ‘death penalty must be legal again for all drug addicts’)

C. A new visualisation of the scales of political speech:

SCALES OF POLITICAL SPEECH

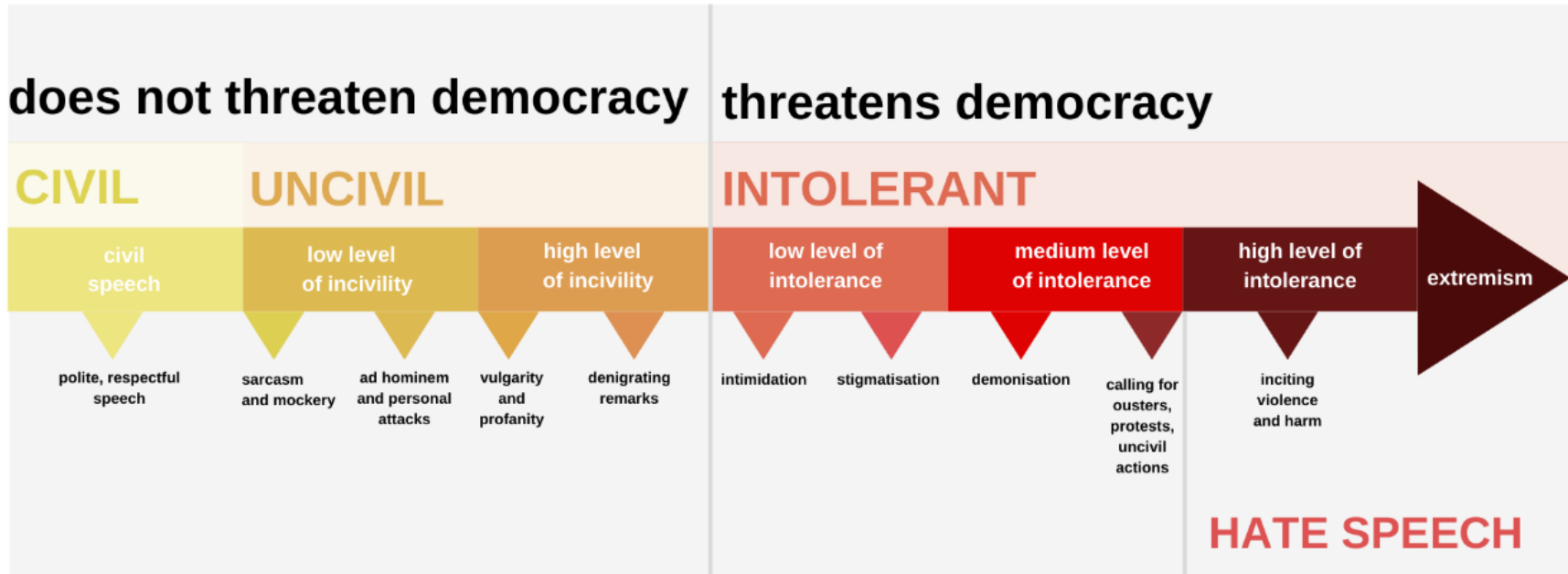


Figure 4.1 The scales of political speech. A methodological visualisation of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech developed for this research. This visualisation is a new visualisation that will be used in Chapter 7 to visualise the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech in the Facebook posts that were analysed in this research.

4.5. Facebook influencer profiles

In this research, the influencers that are being looked at are macro-influencers (with a following of 500,000 and more) and micro-influencers (with a following of 10,000-500,000) (Park et al., 2021; Zarei et al., 2020; Rahman, 2022). Some of these influencers are “pseudonymous influencers,” innocent looking parody accounts (Ong and Cabanes), 2022). According to Ong and Cabanes (2022, p. 2), these pseudonymous influencers “use humorous language or horny thirsttrap selfies to cloak political messages and even inflammatory speech. They are also able to maintain anonymity that helps them evade both creative industry regulations and official investigations.” Antonio Contreras (2020 p.50), who is a pro-Duterte influencer himself, asserts that,

“...the academic domain of theorizing Duterte, while attempting to cast itself as objective and scholarly, is nevertheless dominated by anti-Duterte sentiments that are mainly born from liberal and critical orientations. On the other hand, the social media landscape became the discursive stronghold of the pro-Duterte narratives. The pro-Duterte social media is not only anti-elite but also has an anti-intellectual orientation. As such, it has become a critic of elite institutions, and a disruptor of truth and fact claims made by the elites. Social media also became an effective contrapuntal in painting academic theorizing as a weapon of the anti-Duterte elites.”

This argument is all the more reason to investigate the Facebook content of pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. All ten influencers in this study have been active in either campaigning for or against the Duterte presidency. Some of these A few of them have been transparent in having been given a government position and have been paid tax payer’s money for their work. Notably, influencers who have shown support for the Duterte government have a bigger number of followers than those who criticise the government. Whether the numbers are authentic or not is another question and cannot be verified in this research. The following section profiles the influencers that were analysed in this study.

A. Duterte supporters

1. Mocha Uson (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 5.6 million

Mocha Uson started as a performer with her sexy girl group, Mocha Girls. During the 2016 elections, her "blog" called "Mocha Uson blog", hosted on Facebook, turned political. Mocha was appointed as Assistant Secretary of the Presidential Communications Operations Office in 2016, handling the social media department of the office. She resigned in 2018 after a series of controversies. She was appointed as Deputy Executive Director of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in 2019. The cover page below thanks Duterte for his years as a president. PRRD stands for President Rodrigo Roa Duterte and *Salamat* translates to "Thank you." The middle text calls Duterte "Tatay Digong", *tatay* being the Filipino term for father/dad. Many influencers like Mocha called Duterte *tatay*, likening him to the traditional patriarchal character of Filipino fathers who is strict and rules the home with an iron fist.



Figure 4.2 A screenshot of Mocha Uson's public Facebook page

2. Thinking Pinoy (ran by RJ Nieto), (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 2.1 million

RJ Nieto is behind the Facebook Page Thinking Pinoy (the Thinking Filipino). He is more known for his pen name. Nieto worked as a journalist for a local newspaper in 2010-2011 in the same city, Davao City, where Duterte served as mayor. Nieto started his blog right before the 2016 election campaign started.



Figure 4.3 A screenshot of Thinking Pinoy’s public Facebook page

3. Sass Sasot (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 913k

Sass is a transwoman who was known for campaigning for LGBT rights since the early 2000's. She finished her masters in world politics and global justice from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands and has used her academic profile to lend credibility to her arguments regarding controversial issues in the Philippines.



Figure 4.4 A screenshot of Sass Sasot’s public Facebook page

4. **Mindavote (Screenshot taken October 2022)**

Number of followers: 598k

Mindavote is a pseudonymous Facebook page that supports Duterte. They have a website called Mindanation.com which is also the Official Blog Site of Mindavote. According to their profile, they are "an online community of Duterte supporters, and advocates of a better, stronger, more law-abiding Philippines". In the photo screenshot below, DDS means Diehard Duterte Supporters.



Figure 4.5 A screenshot of Mindavote’s public Facebook page

5. Luminous by Trixie Cruz-Angeles and Ahmed Paglinawan (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 411k

Luminous by Trixie Cruz-Angeles & Ahmed Paglinawan is a Facebook page owned by a lawyer (Ahmed) and a radio personality/archeologist/lawyer (Trixie). According to their profile, the Facebook page serves as a “page to discuss some issues in the political scene, the laws that apply to them, as well as the administrators’ advocacies such as culture and arts.” Trixie Cruz-Angeles currently serves as the official spokesperson of newly elected president Bongbong Marcos.



Figure 4.6 A screenshot of Luminous’s public Facebook page

B. Duterte critics

1. Silent No More (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 963k

Silent No More PH is run by anonymous individuals, or a pseudonymous influencer. The page was created after Duterte was elected president in 2016. The cover photo below criticises Duterte for his failures in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Translated, the text says, “1 million COVID-19 cases is not an achievement but proof of the failures of the administration of #DuterteFailure.”

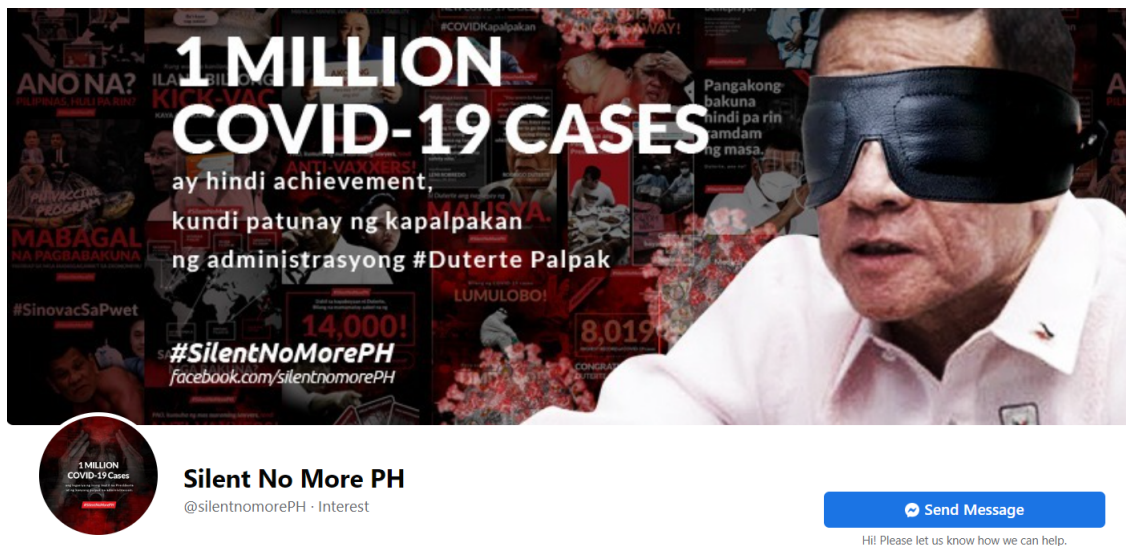


Figure 4.7 A screenshot of Silent No More’s public Facebook page

2. Dakila (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 114k

Dakila is a non-profit organisation who have been campaigning about human rights since 2005. They are a group of artists who use art and creative methods to make statements about political issues. Dakila’s cover photo as shown in the screenshot below says, “Walang Pipikit”, translated to “No one close their eyes,” a metaphor used to ask people to open their eyes to the injustices happening in the country.



Figure 4.8 A screenshot of Dakila’s public Facebook page

3. Chel Diokno (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 801k

Chel Diokno, a human rights lawyer, ran for a seat in the Senate in the 2019 elections. He serves as the chair of the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), the oldest organisation of human rights lawyers in the Philippines who help victims of abuse by the government, military, and police. In the screenshot below, Chel Diokno’s cover photo promotes himself and his page as a free legal help desk. The bottom line translates to, “Have questions? Click the send message button!”



Figure 4.9 A screenshot of Mocha Uson’s public Facebook page

4. Jover Laurio/Pinoy Ako Blog (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 394k

Jover Laurio is the blogger behind Pinoy Ako Blog (PAB). PAB remained anonymous until 2017, when Jover came forward after influencers RJ Nieto and Sass Sasot hunted the owner of the blog for libel charges. In the screenshot below, Pinoy Ako Blog’s cover photo and profile photo is a cartoon of a person wearing a shirt with “Leni 10” written on it. Leni stands for Leni Robredo and 10 stands for her ballot number in the 2022 elections. Pinoy Ako Blog was one of the influencers who campaigned for Leni Robredo.



Figure 4.10 A screenshot of Pinoy Ako Blog’s public Facebook page

5. Superficial Gazette of the Philippines (Screenshot taken October 2022)

Number of followers: 149k

The Superficial Gazette of the Philippines, another pseudonym influencer, is a page that came out of a joke. It is a parody of the "Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines." The page started in September 2016, four months after Duterte was elected into power. It came about after the Official Gazette of the Philippines' Facebook page started sharing false information about the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his family. In the screenshot above, the cover photo of the Superficial Gazette says, “Welcome to the Golden Age.” Here, the term golden age refers back to the Martial Law era under Ferdinand Marcos Sr. Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s presidential campaign in 2022 used disinformation about life under dictatorship, one of which is the myth that the dictatorship was a time of peace and prosperity (France 24, 2022).



Figure 4.11 A screenshot of Superficial Gazette’s public Facebook page

4.6 Data collection process

After the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Facebook restricted the use of their API tools by software developers and only one software was still allowed to download data from Facebook -- Facepager.

Facepager is a tool used to gather data from Facebook. It was developed by Jakob Junger and Till Keyling in 2019 of the Institute for Communications Science and Media Research at Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich (Vierecke, 2014), particularly developed to analyse political communication on Facebook. According to Keyling (2014) in his interview with Vierecke (2014):

“Facepager enables you to collect public data from platforms on the social web (such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube) which these platforms make available through program interfaces (APIs). Our tool is open source, so it is freely accessible; but most importantly, the steps of data collection can all be traced exactly and documented, which is particularly

relevant for scientific work. Facepager reduces the technical obstacle to collecting such data because it no longer requires programming skills.”

The first round of data collection happened in October 2020, gathering data from influencer pages dated January 1, 2019 to September 31, 2020. In May 2021, a second round of data collection was conducted for the new variables added to the code book, as well as to collect new Facebook posts from influencers dated October 1, 2020 to May 5, 2021.

4.7 Ethics

The use of social media data in research has many ethical concerns. One key concern is whether data from social media should be considered private or public -- while users have agreed to terms and conditions of the media platform they signed up to, there are questions on the extent of informed consent once data from a user is used in research (Townsend and Wallace, n.d.). In terms of informed consent, social media users are rarely aware that their data have been used for research, especially in larger data sets such as data from the comments section of a Facebook post. Townsend and Wallace (n.d.) argue that there are conditions where researchers are more ethically bound to seek informed consent from users, especially on data that users expect to be private.

Another consideration when it comes to ethics in social media research is anonymity. Protecting the identity of users is important especially when data is sensitive and may expose the user to risks such as increased vulnerability online, reputational damage, or prosecution (ibid).

Willis (2019), argues that researchers who use online data must consider two things: the technical accessibility of the information uploaded by users; and 2.) how those users treat that information. In his own research using Facebook data, he treated his observations like in an offline public space, therefore not needing consent from the people he was observing. In addition, the Facebook users he observed perceived their Facebook posts as public.

For this research, the data gathered are from Facebook influencers who are public figures and who seek to gain support for their causes by posting on their public Facebook page. These influencers have a range of 100,000 to 5 million followers, which in the real world is similar to having an audience the size of between one and 50 football stadiums. In addition, no interaction was made with any of the observed influencers nor was there any manipulation of data (i.e. manipulating the news feed). In line with Willis' (2019) guidelines on the accessibility of information and how users treat the information they have uploaded, the researcher did not ask for consent from the influencers observed in the study.

Initially, this research also aimed to look at the discourse among Facebook publics by getting data from the comments section of public Facebook pages. However, I have come across a number of ethical issues. First, Facebook does not allow the collection of data from the comments section. Facepager, the software used to collect data in this study, therefore does not have authority to collect data from the comments section. Second, even if manual data collection were to be done and even if this were approved by the university, another ethical concern would be people's right to be forgotten on the Internet. The right to be forgotten, or the right to erasure, acknowledges people's personal data to be erased (Information Commissioner's Office, no date) and by getting their comments and publishing it in a study, their comments can be eternalised even if, in the future, they would have wanted it deleted. It was also pointed out during one of the annual reviews for this research that while people comment on public pages, some of them might be oblivious that their comments were made in public. Franzke et al. (2020) recommends getting informed consent but recognises this difficulty especially when a study involves big data. Because of these ethical dilemmas, the decision was made to forego the collection of public comments and focus on the content made by the public Facebook pages.

The ethics approval of this research was done through Loughborough University's LEON, an online ethics system. Because of the nature of the research, which uses secondary public data from Facebook, the ethics committee confirmed full ethical approval for data collection.

4.8 Pilot Study

According to Gudmundsdottir and Brock-Utne (2010), pilot studies are important in increasing the quality, validity, and reliability of the research. Further, its purpose is not merely to justify the methods used in the research, but to identify questions and variables that do not generate appropriate responses, and be able to modify them (ibid).

In order to test the code book and evaluate the data gathered, a pilot study was conducted in April and May 2021. The pilot study had two aims: 1.) to ensure that the code book is clear and effective in coding the data gathered and 2.) to ensure that the Facebook data gathered is relevant to the research.

Before conducting the pilot study, the researcher finished gathering the data, refining the research questions, and writing a code book that was developed over the course of six months. These steps, including the pilot study, were taken to ensure the quality of the main study.

The pilot study helped in evaluating the quality of data gathered. Some data from the data set, which were found to be not relevant to the research, were removed. One Facebook influencer page had to be changed to another, as the data was not robust. This will be explained more later.

The pilot study also helped re-evaluate the code book to ensure that the codes will help answer the research questions. As a result, the code book was further edited, with variables added, and definitions tightened for clarity. These steps will also help in the process of inter-coder reliability.

Two rounds of pilot studies were conducted: first in April 2021, where the first code book was tested; and second, in May 2021, where the edited code book was tested. Fifty-five units of data from the data set were used to test the code book: five random Facebook posts from each influencer and five random comments.

During the second round of the pilot study, another round of data gathering was also conducted to get further data from the new Facebook page and for the additional variables that were included in the code book. On May 8, 201, the developers of Facepager announced on the

Facebook support group for Facepager users that Facebook is going to stop the software from accessing Facebook data. The additional data needed for the research were downloaded just before Facebook blocked Facepager from its API.

A. Analysis of the code book

Data that was used for the pilot study were from the data gathered from Facebook influencer pages using Facepager. SPSS Statistics was used to code the data using the variables, codes, and definitions from the first code book.

The researcher initially also had difficulty in identifying intolerant speech and hate speech. The definitions of intolerance and hate speech in the original code book were similar to each other, and hate speech does not have one definition. For example, posts/comments like “I hate Duterte” and “His penis is small” (pertaining to a Senator from the opposition) were confusing to code using the original definitions I had. Does using the word “hate” automatically make it hate speech? And do personal attacks against someone’s sexuality -- if they belong in a position of power -- also count as hate speech? For the purpose of the research, the researcher tightened the definition of these variables, especially that of hate speech.

To define hate speech better, the researcher gathered specific definitions of hate speech against women, LGBTQ+, persons with disability, race and ethnicity, and religion. While the definitions of hate speech against minority groups vary, the definitions the researcher used were from organisations who work with these oppressed minority groups and whose definitions of hate speech were in part identified by those who have experienced them. The researcher believes that these definitions were important to ensure that the definitions reflected the lived experiences of minority groups. These were also added to the code book and were used during the second run of the pilot study. As such, posts like “I hate Duterte” and “His penis is small” were clearly not to be coded as hate speech in the new definitions added to the code book.

B. Analysis of the data

To evaluate the data, five random Facebook posts were taken from each Facebook influencer and then coded. In the first run of the pilot study, some of the data turned out to be irrelevant to the research. There were Facebook posts that were birthday greetings to politicians, non-political videos where the caption was “Just sharing this video”, and memes that were not political in nature or did not have any political subtext. The researcher decided that these kinds of Facebook posts need to be deleted from the data set.

Perhaps the biggest change to the research after doing the first run of the pilot study was that one influencer page, Malacanang Events and Catering Services, had to be changed. The researcher found that the page relied heavily on memes, without posting much written text or explaining their political position. The page, which was created as a satire of the Facebook page of the president’s office, was mostly posting mockery and did not have much variation. The researcher decided that the data was not rich enough, and would not capture the range of political commentary on the Duterte presidency. The researcher decided on another Facebook page, Dakila, which has 102,000 followers. Dakila is a non-profit organisation that has been campaigning for human rights since 2005. Their Facebook posts vary from political statements to campaigns. The researcher found that analysing the data from this page can answer the research questions better.

Another kind of data that was questioned whether it was relevant to the research were re-shared or copied and pasted government announcements and/or statements. This data is usually found on influencers’ pages who also hold a government position (e.g. Mocha Uson). It was decided that this data can indicate how frequent influencers serve as a mouthpiece for the government so this data was retained and a variable to identify posts that are re-shared from the government was added to the code book.

C. Pilot study reflections

When planning the pilot study it was suspected that there would be variables in the code book that needed to be revised and that some of the data already gathered will not be relevant to the

research. The researcher found this to be true and made necessary adjustments to the data and the code book to make the research more robust and to ensure its validity. This pilot study also helped in the process of inter-coder reliability, ensuring that the code book would be easy to follow if there was another coder.

Even as the researcher had already made changes to the code book prior to the pilot study, during the process of coding the data, the researcher found that variables needed to be added, and definitions needed to be tightened to ensure that the coder/s would be guided properly in coding the data. This was true for coding incivility, intolerance, and hate speech which seemed to overlap in definitions and/or was ambiguous in the earlier code book. Adding definitions from different literature as well as examples of what counted as uncivil, intolerant, and hate speech, allowed for easier coding of the data during the second round of the pilot study.

The source of data was from Facebook posts of influencer pages and while most data were relevant to the study, a few were found to be irrelevant, and thus deleted from the data set. It was also found that one influencer page (Malacanang Events and Party Services) did not have the robust data needed for the research, as the content were mostly memes and did not fully capture sentiments of critics of the government. As a result, the influencer page was changed to Dakila, another Duterte critic.

As a result of the pilot study, the researcher was able to modify the code book, adding variables, and expanding further on the rhetorical devices. The pilot study was a valuable process to the research whereby issues were identified in relation to the effectiveness of the code book and the robustness of the data. Such modifications would not have been possible without giving detailed attention to the pilot study stage and the main study would have been less effective and reliable.

4.9 Intercoder reliability test

After the pilot study, an intercoder reliability test was done. Intercoder reliability tests are used to validate the variables of the code book and measure to what extent two different researchers agree on how to code content. The process started with a random sampling of the full data set.

Fifty posts from each influencer were chosen for the test, or a total of 500 data points. A research assistant was hired as the second researcher to test the variables. The research assistant is Filipino and has had prior experience coding for content analysis. For this research, it was important to hire another Filipino to code the content, as most posts are in the Filipino language and have subtext/context that only a Filipino immersed in the culture and politics of the Philippines would understand.

The work was done between November 2021-January 2022. The tests were done in February 2022. I and the research assistant had three meetings to discuss posts that were confusing and how to code them. During these meetings, we would agree on the coding, and would review them again at the next meeting. The researchers documented these discussions. Scott's Pi, Cohen's Kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha were used to measure the reliability of the variables.

The summary of results of the first run of tests:

Variable	Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha
V17 Acclaim	88.4%	0.767	0.768	0.767
V18 Attack	86%	0.81	0.81	0.81
V19 Defend	88.8%	0.803	0.804	0.804
V20 Source of Knowledge	92.2%	0.844	0.844	0.844
V21 Collective Appeal	91%	0.819	0.821	0.82
V22 Personal Appeal	91.4%	0.668	0.669	0.669
V23 Quote	91.6%	0.849	0.849	0.849
V24 Humour	60.2%	0.007	0.13	0.008
V25 Call to action	91.4%	0.839	0.839	0.839
V26 Civility/ Incivility	85%	0.789	0.79	0.79
V27 Intolerance	83.7%	0.758	0.759	0.758
V28 Hate speech	94.8%	0.639	0.641	0.64

Figure 4.12 A summary of the results of the first intercoder reliability test

All variables except for V24 Humour passed the test. The humour variable only has 60.2% agreement and scored less than 1 on Scott's Pi, Cohen's Kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha. When reviewing the codes, the researchers found different views on what is considered humorous and what is not (i.e. on some posts, he would code as humorous and I would not) and when humour is present, coding the kind of humour was used is also very different for us (i.e. the research assistant would code one as sarcasm and I would code it as another type of humour like exaggeration). The coders could not agree on the coding. I have identified the humour variable as problematic due to its subjective nature which can depend on culture and upbringing. Due to the results of the variable on humour and its subjectivity, I decided that the variable is not reliable and should be taken out of the code book. Two variables, V22 Personal appeal and V28 hate speech also needed to be elevated to at least 0.7 on Scott's Pi, Cohen's Kappa, and Krippendorff's Alpha. The coders revisited the codes, had a meeting to discuss how to agree on certain variables, and a second test was done.

The summary of results on the second run of tests for V22 Personal Appeal and V28 Hate speech:

Variable	Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha
V22 Personal Appeal	96.2%	0.848	0.849	0.849
V28 Hate Speech	99.2%	0.931	0.931	0.931

Figure 4.13 A summary of the second run of intercoder reliability test

4.10 Analysing the full data set

After the intercoder reliability test, the full data set was analysed and coded. For the full data set, systematic random sampling was used to pick 500 posts from each influencer. Systematic sampling was used for practicality, as the full data set collected consisted of over 25,000 Facebook posts in total. There was neither important ordering nor repetitive patterns in the frame, which might be a problem with systematic sampling (Siegel and Wagner, 2022). However, one influencer page, Superficial Gazette, only had 274 posts in total from January 2019-December 2020. Therefore, all 274 posts were used for the data analysis. No other posts by Superficial Gazette before or beyond January 2019-December 2020 were added to the data set. The total number of posts analysed was 4,774. SPSS was used to analyse the data using descriptive statistics.

4.11 Research Hypotheses

I aim to explore the role of Facebook influencers in shaping the narrative of the Duterte era by exploring the following hypotheses.

A. Hypotheses using Benoit's functional theory and hypotheses

Benoit's functional theory has been used in different research, although mostly looking at western contexts. According to Benoit (2017), from these research, 17 hypotheses have been put forward and were proved to be true. Due to the context of this research, only a few of these hypotheses could be investigated, namely: 1. Political candidates will use acclaims more frequently than attacks, and attacks more than defenses; 2. Policy comments will be more frequent than character comments in political campaign discourse; 3. General goals and ideals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack; 4. Incumbents acclaim and defend more, and attack less than challengers; 5. Campaign winners discuss policy more, and character less, than do losers; and 6. Campaign winners attack more on policy and less on character, than losers. From these hypotheses and

previous works (Curato, 2016), the following hypotheses were made:

H1. Based on Benoit's hypothesis, pro-Duterte influencers will use more acclaims than attacks or defenses to help retain his trustworthiness and approval rating among his supporters while anti-Duterte influencers will use more acclaims to acclaim political figures in the opposition, to help build their image and help them get elected into the senate and congress, especially in the 2019 midterm elections.

H2. I challenge Benoit's hypothesis that policies will be discussed more than character given the highly personalised politics in the Philippines. This thesis hypothesises that character comments will be more frequent than policy comments in political discourse, both for pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Character comments will therefore be used more often to both acclaim or attack.

H3. I challenge Benoit's hypothesis that incumbents acclaim more and attack less. While this research believes pro-Duterte influencers (incumbents) will acclaim and defend more to sustain Duterte's popularity, this thesis also believes that they will attack more than anti-Duterte (challengers) influencers. This is based on earlier observations and the assumption that negative campaigning will smear the names of the opposition making it difficult for them to win the next elections.

B. Hypotheses on rhetorical devices used to discuss human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations

H4. Pro-Duterte influencers will use more probable information to talk about the issues while anti-Duterte influencers will use more sourced information to talk about them

H5. Pro-Duterte influencers will quote government officials and political organisations more while anti-Duterte influencers will use more quotes from other experts (journals, news, academia etc)

H6. Both Pro-Duterte and Anti-Duterte influencers will use collective and personal appeals to gain support from their audience but given the time the data was collected, both groups will use collective appeal and personal appeal to talk about the COVID-19 pandemic more than human rights and law and order, and China-Philippine relations

H7. Anti-Duterte influencers will use online and offline call to actions to protest against Duterte and his policies, while pro-Duterte influencers will use online and offline call to actions to ask the audience different ways to support Duterte and his policies. If violent calls to action are found, these will be quoting or sharing Duterte's statements about certain policies (i.e. killing of drug lords)

C. Hypotheses on the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech

H8. Both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers will engage in incivility, intolerance, and hate speech but the former will post more incivility, intolerance, and hate speech

H9. Pro-Duterte influencers will use more intense forms of incivility and intolerance as well as more hate speech compared to their rivals

4.12 Summary

This chapter presented the key methodological approaches and choices in line with the nature of the research questions. I have presented why quantitative content analysis was the best method to investigate the content of the ten Facebook influencers. This chapter also showed the operationalisation of the research questions through the development of the code book and how intercoder reliability was done to ensure the quality, reliability, and validity of the study. The next three chapters present the key findings of this research using the methods mentioned in this chapter

Chapter 5

The art of electoral campaigning

Blumenthal's (1980, p.7) concept of permanent campaign theorises that politicians think about their everyday endeavours as campaign-like efforts outside of electoral campaign periods, that "remakes government into an instrument designed to sustain an elected official's popularity" through image-making and other strategic calculations, while keeping in mind media coverage. This notion of permanent campaigning is highly relevant to the Philippines where campaigning for a politician seems to be a never-ending cycle of campaigning, winning the elections, and protecting their image until the next campaign season. One could also argue that any person who wants to win any seat in government should start their campaign the moment they set their minds on running for office. In a country where name recall, grandstanding, family connections, and media coverage win the elections, politicians want to ensure that their names remain the first thing people think about positively when they see the ballots, no matter if the next election is three or six years away.

While a president-elect can only hold office once and cannot run for re-elections in the Philippines, their image and branding throughout their six years in office can help the next candidate who they endorse, or else ensure that people vote for a candidate who is similar to who they are and what they believe in. A weak branding can mean they can easily be targeted by any attacks on character and policy stands, which can allow for an opposition candidate to win the next elections. An example of this was Benigno Aquino III and the Liberal Party, who also rose to power by challenging Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's corrupt administration by having the tagline '*Tuwid na Daan*' (*Straight Path*), and who were not able to withstand the attacks hurled at him

and his administration. A survey conducted by Pulse Asia in 2014, four years after he was elected into office, showed that 36% of Filipinos already thought his anti-corruption promises and his *'Tuwid na Daan'* platforms and policies were failing (Coconuts Manila, 2014). Two years later, Rodrigo Duterte uses this dissatisfaction and challenges Benigno Aquino III by using the tagline, 'Change is Coming' and consequently wins the presidential race with an unprecedented support from 16 million Filipinos. A similar pattern has emerged over the course of the Philippines' political history, showing that many presidents have risen to power by challenging previous regimes (Teehankee, 2016). This proves that the success of any political figure and the political ideologies they represent rising to power relies heavily on how they are perceived by the voting public not only during the campaign season but during the entirety of their time in office.

Some scholars have argued that social media have allowed for permanent campaigns to be easier and more common. Vergeer, Hermans, and Sams (2011, p.485) suggest that "with the advent of the Internet, permanent campaigning [...] to build public support becomes easier" while Vaccari (2008, p.6) argues that online environments built by political actors are maintained for long term objectives and that "campaigns are permanent, although with varying intensity". It is therefore important that how these Facebook influencers use strategies to help or attack the image of political figures is investigated. With the reach and engagement of these influencers, the way they portray a certain candidate or government official can influence the public's perception of this person. It is also important to approach the analysis of political communication in the context of contemporary democratic debates in countries like the Philippines where politics have become increasingly polarised in the face of populist sentiments brought about by past failures of democratic governance. In this chapter, I analyse how these influencers try to acclaim, attack, and defend political personalities and their policy stands using Benoit's functional approach theory.

William Benoit (2005) developed the functional approach theory to analyse how candidates campaign to win the elections. According to this theory, the rhetorical devices used by candidates in campaigning are acclaiming, attacking, and defending. Acclaiming tells voters about candidates' good points, stressing about their desirable attributes and crediting them with

desirable policy stands; attacking is criticising an opponent and identifying their weaknesses or disadvantages as well as their disagreeable policy stands; defending refutes any attack made by the opposing candidate to try and prevent further damage and repair their image (Benoit, 2005). According to Benoit (2005, p. 18) “when persuasive to the audience, acclaims increase a candidate’s benefits, attacks increase an opponent's costs, and defenses reduce alleged costs.” He further emphasises that the audiences’ attitudes and existing knowledge and how they perceive messages about a candidate play an important role in decision-making (Benoit, 2017). For example, depending on what they already know and believe in, a candidate who advocates for universal healthcare either through acclaims or attacks, may at the same time attract or repel certain groups.

This chapter looks at the use of Benoit’s functional approach by the ten identified Facebook influencers. Some of the data collected coincided with the campaign season during the 2019 elections (January-May 2019) but extends further to the next year. This chapter focuses on the influencers’ use of acclaim, attack, and defend rhetoric in the political marketing and/or restoring/maintaining/destroying the image of Duterte and other government officials. In this chapter, I answer research question 1a, “What kind of rhetorical appeals and devices do influencers use on their Facebook posts?” in the context of Benoit’s functional approach theory.

In this chapter, I also affirm and challenge some hypotheses that Benoit (2017) put forth, which was presented in chapter 2. As a recap, only six hypotheses that have been advanced using the functional theory will be investigated due to the context of this research:

1. Political candidates will use acclaims more frequently than attacks, and attacks more than defenses.
2. Policy comments will be more frequent than character comments in political campaign discourse.
3. General goals and ideals will be used more often to acclaim than to attack.
4. Incumbents acclaim and defend more, and attack less than challengers.
5. Campaign winners discuss policy more, and character less, than do losers.
6. Campaign winners attack more on policy and less on character, than losers.

Acclaim, Attack, Defend: How to win campaigns

I first analyse the acclaims used by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Duterte was elected by popular vote, garnering 16 million votes or 39% of the total votes casted. When his predecessor, Benigno Aquino III won in the 2011 elections, he garnered 15 million votes, or 42% of the votes casted. However, Aquino's approval ratings dropped from 85% in his first few months in office to 69% during midterm, and down to 57% during the end of his term (Rappler, 2016). In the end, Aquino's term was marred by controversies and growing dissatisfaction among Filipinos, which helped Duterte in his presidential campaign. On the other hand, Duterte's approval ratings were proven to be the highest among the most recent four presidents in the Philippines. Throughout his term, Duterte enjoyed an approval rating of 70% or higher, except in September 2021 when it dipped to 64%, but which jumped back to 72% later that year (Sarao, 2022). Although Duterte's term as president also faced controversies, Filipinos' trust in him remained mostly unchallenged. I presuppose that maintaining a good image, thanks in part to the work of influencers, has helped in this image-making. On the other hand, those who challenged Duterte's presidency and his policy stands have had a more difficult time, thanks to the lack of allies in the Congress and Senate, as well as the lack of public trust in opposition leaders especially after Aquino's term. To this point, I hypothesise the following:

H1. Based on Benoit's hypothesis, pro-Duterte influencers will use more acclaims than attacks or defenses to help retain his trustworthiness and approval rating among his supporters while anti-Duterte influencers will use more acclaims to acclaim political figures in the opposition, to help build their image and help them get elected into the senate and congress, especially in the 2019 midterm elections.

H2. I challenge Benoit's hypothesis that policies will be discussed more than character. Given the highly personalised politics in the Philippines. This thesis hypothesises that character comments will be more frequent than character comments in political discourse, both for pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Character comments will therefore be used more often to both acclaim or attack.

H3. I challenge Benoit’s hypothesis that incumbents acclaim more and attack less. While this research believes pro-Duterte influencers (incumbents) will acclaim and defend more to sustain Duterte’s popularity, this thesis also believes that they will attack more than anti-Duterte (challengers) influencers. This is based on earlier observations and the assumption that negative campaigning will smear the names of the opposition making it difficult for them to win the next elections.

In total, there were 3,215 posts acclaimed, attacked, or defended out of the 4,774 posts analysed: 12% used acclaim; 46% used attack; 9% used defenses as a rhetorical device. The rest of the posts, or 35% of the total posts analysed, did not contain any acclaim, attacks, or defenses.

Total number of acclains, attacks, and defenses of the total number of posts analysed

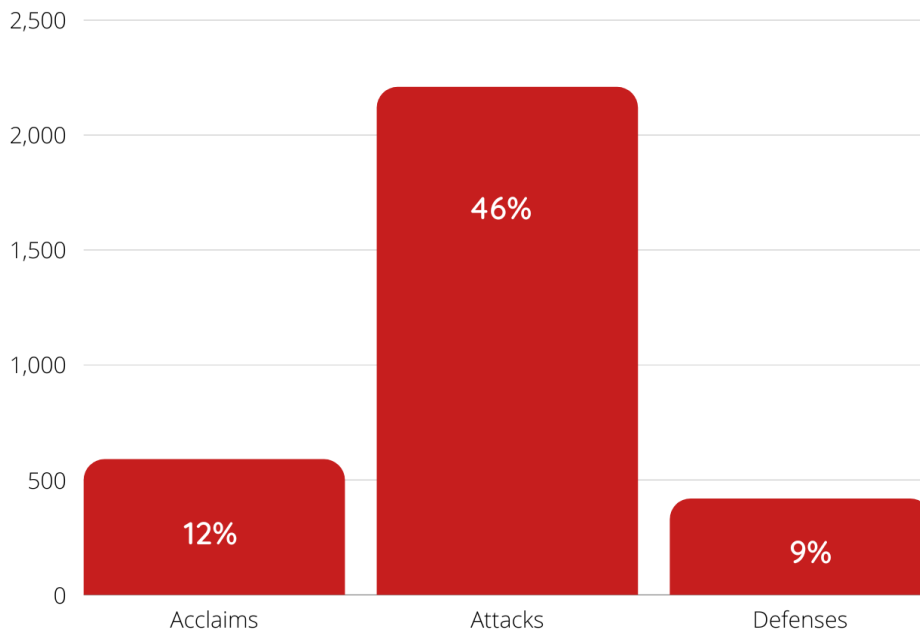


Figure 5.1 A graph showing the total number of acclains, attacks, and defenses in the posts analysed

5.1 Acclaiming

Of the 589 posts that were found to use acclaims, 72% acclaimed a character, followed by acclaiming a policy at 18%, and least used was acclaiming both character and policy at 10%.

Looking at posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers separately, pro-Duterte influencers used more acclaims at 390 versus anti-Duterte influencers who posted 199 acclaims or 66% and 34% of the total acclaims, respectively.

Pro-Duterte influencers posted 62% relating to character, 24% concerning policy, and 14% in respect of both character and policy. In contrast, of the 199 acclaims, anti-Duterte influencers posted 91% acclaims of character, 7% acclaims of policy, and 2% acclaims of both character and policy.

Based on the data, it can be seen that the number of acclaims by anti-Duterte influencers are double the amount compared to acclaims made by pro-Duterte influencers. This can be due to different factors: 1.) some of the influencers like Mocha Uson and Thinking Pinoy have held public office in the Duterte administration, possibly making them post more 'good news' about the president and his accomplishments; 2.) The effort in ensuring that Duterte and his government maintains a good image is part of his permanent campaign to secure good approval ratings from the public. On the other hand, because there are only a few opposition leaders who hold office, anti-Duterte influencers would have less to acclaim, and more to attack.

Total number of posts that acclaim, by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

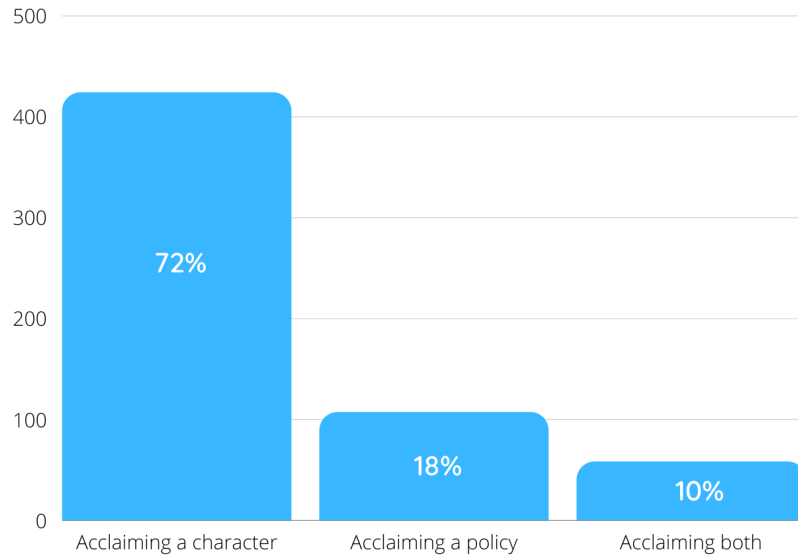


Figure 5.2 A graph showing the total number of acclaims by all ten influencers

Comparing the number of posts that acclaim: pro-Duterte vs anti-Duterte influencers

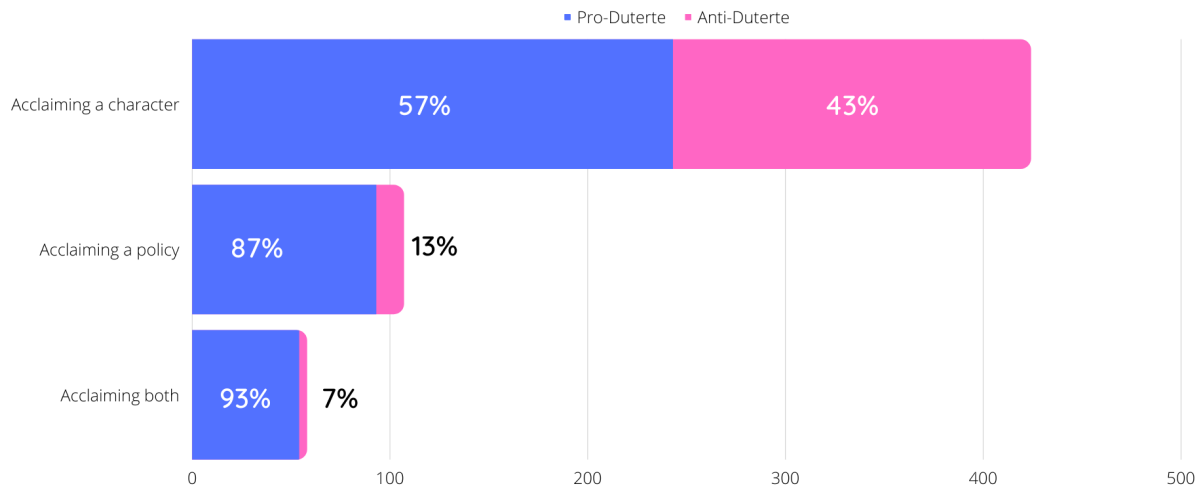


Figure 5.3 A graph comparing the total number of acclaims by pro-Duterte influencers versus anti-Duterte influencers

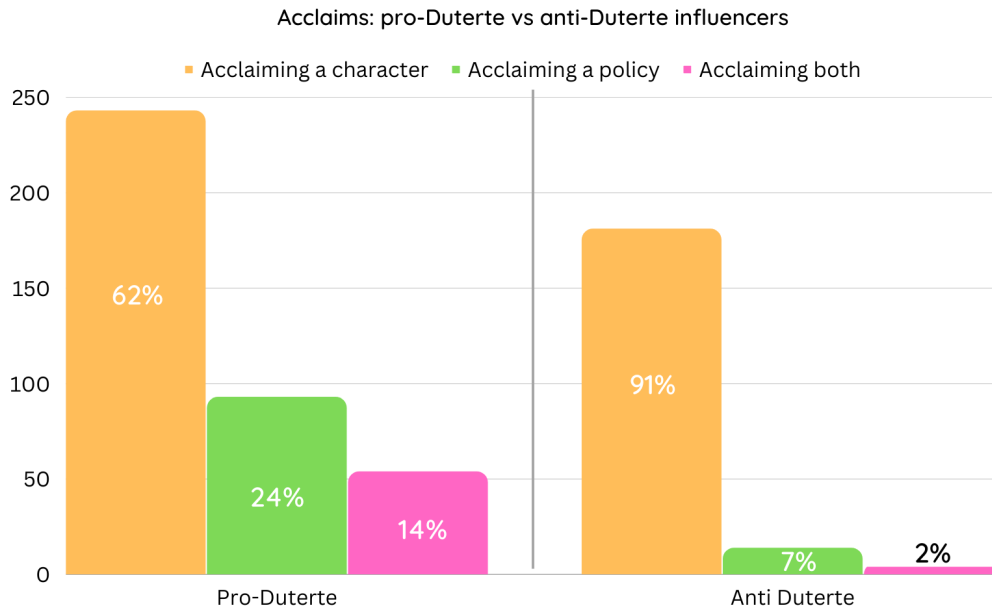


Figure 5.4 A graph comparing the total number of acclaiming a character, acclaiming a policy, and acclaiming both character and policy, between pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

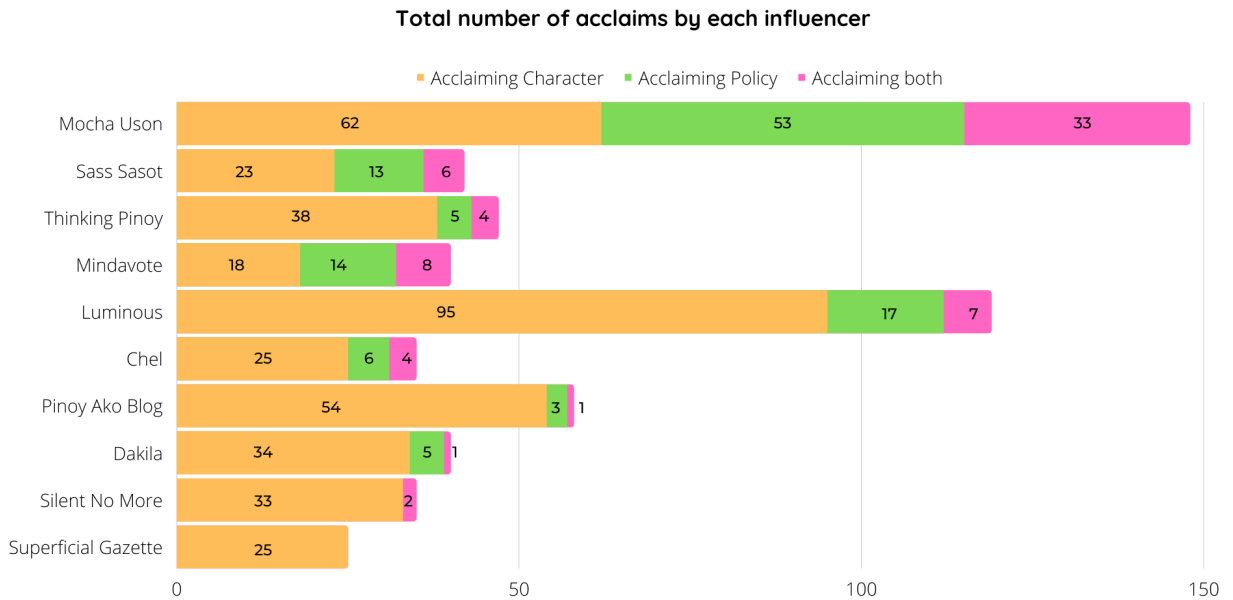


Figure 5.5 A graph showing the total number of acclaiming a character, acclaiming a policy, and acclaiming both character and policy posted by each influencer

A. Acclaims on character

The acclaims of pro-Duterte influencers are varied. Posts by pro-Duterte influencers acclaiming a character either acclaim Duterte himself, other government officials like department secretaries (the Philippine government equivalent of ministers), or other influencers who are pro-Duterte. Some of these acclaims were used to help campaign for candidates who ran under Duterte's slate during the 2019 elections. Other acclaims were used to help boost the image of different officials of the Duterte administration. Pro-Duterte influencers also used acclaims to help Duterte's reputation as a president.

On the other hand, posts by Anti-Duterte influencers that acclaim a character are mostly about political figures in the opposition, such as Leni Robredo, Risa Hontiveros, Leila de Lima, Antonio Trillanes, and Kiko Pangilinan. The acclaims that anti-Duterte influencers post also have elements of comparing and contrasting one person from another, usually a person from the opposition being compared to a person allied with Duterte. Most of the time posts like these use the good versus evil rhetoric, where the opposition is good and Duterte and his allies are evil. As such, the posts contain both acclaims and Benoit's other functional approach, attacks, which will be further discussed in the next section.

Here is an example of a character acclaim by Thinking Pinoy, praising Duterte for his work in giving urgency an anti-discrimination law. These types of post could be seen as one that helps boost Duterte's image of different communities, championing him as an ally of groups, in this case the LGBT community in the Philippines:



Image 5.6 A screenshot of Thinking Pinoy’s post acclaiming Duterte as he declares the passage of the Anti-Discriminatio Bill into law as urgent

In the post above, Duterte is called, ‘smart’ and seemingly in contrast to opposition Senator, Risa Hontiveros. Hontiveros has been a champion of gender rights in the Philippines and has pushed for laws championing the rights of women and the LGBTQ community. However, her proposed SOGIE Bill, which gives equal rights to the LGBTQ community, was rejected by Duterte, causing an uproar from the community. In response,

Duterte said he would rather support a more general anti-discrimination Bill, which would protect the rights of all minorities including, for example, persons with disabilities and the elderly. While Duterte is being called ‘smart’ for championing a law that is ‘all encompassing’, what it hides is the bigotry of the president and conservative politicians who are afraid of equal rights such as same sex marriage. In an interview with Mendez (2019), senator Tito Sotto said:

“(Duterte) is supporting an anti-discrimination bill pretty much like the ordinance in Davao which is encompassing. You should not discriminate upon the elderly, upon PWDs, upon gender or whatever. It’s not like the SOGIE that is focused only on gays. (Including SOGIE provisions) would be difficult. If you (are) going to again transgress on religious freedom, academic freedom, women’s rights, why would we include them? The same-sex marriage might be smuggled in because based on the SOGIE bill, you cannot discriminate a person if he wants to get any kind of government license, including marriage license.”

During the 2019 elections, pro-Duterte influencers also posted acclaims to help boost the image of candidates who were running under Duterte’s slate who called themselves *Hugpong ng Pagbabago*. Mindavote, which has the most posts that acclaims a character among pro-Duterte influencers, posts mostly about Bong Go, who ran and won as a senatorial seat in the 2019 elections. Mindavote’s posts from January-May 2019 mostly acclaims Bong Go and the work he has done formerly as Duterte’s special assistant. In a now deleted post, an example from Mindavote:

Ang pagbibigay serbisyo ay walang kinikilalang kulay; pula o dilaw man, sapagkat tayo’y iisa, tayo ay Pilipino. At ang tanging hangarin lamang ay magsilbi sa ating bayan. Mahal kayo ni KUYA BONG GO MAGING SINO KA MAN.

(Translation: Serving others doesn't see colours; whether you're red or yellow, we are one as Filipinos. His only desire is to serve the country. Kuya Bong Go loves you whoever you are.)

Anti-Duterte influencers have acclaimed political figures in the opposition. Here is an example of a post that acclaims Leila de Lima from Silent No More, contrasting to a Duterte-aligned Senator who was found guilty of corruption and served time in jail:



Silent No More PH

28 August 2019 · 🌐



Dear Fellow Filipinos,

Lamang na lamang sa husay sa pagiging mambabatas si Senador Leila de Lima kumpara sa Senator Korap na si Bong Revilla. Kitang-kita naman na kahit nakakulong sa kasalanang hindi niya ginawa ay patuloy na lumalaban para sa karapatan at kapakanan ng sambayanan. Pero itong si Revilla na sa maraming taon ay umabuso lang sa kapangyarihan at nagnakaw sa kaban ng bayan kaya natuluyan sa kulungan.

Hindi kahit kailan naghangad ng special treatment si Sen. Leila dahil kahit pa pinag-iinitan siya ay pinapatunayan niyang may silbi siya sa bayan. Imbes na magmaktol, ibalik muna ni Revilla ang mga ninakaw niya at huwag sumipsip para hindi masingil sa mga kinulimbat niya!

[#MandaramBongRevilla](#)

[#SilentNoMorePH](#)



👍👎👏 1.8K

283 comments 341 shares

Image 5.7 A screenshot of Silent No More’s post acclaiming Senator Leila de Lima (pictured on the left) by comparing her to Senator Bong Revilla (pictured on the right). The caption under de Lima says, “Critic of Duterte and even if jailed, serves the country.” The caption under Revilla says, “Kissing ass with Duterte and hasn’t returned what he looted from the country. The hashtag #MandaramBongRevilla is a play on words that combine the word *mandarambong* meaning thief, and his name Bong Revilla.

(Translation: Dear Fellow Filipinos, Senator Leila de Lima is clearly ahead of being a good lawmaker than corrupt Senator Bong Revilla. We can see that even if she was jailed for charges she didn’t do, she continues to fight for the rights and welfare of the country.)

Similar to posts of pro-Duterte influencers during the 2019 elections, there were also posts by anti-Duterte influencers that acclaim personalities who ran under the opposition slate, *Otso Diretso*, to help them win seats in government. Chel Diokno, who ran for a Senate seat in the 2019 and 2022 elections, posted acclaims of Risa Hontiveros, comparing her values to his own:



Atty. Chel Diokno

27 March 2019 · 🌐



#CHELfie muna kasama ang lodi kong si [Senator Risa Hontiveros](#). Magkaisa kami sa layuning isulong ang makatarungang pamumuhay para sa lahat ng Pilipino, ligtas sa karahasan, at protektado ang karapatang pantao.

See translation



Ninotchka Rosca, Camille Maranan and 2.1K others

92 comments 242 shares

Image 5.8 A screenshot of Chel Diokno’s post acclaiming Chel Diokno as he runs for a seat in the Senate in 2019. In the photo, he is seen together with Senator Risa Hontiveros, also from the opposition, making a letter C sign with their hands. The C sign was Diokno’s campaign symbol.

(Translation: #CHELfie first with my idol, Senator Risa Hontiveros. We are one in our mission in pushing forward fair and just living for all Filipinos, safe from harm, and where human rights are protected.)

B. Acclaims on policies

Pro-Duterte influencers also posted acclaims for the administration’s policies. For example, this post by Sass Sasot acclaims the economic policies by the Duterte

government. Just like acclaims on character, acclaims on policies help boost the image of Duterte, painting his administration as one that has helped the economy. But just like acclaims on character, this can be seen as a contradiction to the fact that under Duterte, the Philippines has the highest unemployment and inflation rate in Southeast Asia and is in its weakest economy in 70 years (Ibon Foundation, 2022):

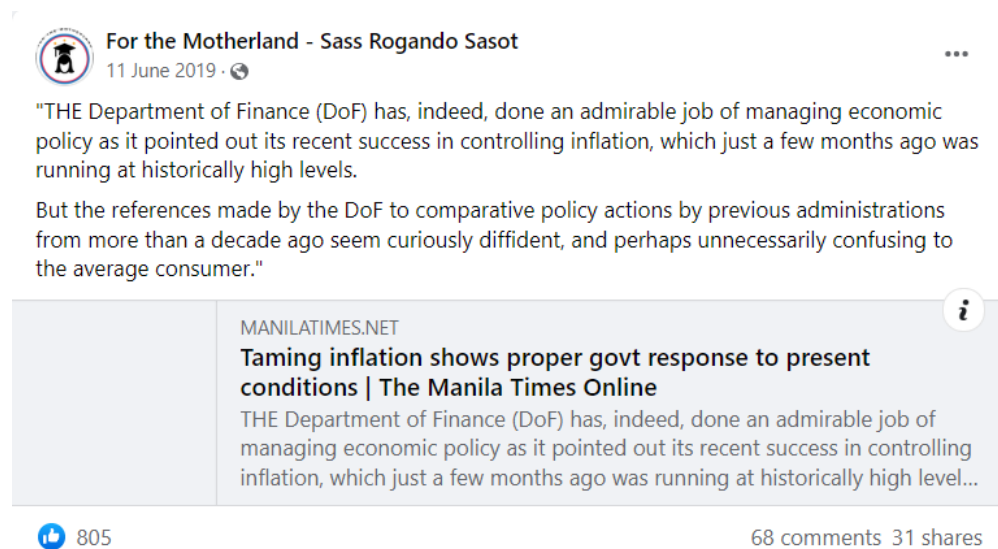


Image 5.9 A screenshot of Sass Sasot’s post acclaiming Duterte’s economic policies

Some of the posts that acclaim policy support a law in contention. For example, Thinking Pinoy posted about the Batang Bilanggo Bill, which sought to amend the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, to revert the criminal liability of children to the minimum age of nine. This post by Thinking Pinoy acclaims the policy and emphasises on the ‘positive outcomes’ of the law should it be implemented. Many human rights groups opposed the passage of the said law for endangering children and not respecting children’s rights (Palaubsanon, 2017). Posts like these help gain support on illiberal policies that the Duterte administration wished to implement:



Thinking Pinoy ✓
22 January 2019 · ⚙



ON HOUSE BILL LOWERING THE AGE OF CRIMINAL LIABILITY, ERRING CHILDREN WON'T BE JAILED, TO BE PUT IN "REFORMATIVE INSTITUTIONS" INSTEAD: HOUSE JUSTICE CHAIR

In his 21 January 2019 opening speech about the bill lowering age of criminal liability, [House of Representatives of the Philippines](#) Justice Committee chair [Atty Doy Leachon](#) said:

"Let it be understood that with the present bill, first, we are not putting these children in jail but in reformatory institutions to correct their ways and bring them back to the community. And second they are not branded as criminals but children in conflict with law. Reformatory institutions do not punish individuals but instead, they were established to help the children to be integrated back to the community after they have committed criminal acts."

#####

[Thinking Pinoy](#): The new bill proposing a lower age of criminal liability essentially removes the element of impunity among children in conflict with the law. With the new bill, erring children will start to be held accountable for their acts, but the punishment is shall NOT be severely punitive in nature.

Instead of putting kids behind bars, children in conflict with the law will be committed to juvenile reform facilities, which are aimed at reforming these kids for eventual re-introduction to society.

In short, the bill appears to simply make Bahay Pag-asa Juvenile Centers like the one in Pasig City a nationwide policy, and it's just unfortunate that the issue has been unduly sensationalized by some media outlets.



10K

1K comments 6.6K shares

Image 5.10 A screenshot of Thinking Pinoy’s post acclaiming a policy that lowers the age of criminal responsibility of children

Mocha Uson, whose page posts the most policy acclaims compared to other pro-Duterte influencers, supports the administration's more controversial policies such as the war on

drugs. Duterte's war on drugs was one of his main platforms during his presidential bid. Just as Donald Trump created an enemy out of illegal migrants to win the elections (Löffmann, 2021), Duterte created an enemy out of drugs to paint a country 'endangered' by drug lords. The war on drugs, which have killed over 12,000 Filipinos (Human Rights Watch, 2022) have been criticised by human rights groups and has led to the International Criminal Court authorising an investigation against Duterte for crimes against humanity (Engelbrecht, 2021.) Posts that acclaim the drug war can help convince supporters that it is an effective policy helping law and order in the country. An example of Mocha Uson's post acclaiming the drug war:

MOCHA USON BLOG
4 June 2019 · 🌐

Nakikita na natin ang magandang epekto ng WAR ON DRUGS ng Pangulo at ng kanyang administration.
Patuloy tayong sumuporta sa #PartnerForChange project para sa ikabubuti ng ating bayan.

Read more:
<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1071177...> ✓

For any inquiry and concerns email me at mocha.uson@gmail.com

See translation

Photo: CTO

57% ANG IBINABA NG MGA KRIMEN SA METRO MANILA SIMULA NG DUTERTE ADMINISTRATION
- Major Gen. Guillermo Eleazar

SOLID MOCHA

📺 Mocha PH Official 📷 @MochaUson 🐦 @MochaUson 📘 @MochaBlogger

👍❤️ 13K

411 comments 1K shares

Image 5.11 A screenshot of Mocha Uson’s post acclaiming Duterte’s war on drugs

(Translation: We can now see the positive effects of the president’s and his administration’s War on Drugs. Let us continue to support the #PartnerForChange project for the betterment of the country.

Crime rates in Metro Manila have dropped 57% since the start of the Duterte administration.)

Only 19 posts by anti-Duterte influencers acclaimed a policy. This can be attributed to the fact that there were only four out of the 24 seats in the senate held by the opposition and that PDP-Laban, Duterte’s party, also won the most seats in congress (Buezam 2019). This could mean that policies and/or laws crafted by the opposition are blocked by the majority in both the Senate and Congress and that policies and/or laws crafted by Duterte allies are prioritised. One example cited in the previous section was Risa Hontiveros’ SOGIE equality bill getting blocked by Duterte himself from being passed into law.

However, anti-Duterte influencers still posted acclaims about policies that were initiated by the opposition and/or support human rights and social justice, for example, the 4P’s program which was started by the Aquino administration in 2006. The 4P’s program or the Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program gives conditional cash transfers to the poor (World Bank, n.d.). The 4P’s Program was institutionalised by the Duterte administration. Chel Dioko posted:



Atty. Chel Diokno

28 April 2019 · 🌐



Sa Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, nabisita ng anak kong si Inez ang mga kababayan natin sa palengke ng Zaragoza, nakatalakayan ang komunidad ng Brgy. Macatbong, at nakausap ang ating 4Ps parent leaders. Makakaasa po kayong kakampi nyo ako, dahil isa po sa isusulong natin ang pagpapatuloy at pagpapalawak ng 4Ps para sa mga nangangailangang Pilipino. #25ChelDiokno

See translation



Shebana Alqaseer, Kristine Kintana and 554 others

24 comments 34 shares

Image 5.12 A screenshot of Chel Diokono’s post acclaiming a policy that was initiated by former president Benigno Aquino III

(Translation: In Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija, my daughter Inez visited our countrymen in Zaragoza market, had a discussion with the community in Brgy. Macatbog, and spoke with 4Ps parent leaders. You can count on me to be an ally in pushing for the continuation and the expansion of 4P’s in helping Filipinos in need.)

C. Acclaims on both character and policies

Posts that combine acclaim for both character and policy were only found on 3.61% of the 2500 posts of Pro-Duterte influencers. Over half or 61% of these acclaims were posted by Mocha Uson. These posts usually attribute a specific policy to a government official, usually Duterte, even if some of these policies were not initiated by him. Posts like these help connect Duterte to successes in policymaking, again boosting his image to the public. One example is a post that acclaims a policy that helps fight corruption, although the initiative was from a congressperson, Mocha Uson attributes this policy to the president's no corruption platform:



Image 5.13 A screenshot of Mocha Uson's post acclaiming Duterte for changes made by congress in the national budget

Translation: The events at the House of Representatives, where the Speaker took out pork and parking funds (parking funds are hidden budgets from the last Congress, are good). This is in accordance to PRRD's command that there will be NO CORRUPTION in his government

Similar to posts that acclaim a policy, there is a small number of posts that acclaim both character and policy posted by anti-Duterte influencers. There were only four posts that acclaim both a character and policy posted by anti-Duterte influencers, or only 0.087% of the group's total number of posts. In comparison pro-Duterte influencers posted 54 acclaims to both character and policy, or 2.16% of their group's total posts.

5.2 Attacking

In total, attacking posts are significantly higher in number than are posts that acclaim. There were 2,208 attack posts from both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Of this 2,208, 66% attacked a character, followed by attacking a policy at 17%, and almost a similar number of attacks on both character and policy were found at 17% also. Looking at posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers separately, pro-Duterte influencers used less attacks 977 versus anti-Duterte influencers who posted 1,231 attacks or 44% and 56% of the total attacks, respectively. Of the 977 attacks, pro-Duterte influencers posted 90% attacks on character, 5% attacks on policy, and 5% attacks on both character and policy. In contrast, of the 1,231 acclaims, anti-Duterte influencers posted 47% acclaims on character, while attacks on policy and both character and policy are on a similar number at 27% and 26% respectively.

The high number of acclaims of character as seen in the previous section, and the high number of attacks of character in this section is an effect of the highly personalised nature of Philippine politics, as was presented in Chapter 3.

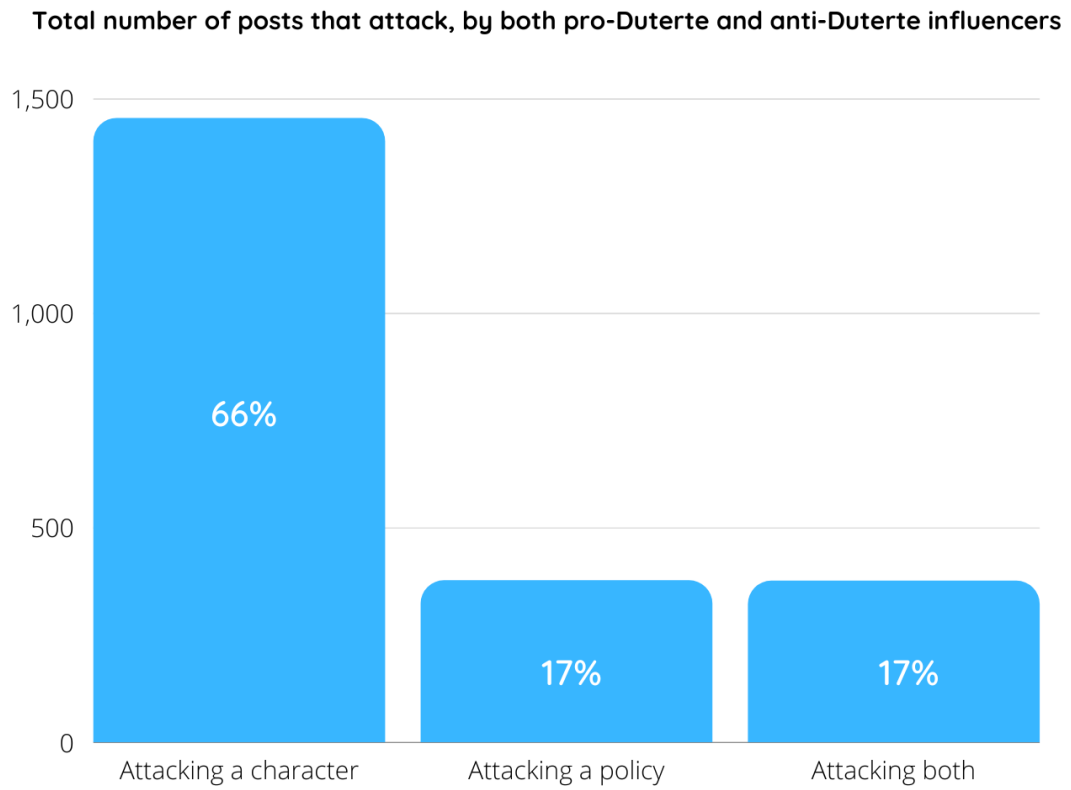


Figure 5.14 A graph showing the total number of attacks by all ten influencers

Comparing the number of posts that attack: pro-Duterte vs anti-Duterte influencers

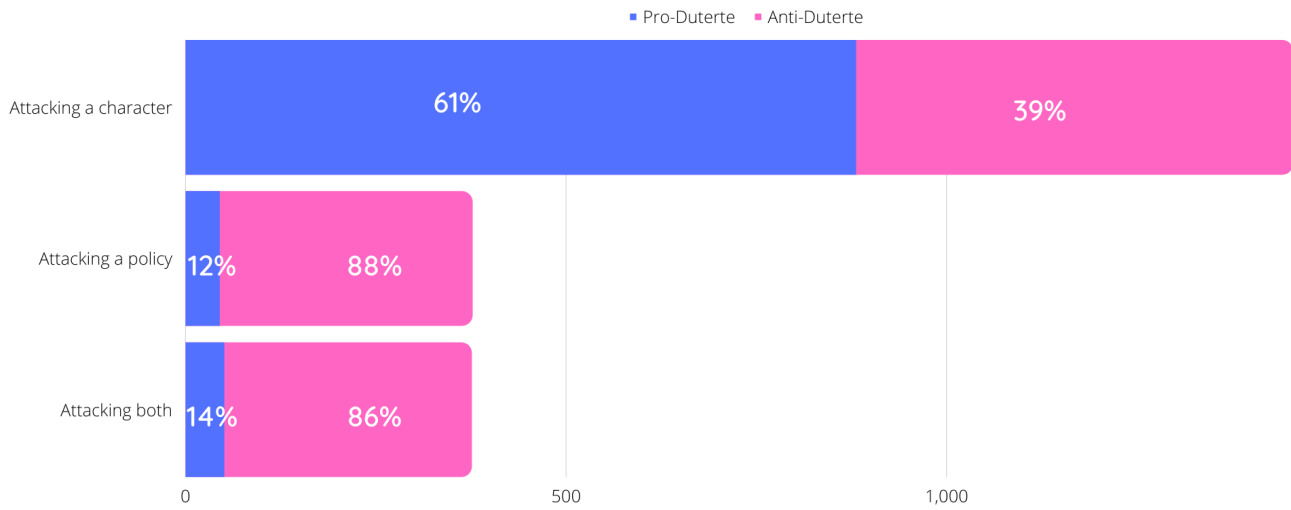


Figure 5.15 A graph comparing the total number of attacks by pro-Duterte influencers versus anti-Duterte influencers

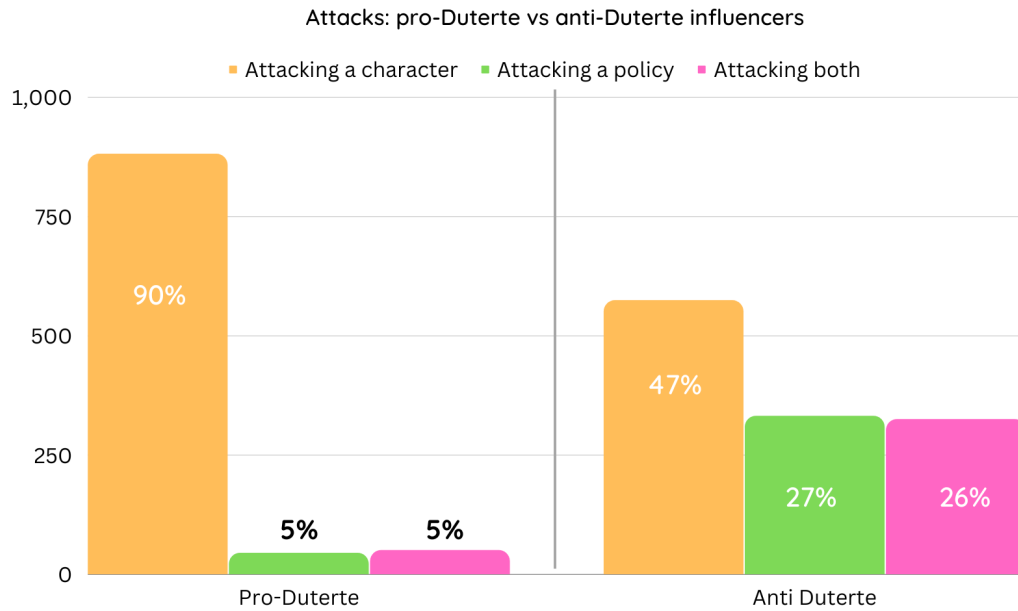


Figure 5.16 A graph comparing the total number of attacking a character, attacking a policy, and attacking both character and policy, between pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

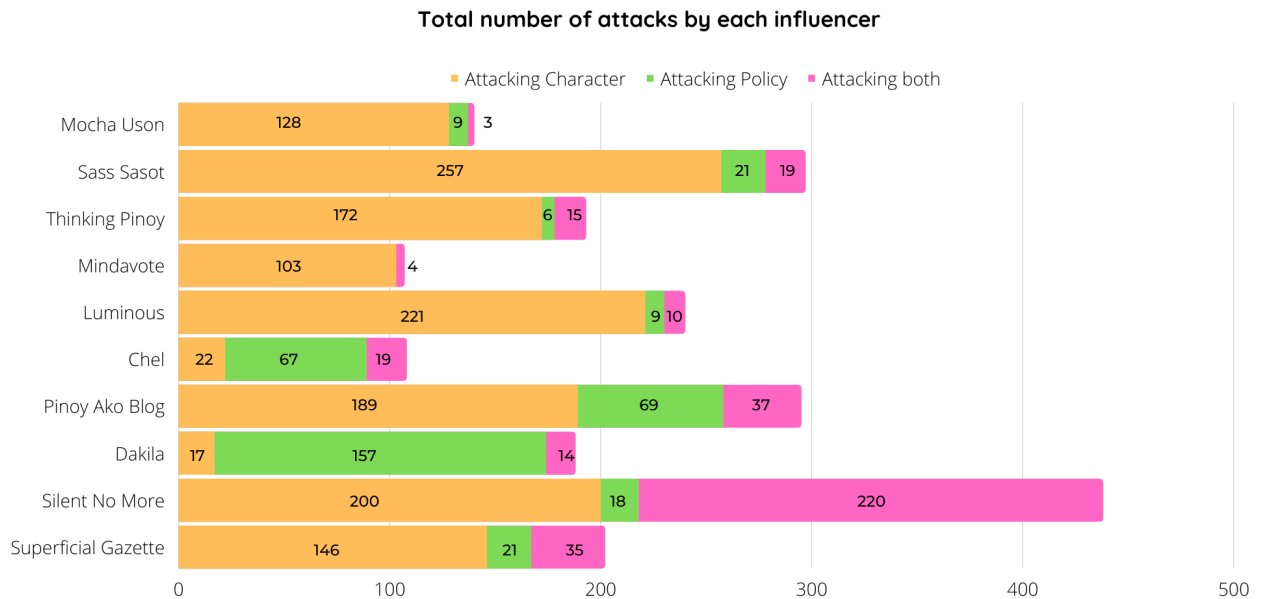


Figure 5.17 A graph showing the total number of attacking a character, attacking a policy, and attacking both character and policy posted by each influencer

A. Attacks on character

Posts by Pro-Duterte influencers that attack a character dominate versus posts that attack a policy and posts that attack both character and policies. These character attacks mostly focus on government officials, influencers, or journalists who oppose and criticise Duterte. These include attacks on Leni Robredo, Maria Ressa, Jover Laurio (who runs Pinoy Ako Blog), Leila de Lima, Kiko Pangilinan, and Risa Hontiveros. Some of these attacks contain hate speech (which will be discussed further in Chapter 7). Posts that attack character help in destroying the reputation of the opposition. Most of these attacks were dedicated to Vice President Leni Robredo, who holds the highest seat of any opposition members.

A post by Luminous, posted by one of their admins, Mark Lopez, also attacks Leni for speaking up, and calls her names like *epal* (a slang for someone who likes to

be the centre of attention), gaga (a vulgar term for crazy), engot (stupid), *MEMA* (a slang meaning someone who keeps speaking just for the sake of) and *MAMARU* (a slang meaning someone who pretends she is an expert but really is not):

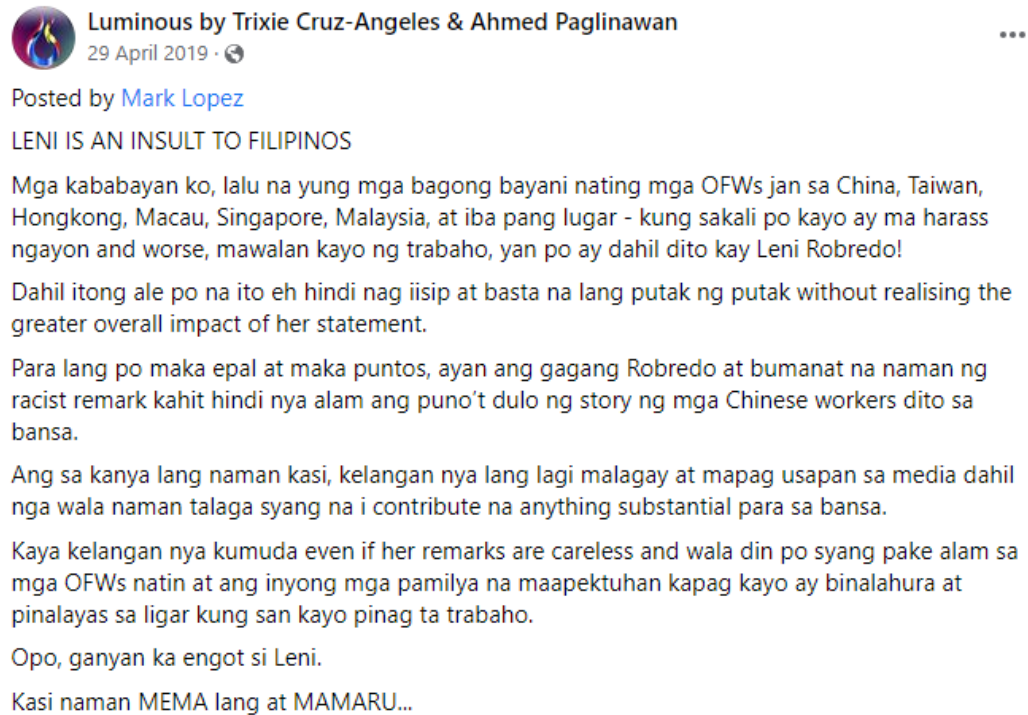


Figure 5.18 A screenshot of a post by Luminous attacking Leni's character

(Translation: Leni is an insult to Filipinos. Because this woman does not think and merely speaks without realising the greater overall impact of her statement. She does this to be the centre of attention and to gain points, this crazy Robredo attacked Chinese workers through her racist remarks even though she doesn't know the full story of why they are in the country. She needs to always be in the media cause she doesn't contribute anything substantial to the country. She needs to keep talking even if her remarks are careless. Yes, that's how stupid Leni is. She's mema and mamaru...)

During COVID-19, however, there were more attacks on government officials, regardless of whether they support Duterte or not. Some government officials that earned the ire of pro-Duterte influencers include Sen. Koko Pimentel, who broke COVID-19 protocols and Sec. Duque, the minister of health who was viewed as a failure for the government's COVID-19 response. It is surprising that Duterte continued to defend Sec. Duque even after criticisms by Duterte aligned influencers. Duterte even says he will continue to stand for Sec. Duque 'even if it brings him down' (Buan, 2021).

This begs the question, what happens when pro-Duterte influencers criticise Duterte's allies? As seen in the events during COVID-19, Duterte does not listen to what these influencers say. Senator Koko Pimentel, Philippine National Police Chief Debold Sinas, and Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque were all caught breaking COVID-19 protocols. And although criticisms were posted by pro-Duterte influencers, there were no repercussions for said personalities. Thinking Pinoy posts about Koko Pimentel:




Figure 5.19 A screenshot of a post by Thinking Pinoy attacking Senator Koko Pimentel

The post above does not only attack Senator Koko Pimentel who he calls ‘the poster boy of inequality’ for breaking COVID-19 protocols and not facing its consequences, but also seemingly attacks the Duterte administration. Thinking Pinoy uncharacteristically attacks ‘leaders who coddle’ the senator, pertaining to Duterte and the Department of Justice, for failing to punish the senator.

Similar to attacks on character by pro-Duterte influencers, attacks on character by anti-Duterte influencers also focus on government officials who they consider the opposition – in this case, Duterte, senators, and congresspeople who support him. This includes personalities like Bong Revilla and Jinggoy Estrada, senators who were jailed due to corruption; Salvador Panelo and Harry Roque, Duterte’s spokespersons; Sara Duterte, Duterte’s daughter and mayor of Davao city; and the Marcos family, to name a few. If pro-Duterte influencers try to paint an image of the opposition as ‘useless’ and ‘stupid’, likewise anti-Duterte influencers try to paint an image of Duterte and his allies

as ‘incompetent’ and ‘corrupt.’ These posts were seen mostly in 2019, when some of these personalities ran for seats in the government during the elections. By attacking their character, anti-Duterte influencers hoped to stop them from winning.

For example, this post by Silent No More emphasises on Bong Revilla’s corruption charges:

 **Silent No More PH**
10 May 2019 · 🌐

Dear Fellow Filipinos,

Sa Lunes, isipin sa pagboto ang mga pulitikong tulad ni Bong Revilla na nang-agrabyado sa maraming Pilipino. Malaki ang ninakaw niya sa bayan at malaki rin ang pinapabalik pero wala siyang pakialam kung tayo ang maghirap at siya ang makinabang.

Hahayaan ba natin na malusutan pa tayo ulit ng mandarambong? Huwag nating payagan na pagtawanan lang niya ang mga kaso niya sa korte.

Huwag tayong padedehado kay Revilla Magnanakaw!

[#SilentNoMorePH](#)

See translation



Tayo ang agrabyado kapag si Revilla ang binoto mo!

Philippines: Senator Ramon ‘Bong’ Revilla Jr. Faces Corruption Charges **Ombudsman: Revilla must pay back plundered P124.5M**

Jan 22, 2014 | Dennis Uy/Inquirer | 1

Bong Revilla asks SC to release him from jail, halt Sandigan proceedings

Adrian Ayala, ABS-CBN News

Bong Revilla: There is no law that prohibits me from running in 2016

THREE SENATORS ACCUSED OF PLUNDER NOW “FREE”

By Bingo P. Dejesusa - December 15, 2018

#SilentNoMorePH

  476

138 comments 170 shares

Figure 5.20 A screenshot of a post by Silent No More attacking Bong Revilla's character. In the photo above, the headline in red reads, "We are aggrieved when you vote for Revilla!" The text in white are headlines from different news articles on Revilla's corruption charges. Pictured on the right is Revilla.

(Translation: Dear Fellow Filipinos, this Monday, when we vote, think about politicians like Bong Revilla who aggrieved many Filipinos. He stole a huge amount of money from the country and he was told to return this money but he doesn't care if we suffer while he benefits from it. Are we going to allow ourselves to get taken advantage of again by a thief? Let's not allow him to laugh off his court cases. Let's not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of by the thief Revilla!)

Were these attacks enough to taint their reputation and stop them from getting back into power? It seems anti-Duterte influencers were not successful in doing so. Many Duterte-allied candidates who ran under his slate *Hugpong ng Pagbabago* like Bong Go, Bong Revilla, Bato dela Rosa, Pia Cayetano, Imee Marcos, Koko Pimentel, Francis Tolentino, and Cynthia Villar all won seats in the senate. That is 66.6% of the 12 senate seats that were up for grabs in the midterm elections. In contrast, there were no seats won by the opposition from the *Otso Diretso* slate.

B. Attacks on policy

Posts by pro-Duterte influencers that attack a policy usually pertain to the Aquino administration and what they see as policy failures of that administration. Because Aquino was once the leader of the opposition, posts that attack the policies under his administration help in highlighting that the Duterte administration is doing better than a government led by the opposition. For example, a post by Luminous contrasts the failures of the Aquino administration in responding to typhoon Yolanda versus Duterte's response to COVID-19:



Luminous by Trixie Cruz-Angeles & Ahmed Paglinawan

11 March 2020 · 🌐

Ah oo. Comparable nga yung Yolanda dito sa COVID19.

Yolanda: Over 10,000 (and much much more!) dead.4k on the first day alone.

COVID: 1 dead due to advanced stage of illness and vulnerability. Edit: 2 na po ang total as of last night.

Complain pa more.

Figure 5.21 A screenshot of a post by Luminous attacking the previous president for his failures in addressing a crisis caused by a typhoon in 2013. Through this attack, the post also defends Duterte from criticisms in the way he responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Translation: Oh yes. Maybe Yolanda is comparable to COVID-19. Yolanda: Over 10,000 (and much more!) dead. 4k on the first day alone. COVID 19: 1 dead due to an advanced stage of illness and vulnerability. Edit 2: There's now a total of two deaths as of last night. Go ahead and complain more.)]

However, the sentiment on COVID-19 policies are not similar across pro-Duterte influencers and sentiments change during the duration of the pandemic. A striking finding was that during the COVID-19 pandemic, pro-Duterte influencers also posted attacks on the policies that the Duterte administration implemented to fight the pandemic. However, these attacks were not directed to the president, whom they still lauded for his efforts, but rather attacks on how these policies were implemented.

For example, although Luminous earlier defended the government's COVID-19 response, they also later on attacked how the Bayanihan Heal As One law was implemented. The said law was controversial because according to its critics, it 'threatens our constitutional right to free expression and access to information' (Foundation for Media Alternatives, 2020) and 'is a double-edged sword which while presumably legislated for benevolent purposes may malevolently executed by authorities for their own ulterior motives'

(Strengthening Human Rights and Peace Research and Education in ASEAN, 2020). In many instances, this law was used to criminalise actions by the public deemed as an exaggeration of how this law was implemented:

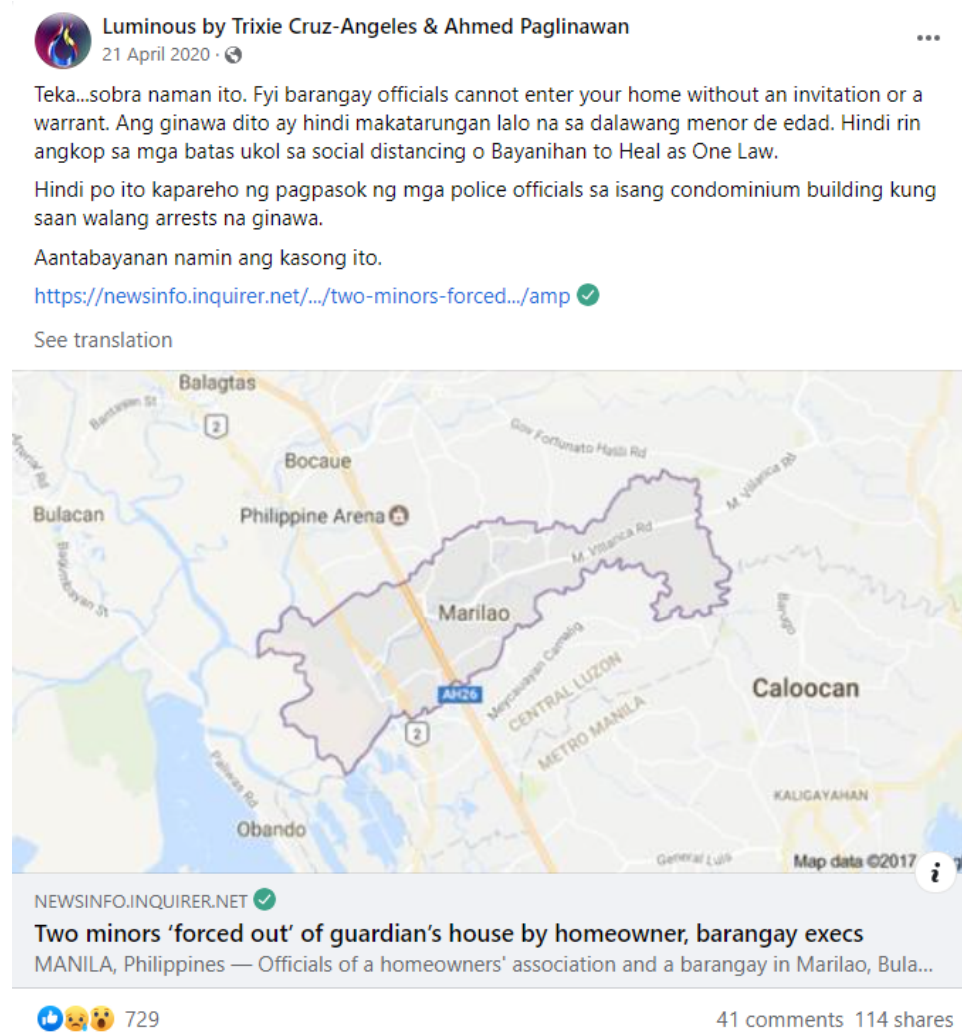


Figure 5.22 A screenshot of a post by Luminous attacking a policy implemented by Duterte to respond to the pandemic.

Meanwhile, anti-Duterte influencers post mostly about attacking policies rather than attacking a character or attacking both. This is not surprising, given the illiberal policies that were approved and implemented during Duterte's term, such as the war on drugs.

Dakila, notably, posted the most attacks on policies including the war on drugs, the closure of ABS-CBN, lowering the age of criminalising children, the handling of the West Philippine Sea dispute and the COVID-19 pandemic, and other human rights violations of the Duterte administration:

Here is an example of Dakila’s post about the war on drugs:

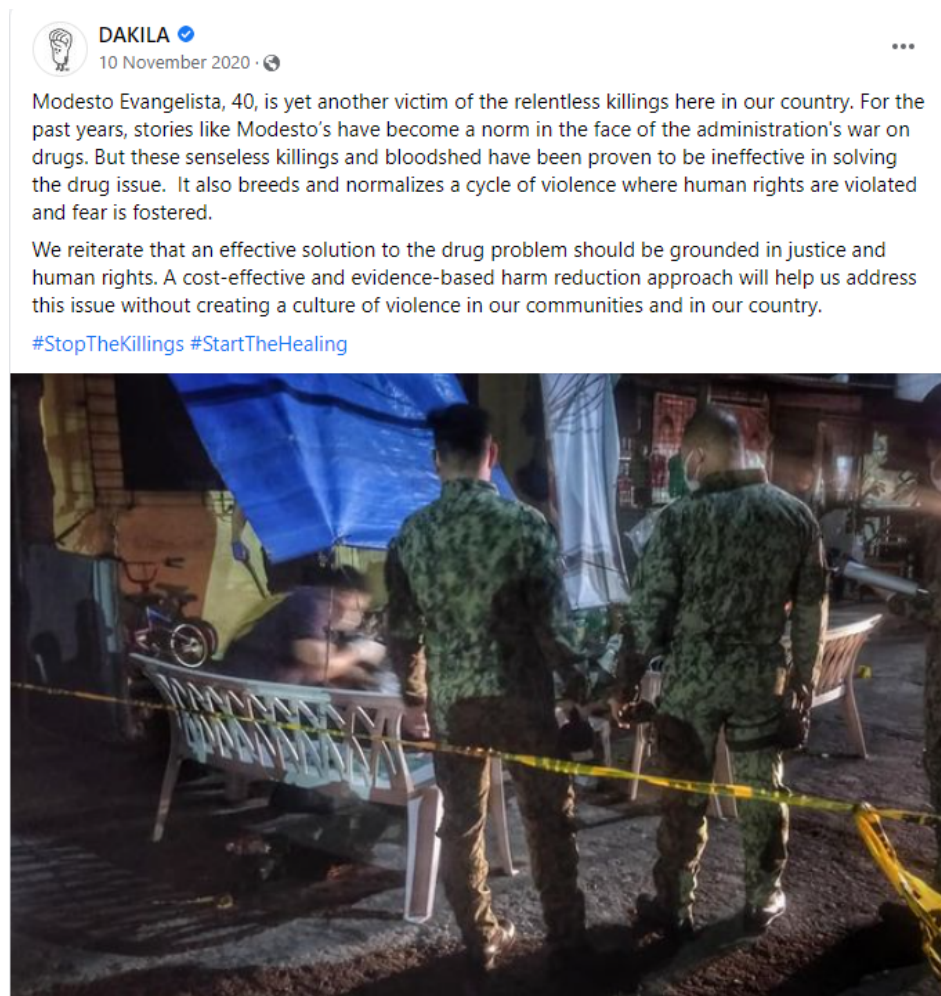


Figure 5.23 A screenshot of a post by Dakila attacking the war on drugs

Just like pro-Duterte influencers, anti-Duterte influencers also criticised the policies of the government in addressing the pandemic. The difference is that while pro-Duterte influencers did not blame Duterte himself for the failure to address the pandemic, anti-Duterte influencers attribute the failure to Duterte himself. A post by Silent No More says:

Silent No More PH
16 July 2020 · 🌐

Dear Fellow Filipinos,

Hindi flattening ng curve ang pinapakita ng mga numerong ito kundi ang epekto ng kapalpakan at katamaran ni Duterte na labanan ang pandemya. At ang kailangan para matugunan ang problemang ito ay mass testing, contact tracing, isolation at treatment ng mga pasyente, hindi ang kasinungalingan at pambibilog ng ulo na ginagawa ni Duque.

#SilentNoMorePH

See translation

Date	Total Number of Cases
APRIL 15	5,453
MAY 15	12,091
JUNE 15	26,420
JULY 15	58,850

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

👍👎🗨️ 2.2K

929 comments 527 shares

Figure 5.24 A screenshot of a post by Silent No More attacking Duterte’s policy on COVID-19.

(Translation: Dear Fellow Filipinos, the numbers show we are not flattening the curve but what we see are the effects of the failure and

laziness of Duterte to fight the pandemic. What we need to address this problem is mass testing, contact tracing, isolation, and treatment of patients, not the lies and flattery that Duque is doing. #SilentNoMorePH)

C. Attacks on character and policy

Linking attacks on policies to a personality is a tactical way to tarnish the reputation of a politician. Similar to the posts that attack policies, posts that attack both character and policy usually also pertain to the Aquino administration. The attacks on the policies are tied to the political figures behind them, tainting the reputation of said political figures.

For example, this post by Thinking Pinoy attacks former president Aquino and the mass vaccination policy against dengue, a viral infection from mosquitoes, which his administration implemented and which led to controversies due to children allegedly dying from the vaccine. Department of Health Secretary Duque calls these accusations ‘baseless, malicious, and counter-productive’ (Department of Health, n.d.). Although no substantial evidence has been submitted that links the Dengvaxia vaccine to the deaths of Filipino children, influencers like Thinking Pinoy attacked Aquino and his policy. According to Mendoza et al. (2021), the implementation of the mass vaccination was coherent with the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) at the time. The vaccine was also approved by the European Medicines Agency soon after and the WHO added Dengvaxia to the list of essential medicines (Mendoza et al., 2021). Despite this, pro-Duterte influencers weaponised Dengvaxia to target Aquino and his administration. But at what cost? Mendoza et al. (2021) found that vaccine confidence significantly dropped among Filipinos from 93% in 2015 to 32% in 2018, and was not limited to Dengvaxia alone. In the same study, the researchers found that the uptake on measles vaccine dropped from 88% in 2014 to 55% in 2018, leading to a 2,000% increase in measles cases from 2017-2019 (Mendoza et al., 2021). This shows that there can be real-life impacts when certain discourses thrive in the media.

Thinking Pinoy posted about Dengvaxia:

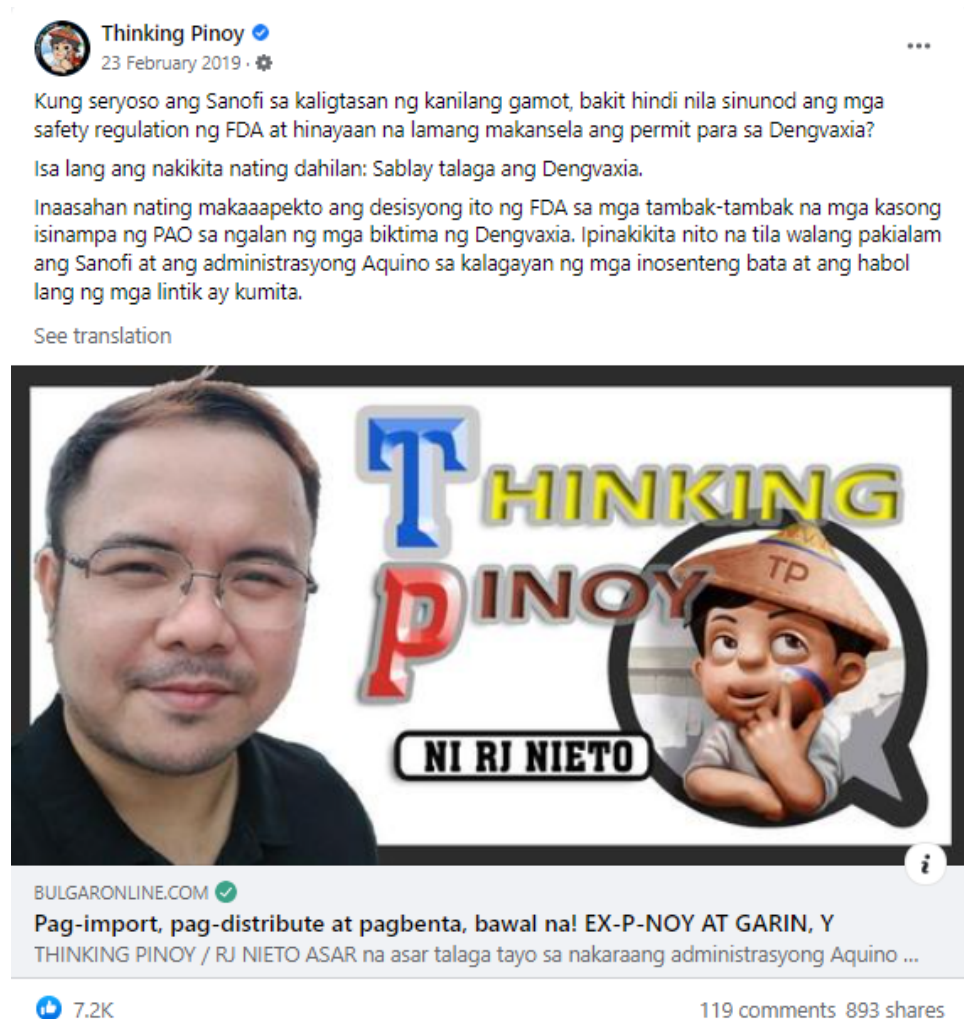


Figure 5.25 A screenshot of a post by Thinking Pinoy attacking Aquino’s policy on mass vaccination against Dengue fever using the Dengvaxia vaccine. At the same time, Thinking Pinoy attacks Aquino’s character, calling him indifferent to the situation of children who supposedly died from the vaccine.

(Translation: If Sanofi were serious about the safety of their vaccine, why didn't they follow the safety regulations of the FDA and why did they allow for their permit to be cancelled for Dengvaxia? We only see one reason: Dengvaxia is a failure. We expect that this decision by the FDA will have an effect on the mountain of cases that the PAO filed in the name of Dengvaxia victims. This shows that Sanofi and the Aquino administration

do not care about the condition of innocent children and all they care about is to earn money).

In attacking both character and policy, anti-Duterte influencers, like pro-Duterte influencers, attach the failure of a policy to the person behind its implementation.

For example, this by Superficial Gazette, attacking the lack of response to a water crisis as well as attacking Senator Angara for not taking his job and the matter seriously:

Superficial Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines
 15 March 2019 · 🌐

The [#DuterteWaterCrisis](#) does not only force Filipinos to suffer from thirst and heat. Because simple acts like taking a bath, flushing the toilet, and drinking enough water are now inaccessible, it means millions of Filipinos - especially children and the elderly - are at risk of all kinds of diseases.

Meanwhile, Duterte senatoriable Sonny Angara thinks it's all a matter of "sexy time."
[#HowLowCanYouGo](#) [#TrollIntelligently](#)



Millions of Filipinos have been suffering from the [#DuterteWaterCrisis](#) for more than a week, lining up for hours daily to get small rations.

Meanwhile, here's what one of Duterte's Senatorial candidates has to say.

Sonny Angara ✓
 @sonnyangara

Hirap mag Sexy Time kung naka Tabo lol 😂
[#showertogether](#) [#conservewater](#)
[#walangtubig](#) 🧡👨👧💧💧

12:22 PM - 15 Mar 2019

👍👎👏 Ernest Vincent C. Abanes, Garrick Bercero and 743 others 120 comments 350 shares

Figure 5.26 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette attacking Senator Angara for making fun of the water crisis, calling him a troll. Angara's tweet says, "It's difficult to have a sexy time when you're using a dipper." At the same time, the page attacks Duterte's policy on the water crisis.

5.3 Defending

Posts that defend are lower in number compared to posts that acclaim or attack. There were a total of 418 defenses posted. While the number of posts that attack are almost similar between pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers, pro-Duterte influencers used more defenses at 78% of the total number of defenses posted. On the other hand, anti-Duterte influencers only posed 22% of the total number of defenses.

Benoit (2005) said that defenses are used in response to attacks. Looking at the data on the number of posts that attack and the number of posts that defend, the data follows Benoit's theory. Because anti-Duterte influencers posted more attacks, pro-Duterte influencers posted more defenses. However, pro-Duterte influencers posted mostly defenses on policies (51%) despite getting more attacks on character, followed by the number of defenses on a character (37%), and least posted were defenses of both character and policy at (12%). Earlier, it was shown that pro-Duterte influencers posted mostly about attacking a character, here we see that anti-Duterte influencers posted mostly about defending a character (93%). In fact, there were only a total of seven posts (7%) by anti-Duterte influencers that defend a policy and there were no posts by anti-Duterte influencers that defend both a character and a policy.

However, the number of defenses by anti-Duterte influencers seem disproportionate to the number of attacks faced by the opposition. If you remember, there were 977 attacks by pro-Duterte influencers, but there were only 91 posts from anti-Duterte influencers that defend. On the other hand, I found 1,231 attacks by anti-Duterte influencers and now see a more significant number of defenses by pro-Duterte influencers at 327 posts.

In the introduction to this chapter, I found evidence that Duterte's approval rating remained high throughout his six years in office. In contrast, Leni Robredo found it difficult to restore her image and found it was too late when her team decided to defend themselves from the attack of trolls and from disinformation perpetuated by some of these influencers. This reflects the data that pro-Duterte influencers posted more defenses overall than anti-Duterte influencers. It can be surmised that this lack of proactively

defending characters who were targets of the anti-Duterte influencers have had an impact on the 2019 and 2022 elections.

Total number of posts that defend, by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

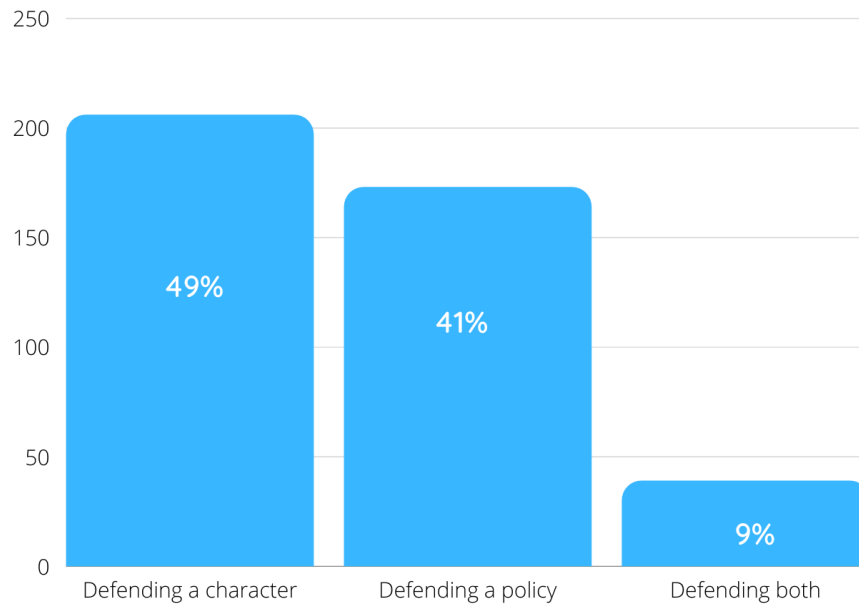


Figure 5.27 A graph showing the total number of defenses by all ten influencers

Comparing the number of posts that defend: pro-Duterte vs anti-Duterte influencers

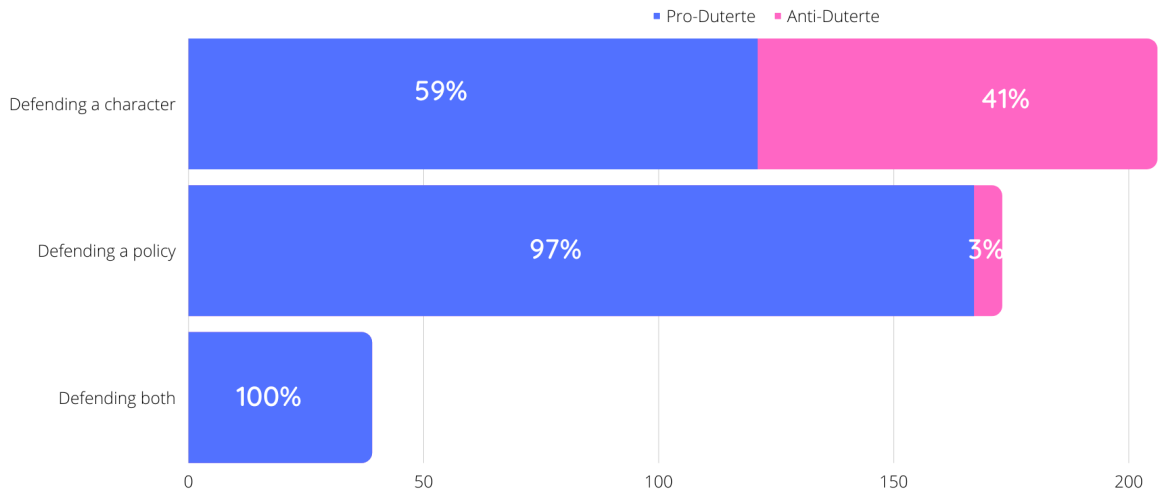


Figure 5.28 A graph comparing the total number of defenses by pro-Duterte influencers versus anti-Duterte influencers

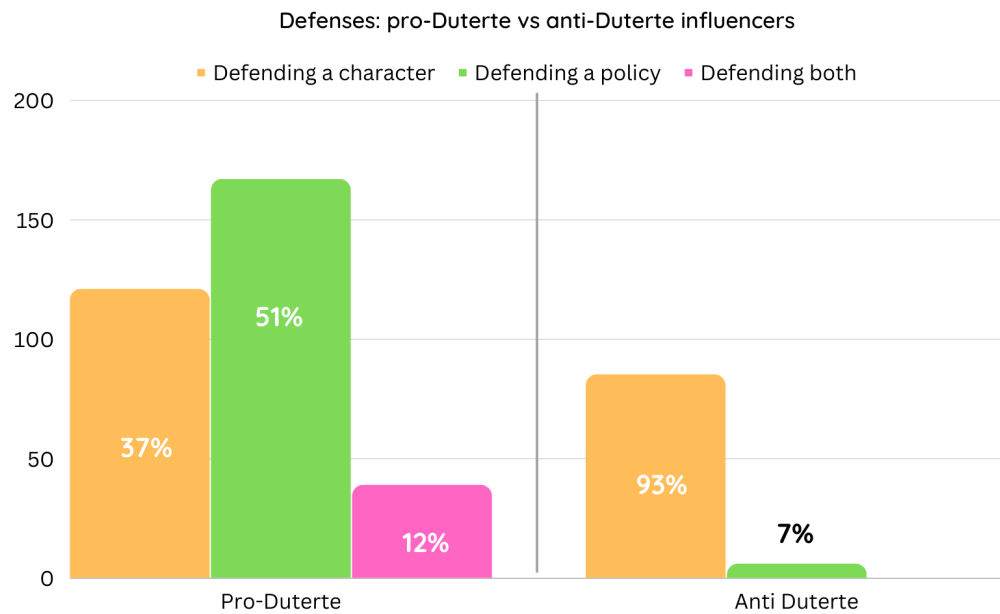


Figure 5.29 A graph comparing the total number of defending a character, defending a policy, and defending both character and policy, between pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

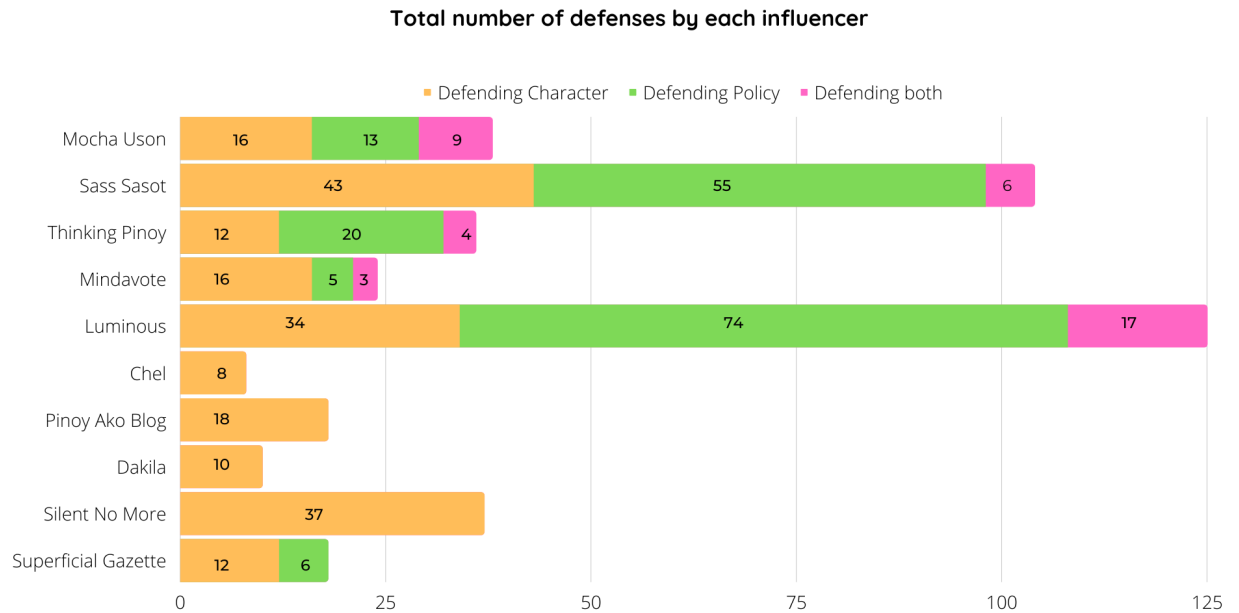


Figure 5.30 A graph showing the total number of defending a character, defending a policy, and defending both character and policy posted by each influencer

A. Defending a character

Defenses on characters posted by pro-Duterte influencers mostly defend Duterte himself, but can also defend themselves from attacks by the opposition.

Mindavote posts about defending Duterte from the opposition calling him a dictator. Interestingly, the post does not defend him by correcting his image, but by attacking the Aquino family who they believe leads the opposition.:



Figure 5.31 A screenshot of a post by Mindavote defending Duterte’s human rights violations

(Translation: The Aquino’s and people surrounding them really have the confidence to call Duterte a dictator. They make people scared of Martial Law. They keep damaging the reputation of the government because of human rights issues. But do you know the truth behind the Aquino legacy? What are they hiding when it comes to events like the Mendiola Massacre?)

Most posts by anti-Duterte influencers were about defending a character. Because many of the attacks by pro-Duterte influencers focused on Leni Robredo, most of the posts by anti-Duterte influencers also defended Leni Robredo.

An example of a post that defends Leni Robredo's character is from Superficial Gazette, defending her from being called 'lazy' by Duterte supporters:

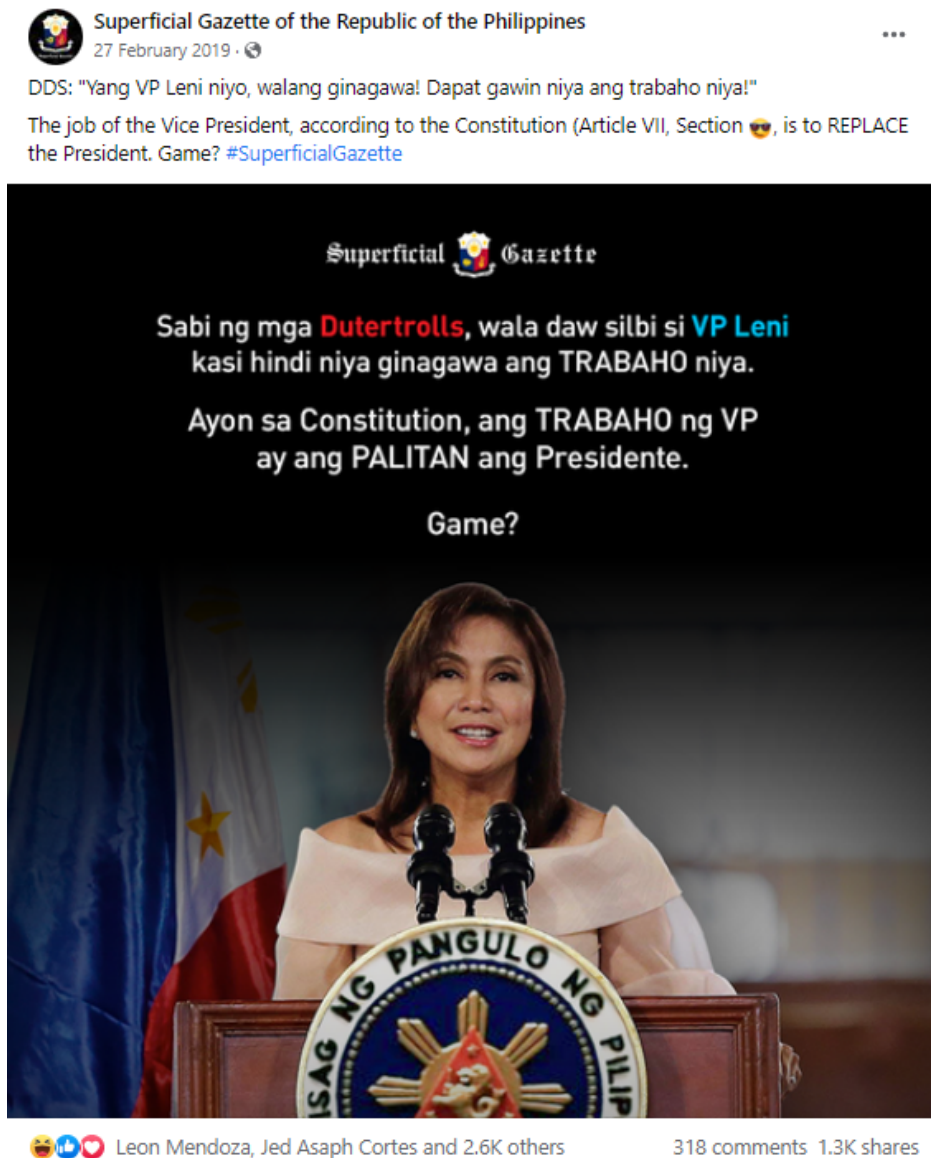


Figure 5.32 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette defending Leni Robredo's character from trolls who call her lazy

(Translation of caption: DDS: Your Vice President Leni doesn't do anything! She should start doing her job! The job of the Vice President, according to the Constitution (Article VII, Section 8), is to REPLACE the President. Game? #SuperficialGazette

Translation of text on image: According to the Duterte trolls, VP Leni is useless because she doesn't do her job. According to the constitution, the work of the VP is to take the place of the president. Game?)

B. Defending a policy

Most posts that defend a policy come from Luminous, followed by Sass Sasot. This is not surprising given the image they portray on social media. Luminous, a page run by lawyers Trixi Angeles and Ahmed Paglinawan, mostly posts explainers on laws and policies of the Duterte administration. Sass, who presents herself as an international scholar who teaches at a Dutch university, also posts analyses of policies, mostly about the arbitral decision of the West Philippine Sea.

For example, in a post, Sass defends Duterte's inaction over ships that were found to be in the territory of the Philippines. She quotes the article she published for the Manila Times, where she is a columnist:

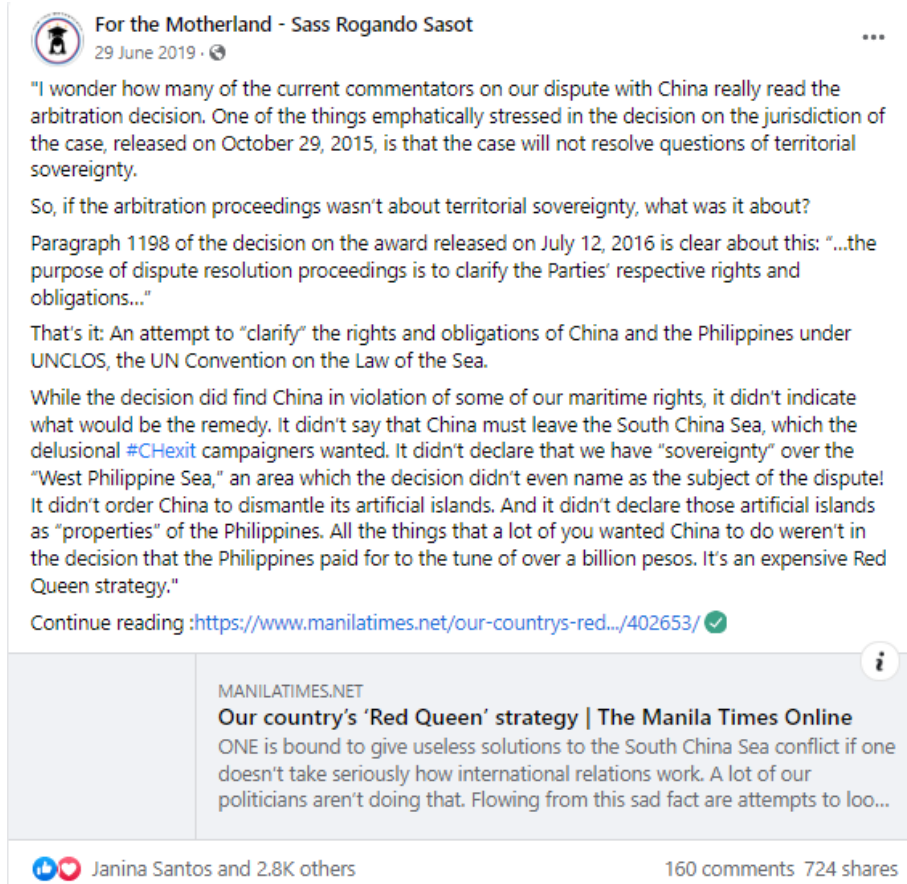


Figure 5.33 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot defending Duterte’s policy on China-Philippine relations, specifically the West Philippine Sea dispute

On the other hand, only six out of the 2,276 posts by anti-Duterte influencers defended the policy. This can be attributed to the fact that there are fewer laws and policies to defend in the Duterte era, where most laws and policies have reflected the illiberal regime. All of these posts are from the Superficial Gazette, defending the SOGIE equality bill which was being blocked by Duterte and his allies from being passed into law. One example of their post:



Figure 5.34 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette defending the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Equality Bill (SOGIE Bill)

C. Defending a character and a policy

Posts that defend both a character and a policy by anti-Duterte influencers usually defend Duterte from being blamed for a failed implementation of a policy. On the other hand, there were no posts by anti-Duterte influencers that defend both a character and a policy.

For example, this post by Luminous defends Duterte and a controversial law that would have allowed criminals jailed for heinous crimes to be released. Aside from defending the law by explaining it, Luminous also shifts the blame from Duterte to Leila de Lima and the previous administration:

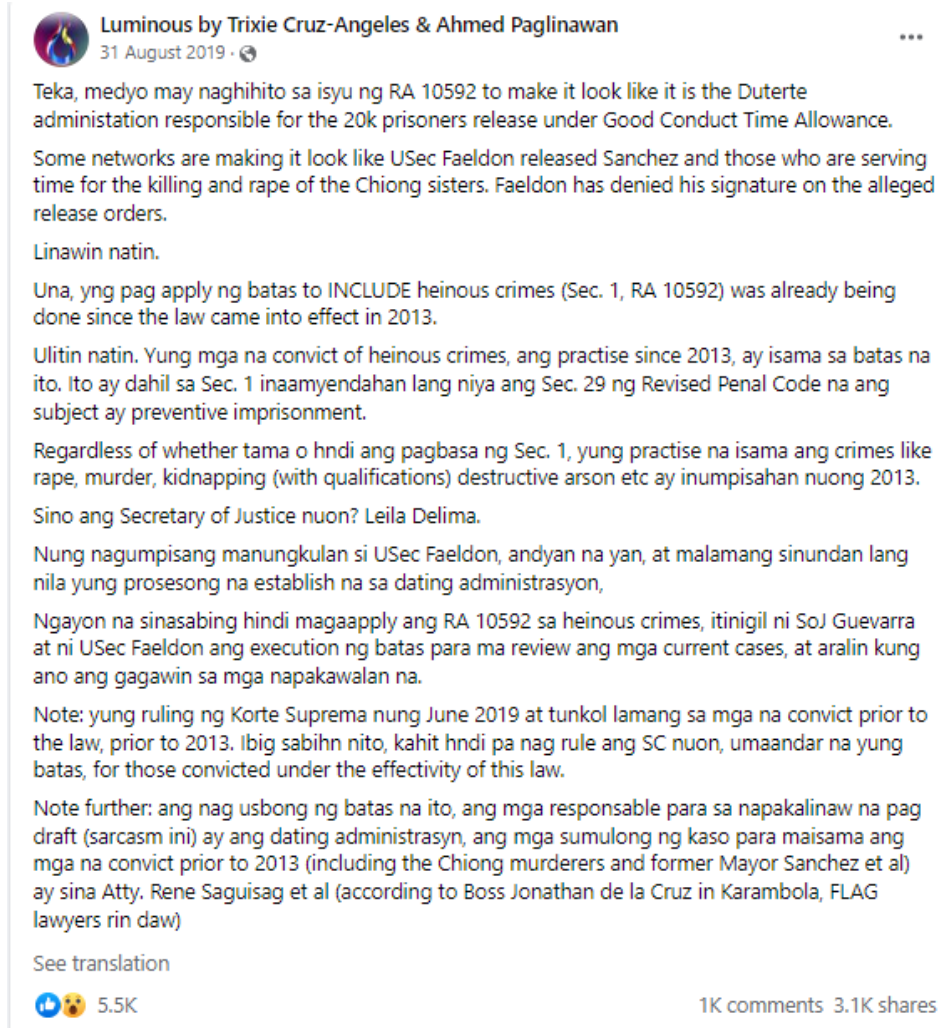


Figure 5.35 A screenshot of a post by Luminous defending a policy

(Translation: Wait, people are trying to make it look like the Duterte administration is responsible for 20k prisoners that have been released under Good Conduct Time Allowance under RA 10592. Some networks are making it look like Usec Faeldon released Sanchez and those who are serving time for the killing and rape of the Chiong sisters. Let's be clear. First, the law that includes heinous crimes (Sec. 1, RA 10592) has already been done since the law came into effect in 2013. Who was the Secretary of Justice then? Leila De Lima. ...Note further: The ones responsible for this law, and the ones responsible for the clear draft (this is sarcasm) of its implementation is the previous administration.)

5.4 Summary

In this chapter, I set out to find the role of influencers in using William Benoit's functional approach to shape the image of the Rodrigo Duterte era. I presented the findings on how claims, attacks, and defenses were used by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers to boost or maintain the good image of a political figure, taint a person's identity, or restore confidence in people who were previously subjects of attacks. This section will summarise what I found in the analysis and if the hypotheses made were correct.

First, it was earlier hypothesised that pro-Duterte influencers will use more acclaims than attacks or defenses to help retain his trustworthiness and approval rating among his supporters while anti-Duterte influencers will use more acclaims to acclaim political figures in the opposition, to help build their image and help them get elected into the senate and congress, especially in the 2019 midterm elections. Based on the data, I found this hypothesis incorrect. In total, there were more attacks than acclaims for both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Additionally, it was found that they tend to use comparisons and contrasts to highlight how one person is better than the other, using the good versus evil rhetoric. Whereby words that are used to describe Duterte and Duterte-aligned officials include 'corrupt,' 'tyrant,' 'misogynist' and words that are used to describe the opposition include 'decent,' 'smart,' 'good.' As such, while pro-Duterte influencers focus on acclaiming a character, the acclaims on a character made by anti-Duterte influencers are usually coupled with an attack on another character.

Given the highly personalised politics in the Philippines, the second hypothesis in this chapter is that character comments will be more frequent than policy comments in political discourse, both for pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Character comments will therefore be used more often to acclaim, attack, or defend. The analysis of the data found this hypothesis to be true. While there were more attacks posted in total by anti-Duterte influencers, pro-Duterte influencers posted more character attacks. In fact, the data shows that 72% of all acclaims posted were acclaims on a character, 66% of all the attacks posted were attacks on character, and 49% of all defenses defended a character. This highlights the different political landscape in the Philippines, which is based on personality politics. While Western politics tend to focus on

policy discussions as is usually found in case studies in Western countries using Benoit's theory, Philippine politics rely on character discussions the most.

The last hypothesis for this chapter is that pro-Duterte influencers (protecting and/or working for incumbents) will acclaim and defend more in order to sustain Duterte's popularity; they will also attack more to smear the names of the opposition making it difficult for them to win the next elections. Based on the data, the first part of the hypothesis is correct: pro-Duterte influencers posted more acclaims and defenses than anti-Duterte influencers. However, attacks were used more by anti-Duterte influencers, perhaps a revelation given that prior observations would point to pro-Duterte influencers as those who would instigate an attack. However, while both groups used mostly attacks on character, the data shows that pro-Duterte influencers largely focused on character attacks (90% of the group's attacks were on character) more than anti-Duterte influencers (47% of the group's attacks were on character). Anti-Duterte influencers posted more policy attacks (27%) or combining policy and character attacks (26%) compared to the policy attacks (5%) and combined policy and character attacks (5%) by pro-Duterte influencers. This data shows that aside from focusing on character alone, anti-Duterte influencers also leveraged on the policy failures of the Duterte administration.

I want to expand on attacks more. Out of Benoit's identified rhetorical devices, the most used was attack. There was a difference in the way attacks were carried out by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Pro-Duterte influencers' attacks smear the names of the opposition and people who criticise Duterte and his policies based on ad hominem personal attacks sometimes border on hate speech. These attacks focused on the opposition in power such as Vice President Leni Robredo, Senators Risa Hontiveros, Franklin Drilon, Kiko Pangilinan, Leila de Lima, and Antonio Trillanes. On the other hand, attacks on character by anti-Duterte influencers usually use evidence-based attacks rather than ad hominem attacks. For example, attacks made by anti-Duterte influencers against Bong Revilla and Jinggoy Estrada would mention his cases of corruption, as evidenced by court decisions. In chapter 7, I will expand on these attacks and what its relationship with incivility, intolerance, and hate speech.

Last, following Benoit's theory that defenses reply to previous attacks, and assuming there would have been more attacks posted by pro-Duterte influencers against the opposition, it would have followed that anti-Duterte influencers should have posted more defenses than pro-Duterte influencers to help the image of political figures from the opposition. On the other hand, while there would have been attacks from anti-Duterte influencers, it was expected that being an incumbent, pro-Duterte influencers would have posted less defenses and will instead focus on acclaiming Duterte and his policies. This was proven wrong on both points. First, there were more attacks by anti-Duterte influencers and therefore, pro-Duterte influencers posted more defenses. However, it should also be noted that anti-Duterte influencers posted fewer defenses in proportion to attacks by pro-Duterte influencers. In contrast, it seemed that pro-Duterte influencers took time to defend Duterte and his policies from the attacks by anti-Duterte influencers and critics.

The findings are in line not only with Benoit's theory but as well as in Robredo's admission that they did not act on the attacks as much as they could, which made it more difficult for her to restore her public image. While Benoit (2001) argues that defending can be counterproductive as it can remind the public about controversial issues, in this case, defending a character and their policy stands could have had an implication in the results of the 2022 national elections. This is of course not to say that there is a causal relationship between defending a character would help their chances of getting elected to office. I merely argue, based on evidence, that the lack of early defenses made it more difficult for political figures such as Leni Robredo to separate herself from stigmas such as being called, '*Leni lugaw*', which was still being used against her when she ran for office in the 2022 elections, even after she owned the name by serving free rice porridge to the public.

In this chapter, it was presented how influencers play an important role in shaping the image of political figures. Rodrigo Duterte was able to hold on to a high approval rating amidst the controversies that his administration faced. Meanwhile, opposition figures like Leni Robredo, who arguably has achieved a lot during her stint as Vice President, still face the stigma brought about by the attacks that she failed to defend herself from. This lack of defenses by the opposition would also see her lose the 2022 national elections and to her admission, Robredo

believed that because of her lack of response to these attacks, it made it more difficult for her and her campaign team to clear her name and correct disinformation. This chapter has proven that acclaims, attacks, and defenses are powerful not only during formal electoral campaigns but by using them in permanent campaigning, they have the power to make or break candidates. The next chapter dives deeper into the topics of human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations and looks at the rhetorical devices and strategies used by the ten influencers in the discourse around these issues.

Chapter 6

The year of tactical thinking

In the last chapter, I analysed the rhetorical devices used by ten opinion-forming pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers in trying to shape public discourse during the President's term in office. Through applying Benoit's functional approach theory, insights were gained into how certain illiberal policies pursued by the Duterte government were acclaimed, attacked, or defended by both defenders and detractors. This chapter complements and deepens this analysis by taking a closer look at three of the President's most controversial policies by focusing on how the discourse was shaped by the ten featured influencers. The topics in question are human rights and law and order, the COVID-19 pandemic, and China-Philippine relations. In analysing these I explore how the influencers tried to persuade their audiences. Having first identified the rhetorical appeals and devices deployed, I consider which of these were the more effective in engaging their audiences?

6.1 Rhetorical devices

The variables that were used to analyse the three chosen topics are based on previous published literature on rhetorical devices used in political discourse as well as rhetorical devices deduced from the content of the posts. The rhetorical devices which were looked at to analyse the three topics are: facts, knowledge, an/or information; quotes; collective appeal; personal appeal; and call to action. According to Aristotle, there are three ways to persuade an audience: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. Logos is the appeal to reason (Ross, 2020), ethos refers to the credibility of the writer or the speaker (Lutzke and Henggeler, 2009), and pathos appeals to the "sympathetic imagination" and the appeal to other people's beliefs or values (Lutzke and Henggeler, 2009). These three are not exclusive of each other and sometimes, a better argument is presented when more than one rhetorical device is used. For example, using information or knowledge can be considered as both logos and ethos, as the information presented to the audience can help in

logical reasoning, but will only be believable if the source or the writer/speaker has credibility. In this case, *logos* and *ethos* work together to persuade the audience.

One way to present a logical argument is to present facts, statistics, knowledge and/or information. In this analysis, I add probable information as part of the analysis given that disinformation has proliferated in the digital political discourse in the Philippines. Like in the example above, persuasion through using information will only be believable depending on the credibility of the speaker. Do we know they are telling the truth? Do we believe them nonetheless? In the last chapter, it was presented that attacks in character were used to tarnish the reputation of certain personalities. In Chapter 2 I also mentioned about the growing distrust of media in the Philippines, creating the term ‘presstitutes’, with influencers like Mocha Uson and Thinking Pinoy selling narratives that journalists like Maria Ressa are not to be trusted with information and are ‘biased’. This has led to certain groups of people, particularly Duterte supporters, who believe that mainstream opinion-forming media companies in the Philippines, like ABS-CBN and Rappler, are not to be trusted. Journalists have also been red-tagged, labelled as communists and state enemies by the police and military (Chua, 2021). This has led to a decline in trust among news channels/brands, especially in brands like ABS-CBN and Rappler who criticise the Duterte administration. In 2021, Rappler only had 45% trust rating while ABS-CBN had 57% trust rating among Filipinos (Reuters Institute, 2021). GMA Network, who remains fairly neutral on political issues, has the highest trust rating at 74% (Reuters Institute, 2021).

On the other end of the spectrum, the trust rating for information found on social media is also low. According to the same study by Reuters Institute (2021), only 20% of Filipinos trust news in social media, especially information about the COVID-19 pandemic from government, politicians and political parties, and ordinary people. Due to the amount of misinformation and disinformation in political discourse in the Philippines, Facebook has partnered with Rappler and VERA Files as third-party fact checkers of the social media platform (Magsambol, 2018). This has, however, been met with resistance from Duterte supporters and has led to the fact-checking of fact-checkers. Government spokesperson Salvador Panelo criticised Facebook for choosing Rappler as its partner but also believes that people will be more discerning on who to believe, an

example of how the government sows mistrust on journalists. In a statement published in the Philippine News Agency (2019), Panelo says:

“Our people have become more knowledgeable and more discerning in reading and analyzing the news. They too have become more critical against those licensed media companies which resort to negative propaganda and biased and distorted stories. As such, we leave the matter to the netizens in determining which online media outlet they wish to patronize or believe in.”

Therefore, it can be assumed that the credibility of the information presented, based on who shared it, is largely based on the perception of the audience, and most likely, their political biases.

While on the subject of *ethos*, quotes are another way of using *ethos* to persuade the audience. Witt (2018) argues that using quotes from other people, especially people who are famous, can make it seem like they agree with your ideas. Additionally, given the highly personalised politics in the Philippines, quoting other influential people only adds to the credibility and the persuasiveness of an argument.

Aristotle, in *Ars Rhetorica*, says,

“The orator persuades by means of his hearers, when they are aroused to emotions by his speech; for the judgements we deliver are not the same when we are influenced by joy or sorrow, love or hate.” (Aristotle, Book 1 Chapter 2 Section5)

According to a survey by Gallup, Filipinos ranked as one of the most emotional populations in the world (Cabico, 2019). The study looked at emotions felt by Filipinos in their day-to-day lives, with worry, sadness, and anger being three of the most experienced emotions by Filipinos (Cabico, 2019). Other countries like Niger, Ecuador, and Liberia were also ranked as the most emotional countries in 2020 (Cabico, 2019). In contrast, Gallup found that the least emotional

country was Singapore, followed by Georgia, Lithuania, and Russia (Clifton, 2012). As an emotional population, it can be argued that emotional appeals, or *pathos*, have a big role to play in persuasion.

For emotional appeal, I look specifically at two appeals to emotions: collective appeal and personal appeal. Collective and personal appeals can help gain the sympathy of the audience by identifying as being one of them or by speaking to them directly. Aside from being one of the most emotional populations in the world, it is said that Filipinos value *kapwa*, the notion of the shared self extended to others, and is, in fact, the “core of Filipino personhood” (Kapwahan, n.d.). According to Enriquez (1992), it is the “unity of one of us and the other”. In collective appeals and personal appeals, one can see reflections of *kapwa*, being able to identify with others, being able to invite them to join collectives and connecting personally with them, can help touch their emotions and therefore persuade the audience better.

Collective appeal uses the pronoun ‘we’ and ‘our’ or in Filipino, ‘*tayo*’ and ‘*atin*’. Personal appeals use the word ‘you’ or in Filipino, ‘*ikaw*’, and ‘*ka*’. In the study by Gerodimos and Justinussen (2010) looking at Obama’s digital campaign in 2012, they found that 71.8% of Obama’s campaign posts on Facebook used collective and/or personal appeal, which they attributed to the more direct and personal mode of communication in Facebook.

Last, calls to action were looked at as a variable. Call to actions can prompt the readers to take some form of direct action, whether online or offline. They can also be coupled with personal appeals or collective appeals. For example, posts such as, “Will you allow your children to be criminalised? Join us at the protest tomorrow near the Supreme Court to fight for your children’s rights” both uses a personal appeal and call to action. Call to actions usually employ all three – ethos, pathos, logos – to be effective. Audiences would usually heed the call to action if 1.) they find the source of the call to action as credible; 2.) the argument made for the call to action is logical; and 3.) the appeal can touch on their emotions.

The use of rhetorical devices and appeals by the featured influencers takes place in the specific context of three of the most important and intensive debates during the Duterte era. The

following section explores their particular significance and with it the rationale for their inclusion in this study.

6.2 Defining Issues: Human rights and law and order, COVID 19, and China-Philippine relations

The protection of human rights in the Philippines have been in danger under Duterte's government due to illiberal policies that masquerade as a necessary tool to implement law and order in the country. The war on drugs, for example, has facilitated unlawful killings and other human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2021). Other issues include the passage of the Anti-terrorism law, which threatens human rights defenders and activists wrongly accused of terrorism; human rights violations amidst the COVID-19 pandemic; red-tagging, illegal arrests, and harassment of journalists and activists; killings of indigenous peoples and farmers fighting for their land; and possibilities of arbitrary arrests and unfair trials through the introduction of new bills like the amendment of the Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 (Amnesty International, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021; US Department of State, 2021). This has led to the International Criminal Court to open an investigation into Duterte's war on drugs for the "widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population took place pursuant to or in furtherance of a state policy" (Regencia, 2021a).

The discourse about human rights has been polarising since Duterte's rise to power. Stalwarts of human rights have continued to fight for its protection, while Duterte and his supporters have undermined its importance. Duterte has branded human rights as a western concept, the defence of criminals rather than the protection of the weak and the vulnerable (Juego, 2018). Juego suggests that the discourse put forward by Duterte and his supporters is the destruction of human rights virtues – universality, inalienability, indivisibility, and interdependence.

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the defining moments of the Duterte government. It tested the Duterte government's capacity to respond to a crisis that the country has not seen before. As I found out in the last chapter, the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic drew criticisms not only from anti-Duterte influencers but also from pro-Duterte influencers. A study

by Hapal (2021) argues that Duterte's response to COVID-19 was to securitise it, framing the pandemic as a war and thereby justifying draconian responses to suppress the spread of the virus. Duterte's response to the pandemic, which focused on security rather than health, was scrutinised by different organisations, with the hashtags #MassTestingNow #OustDuterte becoming a trend on Twitter. Despite having one of the longest and strictest lockdowns in the world, a crippling foreign debt of PhP1.31 trillion (\$24.7B) (de Vera, 2022), Hong et al. (2021) of Bloomberg (2021) still rated the Philippines as one of the worst places to be during the pandemic and fell to last place in its COVID resilience ranking.

Quintos (2020) points to the reactive, ad hoc, and inadequate response of the government, with the underlying problem of a weak healthcare system, causing the failure in the COVID-19 response of the Duterte administration. During the pandemic, the country was suffering from over-capacitated and understaffed hospitals; lack of equipment, beds, and medicines; and inefficient contact tracing, quarantine, and isolation (Chiu, 2021).

Uhyeng and Carley's (2020) study on hate speech in the Philippines during the COVID19 pandemic shows that political identities were targets of hateful discussions on Twitter and humans, rather than bots, engaged more in these discussions. This hate speech can be traced to a more polarised public and the failure of the government to curb the pandemic, as well as the ongoing tensions between the Philippines and China over the West Philippine Sea territorial claims (Uhyeng and Carley, 2020).

Another polarising issue during the Duterte government is the relationship between the Philippines and China. Perhaps one of the most controversial issues in this topic is the territorial dispute in the West Philippine Sea. In the last chapter, it was briefly discussed how the Duterte government decided to take a different approach on the issue in comparison to his predecessor, Benigno Aquino III. While the Aquino government chose to pursue the Philippines' territorial claim to the West Philippine Sea, which led to an international tribunal in The Hague to rule in favour of the Philippines (Rola and Limpot, 2021), Duterte's actions seem to favour smoother relations with China.

Although part of Duterte's campaign promise in 2016 was to take action against China's movement in the West Philippine Sea where the Philippines has economic rights, his regime is riddled with contrasting actions and statements (Rola and Limpot, 2021). For example, in 2017, Duterte said the government cannot stop Beijing from building structures on disputed territory saying that the Philippines cannot risk going to war with a global superpower (Rola and Limpot, 2021). Duterte also allowed the Chinese government to 'explore' Benham Rise, also a part of the Philippine territory, because 'no Filipino could do it' (Santos, 2018) and in 2018, both governments signed a memorandum of understanding for a joint exploration of oil and gas in the disputed territory. Perhaps one of the more controversial events happened in 2019, when a Chinese vessel hit a Filipino fisherman boat near Recto Bank, leaving 222 fishermen floating at sea before being rescued by a Vietnamese vessel (Rola and Limpot, 2022). Duterte downplayed the argument, calling it a 'little maritime incident.'

However in 2020, the Philippines filed a new diplomatic protest against China over the creation of new districts in Philippine territory (Gregorio, 2020). Another diplomatic protest was filed in 2021 over the presence of more than 200 maritime militia vessels at the Julian Felipe Reef, area within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (CNN Philippines a, 2021). But in 2021, Duterte made a statement saying the arbitral win against China was a mere scrap of paper he can throw in the bin (CNN Philippines b, 2021).

These actions and statements were met with polarising views among Filipinos. Some influencers like Sass Sasot have been vocal in supporting the views of Duterte, as can be seen in some examples from the previous chapter, acclaiming Duterte's policies where the West Philippine Sea is involved. In this section, I look at how pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers used rhetorical devices to persuade their audience in which stand to take in the issues that surround China-Philippine relations.

6.3 Exploring the Influencers at Work

Conscious of the three critical issues identified and based on previous studies, evidence, current events, and observation I have four main hypotheses:

H4. Pro-Duterte influencers will use more probable information to talk about the issues while anti-Duterte influencers will use more sourced information to talk about them

H5. Pro-Duterte influencers will quote government officials and political organisations more while anti-Duterte influencers will use more quotes from other experts (journals, news, academia etc)

H6. Both Pro-Duterte and Anti-Duterte influencers will use collective and personal appeals to gain support from their audience but given the time the data was collected, both groups will use collective appeal and personal appeal to talk about the COVID-19 pandemic more than human rights and law and order, and China-Philippine relations

H7. Anti-Duterte influencers will use online and offline call to actions to protest against Duterte and his policies, while pro-Duterte influencers will use online and offline call to actions to ask the audience different ways to support Duterte and his policies. If violent calls to action are found, these will be quoting or sharing Duterte's statements about certain policies (i.e. killing of drug lords)

This section is divided into the main rhetorical devices that were analysed: Facts/Information, Quotes, Collective Appeal, Personal Appeal, and Call to Action. In each section I look at how these rhetorical devices were used to discuss human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations. Further, I compare and contrast how pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers used these rhetorical devices.

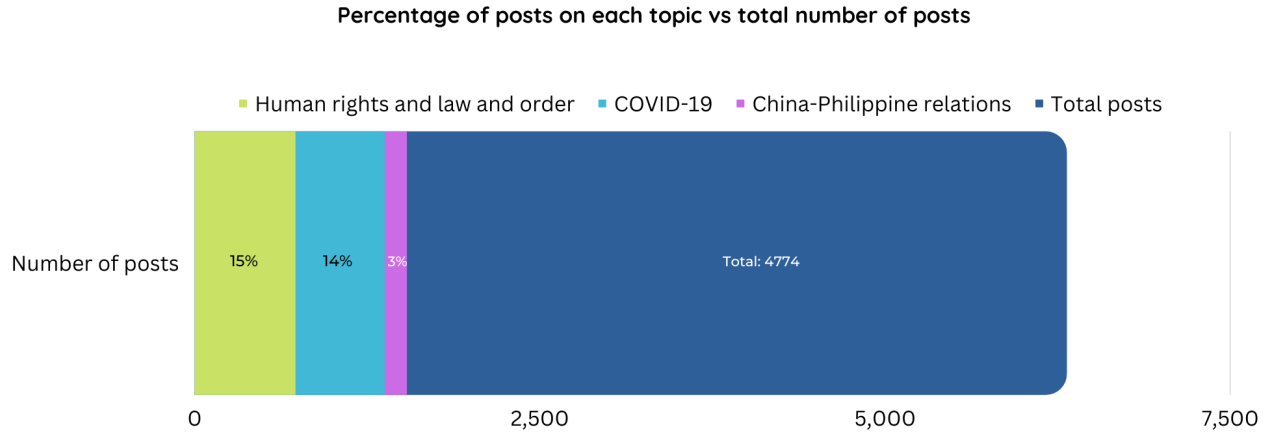


Figure 6.1 A graph showing the total number of posts by the ten influencers that talk about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and Philippine-China relations

Before I go specific to each rhetorical device, I first have an overview of how much pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers post about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations (*figure 6.1*). Out of the total of 4774 post analysed, 15% talked about human rights and law and order related issues, 14% talked about COVID, and 3% talked about China-Philippine relations.

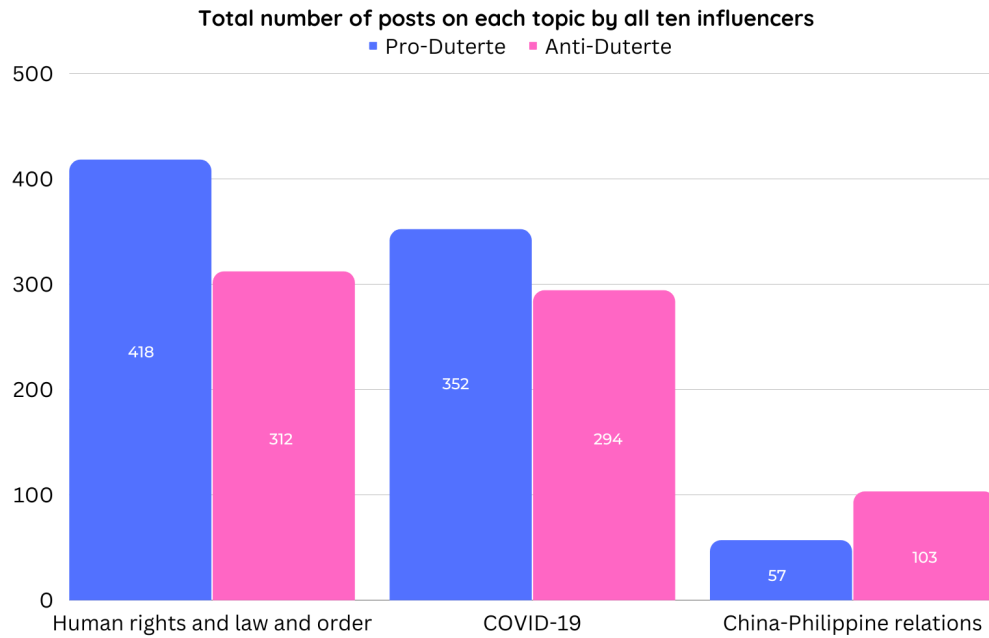


Figure 6.2 A graph comparing the total number of posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers that talk about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and Philippine-China relations

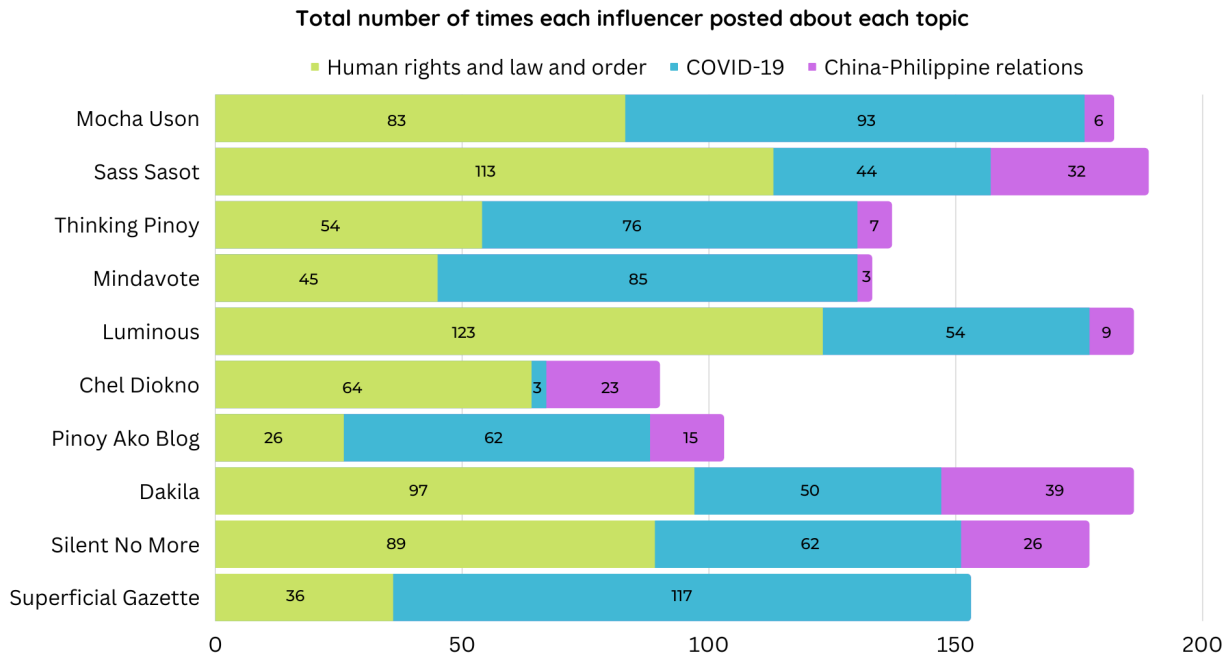


Figure 6.3 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each of the ten influencers that talk about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and Philippine-China relations

Looking at the two groups separately, pro-Duterte influencers had 827 posts talking about all of the three topics (*reference graphic above here*). Of this 827, 50% was about human rights and law and order, 43% was about COVID-19, and 7% was about China-Philippine relations. On the other hand, anti-Duterte influencers had a total of 709 posts talking about all of the three topics. Of this 709, 44% talked about issues on human rights and law and order, 41% talked about COVID-19, and 15% talked about China-Philippine relations. It can be seen that anti-Duterte influencers talked about China-Philippine relations more than twice the amount of times than pro-Duterte influencers. However, looking at the overall picture, the total number of times that the three topics have been posted are similar in proportion to the total number of posts.

I. Facts, knowledge, and information

In total 707 posts by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers that talked about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations were found to use facts/information as a rhetorical device (*figure 6.4*).

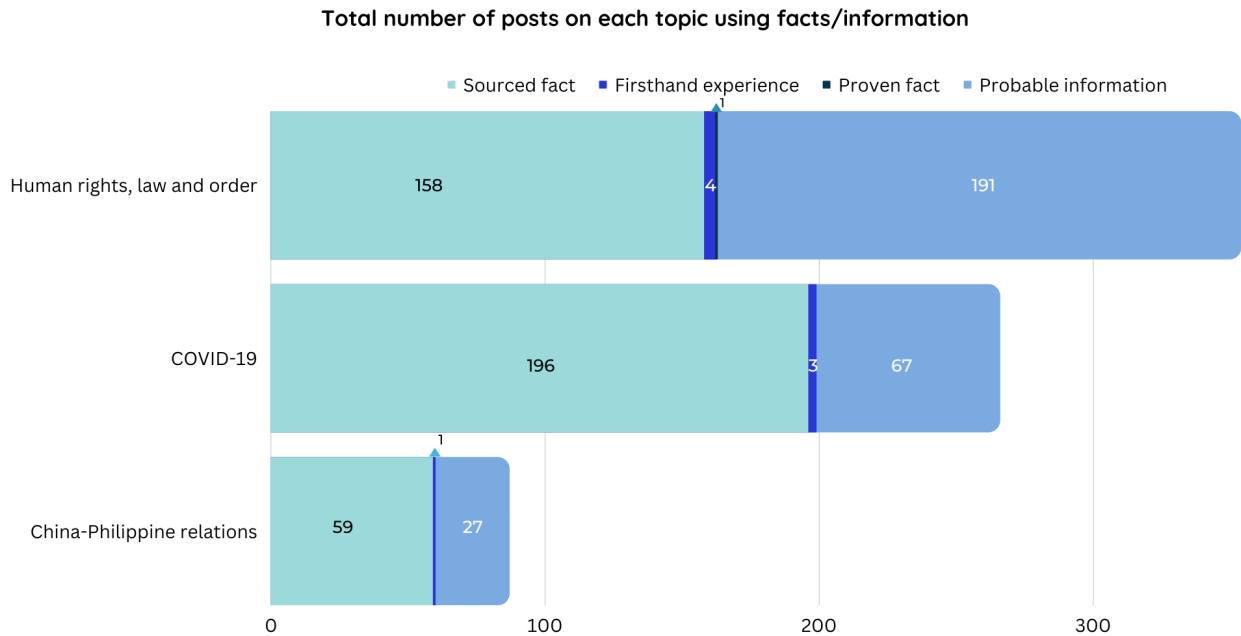


Figure 6.4 A graph showing the total number of posts using facts/information for each of the three topics

Total number of posts on each topic using facts/information, pro-Duterte vs anti-Duterte influencers

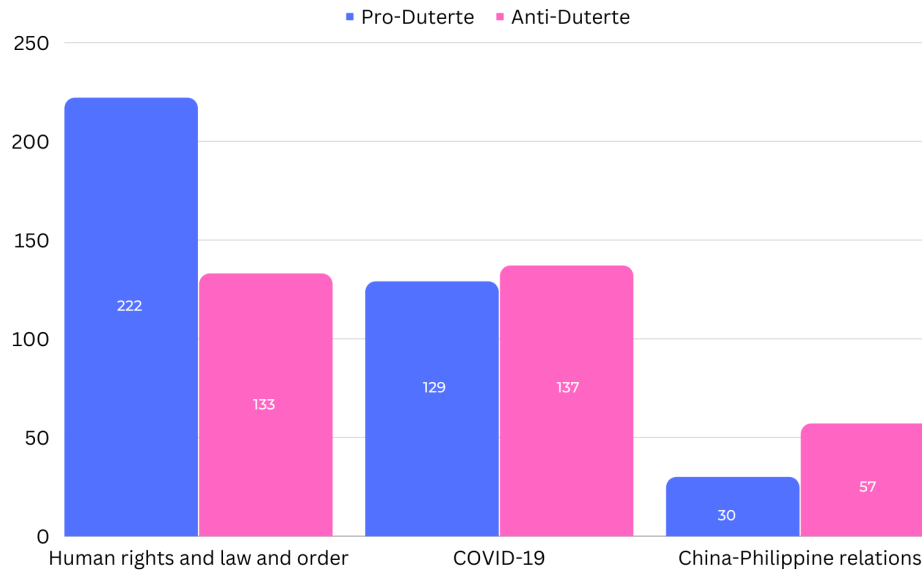


Figure 6.5 A graph comparing the total number of posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers using facts/information to talk about the three topics

Out of this 707, 50% that tackled human rights and law order used facts/information. Of this 354, 54% used probable information, or information that cannot be verified, and 45% used sourced facts. There were hardly any posts that used firsthand experience and proven facts, at 1% and 0.02% respectively.

On the other hand, there were 266 posts by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers that tackled COVID-19 and used facts/information as a rhetorical device. Of this 266, 74% used sourced facts, 25% used probable information and only 2% used firsthand experience. A total of 87 posts by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers used facts/information to discuss China-Philippine relations. Of this 87, 68% were sourced facts, 31% were probable information, and only 1% were firsthand experiences.

Breaking down this number to compare the two groups of influencers, pro-Duterte influencers used facts/information a total of 378 times. Of the 378, 59% were used on

posts discussing human rights and law and order, 34% for discussing COVID-19, and 8% to discuss China-Philippine relations.

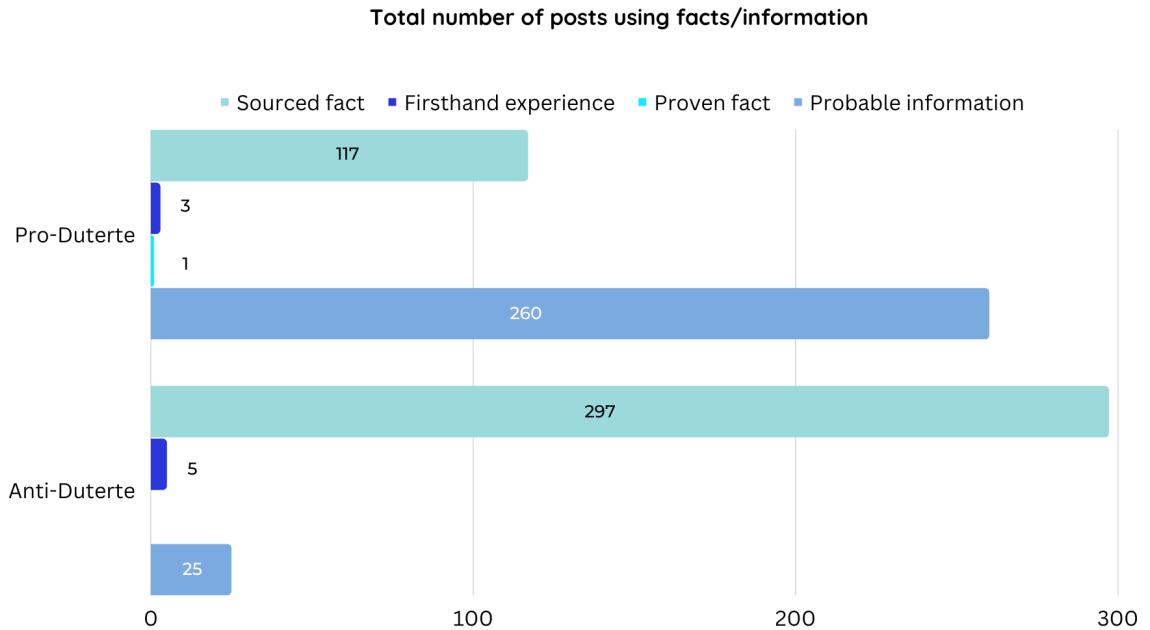


Figure 6.6 A graph showing and comparing the total number of posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers using different kinds of facts/information

When it comes to the types of facts/information used pro-Duterte influencers used probable information the most, at 62% of the total posts. This is followed by sourced facts at 37%. Probable information was used more to discuss issues on human rights and law and order and China-Philippine relations. Discussing COVID-19 was a mix of sourced facts and probable information.

Anti-Duterte influencers used facts/information a total of 327 times. Of these, 67% were used to discuss issues on human rights and law order, 40% for discussing COVID-19, and 18% to discuss China-Philippine relations. In contrast to pro-Duterte influencers, anti-Duterte influencers consistently used sourced facts to discuss all three topics, at 91% of the total posts. Probable information was only used in 8% of the posts, and firsthand experiences were used far less at only 1.5%.

a. Influencers and their use of facts/information to talk about issues on human rights and law and order

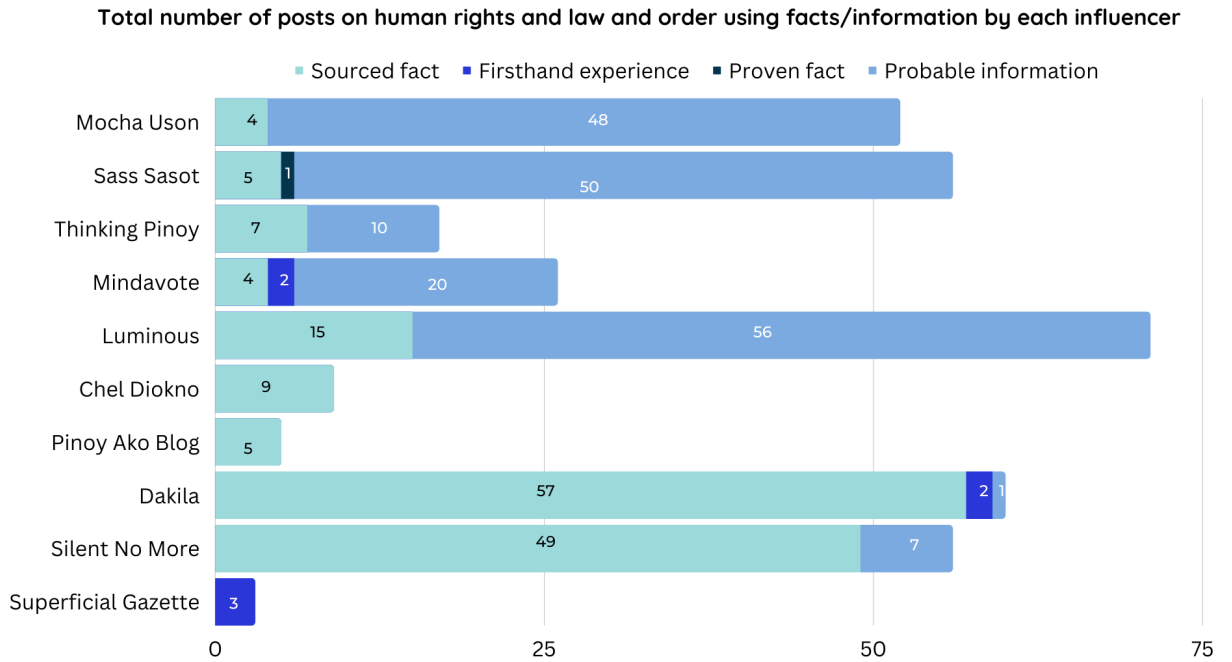


Figure 6.7 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using different kinds of facts/information to talk about human rights and law and order

Like predicted, pro-Duterte influencers used probable facts/information to talk about the drug war. Mocha Uson, who constantly defends Duterte’s war on drugs, for example, constantly posts about the ‘good effects’ of this policy. The war on drugs has killed thousands of Filipinos and is currently under the International Criminal Court’s investigations. Uson, one of the most prolific supporters of this policy, posted:



MOCHA USON BLOG

4 June 2019 · 🌐



Nakikita na natin ang magandang epekto ng WAR ON DRUGS ng Pangulo at ng kanyang administration.

Patuloy tayong sumuporta sa #PartnerForChange project para sa ikabubuti ng ating bayan.

Read more:

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1071177...> ✓

For any inquiry and concerns email me at mocha.uson@gmail.com

See translation

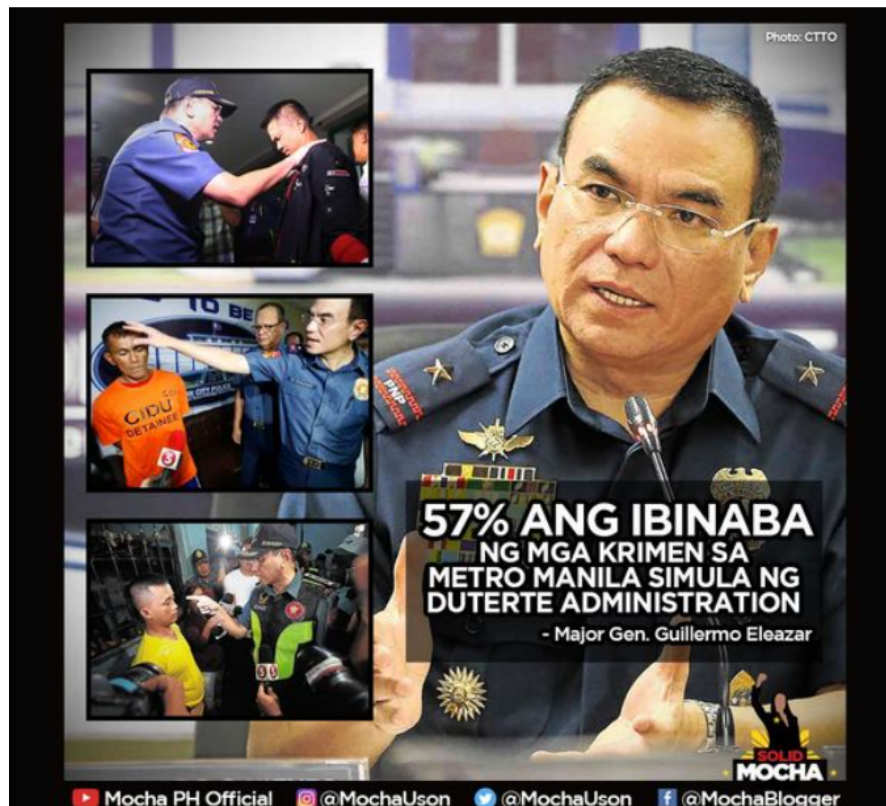


Figure 6.8 A screenshot of Mocha Uson’s post using probable facts on the war on drugs

(Translation: We can see the good effects of the president’s WAR ON DRUGS. Let us continue to support this project for the betterment of the country. Read more:

https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1071177?fbclid=IwAR3ZMXnNA3L8iQQEF127aiwUmWw6HzGYBRpH5S_FbS11DjPaJ8ZMYKPraU0

The post by Mocha links to an article by the Philippine News Agency that claims that crime rate in Metro Manila has decreased, thanks to the intensified campaign against crimes, especially the war on drugs. This was a statement by the Chief of National Police

Guillermo Eleazar. This was considered as probable information, because the Philippine National Police has been found to lie about the war on drugs (Cupin, 2017), and therefore the data could not be trusted.

Anti-Duterte influencers use mostly sourced facts to talk about issues on human rights and law and order. Unlike Mocha Uson, whose posts link only to government websites and government statements, anti-Duterte influencers use sources like news and research reports from what are deemed as more reputable organisations. For example, Dakila, who posted the most fact-based information on human rights, posts about the war on drugs, linking to a news article by Reuters that talk about reports by organisations like Human Rights Watch and the data they have gathered about Duterte’s war on drugs:

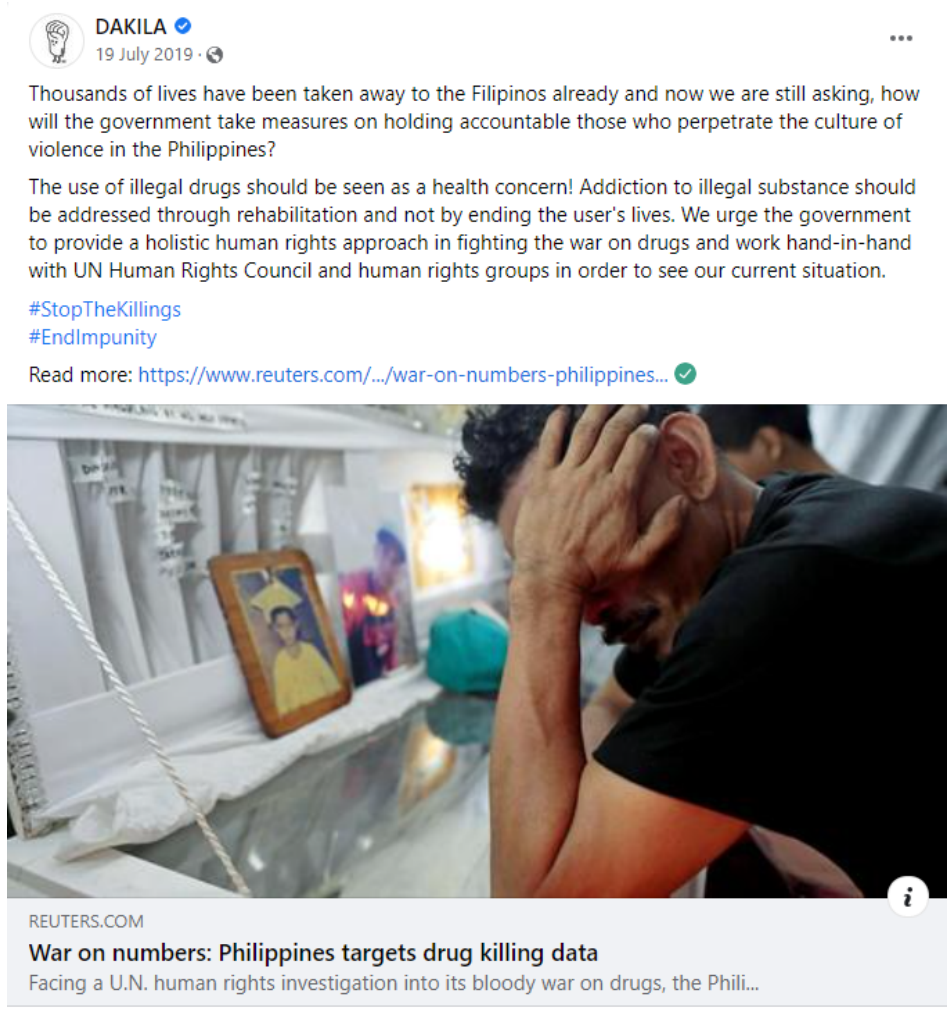


Figure 6.9 A screenshot of Dakila’s post using sourced facts on the war on drugs

I also found that another human rights issue frequently posted by pro-Duterte influencers is about the Communist Party of the Philippines and New People's Army (CPP-NPA). During his campaign, Duterte promised peace with the communist group and agreed on many reforms that the group were fighting for – land reform, and the development of local industries, for example (Fonbuena, 2017). However, the peace talks failed and the government declared an all out war against the group, declaring them as terrorists (Fonbuena, 2017). Pro-Duterte influencers started posting about the CPP-NPA in the same manner, painting the group as an enemy of the state and a group that takes children away from their families by recruiting them to join the revolution in the mountains.

An example of a post using probable information by Luminous, known to support the all-out war against the CPP-NPA and the influencer page that used probable information to discuss human rights issues the most:

Luminous by Trixie Cruz-Angeles & Ahmed Paglinawan
25 December 2020 · 🌐

Napatay ang isang babaeng myembro ng NPA today. Isa na namang nasawi sa ngalan ng CPP NPA NDF na mistulang sindikato lang na nagpapakakbo ng isang malaking extortion raket. Tapusin na ang walang kwentang rebelyon na yan. Sayang ang buhay ng kabataan natin.

[See translation](#)

PNA Phil News Agency @pnagovph

LOOK: The Army's 75th Infantry Battalion on Friday, Dec. 25 said that a female NPA member was killed while high-powered firearm and ammunition were also seized in an encounter on Dec. 23) in Purok Quarry, Sitio Kabalawan, Barangay Anahao Daan, Tago, Surigao del Sur

6:01 PM · 12/25/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

3.7K

158 comments 234 shares

Figure 6.10 A screenshot of Luminous' post using probable information about the CPP-NPA

(A woman who is a member of the NPA was killed today. Another one killed in the name of the CPP NPA NDF that acts like a syndicate running a big extortion scam. End the senseless rebellion. We are wasting young people's lives.)

The post above by Luminous is information that cannot be verified or trusted. First, there are no reliable sources mentioned in the post that can prove any of the information are true: 1.) that there was a killing involved; and 2.) if the woman who was allegedly killed was truly a member of the CPP-NPA. In the post it can be seen that similar to Uson's post on the war on drugs, the information shared was from the Philippine News Agency (PNA), the government-owned media outlet that has a track record of posting disinformation (VERA Files, 2017). In addition, the PNA's information seems to have come from the military, who have also been lambasted by the CPP-NPA groups for lying about information on how they were dealing with the said group. For example, in 2018, the CPP-NPA group called out the military for parading CPP-NPA "surrenders", which turned out to be a hoax, which the group said was "a deception that the Duterte government has succeeded in defeating the NPA" (Davao Today, 2018).

b. Influencers and their use of facts/information to talk about COVID-19

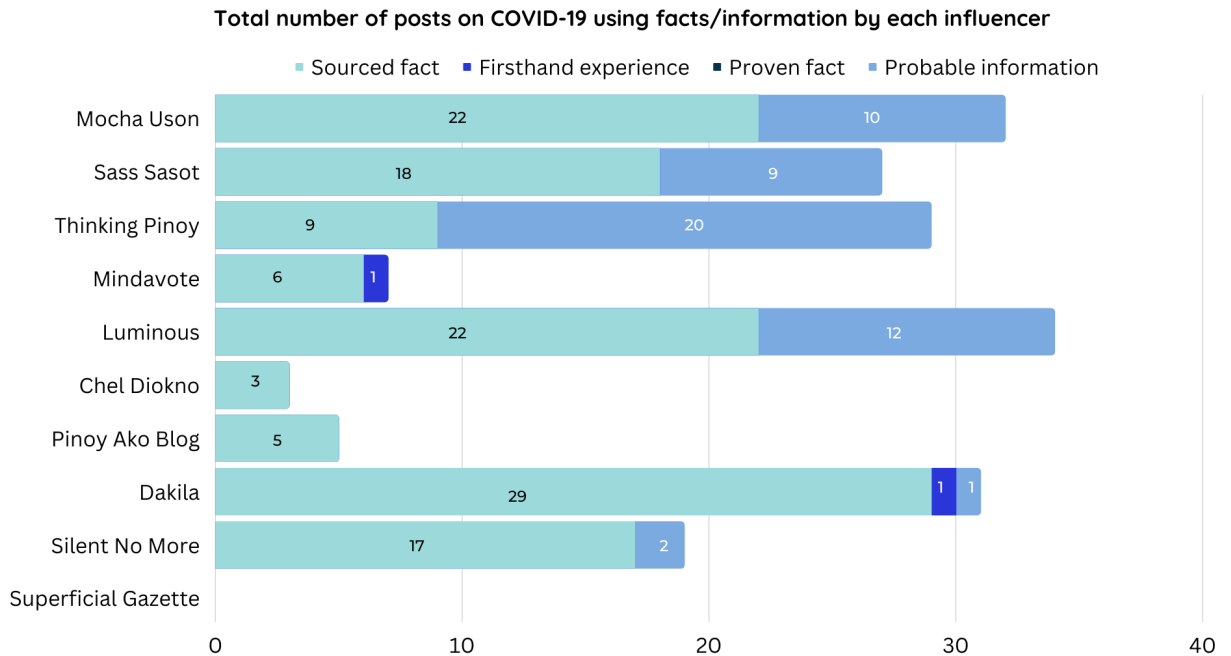


Figure 6.11 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using different kinds of facts/information to talk about COVID-19

Pro-Duterte influencers used mostly sourced facts when posting about COVID-19. Most of these posts included data from the Department of Health, and information about the latest science/knowledge by scientists and other organisations. However, sourced facts were mixed with probable information that sounded scientific and presented statistics but once fact-checked, turned out to be false information. The post was shared from an organisation called Swiss Policy Research, whose editors remain anonymous but claim to be independent, non-partisan, and non-profit. While the name of the organisation and the data seems credible, the facts presented turned out to be false. This shows the danger wherein websites can look credible but may cause harm especially in the time of a global health pandemic. While it seems out of character that Sass, who prides herself in being well-educated and an academic, would share content that contains false information, I have found a trend where her page seems to share similar types of content from seemingly credible sources which are in fact false information.

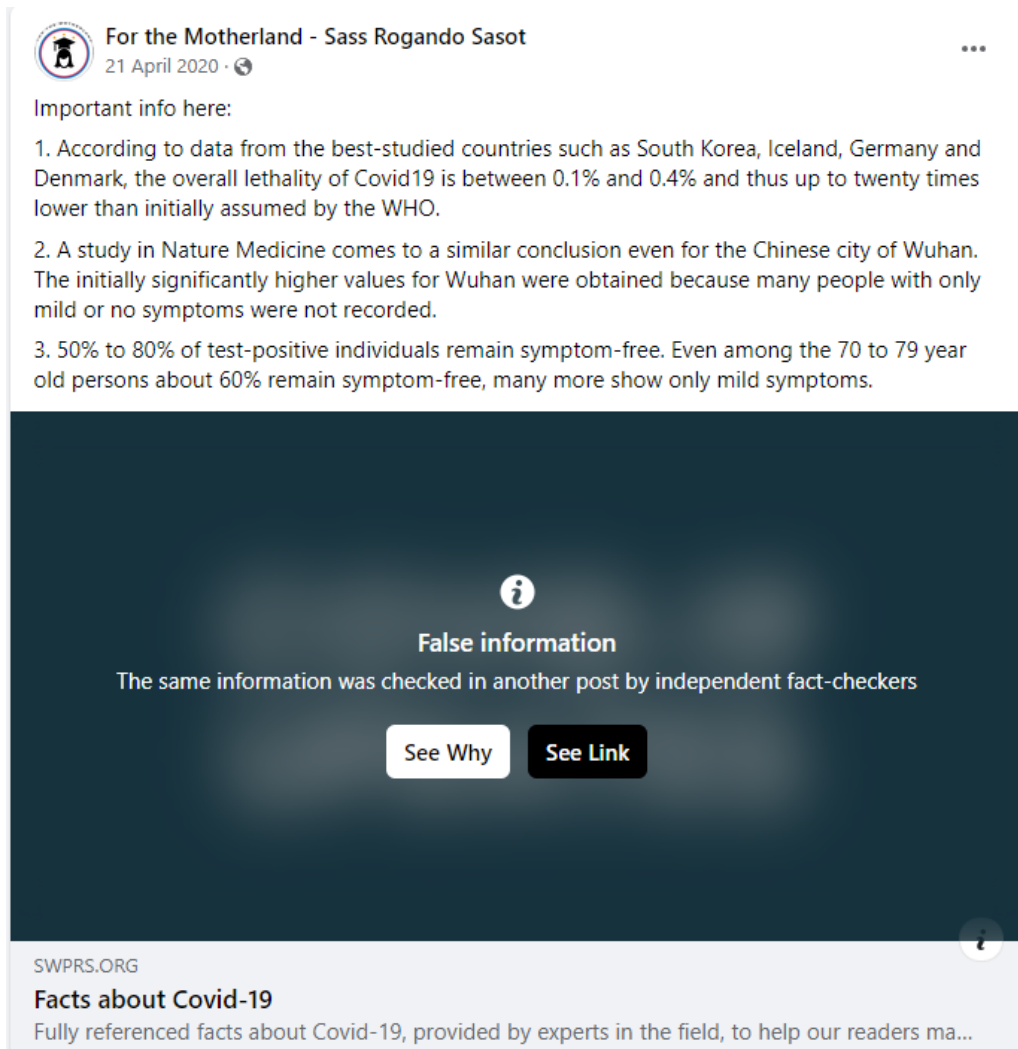
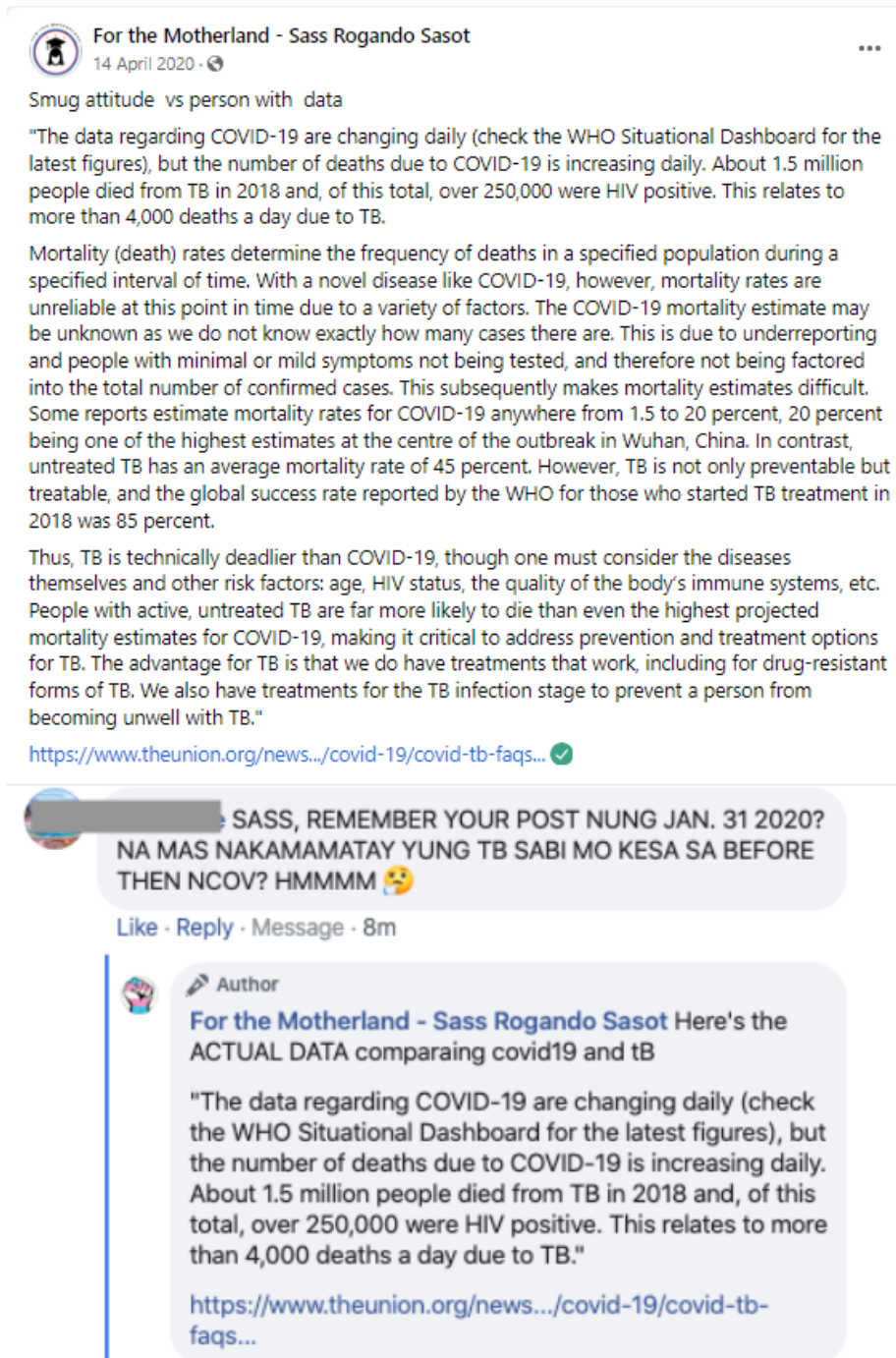


Figure 6.12 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot containing disinformation about COVID-19

To illustrate how Sass prides herself as a ‘person with data’, here is a post where she answers a comment from someone who challenges the credibility of information that Sass posted previously about tuberculosis being more deadly than COVID. This time, Sass shares information from a credible source, The Union, a group of medical professionals who study lung health. However, it seems that Sass has zoned in on the line, ‘TB is technically deadlier than COVID-19, and has ignored the other facts mentioned like COVID-19 mortality rates were unreliable at the time given its novelty, and that

tuberculosis have treatment that COVID-19 didn't have then. It shows the nuances where factual information can be used to support a wrong argument.



The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the profile 'For the Motherland - Sass Rogando Sasot' dated 14 April 2020. The post title is 'Smug attitude vs person with data'. The main text of the post discusses COVID-19 mortality estimates compared to tuberculosis (TB) mortality, citing WHO data that about 1.5 million people died from TB in 2018, with over 250,000 being HIV positive, resulting in more than 4,000 deaths a day. It also notes that untreated TB has a 45% mortality rate, while TB is 85% treatable. A link to a WHO FAQ page is provided. Below the post is a reply from a user with a greyed-out profile picture, asking Sass to remember her previous post from January 2020 where she claimed TB was more deadly than COVID-19. The reply includes the text: 'SASS, REMEMBER YOUR POST NUNG JAN. 31 2020? NA MAS NAKAMAMATAY YUNG TB SABI MO KESA SA BEFORE THEN NCOV? HMMMM 😏'. The reply has 8 minutes of engagement. Below the reply is a quote of the original post's text, including the link.

For the Motherland - Sass Rogando Sasot
14 April 2020 · 🌐

Smug attitude vs person with data

"The data regarding COVID-19 are changing daily (check the WHO Situational Dashboard for the latest figures), but the number of deaths due to COVID-19 is increasing daily. About 1.5 million people died from TB in 2018 and, of this total, over 250,000 were HIV positive. This relates to more than 4,000 deaths a day due to TB.

Mortality (death) rates determine the frequency of deaths in a specified population during a specified interval of time. With a novel disease like COVID-19, however, mortality rates are unreliable at this point in time due to a variety of factors. The COVID-19 mortality estimate may be unknown as we do not know exactly how many cases there are. This is due to underreporting and people with minimal or mild symptoms not being tested, and therefore not being factored into the total number of confirmed cases. This subsequently makes mortality estimates difficult. Some reports estimate mortality rates for COVID-19 anywhere from 1.5 to 20 percent, 20 percent being one of the highest estimates at the centre of the outbreak in Wuhan, China. In contrast, untreated TB has an average mortality rate of 45 percent. However, TB is not only preventable but treatable, and the global success rate reported by the WHO for those who started TB treatment in 2018 was 85 percent.

Thus, TB is technically deadlier than COVID-19, though one must consider the diseases themselves and other risk factors: age, HIV status, the quality of the body's immune systems, etc. People with active, untreated TB are far more likely to die than even the highest projected mortality estimates for COVID-19, making it critical to address prevention and treatment options for TB. The advantage for TB is that we do have treatments that work, including for drug-resistant forms of TB. We also have treatments for the TB infection stage to prevent a person from becoming unwell with TB."

<https://www.theunion.org/news.../covid-19/covid-tb-faqs...> ✓

SASS, REMEMBER YOUR POST NUNG JAN. 31 2020? NA MAS NAKAMAMATAY YUNG TB SABI MO KESA SA BEFORE THEN NCOV? HMMMM 😏

Like · Reply · Message · 8m

Author
For the Motherland - Sass Rogando Sasot Here's the ACTUAL DATA comparaing covid19 and tB

"The data regarding COVID-19 are changing daily (check the WHO Situational Dashboard for the latest figures), but the number of deaths due to COVID-19 is increasing daily. About 1.5 million people died from TB in 2018 and, of this total, over 250,000 were HIV positive. This relates to more than 4,000 deaths a day due to TB."

<https://www.theunion.org/news.../covid-19/covid-tb-faqs...>

Figure 6.13 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot answering a critic calling her out for posting disinformation about COVID-19

Much like pro-Duterte influencers, anti-Duterte influencers used mostly sourced facts to post about COVID-19. But unlike pro-Duterte supporters, I found only three posts with probable information. It can be assumed from this data that anti-Duterte supporters gave more scrutiny in sharing information about COVID. Anti-Duterte influencers shared data from the government, like the Department of Health, and other studies from other countries. For example, Dakila posted information from the Department of Health regarding testing:

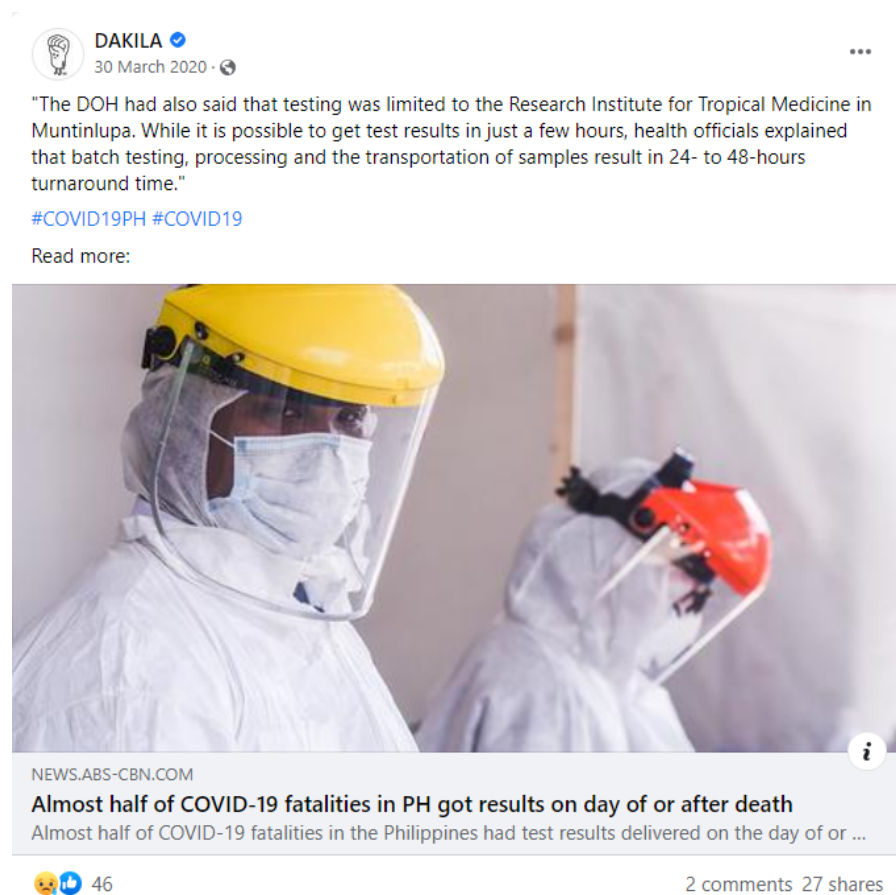


Figure 6.14 A screenshot of a post by Dakila sharing sourced facts on COVID-19 by sharing news with data from the Department of Health

Some probable information that was posted by pro-Duterte influencers were about ‘probable’ scenarios that were not based on any evidence, or information that simply could not be checked if true. Some of these also seem to be born out of frustration from the government’s response to the pandemic. An example of probable information posted

by Thinking Pinoy where he tells the story of his friend who contacted COVID-19 because of the lack of PPE. You can see that there is a tone of frustration in the post. This post was coded as probable information because the truth to this claim cannot be verified. There were no details about the event that transpired nor were there any more details about who this friend was. While it may be true, it may also be false:

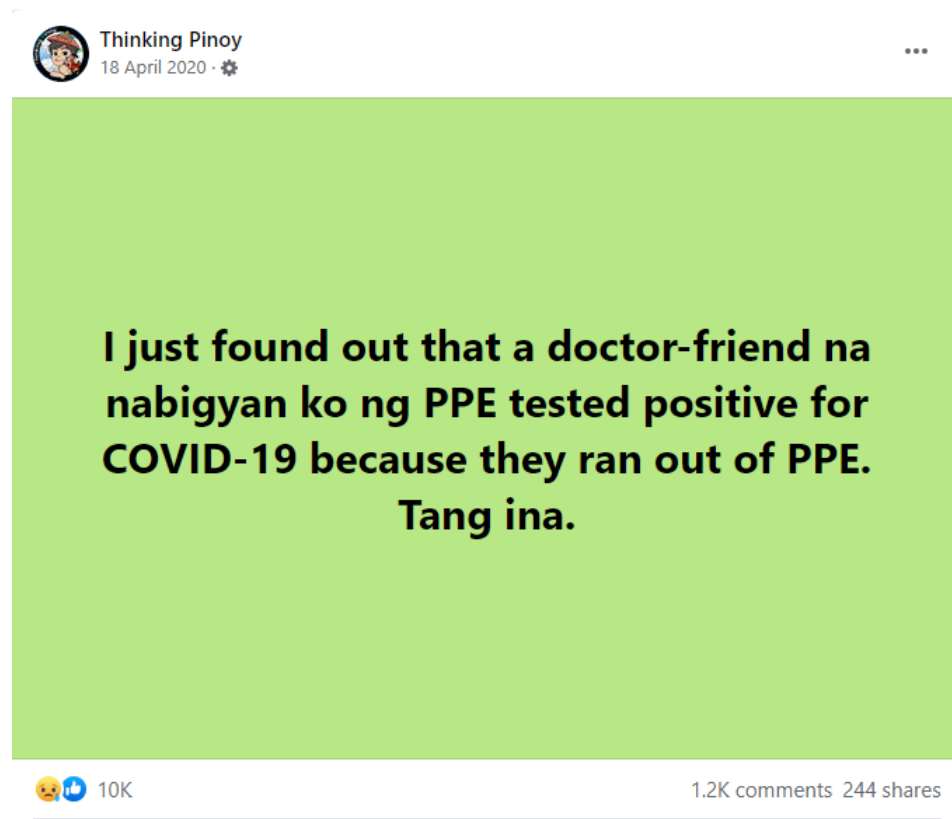


Figure 6.15 A screenshot of a post by Thinking Pinoy sharing probable information (personal stories) that cannot be verified

Similarly, anti-Duterte influencers also posted frustrations from the government's response to the pandemic and they have also shared experiences in hospitals. However, instead of posting personal stories with no source of information, they shared verified news stories from credible sources. For example, this post by Superficial Gazette claims that medical frontliners were dying due to cleaning bleach, allegedly a practice in government quarantine facilities. The difference can be seen where both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers have become frustrated about the situation during the pandemic,

pro-Duterte influencers like Thinking Pinoy use information that cannot be verified, while anti-Duterte supporters were more careful in sharing information.



Figure 6.16 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette sharing a verifiable story on COVID-19

COVID-19 discussions were heavily presented with sourced facts/information rather than probable information. This is most likely because the pandemic was a global problem that required solutions based heavily on scientific data and evidence. However, it cannot be denied that there was also some false information about medicines and other ‘cures’ for the virus. One of the most controversial disinformation campaign came from Cebu Governor Gwendolyn Garcia who claimed that *tuob* or the practice of inhaling steam from a basin of infused water while covering one’s head was a cure for COVID-19. The governor even put *tuob* in her official memorandum as part of her wellness programme for government employees and has been corrected by the health ministry many times (Rappler, 2020).

It would seem that anti-Duterte influencers valued factual data and information that would help the public learn more about the virus and what is happening in the country and around the world. On the other hand, pro-Duterte supporters mixed sourced or factual information with probable or unverifiable information. Most of these posts with probable information seemed to reflect frustrations surrounding the government’s response to the pandemic.

c. Influencers and their use of facts/information to talk about China-Philippine relations

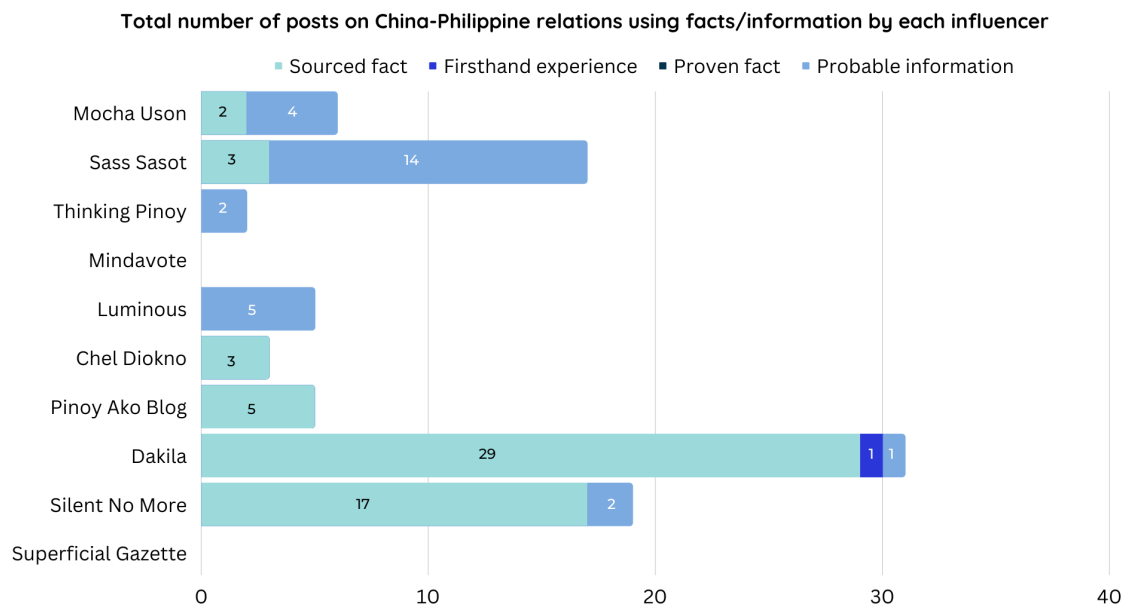


Figure 6.17 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using different kinds of facts/information to talk about China-Philippine relations

Pro-Duterte influencers mostly used probable information to talk about China-Philippine relations. Most of this information is used to defend the government's policies on the West Philippine Sea territorial claim.

For example, a post by Sass claims that the South China Sea is not being stolen from the Philippines. While it is true that there are multiple countries that claim territory to the different islands of the Spratly Islands, it is also true that China's movements in the disputed territories have been subject to complaints from other countries and the Philippines. And as was presented in the first part of this chapter, the Philippines has lodged multiple diplomatic protests in the international arena for different events involving Chinese vessels and maritime militia. I coded posts like this as probable information because part of it is true (that many countries claim territory to the Spratly Islands) but part of it needs to have more proof/evidence to support the argument that no territory in the Philippines is 'being stolen' by other countries:



Figure 6.18 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot using probable information to talk about Philippine-China relations

In contrast to pro-Duterte influencers, anti-Duterte influencers mostly used sourced facts to discuss China-Philippine relations. For example, this post by Dakila uses a quote from

the ruling from The Hague to emphasise that China's territorial claims do not have any legal basis. This post also uses another form of rhetorical device, a quote, which will be discussed more in the next section of this chapter. By quoting the arbitral decision, Dakila presents a sourced fact:

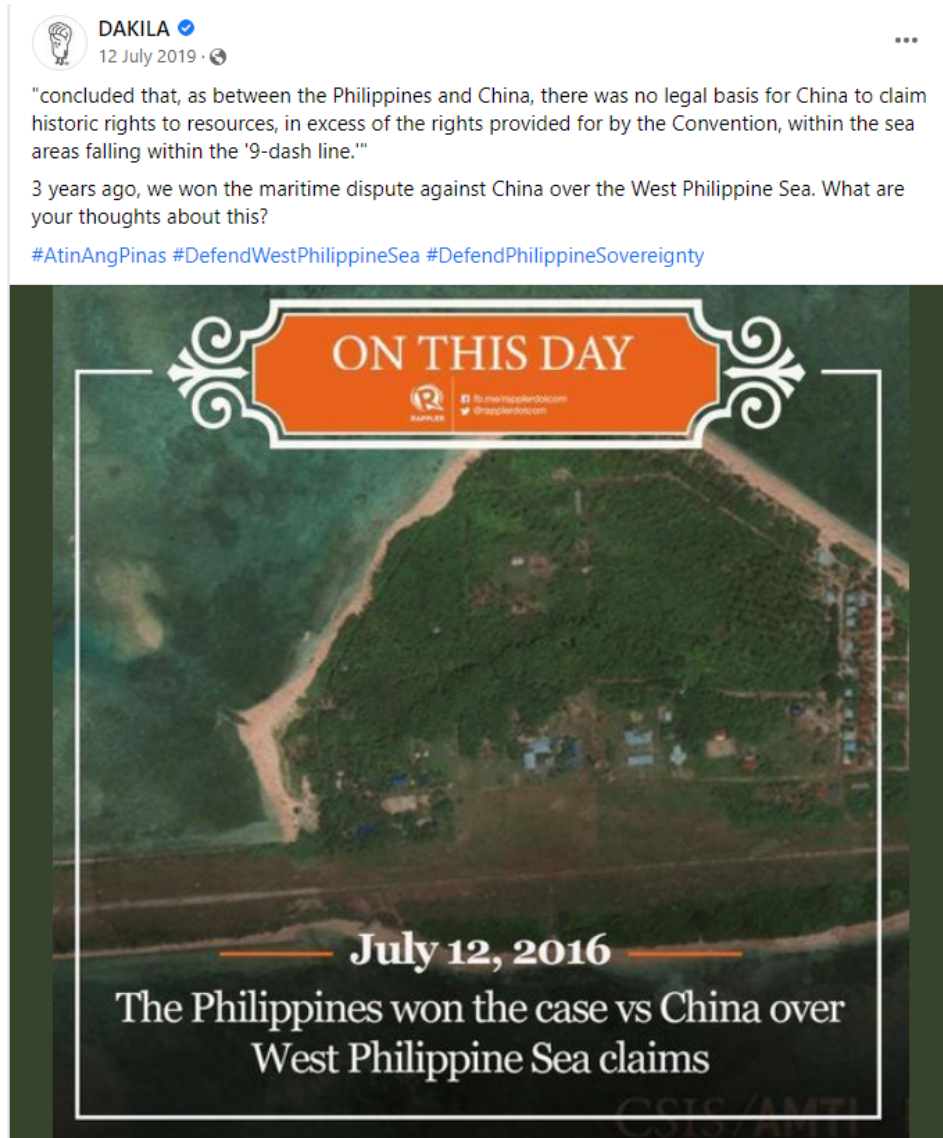


Figure 6.19 A screenshot of a post by Dakila using sourced fact to talk about Philippine-China relations

II. Quoting other people, groups, and organisations

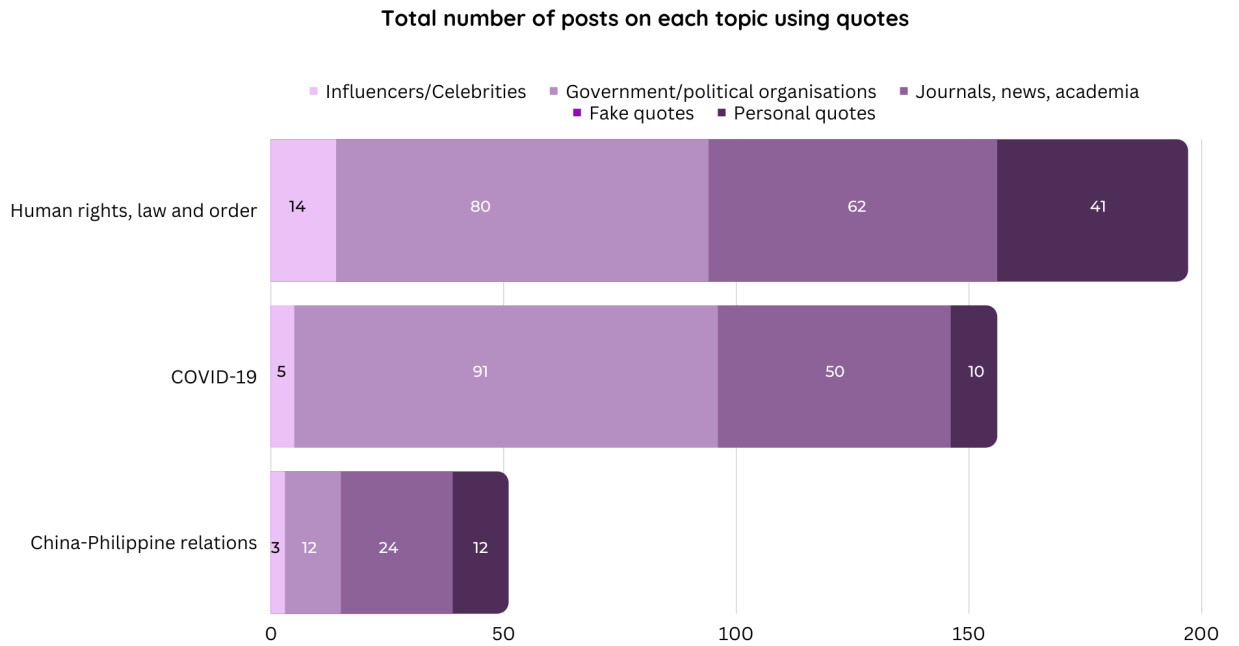


Figure 6.20 A graph showing the total number of posts using different quotes for each of the three topics. There were no fake quotes found in analysing the full data set.

Total number of posts on each topic using quotes, pro-Duterte vs anti-Duterte influencers

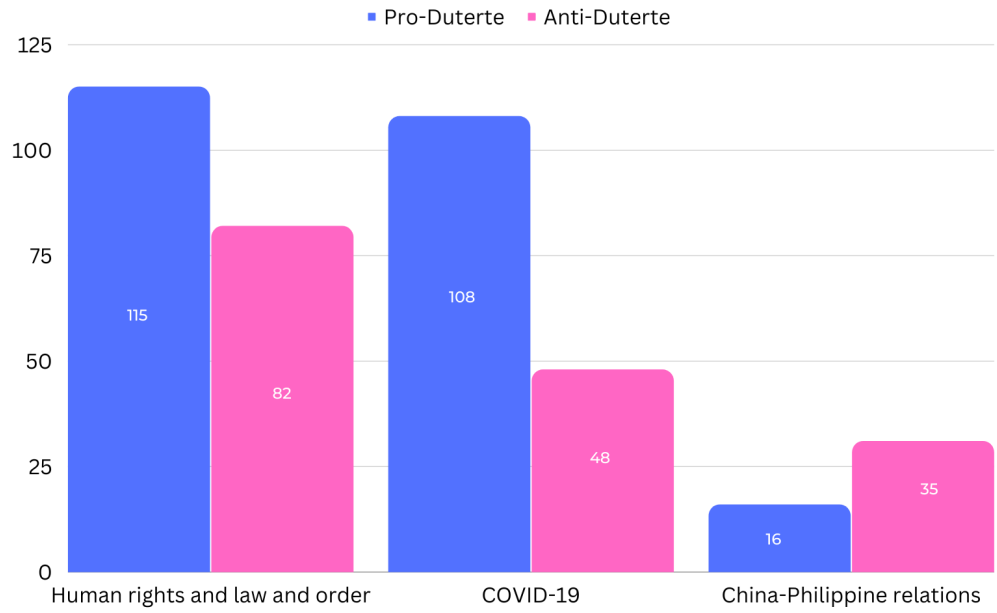


Figure 6.21 A graph comparing the total number of posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers using quotes to talk about the three topics

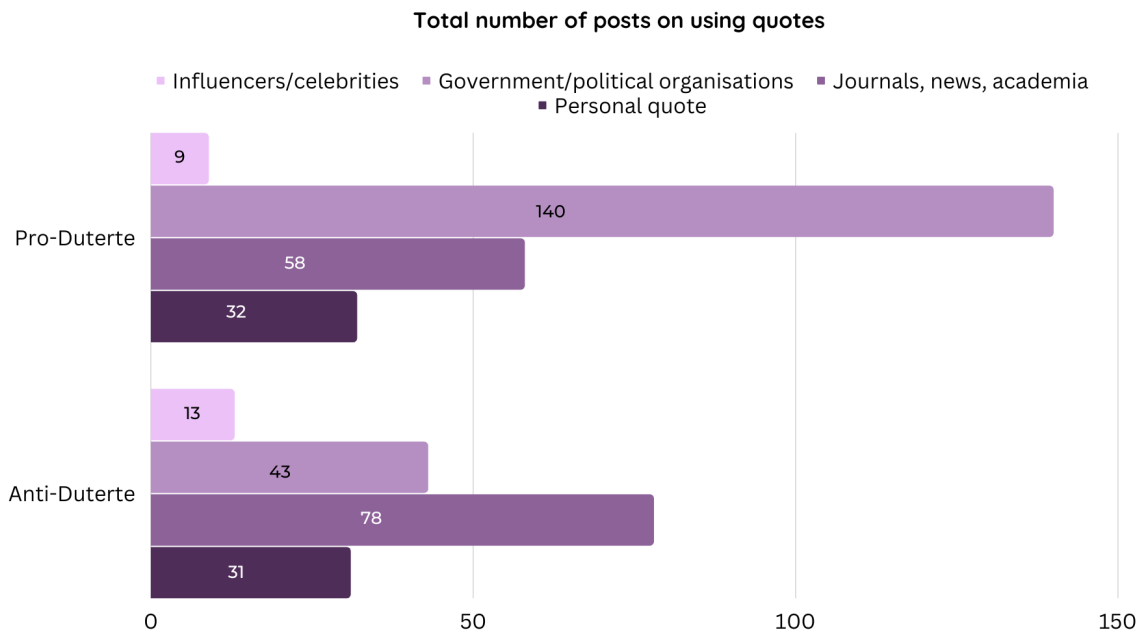


Figure 6.22 A graph showing and comparing the total number of posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers using different kinds of quotes

In total 407 posts by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers that talked about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations were found to use quotes as a rhetorical device. Overall, governments and political organisations were mostly quoted for all three topics, thanks to pro-Duterte influencers who quoted Philippine government officials and/or Philippine ministries. Of the total use of quotes by pro-Duterte influencers 59% quoted government officials and political organisations, 24% quoted journals, news, and academia, 10% used personal quotes, and 4% used quotes from other influencers/celebrities. Unlike pro-Duterte influencers, anti-Duterte influencers quoted more journals, news, and academia at 47%; followed by quotes from government officials and political organisations at 26%; 24% quoted journals, news, and academia, 17% used personal quotes, and 8% used quotes from other influencers/celebrities.

Looking at the use of quotes per topic, 115 posts by pro-Duterte influencers on human rights and law and order used quotes. Of this 115, 53% were from government officials and political organisations; 23% quoted journals, news, and academia; 18% were personal quotes, and 5% quoted influencers/celebrities. On the other hand, 82 posts by anti-Duterte influencers on human rights and law and order used quotes. Of this, 30% quoted journals, news, and academia; 17% were from government officials and political organisations; 17% were personal quotes, and 7% quoted influencers/celebrities.

There were 108 posts by pro-Duterte influencers that used quotes to discuss COVID-19. Of this 108, 88% quoted government officials and political organisations; 34% quoted journals, news, academia; 9% used personal quotes; and 1% quoted influencers/celebrities. There were 48 posts by anti-Duterte influencers that used quotes to discuss COVID-19. Of these 48, 46% quoted journals, news, academia; 40% quoted government officials and political organisations; 8% quoted influencers/celebrities; and 6% used personal quotes.

A total of 16 posts by pro-Duterte influencers used quotes to talk about China-Philippine relations. Of this 16, 43% quoted government officials and political organisations, 25% used personal quotes, 19% were quotes from journals, news, academia; and 13% were quotes from influencers/celebrities. A total of 35 posts by anti-Duterte influencers used quotes to talk about China-Philippine relations. Of this 35, 58% were quotes from journals, news, academia; 22% used personal quotes; 14% quoted government officials and political organisations. There was one post of a quote from an influencer/celebrity and no posts that used any fake quotes were found.

a. Influencers and their use of quotes to talk about issues on human rights and law and order

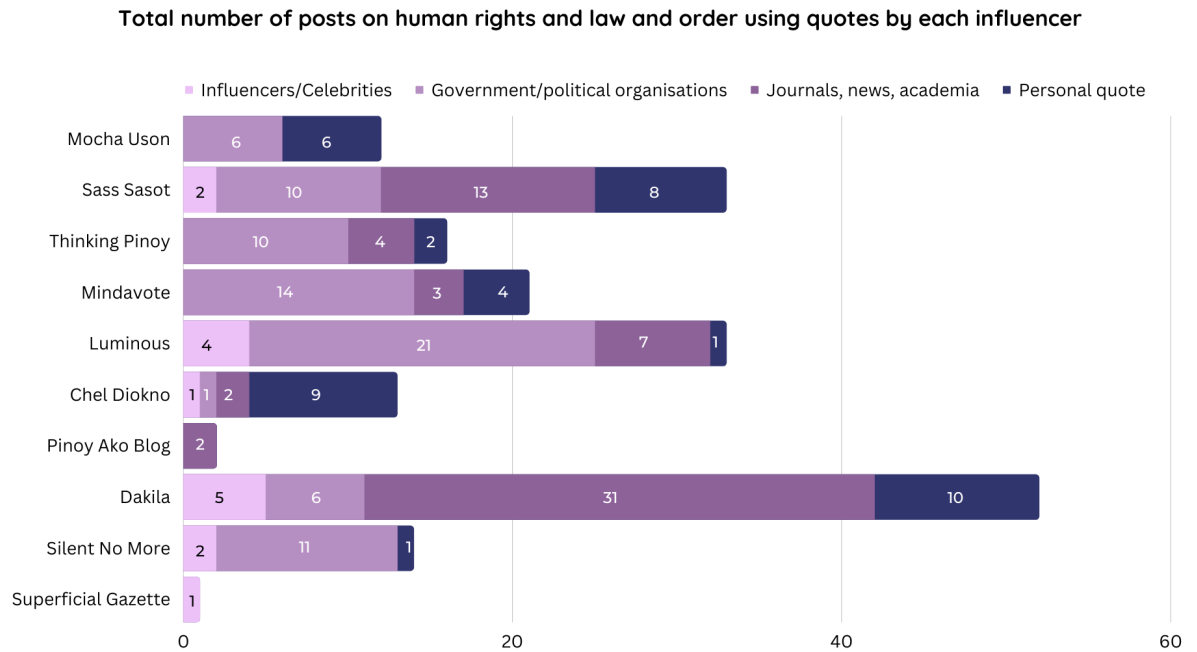


Figure 6.23 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using different kinds of quotes to talk about human rights and law and order

Some pro-Duterte influencers like Mocha Uson held office as part of the Duterte administration, and this could be a big influence on why they posted mostly quotes coming from the government to support the government’s policies on human rights and law and order. Other pro-Duterte influencers, although not employed by the government, have also quoted Duterte and Duterte-aligned government officials to discuss issues on human rights and law and order. Quoting Duterte and government officials under his administration can help the influencers build credibility and authority among their audiences by agreeing to the ideas and policies of the highest officials in the country. Most of these quotes were posted by Mocha Uson, Mindavote, and Luminous.

On the other hand, anti-Duterte influencers used more quotes by journals, news, and academia to talk about human rights and law and order. Unlike pro-Duterte influencers, they quoted government officials far fewer times. This reflects the attitude of anti-Duterte influencers who rarely agree, if at all, with anything that Duterte and his government officials say. This goes back to *ethos*. While pro-Duterte influencers find credibility and authority in quoting Duterte and his government officials, anti-Duterte influencers do not. Instead, they find credibility and authority from quoting reports, studies, news articles, academics, journals, experts who might have the data and evidence they need to back-up their arguments. Most of these quotes were posted by Dakila.

For example, Mindavote, an influencer page that posts against the CPP-NPA and shares posts that red-tag some groups and activists, quotes Philippine National Police Chief Benigno Durana, who then quotes CPP chairman Jose Maria Sison. By quoting a chief of police who deals with the peace talks concerning the CPP-NPA, Mindavote is able to show authority on the issue. Additionally, by quoting Jose Maria Sison, Mindavote lends credibility to allegations that certain groups are so-called legal fronts of the communist movement. Whether the quote accurately quotes Jose Maria Sison is of course another matter, but for an audience who might already be questioning these groups, quoting two people who have authority on the matter might be enough to believe in the information at face value.

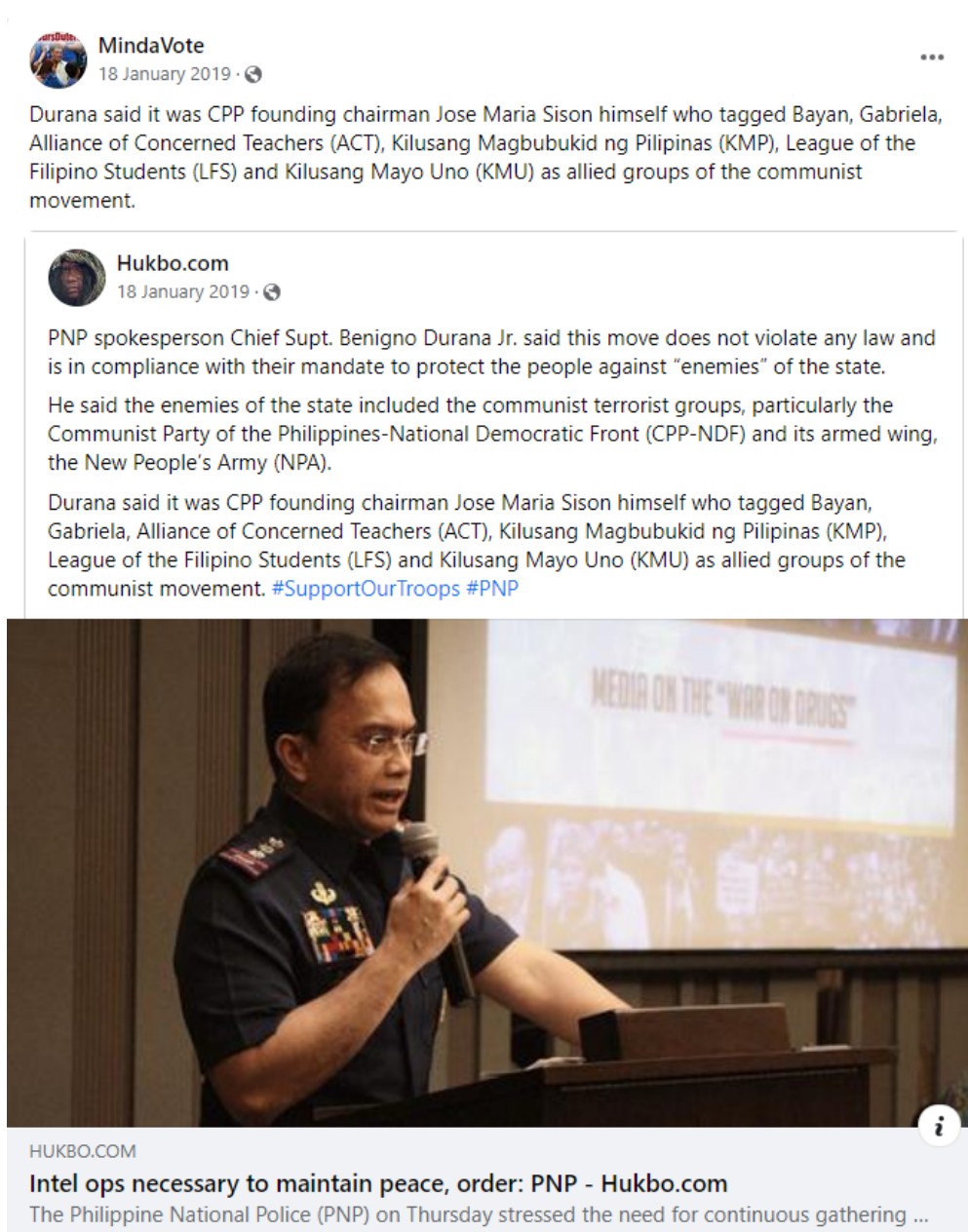


Figure 6.24 A screenshot of Mindavote’s post quoting PNP Chief Supt. Durana Jr.

Another tactic that pro-Duterte influencers use is quoting from direct experiences. For example, I found Mocha Uson quoting the experience of an alleged former CPP-NPA member. I coded this as ‘personal quote’, or quotes based on personal experiences. By quoting an alleged previous member of the CPP-NPA, Mocha hopes to give credibility to the fight against the group. Who would know better than an ‘insider’? In this post, the alleged former member of the CPP-NPA talks about how they recruit young people:



Binuking ng dating rebelde na ang Party list na ACT TEACHERS at NUJP ay may kinaugnyan sa NPA.

"Ka Jamie", a teacher who claims to be witness to the struggle of various public school teachers in the country, said the CPP-NPA-NDF used the ACT in pushing for the communist group's agenda.

"Noong una ay issues lang ng mga guro ang topic namin sa mga group discussion kung paano itaas ang aming karampot na sahod (At first, we were only fighting for the low wage of educators)," she said.

She added that she became an organizer of the Manila Public School Teachers Association (MPSTA).

Ka Jamie said she became a regular street demonstrator along with the Public School Teachers Association, calling for the salary increase of public school teachers.

Her involvements, she said, became deeper in the communist organization until she found herself teaching in the Pambansang Demokratikong Paaralan, an educational institution built by the communists, which she refers to as "intentionally designed to foster a rebellious spirit within the students".

The communist group, she said, has been recruiting minors and deceiving their families of the true cause of the organization.

"Mabilis lang kasi malinlang ang mga tao sa bundok (They can easily deceive people who live in the countryside)," she added.

"Umalis ako kasi gusto ko nang bumalik at buwagin ang ilegal activities, paano naman ang issues naming mga guro (I left because I want to go back and get rid of the illegal activities. What happens to the legitimate concerns of teachers?)," Ka Jamie added.

Meanwhile, "Ka Ernesto", another former rebel who claimed to have observed anomalies in the NUJP, also bared allegations against the group.

"Ginagamit nila (CPP-NPA-NDF) ang NUJP bilang shield, panangga para ipagpatuloy ang pagsusulong sa digmaang bayan (They are using the NUJP as a shield to continue the protracted war)," he said.

Ka Ernesto, who claims to be an editor-in-chief in his time in college but had to stop because of his involvement in the communist group, said the journalists' organization "sympathizes with the leftist group".

"Witness ako kung paanong kino-control nila ang mga balitang lumalabas para sa media giants. Hindi nila nilalabas yung totoo, mga masasamang nangyayari (I am a witness as to how they control news on illegal activities happening within the CPP-NPA-NDF. They exclude the bad details)," he said.

Figure 6.25 A screenshot of Mocha Uson's post quoting supposed former members of the CPP-NPA

On the other hand, quotes are used by anti-Duterte influencers to lend credibility to their criticisms of the Duterte government. This is used mostly by Dakila. For example, Dakila quotes a news article from Forbes, based on a research report by Global Witness,

about the number of killings of land and environmental defenders in the Philippines. The post starts by quoting facts from a news report, followed by an emotional appeal and ends with a call to action. This is another example of rhetorical devices used together to make a case to persuade the audience better:

 **DAKILA** ✓
4 August 2019 · 🌐

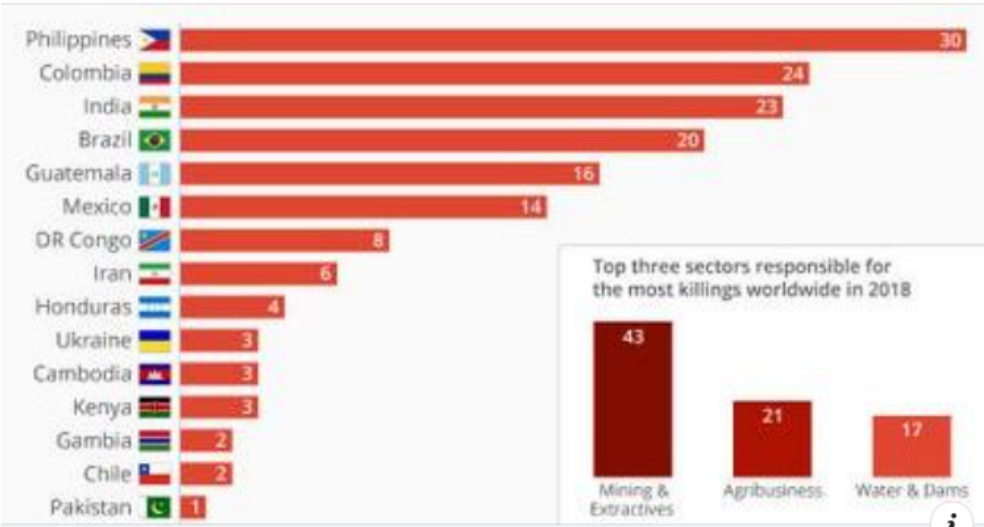
"Overall, the Philippines had the highest activist/land defender death toll of any country last year with 30 killings documented."

Our land has become one of the most dangerous countries for activists as it does not provide an environment where they can truly fight for their rights.

Let this be a reminder that we should not stop fighting until the country has become a space where everyone is free to express themselves and defend their fellows as well. The culture of violence should not and never be tolerated!

#DefendTheDefenders #EndImpunity #StopTheKillings #StopTheAttacks

Read more: <https://www.forbes.com/.../report-164-activists-were-.../> ✓



Country	Number of Killings
Philippines	30
Colombia	24
India	23
Brazil	20
Guatemala	16
Mexico	14
DR Congo	8
Iran	6
Honduras	4
Ukraine	3
Cambodia	3
Kenya	3
Gambia	2
Chile	2
Pakistan	1

FORBES.COM

Report: 164 Activists Were Killed Around The World Last Year [Infographic]
A new report has shed light on the number of activists/land defenders killed in 2018 as a result...

🙄🙄🙄 David Garcia and 66 others

1 comment 40 shares

Figure 6.26 A screenshot of Dakila’s post quoting a report from Global Witness on activist killings

b. Influencers and their use of quotes to talk about COVID-19

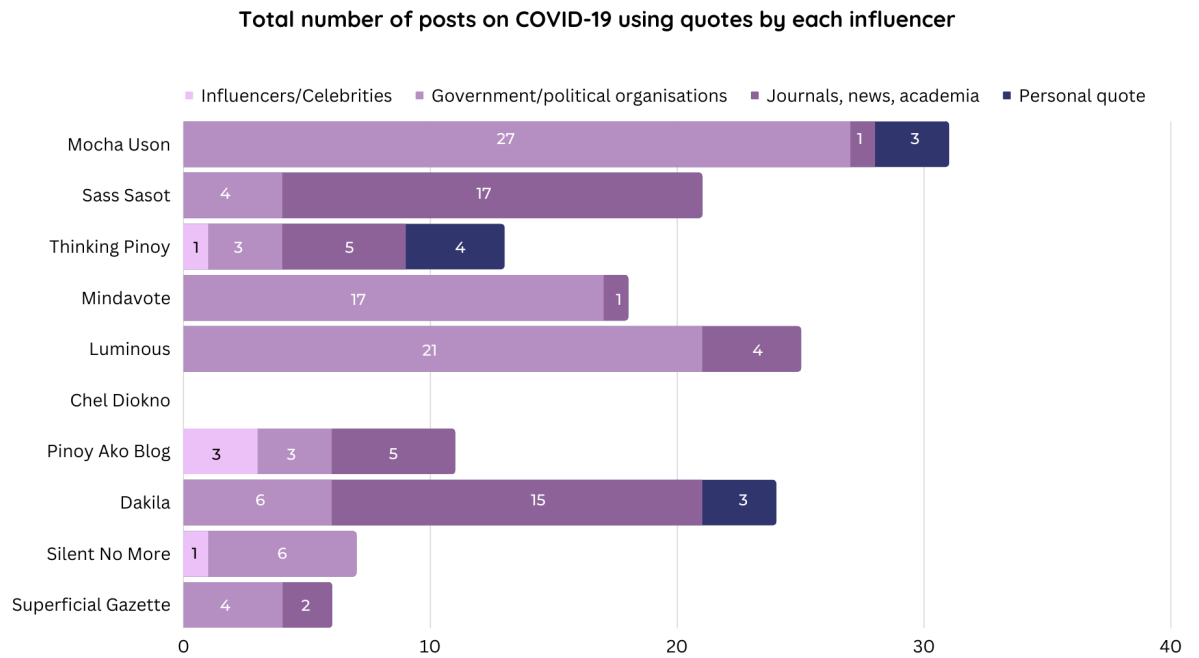


Figure 6.27 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using different kinds of facts/information to talk about COVID-19

Similar to issues on human rights and law and order, pro-Duterte influences quoted mostly government officials. Mocha Uson, who posted most quotes from government officials, is part of the Presidential Communications Office Office (PCOO) and it might be part of her job in the PCOO to repost statements of government officials on certain issues. Many of these posts from Uson were announcements by national and local governments about the latest lockdown guidelines, latest data on number of infections, new laws and policies implemented to fight the pandemic, etc.

An example is a post by Luminous, which quotes a press release from the Department of Health. The post informs the public about the latest number of COVID-19 cases. After presenting the data, they also quote an emotional appeal from the secretary of health,

appealing to the public to cooperate in the government's efforts to fight the pandemic. This is also another example of how different rhetorical devices can be used in one post, in this case all rhetorical devices looked at in this chapter – facts/information, quote, collective appeal, personal appeal, and call to action – were all used for the audience to act on the pandemic.

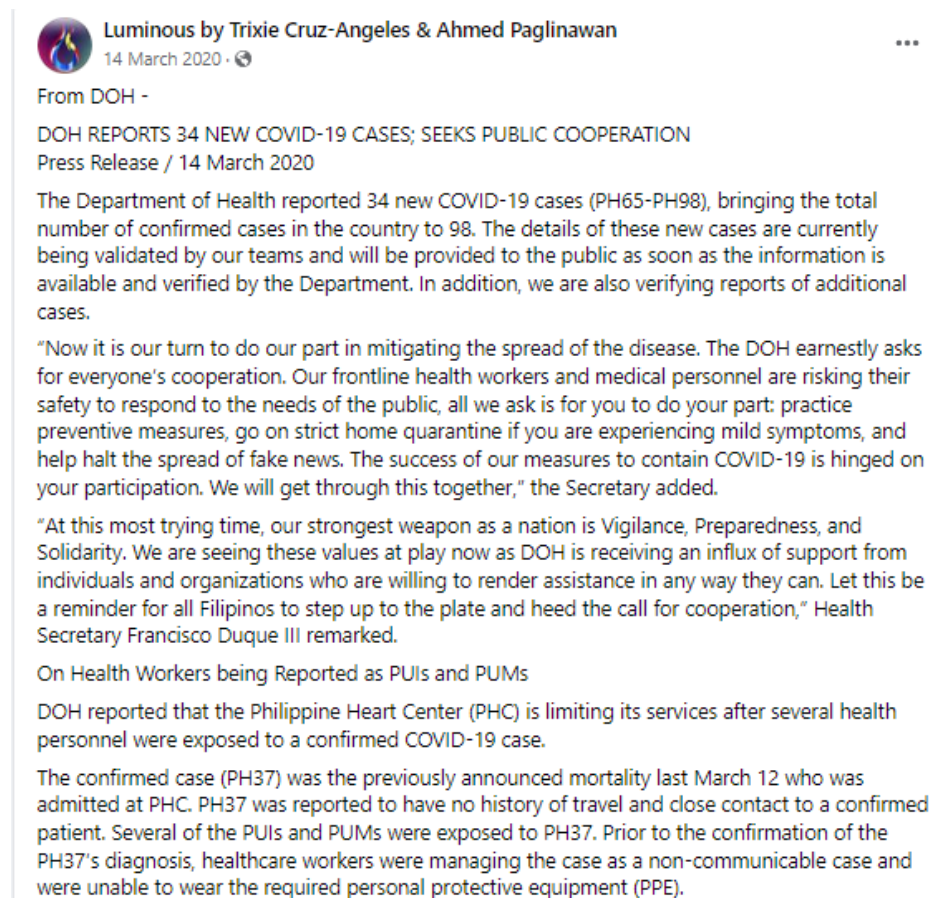


Figure 6.28 A screenshot of a post by Luminous quoting the Department of Health on the COVID-19 pandemic

In contrast, although the intent is also to make the public more informed about the pandemic situation, including about laws and policies, lockdowns, and infection rate, anti-Duterte influencers chose to quote more journals, news, and academia more than the government. While pro-Duterte influencers used quotes merely to inform the public,

anti-Duterte influencers used these quotes to criticise the government's response to the pandemic. Most of these quotes were posted by Dakila, followed by Pinoy Ako Blog.

An example is a post from Pinoy Ako Blog. In this post, she quotes a news article about the latest infection rate in the Philippines to sarcastically criticise Duterte's COVID-19 strategy. She starts with a congratulatory greeting, but goes on to quote the news that the Philippines has become one of the most infected countries during the pandemic:



Figure 6.29 A screenshot of a post by Pinoy Ako Blog quoting Rappler on the latest data on the COVID-19 pandemic

c. Influencers and their use of quotes to talk about China-Philippine relations

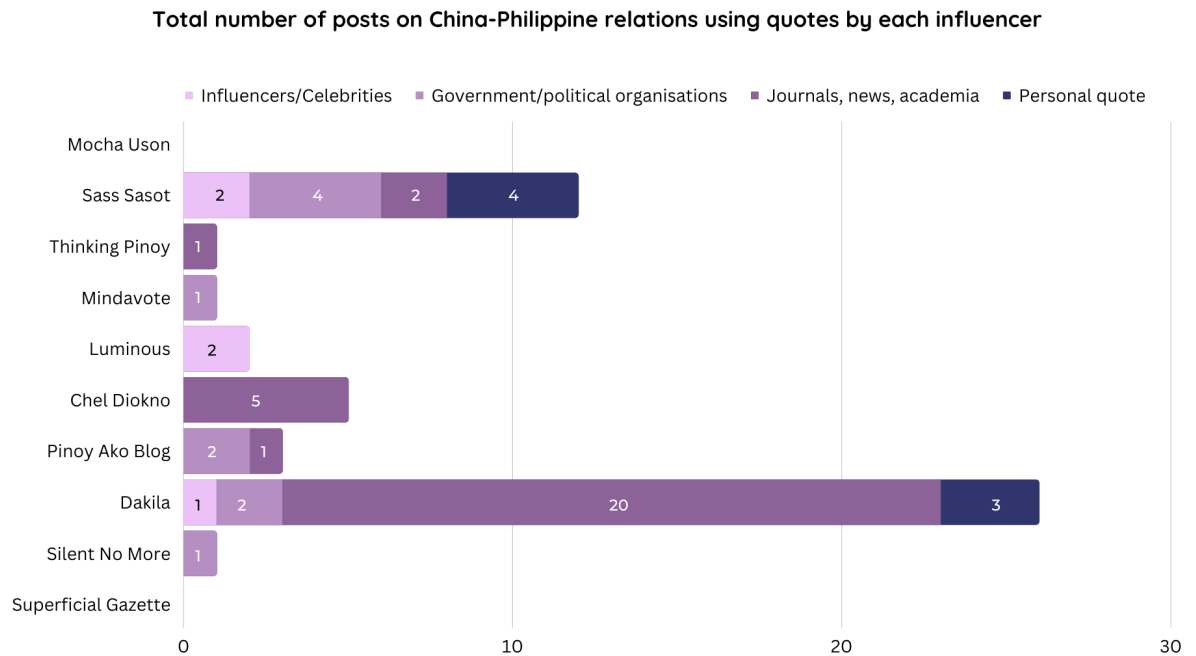


Figure 6.30 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using different kinds of facts/information to talk about China-Philippine relations

Most posts that use quotes to discuss China-Philippine relations were posted by Sass Sasot. Personal quotes and quotes from government officials were used the same number of times. These personal quotes were all quoting herself from her published articles. Sass writes a column for a newspaper, Manila Times, and uses it as a platform to explain Duterte’s policies, and then shares them on her Facebook page. By quoting an article she wrote and published in a broadsheet, Sass hopes to give credibility to herself and her arguments. Sasot uses her profile as an academic in the Netherlands to look credible to her audience and oftentimes uses academic jargon. Although the Manila Times has been known to be Duterte’s mouthpiece, those who already support Duterte and believe in Sasot’s credibility will only find her more credible with her publications.

An example of Sass quoting herself:

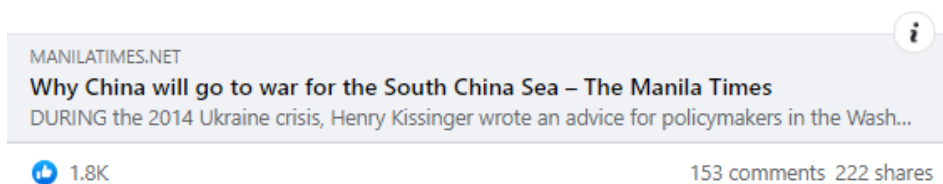
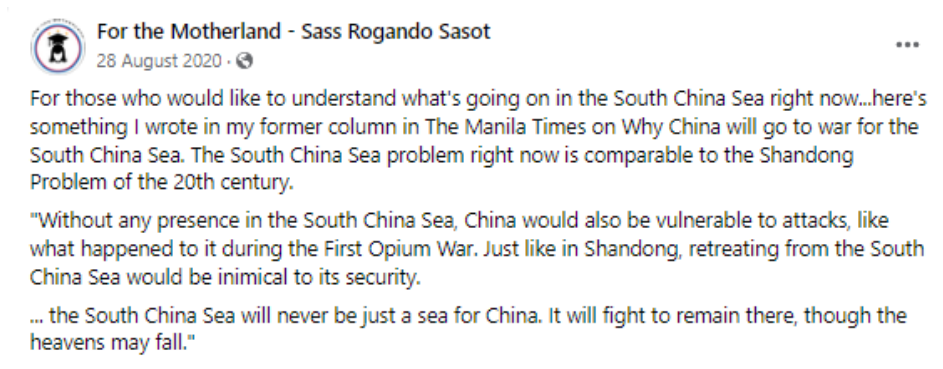


Figure 6.31 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot quoting her own article published in a newspaper, The Manila Times

On the other hand, most of the quotes talking about China-Philippine relations were posted by Dakila, and they used mostly quotes from journals, news, and academia. While Sass chose to give credibility to her arguments through her profile and her publications, Dakila chose to use the voice of experts to drive home a point.

For example, this post by Dakila quotes an analysis published in Forbes, about China's relationship with Vietnam, then connecting it to the situation in the Philippines. Similar to how Dakila used quotes to talk about issues on human rights and law and order, they follow it up with an emotional appeal and call to action:

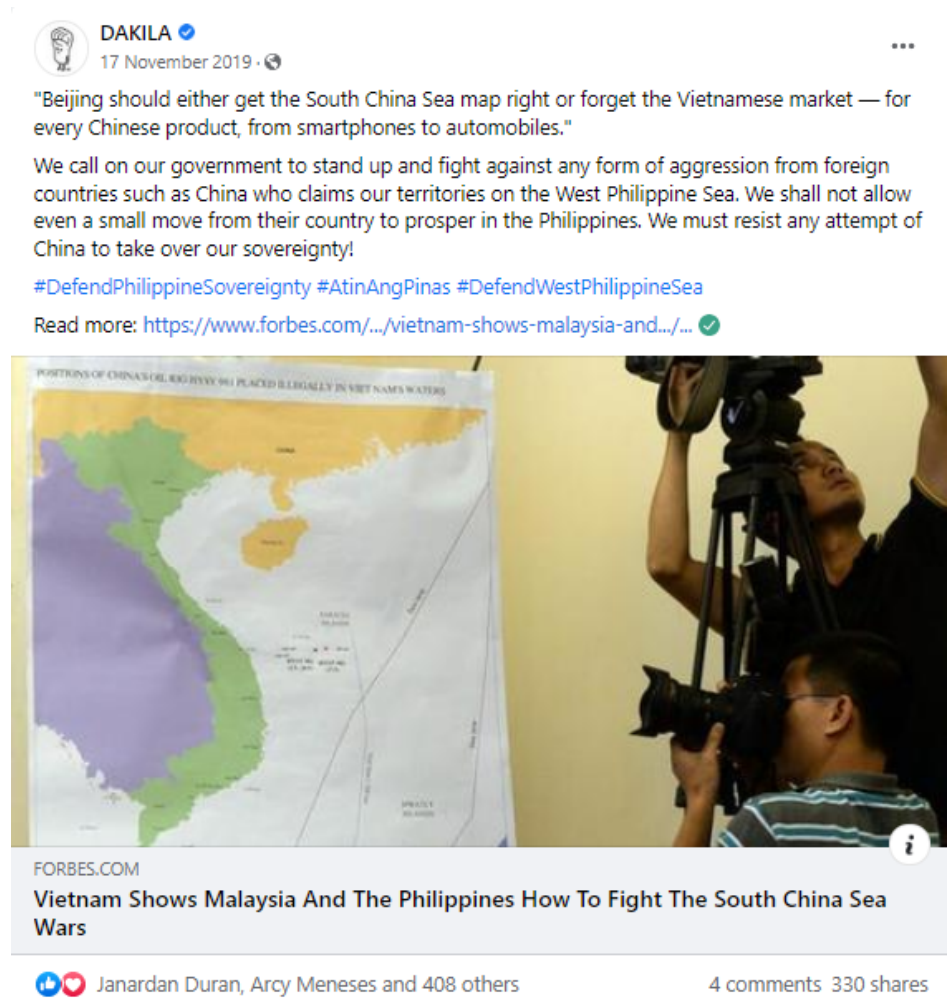


Figure 6.32 A screenshot of a post by Dakila quoting an analysis published in Forbes

Just like how Mocha Uson used personal quotes from alleged former CPP-NPA members to give credibility to their fight against the communist groups, Chel Diokno also used a personal quote from a fisherfolk who was allegedly attacked by Chinese fishermen when he tried to fish in disputed territory:



Atty. Chel Diokno

9 April 2019 · 🌐

...

Kwento sa kin ni Ka Wilfredo, isang mangingisda sa Masinloc na nagpupunta sa Panatag: Attorney, hindi na kami nakakaabot doon. Pagdating na pagdating pa lang namin doon e pinapalayas na kami. Tapos tinanong niya sa akin: Attorney, kanino ba yan? Sa Pilipinas ba yan o sa Tsina? Pero ito ang nakakalungkot. Sabi niya: ginagawa nilang kuto ang Pilipino.

Papayag ba tayo diyan? Pangulo, makinig ka sa amin. Hindi kami papayag diyan. #25ChelDiokno

See translation



KWENTO SAKIN NI KA WILFREDO, ISANG MANGINGISDA SA MASINLOC NA NAGPUPUNTA SA PANATAG:

"Attorney, hindi na kami nakakaabot doon. Pagdating na pagdating pa lang namin doon e pinapalayas na kami." Tapos tinanong niya sa akin: 'Attorney, kanino ba yan? Sa Pilipinas ba yan o sa Tsina?' Pero ito ang nakakalungkot. Sabi niya: 'ginagawa nilang kuto ang Pilipino.'

Papayag ba tayo diyan? Pangulo, makinig ka sa amin.
Hindi kami papayag diyan.

Figure 6.33 A screenshot of a post by Chel Diokno quoting personal experiences by fishermen encountering Chinese vessels in the West Philippine Sea

(Translation: According to Ka Wilfredo, a fisherman in Masinloc who sails to Panatag: Attorney, we don't reach that part of the sea. The moment we get there, they throw us out. He then asks me: Attorney, who owns it? Is it the Philippines' or China's? But this is the sad part. He said: They treat us like lice. Are we going to let this happen? President, listen to us. We will not allow this. #25ChelDiokno)

III. Collective Appeal

There were a total of 446 posts that used collective appeal to discuss each topic. Of this 446 46% were used to discuss issues on human rights and law and order, 36% were used to talk about COVID-19, and 18% were used to discuss China-Philippine relations.

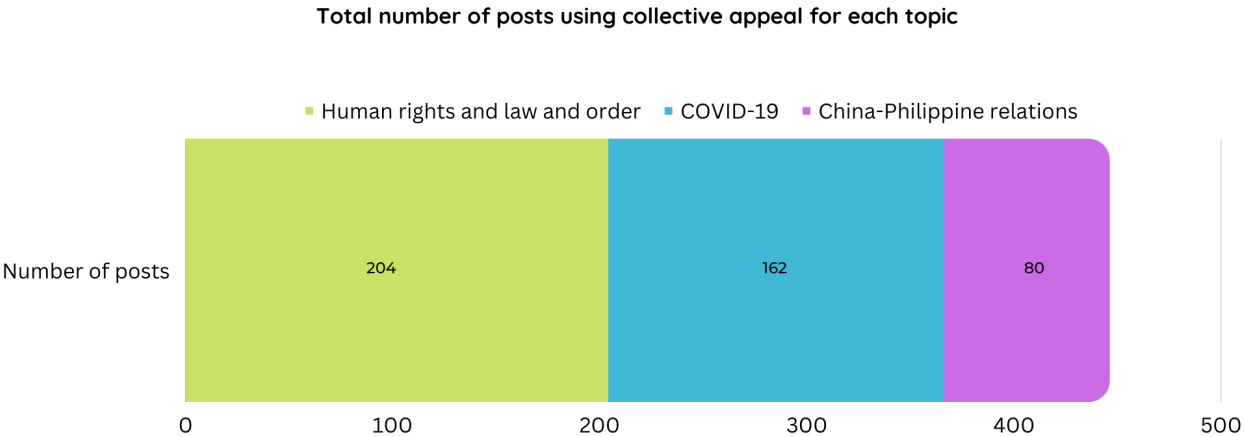


Figure 6.34 A graph showing the total number of posts collective appeal for each of the three topics

Looking at the two groups of influencers, anti-Duterte influencers used more collective appeals in discussing all three topics. A total of 343 collective appeals were posted by anti-Duterte influencers as compared only to 105 collective appeals by pro-Duterte influencers. Of these 343 collective appeals used by anti-Duterte influencers, 43% were used to discuss issues on human rights and law and order, 32% were used to talk about COVID-19, and 19% were used to discuss Philippine-China relations.

Total number of posts using collective appeal for each topic, pro-Duterte influencers vs anti-Duterte influencers

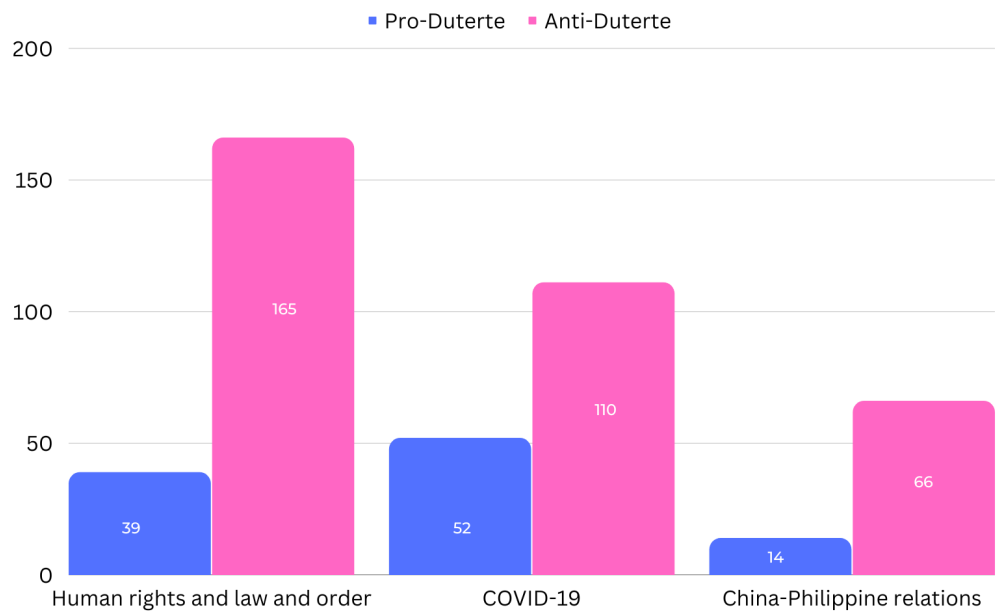


Figure 6.35 A graph comparing the total number of posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers using facts/information to talk about the three topics

Of the 105 collective appeals used by pro-Duterte influencers, 37% were used to talk about human rights and law and order, 50% were used to discuss COVID-19, and 13% were used to talk about China-Philippine relations.

Anti-Duterte influencers use more collective appeals to talk about human rights and law and order. In chapter 5, I presented that anti-Duterte used attacks mostly to criticise Duterte's policies. I can argue that based on this, anti-Duterte influencers used collective appeals to try to persuade the audience to object to said policies. Anti-Duterte influencers also used collective appeals more than pro-Duterte influencers to talk about COVID-19 and China-Philippine relations. Aside from appeals to follow rules and regulations, anti-Duterte influencers also used collective appeals to try and persuade the audience to join them in the call for better policies to help fight the pandemic (i.e. mass testing). For China-Philippine relations, collective appeals were used to persuade the audience to join the fight for Philippine sovereignty and resist China's actions in claiming Philippine territory.

On the other hand, pro-Duterte influencers used more collective appeals to talk about COVID-19 versus human rights and law and order and China-Philippine relations. One of the possible reasons for this is that some of these influencers worked for the government and appeals by the government to follow rules and regulations during the pandemic were echoed by these influencers. For human rights and law and order, collective appeals were used by pro-Duterte influencers to persuade the audience that these policies are worth supporting and/or needs to be followed. Similarly, in using collective appeals to talk about China-Philippine relations, pro-Duterte influencers use collective appeals to persuade the audience to support the government’s decisions on China-Philippine relations.

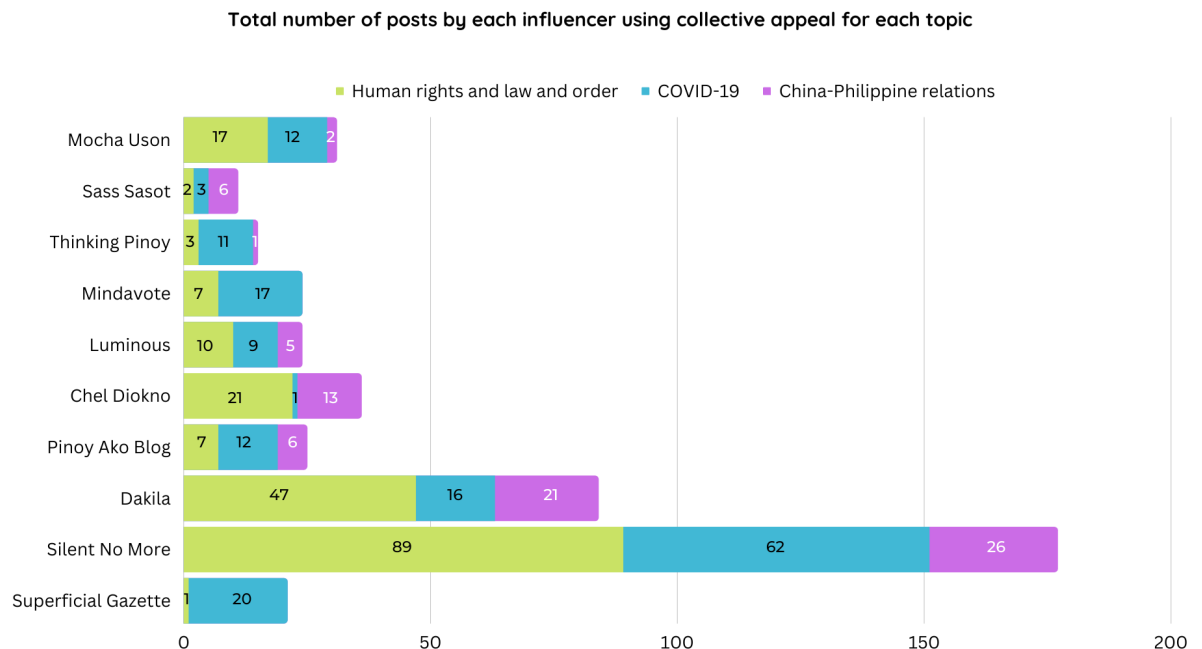


Figure 6.36 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using different collective appeal to talk about each of the three topics

Here is an example from Silent No More, who, it should be noted, frequently uses the salutation ‘Dear fellow Filipinos’ to talk about these three topics. It seems that the communication strategy of the group is to start most of their posts with a collective appeal. For example, this post starts with the salutation and proceeds to continue using

the word 'we' to appeal to their audience. The post criticises Duterte for appointing Leni Robredo as his 'drug czar' for a mere 18 days.

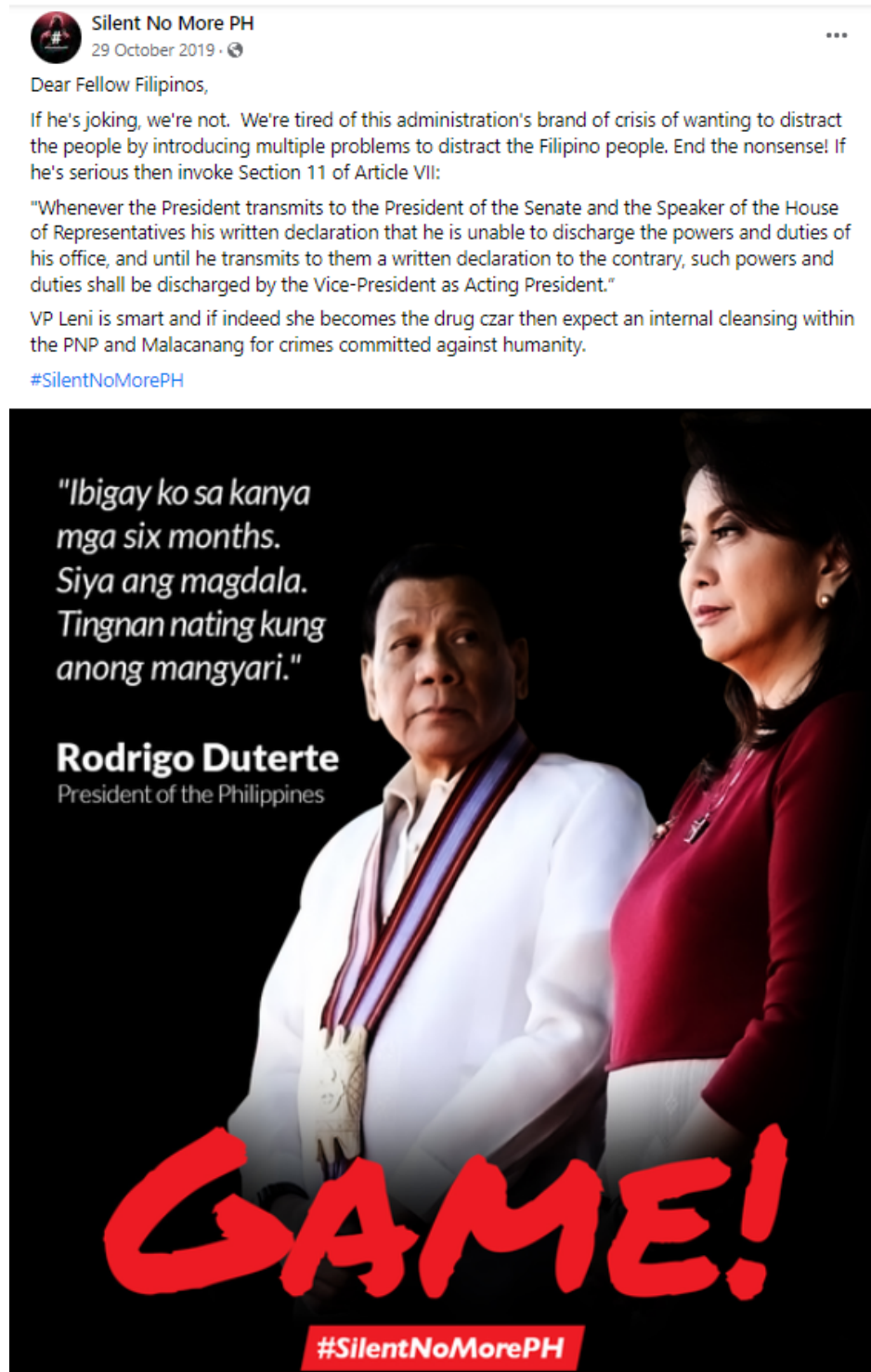


Figure 6.37 A screenshot of a post by Silent No More using collective appeal to criticise Duterte

Another example is a post by Dakila with a collective appeal to their audience asking for vigilance and resistance against China, as well as a collective appeal calling on their audience to support the Philippines claim in the West Philippine Sea:



Figure 6.38 A screenshot of a post by Dakila using collective appeal to support the Philippine’s claim to the West Philippine Sea

In contrast, a collective appeal by Sass Sasot talking about China-Philippine relations argues why the Filipinos allegedly have Sinophobia. In this post, Sass uses the words ‘our’ and ‘we’ seemingly to appeal to the collective Sinophobia of Filipinos, asking them to rethink why they think about the Chinese the way they do:

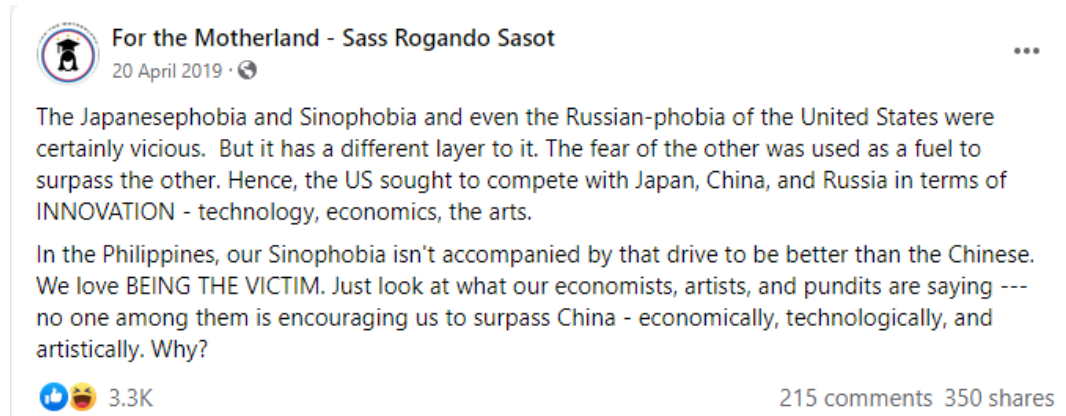


Figure 6.39 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot using collective appeal to talk about the supposed Sinophobia in the country

Pro-Duterte influencers posted more collective appeals about COVID-19. Mocha Uson and Mindavote both re-share a statement from Duterte, appealing to the public to observe rules and regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic:

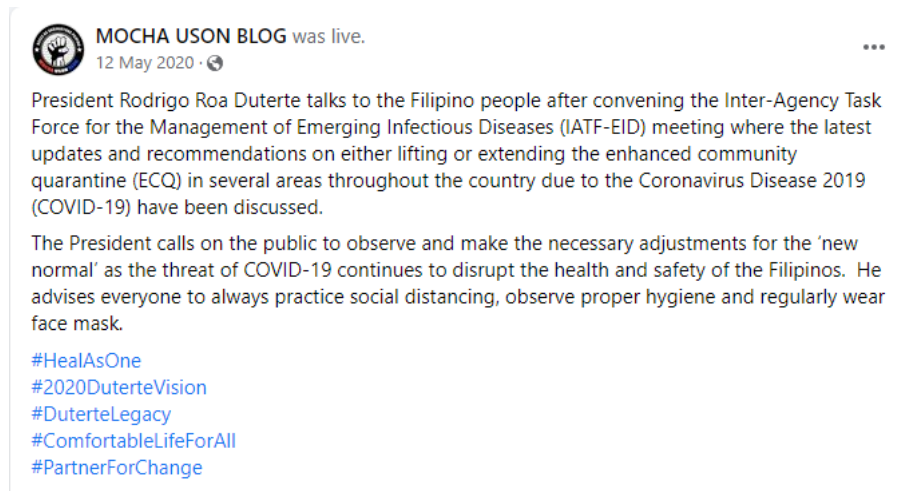


Figure 6.40 A screenshot of a post by Mocha Uson using collective appeal to ask the public to follow COVID-19 rules

Just like pro-Duterte influencers, anti-Duterte influencers also used collective appeals to talk about the COVID-19 pandemic, although used less frequently. As mentioned earlier, collective appeals about COVID-19 posted by anti-Duterte influencers are used to criticise Duterte and his policies in fighting the pandemic. A post by Pinoy Ako Blog criticises Duterte's policies on COVID-19. She uses the word '*natin*' (our) to pertain to

the debts incurred by the government, reminding her audience that this debt is the debt of the Filipino population and not just Duterte's debt:



Figure 6.41 A screenshot of a post by Pinoy Ako Blog using collective appeal to remind the people about the debt Duterte has incurred during the pandemic

(Translation: Our debt has risen to trillions but some of our frontliners still don't get enough protection against COVID-19?)

IV. Personal Appeal

There were a total of 309 posts that used collective appeal to discuss each topic. Of this 309 49% were used to discuss issues on human rights and law and order, 38% were used to talk about COVID-19, and 14% were used to discuss China-Philippine relations.

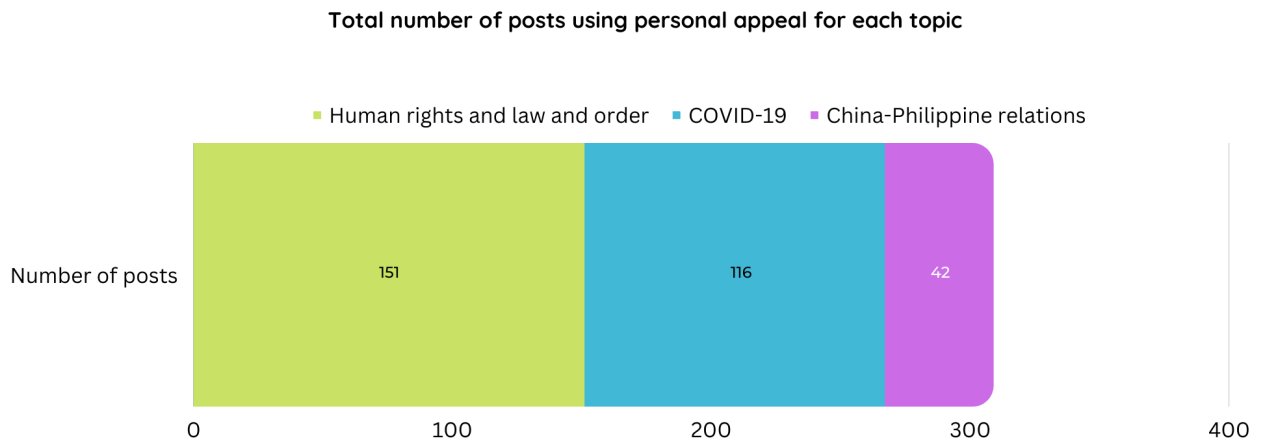


Figure 6.42 A graph showing the total number of posts using facts/information for each of the three topics

Total number of posts using personal appeal for each topic, pro-Duterte influencers vs anti-Duterte influencers

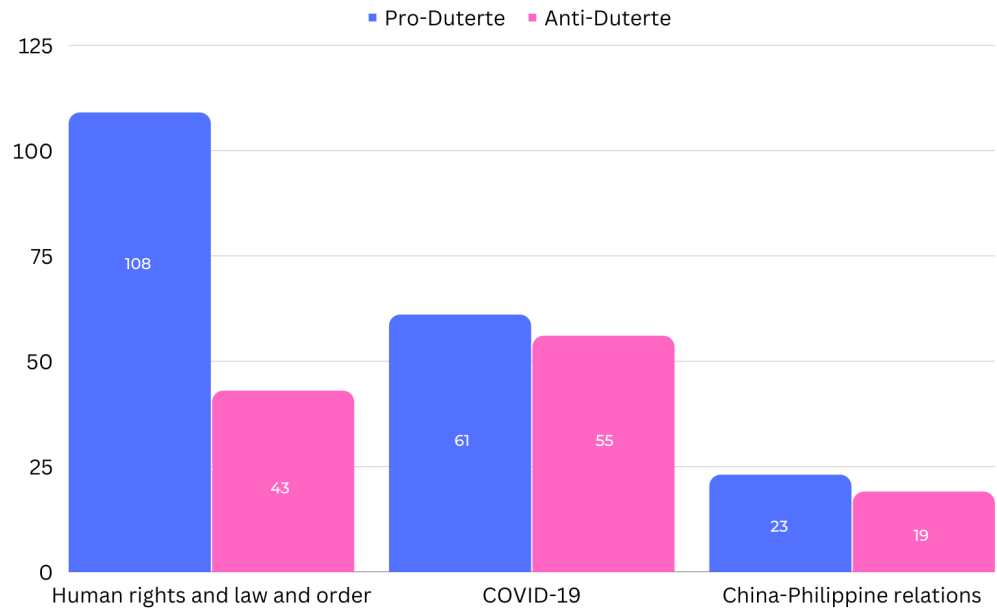


Figure 6.43 A graph comparing the total number of posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers using personal appeal to talk about the three topics

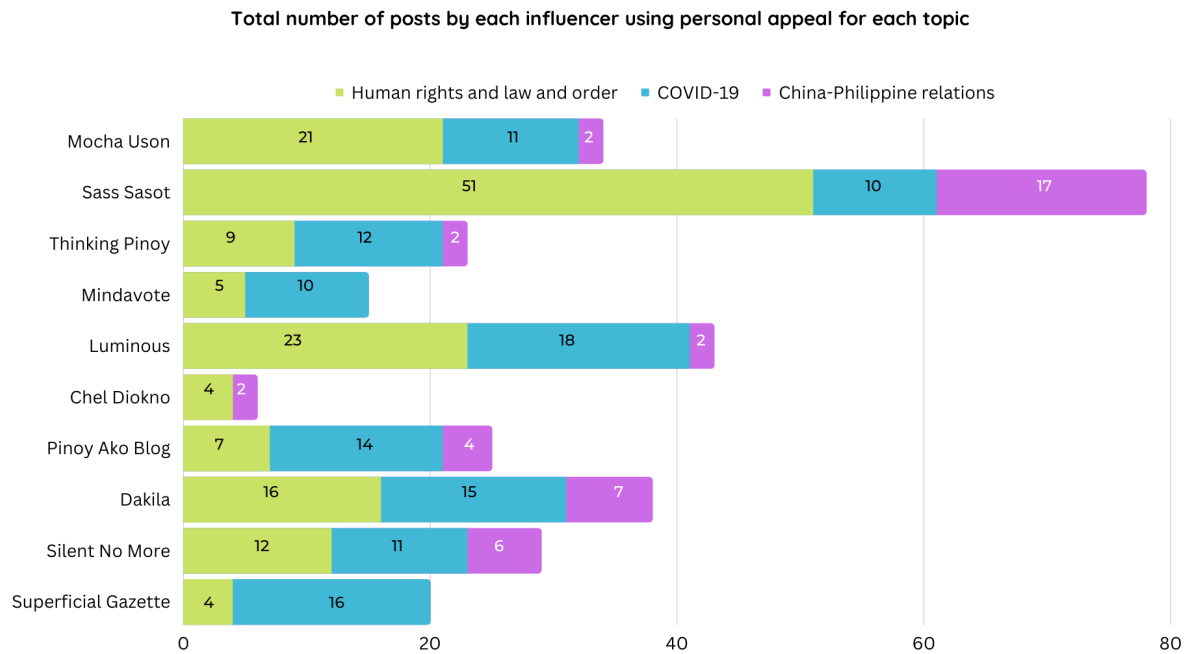


Figure 6.44 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using personal appeal to talk about each of the three topics

Looking at the two groups of influencers, pro-Duterte influencers used more personal appeals in discussing all three topics. A total of 193 personal appeals were posted by pro-Duterte influencers as compared only to 118 personal appeals by anti-Duterte influencers. Of these 193 personal appeals used by anti-Duterte influencers, 56% were used to discuss issues on human rights and law and order, 32% were used to talk about COVID-19, and 12% were used to discuss Philippine-China relations. Of the 113 personal appeals used by pro-Duterte influencers, 36% were used to talk about human rights and law and order, 47% were used to discuss COVID-19, and 16% were used to talk about China-Philippine relations.

Pro-Duterte influencers used more than double the amount of personal appeals to talk about human rights as compared to anti-Duterte influencers, and almost double the amount of personal appeals talking about COVID-19. And while pro-Duterte influencers

use personal appeals for their audience to persuade their audience to continue to support Duterte and his policies, anti-Duterte influencers use personal appeals to do the opposite. Anti-Duterte influencers use personal appeal to criticise the president and his policies. There were more personal appeals about COVID-19, posted mostly by Dakila and Superficial Gazette. Personal appeals on human rights were posted mostly by Superficial Gazette, Dakila, and Pinoy Ako Blog. Personal appeals to talk about China-Philippine relations were mostly by Dakila and Silent No More.

Mocha Uson uses personal appeal to make her audience directly support Duterte's illiberal policies. Most of these posts are about supporting the war against the CPP-NPA. For example, this post by Mocha appeals to parents to stop their children from being recruited by the said group. Mocha, as with other government officials, believe that universities/schools are the 'breeding ground' of communist recruitment. Parents would therefore be a good audience to appeal to, to ensure that their children do not join the CPP-NPA. Mocha also uses her audience's personal circumstances to appeal to their emotions:



MOCHA USON BLOG

19 August 2019 · 🌐



RECRUITMENT NG NPA SA MGA ESTUDYANTE.

Makipag-usap lagi at kumustahin ang inyong mga anak kung ikaw ay nasa ibang bansa. Ang hirap, pawis, at sakripisyo ng isang magulang para sa pag-aaral ng kanilang anak ay hindi dapat masira ng mga NPA.

--- Boses ng Ordinaryong Pilipino ❤️

See translation



Figure 6.45 A screenshot of a post by Mocha Uson using personal appeal to ask parents to make sure their children don't join the CPP-NPA. The text below the photo is a quote from a supposed former member of the CPP-NPA. It translates to, "I got pregnant. I asked help but did not get anything from them, not even a single peso. The NPA only used us!"

(Translation of post caption: RECRUITMENT OF NPA WITHIN STUDENTS – Don't forget to speak often to your children and ask how they are doing, especially if you're working in another country. Your

hardships, sweat, and sacrifices as a parent for your child's education should not be destroyed by the NPA – Voice of the Ordinary Filipino <3)

In contrast, personal appeals by anti-Duterte influencers on human rights are mostly directed to the audience to persuade them to oppose Duterte's illiberal policies. An example is by Superficial Gazette, using personal appeal to ask their audience to be like the Avengers in fighting for democracy and against Duterte's illiberal policies likened to a dictatorship. In this post, personal appeal was first used ('you can do this') and ends with a collective appeal ('we can do this together'), signifying that individual actions will collectively lead to something big. Like the example above, the personal appeal presents a challenge. Superficial Gazette's challenge to protect democracy is abstract and can feel overwhelming to the intended audience, but by ending the post with a collective appeal, it can make the audience feel like they are not alone in the fight (i.e. it's not just you alone, but us together in the fight):



Superficial Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines is with Alexis Bartolo.

...

14 May 2019 · 🌐

Democracy dies in darkness. (Tagalog translation in the top comment)

Now that Duterthanos has collected the Impunity Stones and snapped his fingers, the disintegration of the Philippines begins.

- 1.) With his domination of the Senate, expect evil laws to be passed, like the lowering of the Age of Criminal Responsibility and the Death Penalty, which will let Duterte throw children in jail and execute them like common adult criminals. Like the continuation of [#TRAINwreck](#), which drives prices up at the expense of ordinary Filipinos.
- 2.) Expect more corrupt politicians, who can steal billions from Filipino taxpayers without facing justice as long as they serve Duterte's goals, and incompetent officials who are completely unqualified for their positions. More of them are already in the Senate. If it was hard enough to find political leaders who are competent and not corrupt (like Otso Diretso), it will be even harder now.
- 3.) Expect an even higher growth of [#FakeNews](#), where Fake News Bloggers like Mocha, Sass, TP, and the army of paid Dutertrolls to spread even more lies, until more Filipinos stop caring about facts and truth.
- 4.) Expect the continuation of the golden age of drugs, where China-funded syndicates — including the [#DuterteDrugSyndicate](#) — enjoy the support of the President*, while the innocent poor continued to be murdered and falsely accused of being addicts and pushers.
- 5.) Expect more thousands of dead Filipinos, adding to the nearly 30,000 innocents who are already dead, all in the name of Duterte's false War on "Drugs". (a.k.a. the War on the Poor)
- 6.) Expect shady "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure projects that Duterte will use to pretend he is bringing progress to the Philippines, when in reality, he will bury us in billions of debt to China that your children (and their children after them) will spend decades paying for, like the Marcos debts.
- 7.) Expect further Chinese invasion, beyond the landing of Chinese fighter planes in Davao, beyond the Chinese military bases on our islands, beyond the destruction of our seabeds and the sale of our rare clams, beyond the replacement of ordinary Filipino workers with Duterte's favored Chinese immigrants. The Chinese "third telco" will infiltrate our communications structure, allowing the Chinese government to spy upon YOU.

8.) Expect the further deterioration of Filipino character and morals, where more will follow Duterte's lead: freely cursing at fellow Filipinos, having no respect for women, attacking our religious traditions (except powerful cults like Iglesia Ni Manalo, who serve the President*), and having zero empathy for the poor who Duterte executes in the streets.

9.) Expect a Charter Change to "Federalism" that gives more power not to the provinces and the people, but to the rich political dynasties, like the Dutertes and their plunderer allies.

10.) And worst of all, expect the Charter Change to create a "Transition Government," headed by Duterte and completely lacking of any checks and balances on his absolute power. It will be a dictatorship, where you are only allowed actions and thoughts that do not anger the China-Duterte regime.

Without the movie Avengers' time travel, how can we stop Dutertanos?

You, the right-minded Filipinos who still believe in the freedom and democracy our ancestors fought and died for, the forgotten voices trampled upon by the China-Duterte regime, the patriots who stand against China, and the ones who still use your brains, are the real-life Avengers. It is you who will keep the Filipino dreams of freedom, good government, and good character alive, holding our country together until our motherland is finally cleansed of the Duterte plague.

Democracy dies in darkness. But together, we can get rid of the worst, most incompetent excuse for a government since the Marcos Dictatorship.

And together, we can bring democracy back to life. [#SuperficialGazette](#)



Figure 6.46 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette using personal appeal asking the public to protect democracy

Personal appeals were also used extensively by pro-Duterte influencers to make people follow rules and regulations during the pandemic. Luminous posted the most personal appeals on COVID-19. One example post by Luminous asks people to follow lockdown and quarantine rules. They use intimidating and threatening tone and use their authority as a lawyer to make people listen:

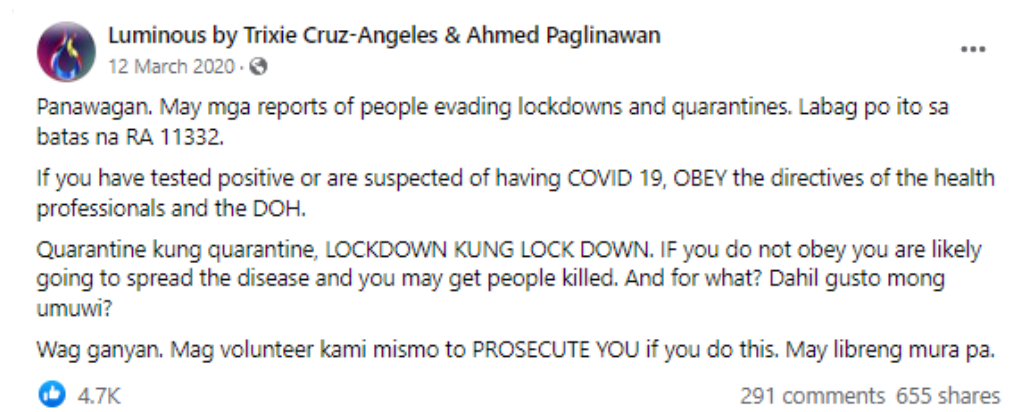


Figure 6.47 A screenshot of a post by Luminous using personal appeal to ask people to follow COVID-19 protocols

(Translation: This is a call. There are reports of people evading lockdowns and quarantines. This is against the RA 11332 law. If you have tested positive or are suspected of having COVID 19, OBEY the directives of the health professionals and the DOH. Quarantine is quarantine, lockdown is lockdown. IF you do not obey you are likely going to spread the disease and you may get people killed. And for what? Because you want to go home? Don't be like that. We will volunteer to PROSECUTE YOU if you do this. We will even curse you for free.)

Personal appeals by anti-Duterte influencers to discuss COVID-19 range from criticising policies by the government, criticising government officials, to asking people to help in COVID-19 relief efforts.

An example of a personal appeal that criticises a government official is a post by Superficial Gazette criticising a senator who violated COVID-19 rules. It uses personal appeal to make their audience feel anger towards the senator:

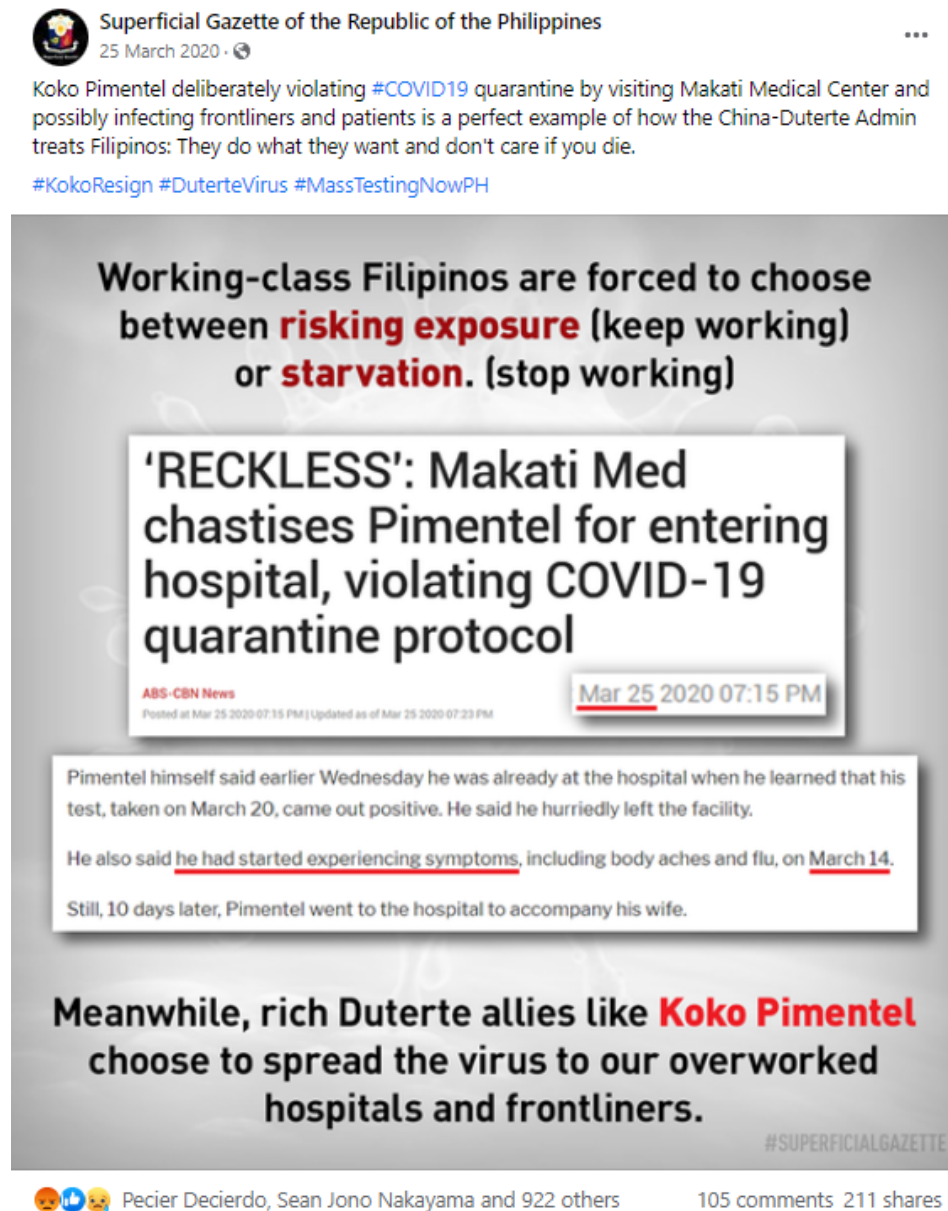


Figure 6.48 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette using personal appeal to criticise a senator who broke the COVID-19 protocol

Sass again posted the most personal appeals to talk about China-Philippine relations. In this post, she addresses those who lauded the United States for making a statement that it

will defend the Philippines if it breaks the ruling from The Hague. The US has always made its stand, saying China's claims in the South China Sea are unlawful (Ching, 2020). This year, the US Embassy in Manila issued a statement from US Secretary of State Antony Blinken calling on China to comply with the ruling with a warning that it is obliged to defend the Philippines should China attack in disputed waters (Gomez, 2022). Sass' post uses personal appeal to create distrust among Filipinos about the intentions of the US:

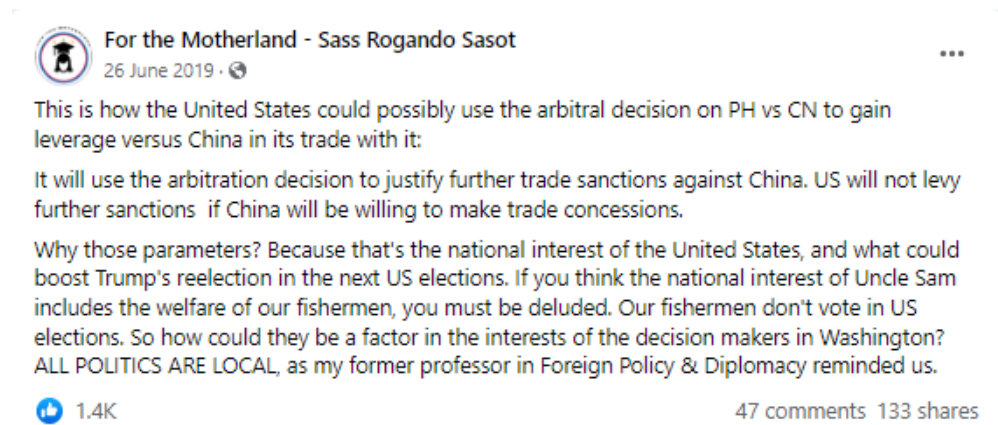


Figure 6.49 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot using personal appeal to talk about the West Philippine Sea

There are far less personal appeals used by anti-Duterte influencers to talk about China-Philippine relations compared to the other two topics. Anti-Duterte supporters usually criticise Duterte's policies on China and asks to support Philippine sovereignty. For example, this post by Dakila asks their audience to speak up about the West Philippine Sea despite being told by the presidential spokesperson, Salvador Panelo, to "shut up":



DAKILA

5 July 2019 · 🌐



Whether you're a part of the opposition, a critic of the government, or just a simple Filipino, you should not be silenced by anyone in the government. We should not be afraid to voice out our firm stand on issues specially in times when foreign countries attempt to take away our sovereignty.

#DefendWestPhilippineSea

#DefendPHSovereignty

#AtinAngPinas

Read more: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/.../panelo-asks-opposition...> ✓



NEWSINFO.INQUIRER.NET

Panelo asks opposition to 'shut up' on West Philippine Sea row

Critics of the Duterte administration's stance in the West Philippine Sea dispute should just "sh...

Figure 6.50 A screenshot of a post by Dakila using personal appeal to talk about the West Philippine Sea

V. Call to Action

A total of 450 posts by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers were found to use call to action as a rhetorical device to talk about human rights and law and order issues. Out of this 450, 38% were online, non-violent calls to action; 61% were offline, non-violent calls to action; 2% were offline, violent call to actions; and 0.4% were online, violent calls to action. Both the online and offline violent calls to action were found in discussions on human rights and law and order.

Pro-Duterte influencers posted a total of 183 calls to action. Of these 183, 53% were offline, non-violent call to actions; 39% were online, non-violent call to actions. Most of these calls to action were on COVID-19 and human rights and law and order. Notably, only pro-Duterte influencers posted violent calls to action, online and offline.

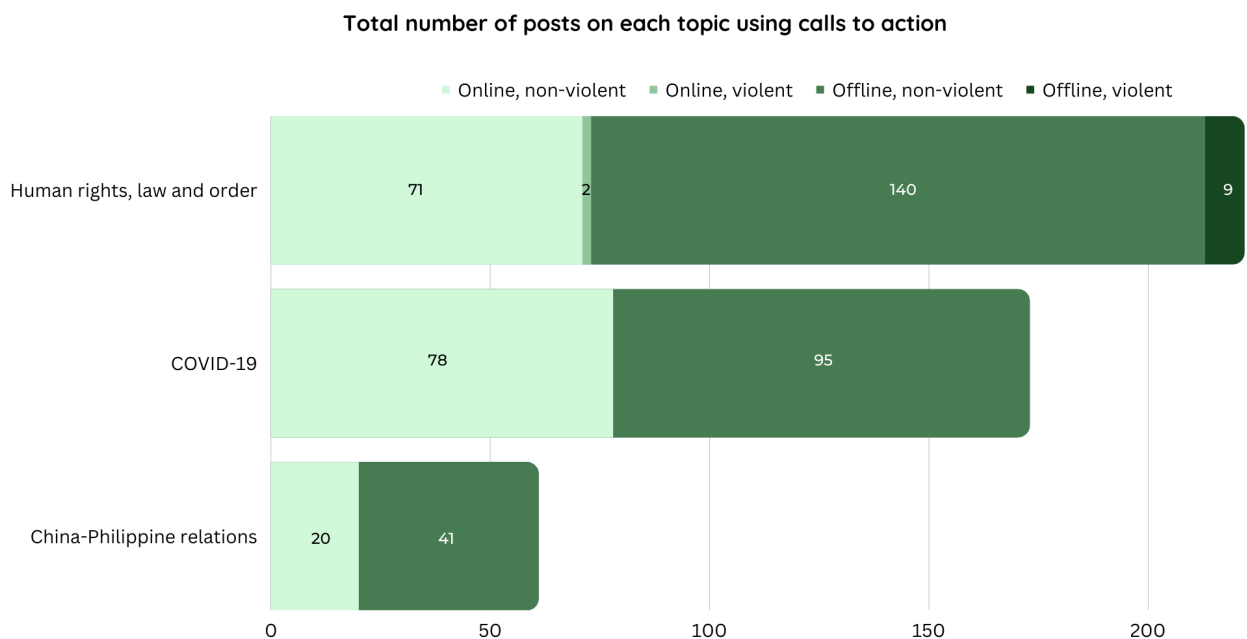


Figure 6.51 A graph showing the total number of posts using calls to action for each of the three topics

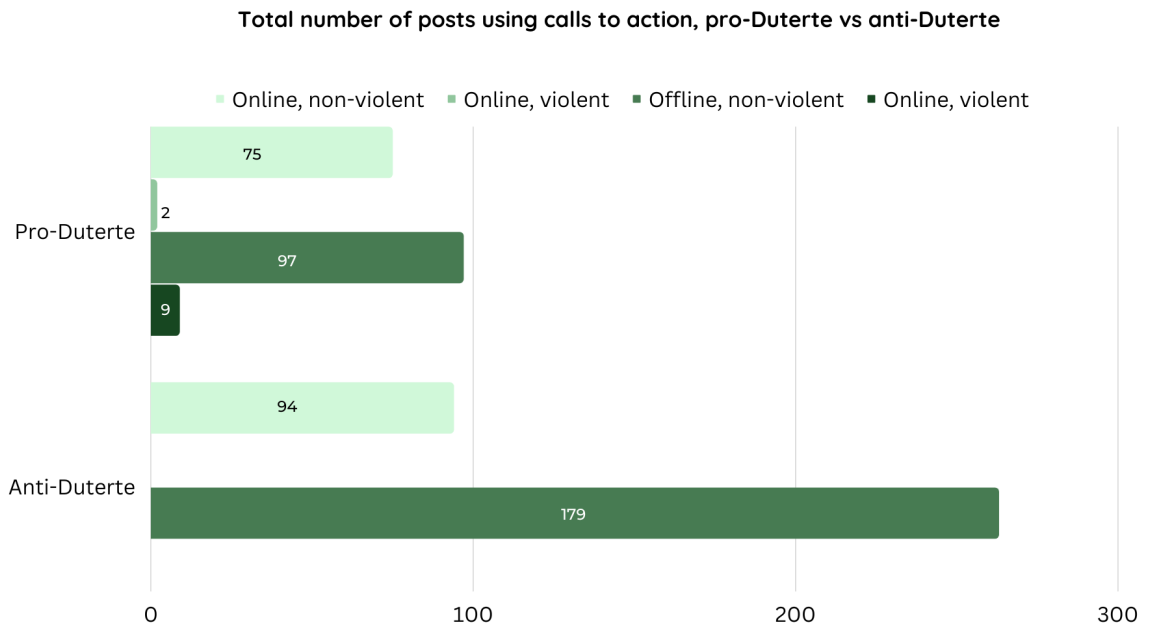


Figure 6.52 A graph comparing the total number of posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers using different kinds of call to action

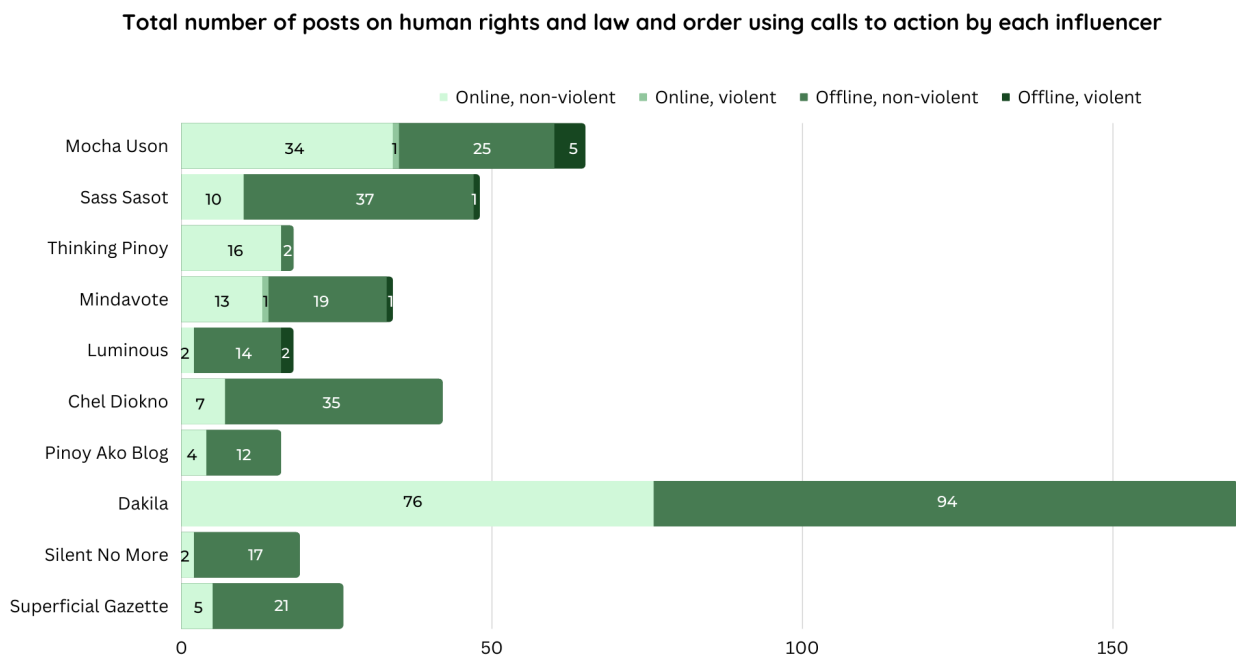


Figure 6.53 A graph comparing the total number of posts by each influencer using different kinds of calls to action to talk about human rights and law and order

Anti-Duterte influencers posted a total of 273 calls to action. Of this 273, 66% were offline, non-violent calls to action; 34% were online, non-violent calls to action. Most of these calls to action were on discussions on human rights and law and order. No violent calls to action were found in any posts by anti-Duterte influencers.

Pro-Duterte influencers use mostly offline, non-violent calls to action followed by online non-violent calls to action. All of the violent calls to action were found in posts that discuss human rights and law and order, mostly posted by Mocha Uson.

Non-violent Online calls to action all ask the audience to read more, click the link, share the post, etc. This is true for all the three topics. The usual posts include good news about Duterte and his administration, his achievements, and policies he has enacted; most of these are information from government officials and/or government agencies. Aside from

these, pro-Duterte figures also asked their followers to read and share controversial issues about the opposition and critics of the president.

Anti-Duterte influencers also use mostly offline, non-violent calls to action. This is followed closely by online, non-violent calls to action. Dakila dominates in using calls to action as a rhetorical device. There were no violent calls to action found in any of the posts by anti-Duterte supporters. Online calls to action by anti-Duterte influencers are somewhat similar to the calls to action by pro-Duterte influencers. Most of these ask people to like, share, read, or watch something online. This is true in all the three topics that were investigated. However, in contrast to what pro-Duterte influencers ask their audience to like, share, read, or watch, the posts are mostly criticisms of Duterte and his policies. What I found unique in anti-Duterte posts are online calls to action to sign petitions to push back against certain policies as well as to ask government officials to resign from their posts.

a. Online calls to action

An example of an online, non-violent call to action on human rights and law and order was posted by Mocha Uson. In this post she asks her followers to share and like information to help ‘end the abuses of the NPA among Filipinos’. This call to action is coupled with a personal appeal (i.e. ‘You can help do this):



MOCHA USON BLOG

5 July 2019 · 🌐 · 🌐



Kailangan ng gobyerno ang iyong tulong upang mawakasan na ang pang aabuso ng mga NPA sa ating mga kababayan. Walang MAINSTREAM MEDIA na nais tumulong dahil ito ay walang pakinabang sa kanila kaya tayo nalang ang mag share at pakalat ng mga ganitong impormasyon. PLS SHARE and LIKE.

See translation



👍 16K

877 comments 22K shares

Figure 6.54 A screenshot of a post by Mocha Usong using non-violent online call to action (share, like). The text in the photo translates to, “Fight the CPP-NPA propaganda. Share this video.”

(Translation: The government needs your help to put an end to the abuses of the NPA among our countrymen. No mainstream media wants to help because they will not benefit from it, so let's do our part and share and spread this kind of information. PLS SHARE and LIKE)

An example of a controversial post about critics of Duterte is a post by Luminous which asks his followers to read and share a blog about fellow influencer, Thinking Pinoy, about alleged funding by the CIA involving media news outlets they call ‘biased’:



Figure 6.55 A screenshot of a post by Thinking Pinoy using non-violent online call to action (share, read).

This particular post by Thinking Pinoy alleges that media outfits like VERA Files, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Rappler, and the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility are funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, a non-profit organisation that is largely funded by tax payers in the United States (National Endowment for Democracy, no date) and not by the CIA. However, influencers like Thinking Pinoy and Sass Sasot have been selling the narrative that these media outfits, who have been a critic of the Duterte government, is a “CIA operative.”

On the other hand, petition signing remained the most popular call to action for anti-Duterte influencers. For example, Dakila asked their followers to sign petitions on all three topics. On human rights and law and order, a petition to junk the anti-terror bill which would impinge on the right of people to dissent:



DAKILA

2 June 2020 · 🌐



We at DAKILA rally with the Filipino people in condemning the railroaded Anti-Terrorism Bill of 2020. Just like a thief in the night, the Congress approved the Anti-Terror for second reading only a day after President Duterte certified it as urgent — this, as our nation battles, and fails, to combat the on-going health crisis.

While we stand against any real threat to the public, the anti-terror bill is built on dangerous provisions that only indicate its true targets: valid criticisms and legitimate acts of dissent - both important to a functioning democracy.

It both justifies and intensifies the already grim state of surveillance, red-tagging, and human rights violations. More dangerously, the vagueness of the bill makes every Filipino as potential targets. By simply expressing an opinion on the government, anyone can be arrested without any warrant and may be imprisoned.

As the bill creates more terror than it solves, we call on to everyone to join us in expressing our strong rejection of the terror bill and to focus on the real urgency now — the curbing of the pandemic.

This is not the time to stay silent. Let us answer their attempts to gag us with a more raging voice for justice! Sign the petition at <https://www.change.org/.../junk-the-anti-terrorism-bill...> ✓

#JunkTerrorBillNow #ActivismNotTerrorism #MassTestingNowPH



Figure 6.56 A screenshot of a post by Dakila using non-violent online call to action (sign petition)

Petition-signing to ask for resignation of government officials were also a common trend found in the posts of anti-Duterte influencers. An example from Silent No More asks their followers to sign a petition for the resignation of Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary Teddy Boy Locsin over his fake tweets on drug cartels and extra-judicial killings:



Figure 6.57 A screenshot of a post by Silent No More using non-violent online call to action (sign petition)

(Translation: Dear Fellow Filipinos, Do you think Teddy Boy Locsin should resign? Sign this petition here and share it to everyone you know. Teddy Boy Locsin is spreading lies in his latest tweet that drug cartels will be giving bonuses to everyone who works for the Iceland resolution that will allow people to investigate extrajudicial killings. Is this how a top diplomat acts? This is the lowest kind of a diplomat.)

While these petitions remain popular among anti-Duterte influencers, it is important to note that none of these petitions have achieved their goal. However, these petitions might be classified as an easy concrete action that one might do and can act as a gateway to bigger things like joining a protest in person. According to Croesser (2019), petitions, while they don't usually achieve their goals, can help bring attention to issues that are usually not in the agenda and allow for momentum to gain in ongoing campaigns, as well as make people feel they are part of a collective.

There were only two posts that were considered online violent calls to action, both from anti-Duterte influencers. In one of these posts, Mocha posts about beating up certain groups of people in their live video. The word '*banatan*', usually pertaining to physical fights, is used here as a term to attack someone through their 'live news'. In this case, they invited the audience to join them through the online stream. The page also posted logos of organisations who they tagged as a communist group but are legal organisations. Gabriela, for example, is a left-leaning organisation who has been helping advance women's rights in the country. While there are no physical fights involved, this was violent because Mocha Uson's page is known to red-tag people as communists, which in many cases can be life-threatening for these people:



MOCHA USON BLOG

14 May 2020 · 🌐



SHARE, FOLLOW + SEE FIRST.

Tara Banatan natin ang mga Scammer, Pasaway, Mapang-api sa Ordinaryong Pilipino, Abusado, at Mapanlinlang na mga Komunista. 🙏

See translation



Figure 6.58 A screenshot of a post by Mocha Uson using violent online call to action (sign petition)

(Translation: Share, follow, + see first. Let's go beat up scammers, stubborn people, those who oppress ordinary Filipinos, those who abuse, and those deceptive communists.)

b. Offline calls to action

When it comes to offline calls to action by pro-Duterte influencers, they asked their followers to vote for certain candidates who aligned themselves with Duterte and his policies on human rights and law and order. In this example that has already been deleted by the page, Mindavote also asks their audience to vote for the senator, who they advertise as someone who will help the president fight illegal drugs, crime, and corruption:

Muli na namang inihayag ni Kuya Bong na susuportahan niya ang pinaka-importanteng laban ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte sa kanyang

*termino — ang laban sa illegal na droga, kriminalidad at korapsyon...
Kaya ngayong eleksyon, huwag po nating kalimutan na iboto ang ating
Kuya Bong Go! #34GoBongGO 🇵🇭*

*(Translation: Kuya Bong Go once again states that he will support the
most important fight of president Rodrigo Duterte in his term – the fight
against illegal drugs, crimes, and corruption... That’s why these elections,
don’t forget to vote for our Kuya Bong Go! #34GoBongGO 🇵🇭)*

On the contrary, Superficial Gazette dedicated many of its posts to ask its followers to not vote for candidates they call ‘team China’ or ‘China lapdogs.’ Some of their posts:



Superficial Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines is with Nellie Horak and Yam Ramirez.

10 April 2019 · 🌐

Ang mga kurakot na G.E.R.M. - Go, Estrada, Revilla, at Marcos - ay kumikita ng milyon at bilyon, habang ang ordinaryong Pilipinong natatrabaho nang maayos at marangal ay nagtitiis sa gutom.

A vote for Duterte candidates is a vote for drug lords and plunderers. Wag bumoto sa mga corrupt. #SuperficialGazette #FightGERM

See translation

Candidate	Amount	Source
BONG Go	3.07 BILLION	DUTERTE DRUG SYNDICATE (2010 to 2018)
JINGGOY Estrada	183 MILLION	PORK BARREL SCAM
BONG Revilla	224.5 MILLION	PORK BARREL SCAM
IMEE Marcos	66.4 MILLION	KINURAKOT SA ILOCOS NORTE TOBACCO FUNDS
IMEE Marcos	503 BILLION	MARCOS PLUNDER NOONG MARTIAL LAW

WAG BUMOTO SA CORRUPT! #FIGHTGERM



F Jordan Carnice, Nina Natalia Bautista and 2.7K others

1.1K comments 9K shares

Figure 6.59 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette asking their followers not to vote for certain candidates in the elections

(Translate: Here are the corrupt G.E.R.M. - Go, Estrada, Revilla, and Marcos – they earned millions and billions while ordinary Filipinos who work hard through honourable means endure hunger. A vote for Duterte

candidates is a vote for drug lords and plunderers. Don't vote for corrupt politicians. #SuperficialGazette #FightGERM)

Offline calls to action by pro-Duterte influencers on COVID-19 mostly ask their readers to follow certain guidelines or policies. This was true especially during the pandemic. An example of an offline call to action during COVID-19 by Sass Sasot guides her followers on what to do when one has a weak immune system, asking everyone to not panic and for her followers to do what they can individually:

For the Motherland - Sass Rogando Sasot
16 March 2020 · 🌐

Based on the data, most who got infected will recover. Actually, under-reported ang total number na nag-recover. Ito ay dahil sa maraming rason. One reason is, katulad dito sa Netherlands, ang mga may mild symptoms ay hindi naman tinitest. Testing is only being conducted sa may history of exposure sa positive sa COVID19 or iyong may severe symptoms na. Iyong mga asymptomatic (hindi nag show ng symptoms) eh hindi tinitest (unless may history of exposure sa taong positive sa COVID19 katulad ni Sen. Zubiri).

The real issue about this virus is that it spreads faster and that you can pass it on sa mga taong mahina na ang immune system.

So don't panic. But be aggressively considerate sa mga taong mahina na ang immune system like the elderly and may pre-existing health conditions. So practice extensive social distancing. Kung mahina na ang immune system mo or may pre-existing health conditions ka, better self-isolate.

Source:
<https://ncov2019.live/data...> ✓



Figure 6.60 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot using call to action for the public to follow COVID-19 protocols

Dakila, on the other hand, posts a call to action to both government officials and the public on COVID-19 measures. Unlike Sass who focuses on directing the public on what to do to avoid getting infected by the virus, Dakila’s emphasis is to ask the public to make the government more responsible with how they respond to the pandemic:

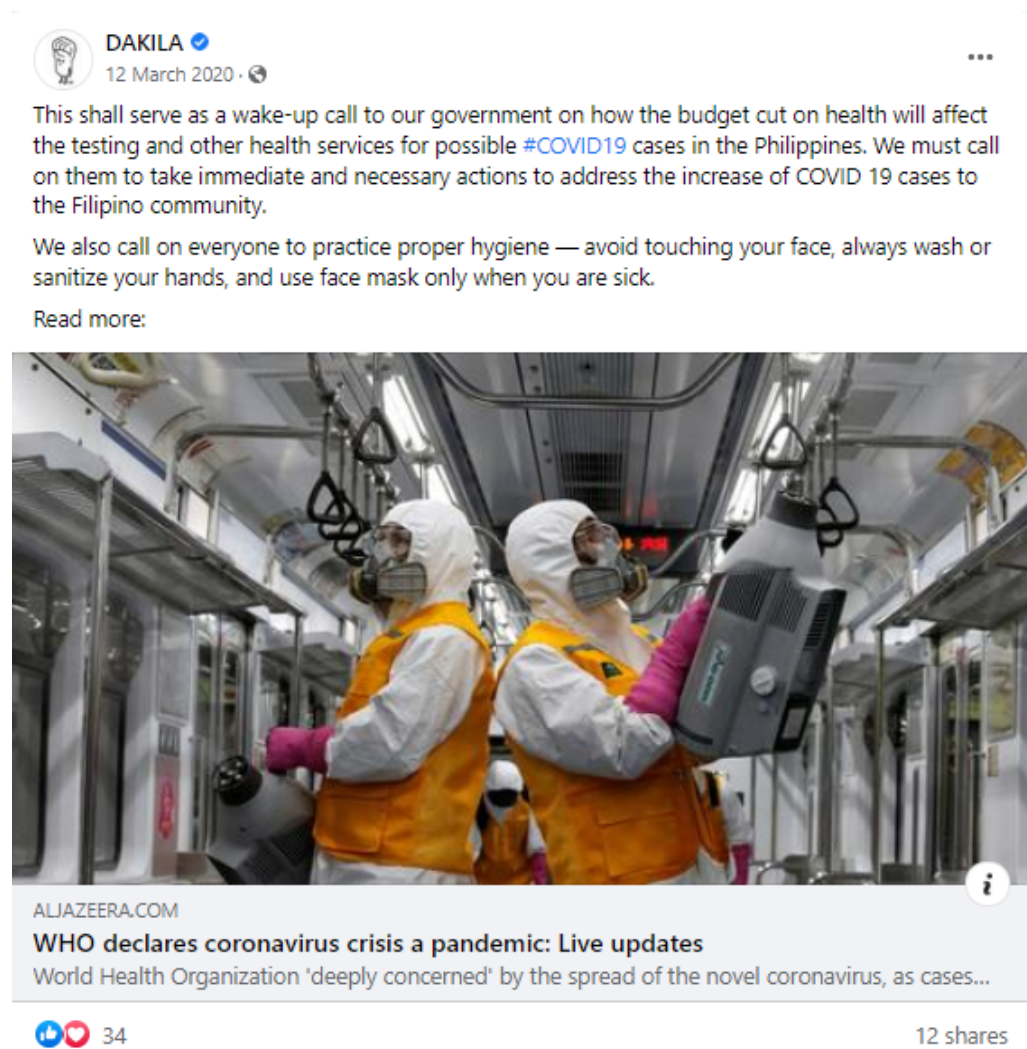


Figure 6.61 A screenshot of a post by Dakila using call to action for both the government and the public

While there were no offline violent calls to action by anti-Duterte influencers, there were a few offline violent calls to action by pro-Duterte influencers, mostly posted by Mocha Uson, and all of her posts pertain to the all-out war of the military against CPP-NPA. In this post, Mocha shares a controversial statement by Department of Foreign Affairs minister Teddy Boy Locsin where he asks communists to be shot. While the post is not originally from Mocha Uson, the page shares the sentiment with a laugh emoji, which seemingly agrees with the violent call to action.



Figure 6.62 A screenshot of a post by Mocha Uson sharing a violent call to action (to shoot) against the communist group CPP-NPA

6.4 Summary

In this chapter, I looked at five rhetorical devices – facts/information, quotes, collective appeal, personal appeal, and call to action – and how they were used by the ten influencers to discuss issues on human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations. At the beginning of this chapter I presented four main hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that pro-Duterte influencers will use more probable information while anti-Duterte influencers will use more sourced information. This hypothesis is correct. It was found that pro-Duterte influencers, in fact, used more probable information while anti-Duterte influencers used more sourced information when presenting their arguments.

Pro-Duterte influencers used probable information to defend Duterte's policies on human rights and law and order and China-Philippine relations. For example, claims on the good effects of the drug war, and claims that China is not stealing any Philippine territory were used to make their audience continuously support Duterte's policies. While these kinds of information may or may not be true, (or arguably, can even be proven to be false), Duterte supporters can take this information at face value. This is consistent with Ong et al.'s (2022) findings from interviews with non-government organisations, for example, that the middle class believe the narrative that the drug war protects human life, going beyond human rights.

Arguably, the same could be said about anti-Duterte influencers and supporters. While anti-Duterte influencers chose to share facts/information from experts (i.e. news, reports, journals, academia, etc.), that would criticise Duterte and his illiberal policies, it is expected that their audience, who are already critics of Duterte, would use this information to challenge or protest against him and his policies. But as Ong et al. (2022) found in their report, anti-Duterte influencers, who want to protect human rights, 'preach to the choir' and 'build walls' instead of using communications to help more people understand the values and principles of human rights. This reflects the concept of an echo chamber that has been created in social media as people continue to filter their social network with people whom they only agree with. While anti-Duterte influencers used sourced facts and information, without proper understanding of why Duterte supporters support his illiberal policies, stating mere facts would not connect to an

audience whose minds need changing. This can prove a challenge in changing public discourse on human rights, which has been under attack since Duterte came to power.

The topic that would go against the grain is COVID-19. When I looked at the data on posts about COVID-19, both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers shared sourced information that were trusted and verifiable, and based on science and evidence. Pro-Duterte influencers still shared mostly information from the government, especially from the Department of Health, but there is no reason to believe that this data might not be true. However, I also found that pro-Duterte supporters mixed credible sources of information with less credible ones, and have shared information about COVID-19 which were later on proven to be false. Anti-Duterte influencers also shared information coming from the government, although this data was used more to criticise the government's response to the pandemic.

The second hypothesis is that Pro-Duterte influencers will quote government officials and political organisations more while anti-Duterte influencers will use more quotes from other experts (journals, news, academia etc). Again, this hypothesis is correct. One factor for this could be that some pro-Duterte influencers worked for the government and trusted their word. On the other hand, anti-Duterte influencers rarely trusted the government and would rather get their information from other sources. This is in line with the findings on using facts/information as a rhetorical device. The only difference is that not all quotes contain facts/information. Again, this finding suggests that the Facebook influencers use rhetorical devices that cater to the political biases of their audience. Naturally, Duterte supporters would believe and listen to Duterte and his government officials while Duterte critics would not so using quotes where their audience would find most credibility would be logical.

Another important finding in the use of quotes was the use of personal quotes. There were two kinds of personal quotes found in these posts. First, personal quotes where the influencer quotes herself/himself from another publication or an interview. This lends credibility to the influencer by presenting herself/himself as an expert on the issue who is invited to talk on television or radio or someone who can publish in broadsheets as a political analyst. This is true especially for Sass Sasot, Thinking Pinoy, and Mocha Uson who have columns in different newspapers.

Second, personal quotes where ordinary people are quoted based on their experiences were found to be used for better emotional appeals to the audience. In this chapter I presented personal stories, as in the alleged former members of the CPP-NPA and why they decided to leave the group, and the stories of fisherfolks who allegedly experienced harassment from China when fishing in disputed territory. These personal stories quoting ordinary people help lend credibility to the campaigns. Who would be the best person to talk about these issues if not those who have experienced it directly? Using these personal experiences and quoting these people is a smart way to persuade the audience to the cause.

The third hypothesis is that both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers will use collective and personal appeals to gain support from their audience but given the time the data was collected, both groups will use collective appeal and personal appeal to talk about the COVID-19 pandemic more than human rights and law and order and China-Philippine relations. One part of the hypothesis is correct – that both influencers will use collective and personal appeals to gain support from their audience. The number of posts with collective and personal appeals between pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers are not far from each other. However, the second half of the hypothesis is incorrect – that the appeals will be used more to discuss COVID-19 more than they will be used to discuss issues on human rights and law and order. In fact, collective and personal appeals were used mostly to discuss human rights and law and order.

I found that the use of collective appeals and personal appeals were used by both groups of influencers to appeal to the emotion of their audience – anger, frustration, intimidation – are only some of the emotions employed in these appeals. Pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers of course use these emotions in completely different ways. The first, to make their audience support Duterte and his policies, and the latter, to make their audience criticise the president and his policies. Our example earlier saw Mocha Uson asking people to continue supporting the war on drugs (collective appeal) and directly speaking to parents to ask them to speak to their children and make sure they don't join the CPP-NPA group (personal appeal). On the other hand, anti-Duterte influencer Dakila addressed its followers, "Let us not fail our children," to protest the lowering of the age of criminalisation (collective appeal). Meanwhile, Superficial Gazette directly addresses the audience, comparing them to The Avengers, "You are the real-life

Avengers. It is you who will keep the Filipino dreams of freedom, good government, and good character alive” (personal appeal).

In using appeals for COVID-19, pro-Duterte influencers asked their followers to follow guidelines and obey the rules the government set-out to fight the pandemic. In the example I have, Luminous even went as far as to intimidate their followers by saying they themselves will prosecute those who will disobey the rules. On the contrary, appeals by anti-Duterte influencers involved asking their followers to demand better COVID-19 strategies, such as mass testing, from the government. There were also some specific appeals to certain government officials to resign from their posts.

The last hypothesis is that anti-Duterte influencers will use online and offline call to actions to protest against Duterte and his policies, while pro-Duterte influencers will use online and offline call to actions to ask the audience different ways to support Duterte and his policies. If any violent calls to action are found, these will be quoting or sharing Duterte’s statements about certain policies (i.e. killing of drug lords). The last hypothesis is also partly correct. Most calls to action by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers were non-violent. Online calls to action by both groups asked their audience to like, watch, or share something they posted. Pro-Duterte influencers usually ask their audience to like, share, or watch good news about Duterte and his administration, his achievements, and policies he has enacted. Sometimes, they would ask their followers to share more controversial issues that involved any of the opposition.

Perhaps unique to anti-Duterte influencers was asking their followers to sign petitions. In this chapter I illustrated some of the petitions about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and the West Philippine Sea, as well as petitions for certain government officials to resign, that were shared by anti-Duterte influencers. I also pointed out that while these petitions did not achieve their goals, these actions can help their audience feel like they are part of a collective fighting against or for a cause.

Some of the offline calls to action from pro-Duterte influencers posed a challenge to specific people, like the opposition, but suggests that these influencers did not seem to believe that their

challenge would be taken up by these people. In our examples, it was found that Sass and Luminous challenging the opposition to take actions like filing a petition to the Supreme Court to challenge Duterte's policies on China and starting a war with China. However, the sarcasm and mockery in the post indicates that there is no reason for them to believe the opposition would really do what they asked.

Speaking of starting a war with China, some posts like this that were violent calls to action were not always an echo of Duterte's statements, a part of the hypothesis that was proven to be incorrect. Although relatively few, Mocha Uson's page posted the most violent calls to action, both online and offline. In her online call to action, it was found that she invites her followers in the live stream to 'attack' (*banatan*) certain groups of people. I coded this as violent for potential harassment and red-tagging, which can ultimately lead to killings.

In this chapter, I also presented how several different rhetorical devices can be used together in one post by an influencer to be more persuasive to the audience. Therefore, in a post, it can be seen that facts/information, quotes, appeals, and call to action all used as part of their messages to their followers. Rhetorical devices are indeed important in the art of persuasion, but the influencers needed to keep in mind who their audience were, because their audience will not believe in the same things said in the same way.

This chapter also saw a glimpse of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech in the posts by the ten influencers. I presented how some influencers used sarcasm and mockery and how some used intimidation in the way they spoke to their audience. These are ways to communicate incivility and intolerance to the audience. In a polarising political environment, there is also an increase in incivility and intolerance towards others, which can even lead to hate. In the next chapter, I look at the prevalence of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech; what kinds of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech influencers used; and the experiences of people on Facebook who faced hate speech for their political views.

Chapter 7

The hate we give

In increasingly polarised spaces like social media, it is not surprising that we see an increase in incivility and intolerance in political ideologies different from our own, especially when users only choose to expose themselves to people with the same beliefs, creating a filter bubble where the only information we consume are those that already align with our ideologies (Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2009). This can lead to even more polarisation and in effect, increased incivility, intolerance, and hate speech towards those whose ideas and political beliefs do not align with us. According to Jonshon et al. (2019) and Bowman-Grieve (2009), the nature of social media, its efficient information dissemination among networks, allows hate speech to easily proliferate and intensify and allows for hate groups to have a sense of community. Chen (2017, p.64) writes,

“The de-individuation of online discourse along with the lack of conversational cues plus the speed with which a comment can go public and viral online foments a perfect storm of sorts for incivility to flourish and cause harm.”

While increasing incivility, intolerance, and hate speech can be seen in social media platforms like Facebook, we have to remember that this is based on division we see in the real world and have real-world impacts like aggressions against minorities or political groups, violence, and actions that threaten democracy, to name a few (Yachysen and Mather, 2022; Gagliardone et al., 2015; Papacharissi, 2004; Anderson et a., 2014).

In this chapter, I will explore the question: What is the prevalence and to what intensity of incivility, intolerance and hate speech do pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers use in their posts? I use quantitative content analysis to determine the prevalence of incivility, intolerance,

and hate speech as well as the kinds of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech present in the posts. Based on previous studies, reports, and observations, the following hypotheses were formed:

H8. Both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers will engage in incivility, intolerance, and hate speech but the former will post more incivility, intolerance, and hate speech

H9. Pro-Duterte influencers will use more intense forms of incivility and intolerance as well as more hate speech compared to their rivals

7.1 Overview

Before this chapter goes deeper into details, first a brief overview of the findings on the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech based on the incivility-intolerance continuum. Overall, there were mostly civil posts by both groups at 5,967 or 61% of the 9,776 posts. The rest, or 39% of the posts that were coded were either uncivil, intolerant, or both. Where incivility and/or intolerance is present, anti-Duterte influencers posted more uncivil and intolerant posts than pro-Duterte influencers. Out of the 5,000 posts by pro-Duterte influencers, 30% were found to be uncivil and/or intolerant; and of the 4,776 posts by anti-Duterte influencers, 43% or almost half were found to be uncivil and/or intolerant.

When I looked closer at the types of incivility and intolerance present, demonisation was used by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers the most. Demonisation is defined as posts that portray someone or something as evil or worthy of contempt. Demonisation is distinguished from denigration which was defined as attacking someone's reputation by belittling or denying their importance or validity. In the scales of political speech visualisation presented in Chapter 4, demonisation can be found in the higher level of intolerance while denigration is at the highest end of incivility.

Total number of civil, uncivil, and intolerant posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte supporters following the incivility-intolerance continuum model

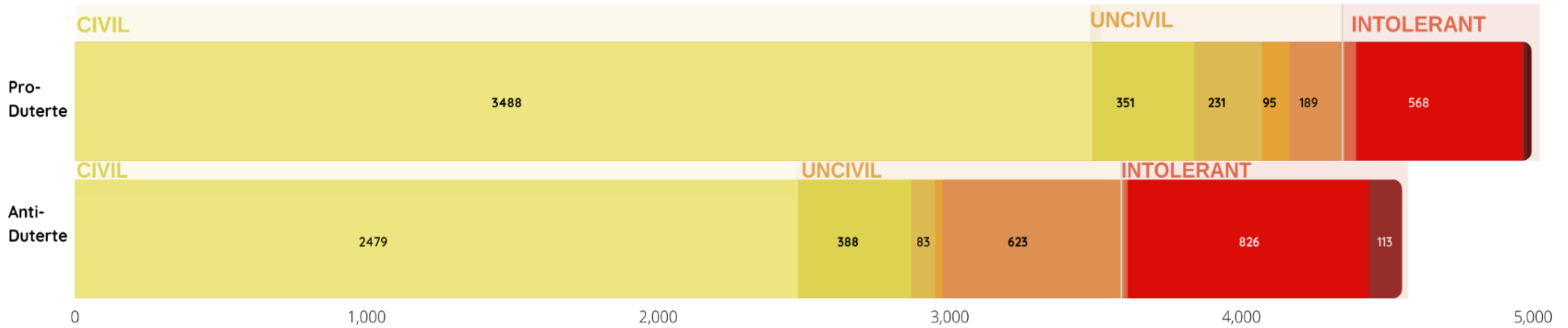


Figure 7.1 A graph showing and comparing the total number of civil, uncivil, and intolerant posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

Legend:

- polite, respectful speech
- vulgarity and profanity
- stigmatisation
- inciting violence and harm
- sarcasm and mockery
- denigrating remarks
- demonisation
- extremism
- ad hominem and personal attacks
- intimidation
- calling for ousters, protests, uncivil actions

Total number of incivility and intolerance by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte supporters following the incivility-intolerance continuum model (civil posts not included)

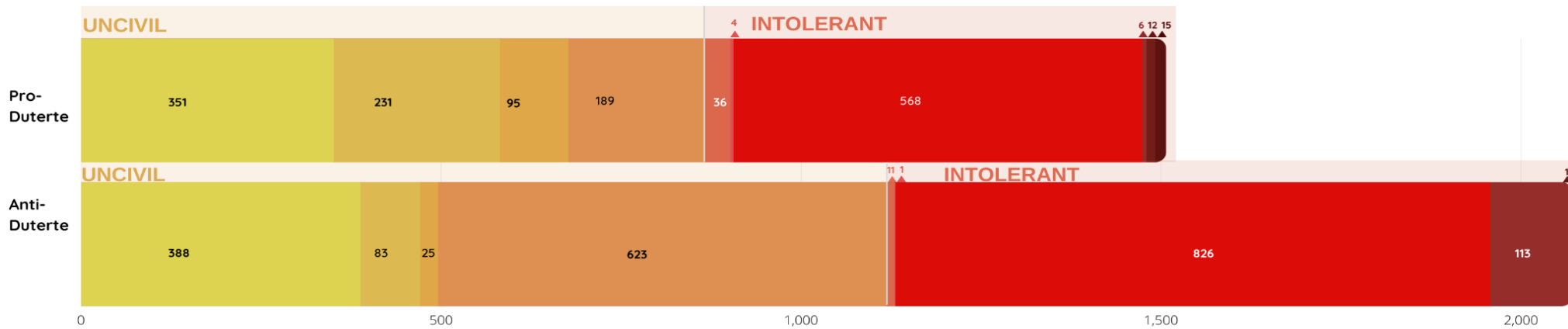


Figure 7.2 A graph showing and comparing the total number of uncivil, and intolerant posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

Legend:

- polite, respectful speech
- vulgarity and profanity
- stigmatisation
- inciting violence and harm
- sarcasm and mockery
- denigrating remarks
- demonisation
- extremism
- ad hominem and personal attacks
- intimidation
- calling for ousters, protests, uncivil actions

7.2 The prevalence and intensity of incivility in the posts by influencers

I first present the types of incivility used by both groups of influencers in their Facebook posts. In total, there were 1,984 uncivil posts by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Of this, 56% were posted by anti-Duterte influencers and 44% were posted by pro-Duterte influencers. This finding was surprising, given that anti-Duterte influencers have been seen as the antithesis to pro-Duterte influencers – whereas pro-Duterte influencers would applaud and defend Duterte for his vulgar remarks, anti-Duterte influencers would heavily criticise the president for doing so. While it is understood that incivility and intolerance can be a consequence of highly polarising politics and emotions running high, this can be counter-intuitive for anti-Duterte supporters who have been trying to gain more support for the opposition, especially during the election season.

Comparing this to the number of civil posts, 49% or almost half of the total number of posts by anti-Duterte influencers were found to be uncivil. In contrast, only 35% of the total number of posts by pro-Duterte influencers were found to be uncivil.

Total number of uncivil posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

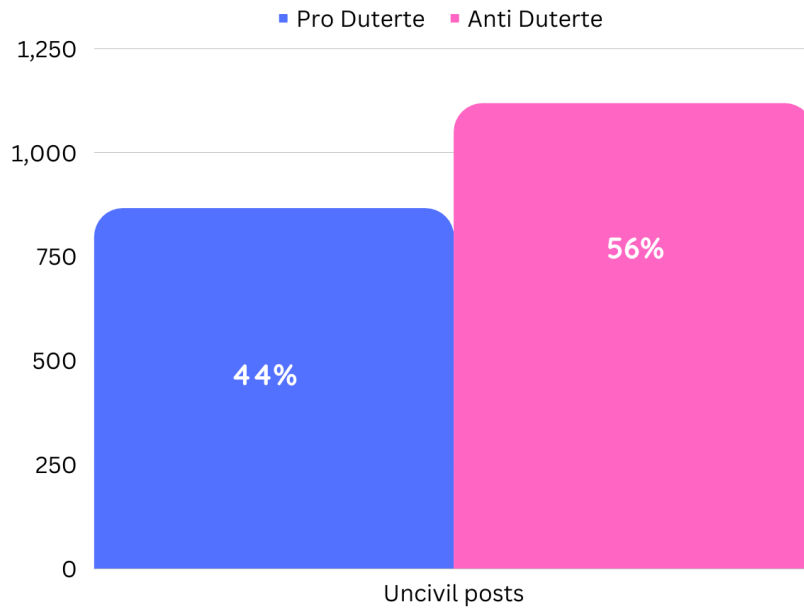
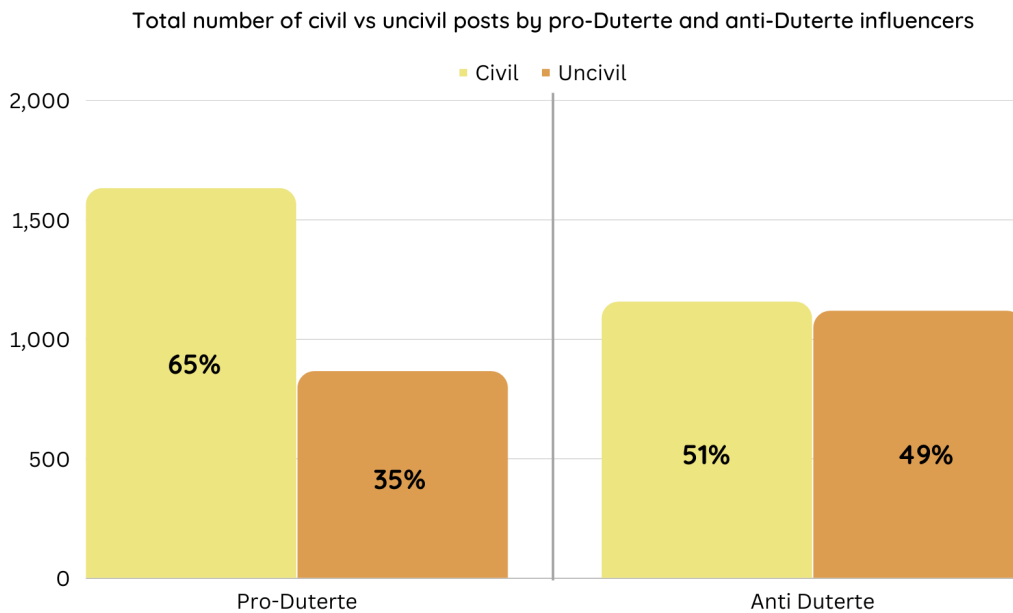


Figure 7.4 A graph showing the total number uncivil posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers



Note: Chi-square test result indicates $p < 0.001$

Figure 7.5 A graph showing and comparing the total number uncivil and civil posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

When the types of incivility used by both groups were analysed, anti-Duterte influencers posted mostly denigrating remarks, while pro-Duterte influencers posted mostly sarcasm and mockery. When being uncivil, anti-Duterte influencers focussed on Duterte and his regime's failures while pro-Duterte influencers' tactic was to attack the opposition by being sarcastic and using this sarcasm to mock the opposition. Looking at the data from least to most severe form of incivility and intolerance and the incivility-intolerance continuum, pro-Duterte influencers used the least extreme form of incivility, while anti-Duterte influencers used mostly the highest form of incivility (*figure 7,2*). Running a chi square test to see the association between being a pro-Duterte or anti-Duterte influencer, it was found that the results are statistically significant.

Types of incivility posted by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

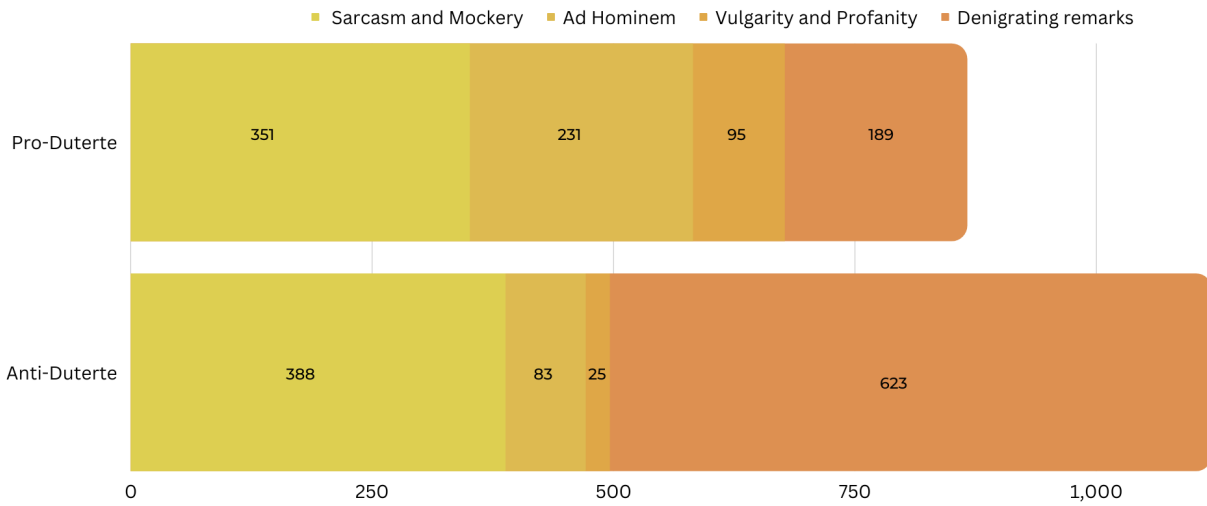


Figure 7.6 A graph showing and comparing the total number of the different kinds of uncivil posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

Total number of each kind of incivility posted by influencers

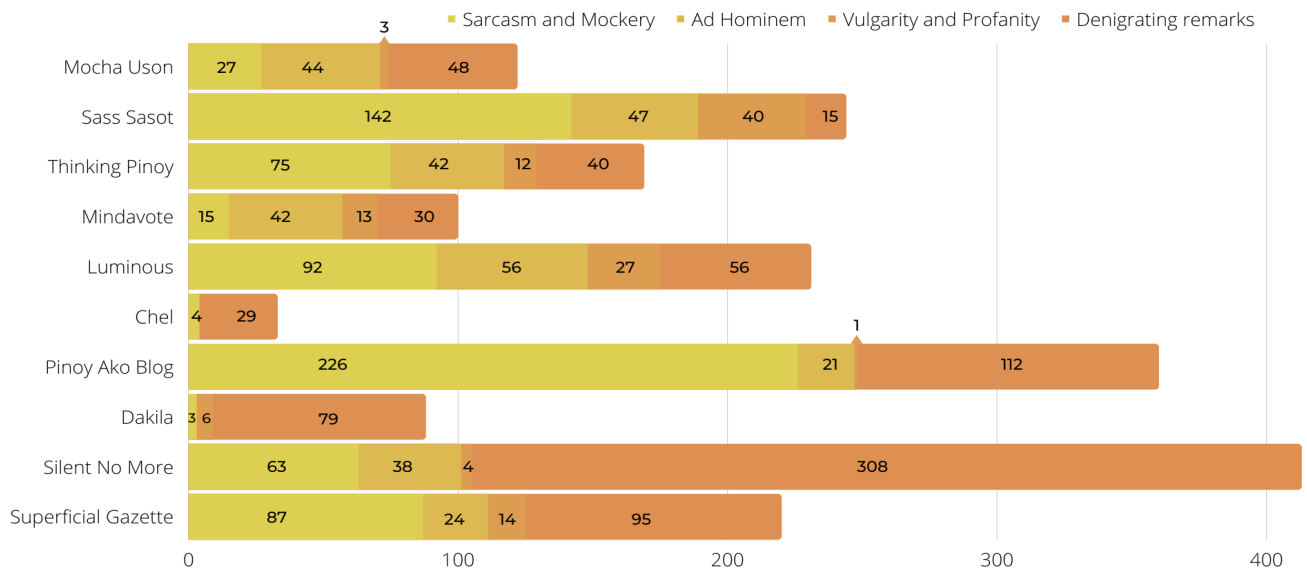


Figure 7.7 A graph showing the total number of the different kinds of uncivil posts by each influencer

Anti-Duterte influencers posted more incivility than pro-Duterte influencers, and they used what the most extreme form of incivility according to the scale – denigrating remarks, which accounted for 56% of the total 1,118 related posts, with 35% about sarcasm and mockery, 7% were ad hominem and personal attacks, and 2% were vulgarity. Silent No More posted most of the denigrating remarks while Pinoy Ako Blog posted most of the sarcasm and mockery of the group. Even Dakila, who said in their interview with Ong et al. (2022) that they use ‘radical empathy’ and ‘disruptive kindness’ on their Facebook page, was found to engage in some forms of incivility. In Chapter 5, I showed that anti-Duterte influencers posted more attacks than pro-Duterte influencers, and I found that most of these attacks were denigrating remarks to criticise the government.

In this example, Silent No More posts denigrating remarks about Duterte and his failure to address illegal drugs. Here, there are attacks that call Duterte names such as a ‘puppy’ of China and *Katay Digong (Butcher Digong)* is a play on words on *Tatay Digong (Dad Digong)*, which is what his supporters call him. But the attack in this post doesn’t stop with name-calling, it alleges that Duterte allows Chinese drug lords to get off the hook from criminal persecution and does not serve jail time. The post belittles Duterte and his drug war policies and possibly defames him by saying he abets in the freedom that Chinese drug lords enjoy in the country:

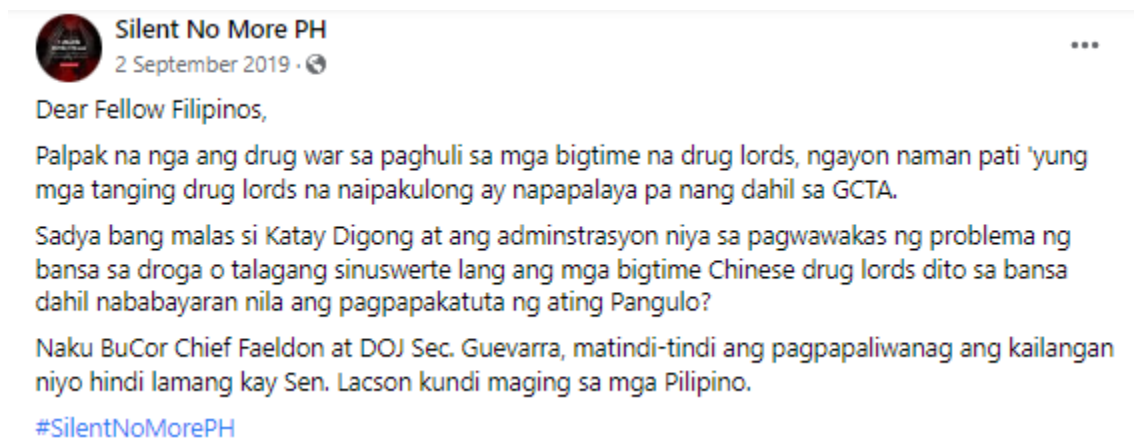


Figure 7.8 A screenshot of a post by Silent No More using denigrating remarks against Duterte

(Translation: Dear Fellow Filipinos, the drug war has failed to catch bigtime drug lords, and now even those few drug lords that have been jailed are due to be released because

of the GCTA. Is it that Katay Digong and his administration have no luck in ending the illegal drugs problem in the country or are bigtime Chinese drug lords really lucky because they can pay the president to be their puppy?)

Sarcasm and mockery were mostly posted by Pinoy Ako Blog. Notably, Pinoy Ako Blog uses a lot of emojis to convey this. Her posts are also mostly short and direct to the point. In this example, she mocks the presidential spokesperson for getting ‘burned’, similar to how Luminous in the earlier example mocked the opposition for getting burned. She also ends the post with a laugh emoji, which emphasises the mockery:

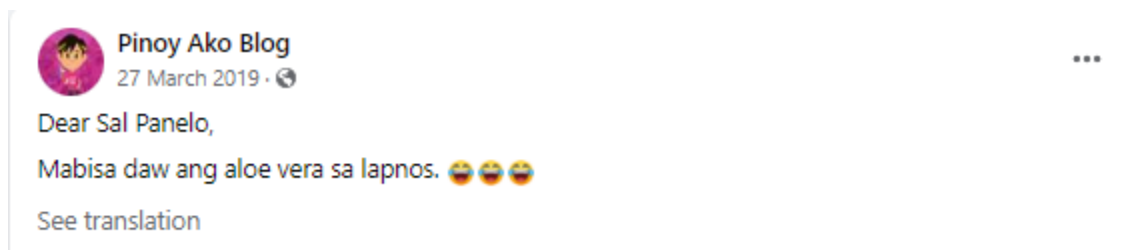


Figure 7.9 A screenshot of a post by Pinoy Ako Blog using sarcasm and mockery

(Translation: Dear Sal Panelo, they say aloe vera is effective for getting burned 😂😂😂)

Silent No More and Superficial Gazette posted the most ad hominem. Silent No More notably uses a lot of name-calling. For example, Spokesperson Salvador Panelo is called ‘Jokesperson Panelo’ or ‘Salsal Panelo’ (‘salsal’ means to masturbate) and as was shown in an earlier example *Tatay Digong* becomes ‘*Katay Digong*’. Superficial Gazette also uses the name ‘Kupit-19’ to refer to officials of the Department of Health embroiled in corruption charges. The word ‘kupit’ means ‘to steal’.

This post by Silent No More attacks Duterte supporters by calling them dedicated fools for still supporting the president. The post also calls Duterte ‘*Katay Digong*’. While the post is mocking in tone, it is also a personal attack to both Duterte supporters and Duterte himself. There were no logical arguments presented in this post and were solely dedicated to attacking people for supporting the president. In the incivility continuum, this is counted as an ad hominem attack:

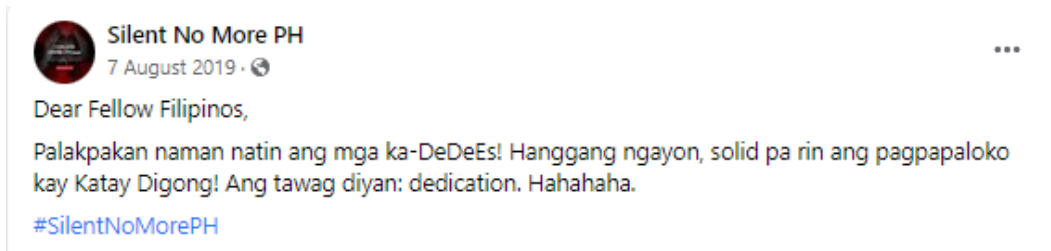


Figure 7.10 A screenshot of a post by Silent No More using ad hominem attack

(Translation: Dear Fellow Filipinos, let's clap our hands for ka-DDS! Until now, they solidly allow themselves to be fooled by Katay Digong! We call this dedication. Hahahaha. #SilentNoMorePH)

Vulgarity was the least used form of incivility by anti-Duterte supporters, posted by Silent No More, Superficial Gazette, and Pinoy Ako Blog.

Silent No More, for example, uses a pun to call '*Hugpong ng Pagbabago*' as '*Hugpong ng Panggagago*'. If you remember, *Hugpong ng Pagbabago* is the party-list created by Duterte-aligned senatorial candidates for the 2019 elections. *Gago* is a profanity in the Filipino language which means 'stupid', 'foolish' or 'ignorant'. *Ginagago*, a verbing of the noun *gago*, means to make a fool out of someone. In a now deleted post, Silent No More, makes a pun out of the profanity to say that the party-list is a group that makes a fool out of Filipinos:

Wala talagang maaasahan sa Hugpong ng Panggagago

(Translation: There really is nothing to expect from the Hugpong ng Panggagago)

Another example of profanity is a post by Pinoy Ako Blog. In her post she calls spreaders of fake news as '*tanga*', another profanity that also means 'stupid.' This post is also a mockery and can also be considered as an ad hominem attack. However, because profanity was used, this post was under profanity and vulgarity, which in the incivility-intolerance continuum is a considered as a higher level form of incivility than sarcasm and mockery and ad hominem:



Figure 7.11 A screenshot of a post by Pinoy Ako Blog using profanity

(Translation: Dear Ka-PAB, Read how tanga those spreaders of fake news are 🤡🤡🤡)

On the other hand, Pro-Duterte influencers posted a total of 866 uncivil posts, 41% of which exhibited sarcasm and mockery, with 27% ad hominem attacks, 22% denigrating remarks, and 11% contained vulgarity. The influencers Sass Sasot, Thinking Pinoy, and Luminous posted most of the sarcasm and mockery and in doing so usually talked about the opposition candidates and critics of the president.

For example, this post by Sass mocks Rappler for criticising an article published by another media company, the Manila Times, where Sass also publishes her works. The outlet published an article alleging that journalist Ellen Tordesillas is connected to whistleblower *Bikoy*, who in

2016, came out with an expose saying that the Duterte family is involved in the illegal drug trade. Rappler criticised the allegations about Tordesillas, and in this post, Sass mocks Rappler for that criticism. The use of laughing emoji in the end helps convey this tone of sarcasm (*cite/show this example*). Connecting this to chapter 5 of this research, the sarcasm and mockery attacks a critic of the president by mocking their reputation as journalists, and at the same time, defends the president from the controversy by making light of the issue at hand:

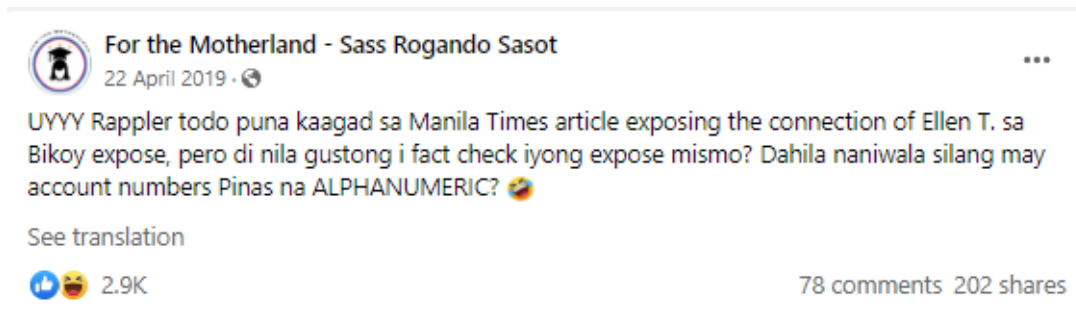


Figure 7.12 A screenshot of a post by Pinoy Ako Blog using profanity by Sass Sasot using sarcasm and mockery

(Translation: UYYY, Rappler quickly keeps on criticising the Manila Times article exposing the connection of Ellen T. with the Bikoy sexpose, but they do not want to fact-check the expose itself? Because they believe that there are account numbers in the Philippines that are Alphanumeric?)

Ad Hominem and personal attacks were the second most used type of incivility by pro-Duterte supporters. For example, in this post by Thinking Pinoy, the influencer attacks a vocal critic of the president, Jim Paredes, whose sex video was leaked. In this post, Thinking Pinoy takes a dig at Jim Paredes' character who is known to use the word 'decent' to pertain to the opposition (as opposed to the vulgar Duterte). Thinking Pinoy sarcastically says, "he says he's not a pervert" and uses a laugh emoji to convey this sarcasm better. However, because the post goes further beyond sarcasm and posts a personal attack about a person, this particular post was coded as an ad hominem attack:



Figure 7.13 A screenshot of a post by Thinking Pinoy using profanity by Sass Sasot using sarcasm and mockery

(Translation Guys, the social media poster boy of Liberal Party, he says he's not a pervert. 😏 P.S. Have you watched it?)

When it comes to denigrating remarks, many of these were used to belittle and defame members of the opposition, especially Leni Robredo, later the opposition candidate in the 2022 election.. An example is one already used in Chapter 5, posted by Luminous, attacking Leni and calling her names like *epal* (a slang for someone who likes to be the centre of attention), *gaga* (a vulgar term for crazy), *engot* (stupid), *MEMA* (a slang meaning someone who keeps speaking just for the sake of) and *MAMARU* (a slang meaning someone who pretends she is an expert but really is not). While the post can also be considered as ad hominem attacks and vulgarity, because the post belittles her capacity as a vice-president and pertains to her work in the government, this post was coded as a denigrating remark, one that attacks her reputation as a high official of the country, and one that can even be considered as defamation:

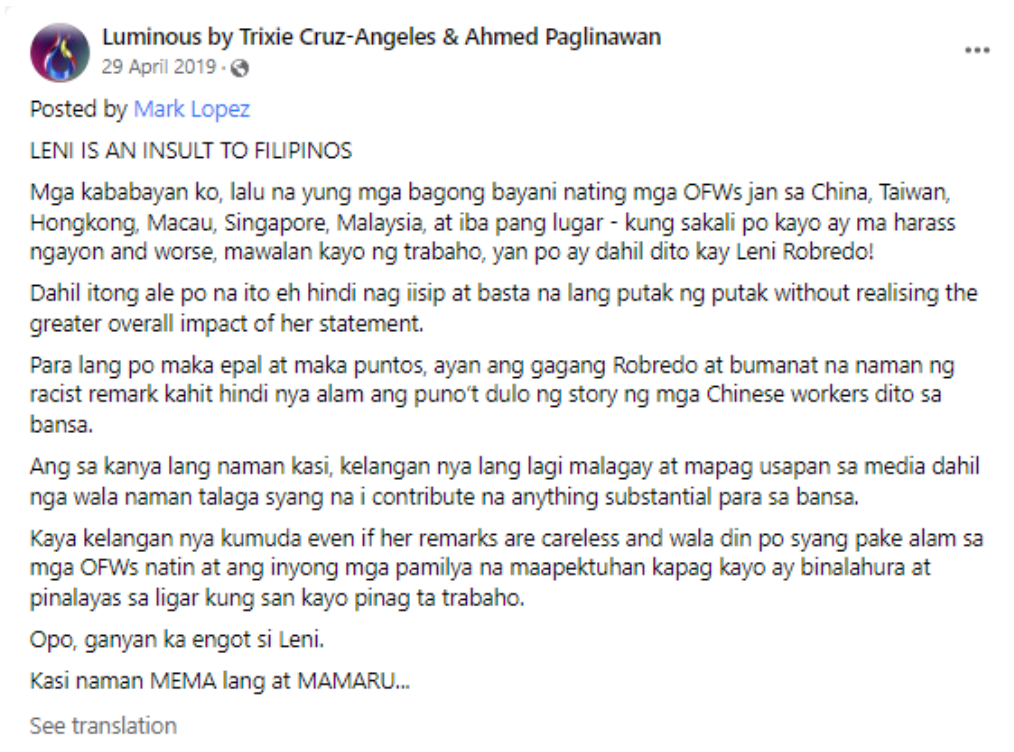


Figure 7.14 A screenshot of a post by Luminous using denigrating remarks against Leni Robredo

(Translation: Leni is an insult to Filipinos. Because this woman does not think and merely speaks without realising the greater overall impact of her statement. She does this to be the centre of attention and to gain points, this crazy Robredo attacked Chinese workers through her racist remarks even though she doesn't know the full story of why they are in the country. She needs to always be in the media cause she doesn't contribute anything substantial to the country. She needs to keep talking even if her remarks are careless. Yes, that's how stupid Leni is. She's mema and mamaru...)

Vulgarity was the least used by pro-Duterte influencers among all the types of incivility. Just like previous types of incivility that were looked at, vulgarity was used to attack members of the opposition and critics of Duterte. In this example, Sass uses the word ‘puta’ or whore to refer to Leni Robredo. While it is an ad hominem attack, this post was coded as a vulgarity because of the word ‘puta’. I also coded this as a form of hate speech against women, which will be discussed later in more detail:

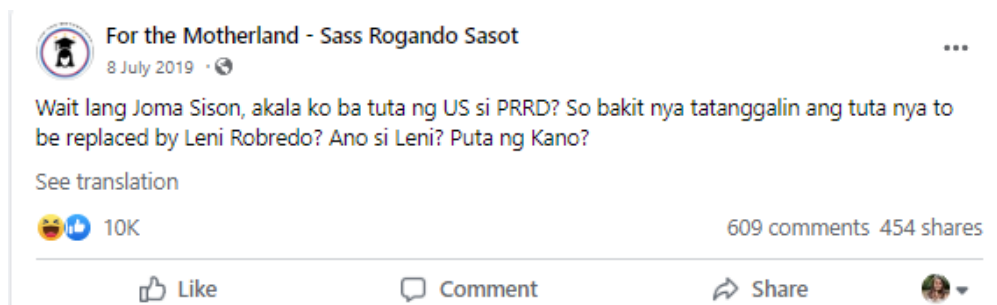


Figure 7.15 A screenshot of a post by Sass Sasot using vulgarity

(Translation: Wait, Joma Sison, I thought PPRD is the puppy of the US? So why would they replace their puppy with Leni Robredo? What is Leni? The Americans' whore?)

7.3 The prevalence and intensity of intolerance in the posts by influencers

In this section, I present the types of intolerance used by both groups of influencers in their Facebook posts. In total, there were 1,593 uncivil posts by both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. Of this, 40% were posted by pro-Duterte influencers and 60% were posted by anti-Duterte influencers. Comparing this to the number of tolerant posts, 42% of the total number of posts by anti-Duterte influencers were found to be intolerant. In contrast, only 26% of the total number of posts by pro-Duterte influencers were found to be intolerant. Running a chi square test to see the association between being a pro-Duterte or anti-Duterte influencer, a statistically significant relationship between being a pro-Duterte or anti-Duterte influencer and posting intolerance on Facebook was found.

Similar to incivility, the high number of intolerant posts by anti-Duterte influencers can be counter-intuitive if they wanted to gain support and change the minds of Duterte supporters. As Rossini (2019, p.2) found in her study, “intolerant discourse emerges precisely when it may hurt democracy the most by targeting minorities and disenfranchised groups in relatively homogeneous discussions when they are the topic of a news story, contributing to further exclusion of their voices.” In this case, Duterte’s rise to power has been attributed to the disenfranchised public, thanks to the failures of democracy post dictatorship (Teehankee, 2016). Intolerance towards Duterte supporters without listening to their legitimate grievances only exacerbates the already-polarised landscape of politics in the country.

Total number of intolerant posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

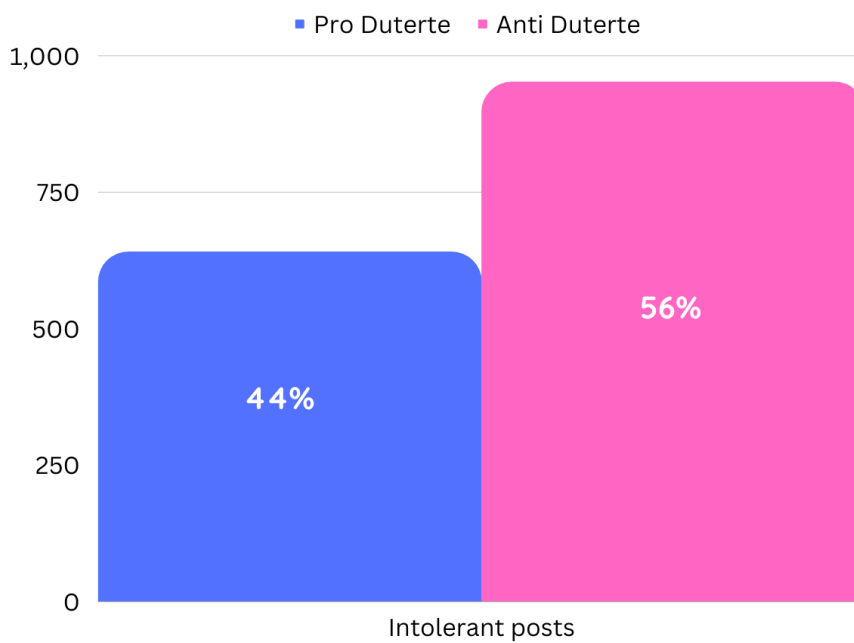
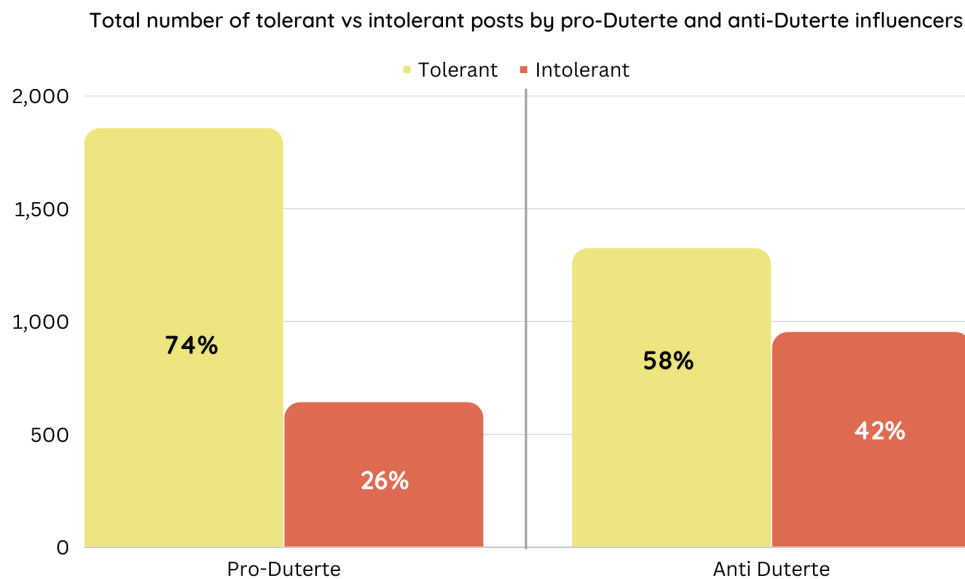


Figure 7.16 A graph showing the total number of intolerant posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers



Note: Chi-square test result indicates $p < 0.001$

Figure 7.17 A graph showing and comparing the total number of tolerant and intolerant posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

When the types of intolerance used by both groups were analysed, both anti-Duterte and pro-Duterte influencers posted demonising political opponents, organisations, or personalities the most. Anti-Duterte influencers also posted quite a number of posts that called for ousters, protests, and resignations. Pro-Duterte supporters, on the other hand, posted more intimidation, inciting violence and harm, and extremism more than anti-Duterte influencers. In fact, I only found one post by anti-Duterte influencers that incited violence or harm, and no posts were about extremism. That one post that incited violence was quoting Duterte and not an idea coming from the anti-Duterte influencers themselves. Looking at the data from the least to most extreme form of intolerance and our incivility-intolerance continuum, both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers used a medium level of intolerance but the highest forms of intolerance are used almost exclusively by pro-Duterte influencers.

Anti-Duterte influencers posted more intolerant posts than anti-Duterte influencers at 952 total posts. Like pro-Duterte influencers, most of these were demonising political opponents,

organisations, and personalities, at 87% of the total intolerant posts. Calling for ousters, protests, and resignation came second at 12%; intimidation at 1%; inciting violence or harm came last at less than 1 or 0%.

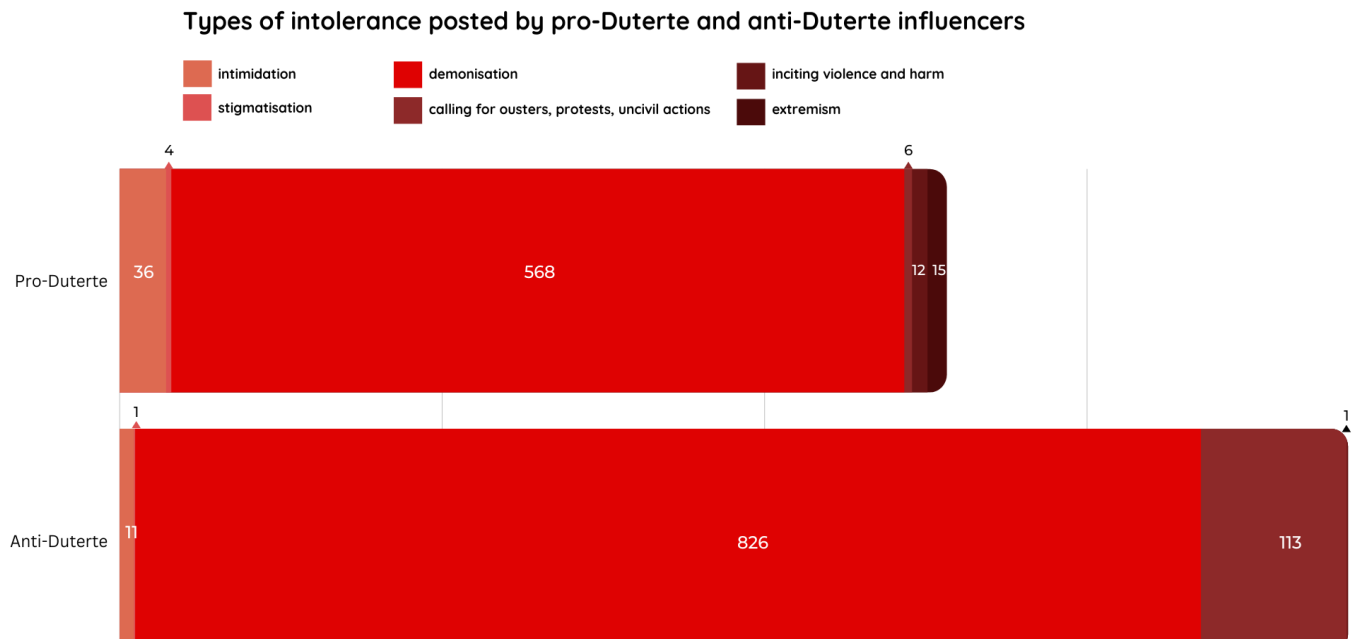


Figure 7.18 A graph showing and comparing the total number of the different kinds of intolerant posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

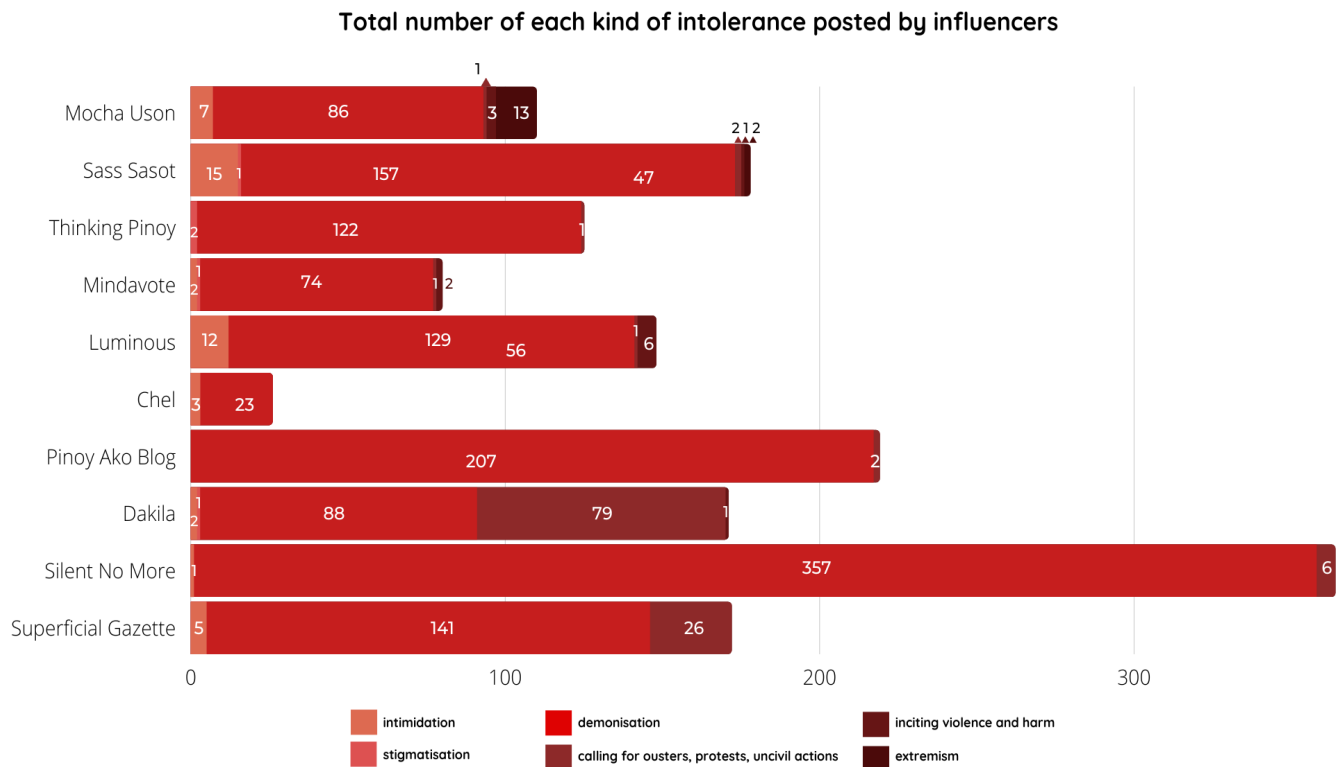


Figure 7.19 A graph showing the total number of the different kinds of intolerant posts by each influencer

Demonising political opponents is the most used form of intolerance by anti-Duterte influencers. Out of the five, Chel Dioko is the influencer in the group who posted any kind of intolerance the least number of times, with only 26 posts that are intolerant. Silent No More, Pinoy Ako Blog, Superficial Gazette, and Dakila all posted intolerance between 170-365 times. The intolerance posted by anti-Duterte influencers can be found in the medium level of intolerance of the incivility-intolerance continuum.

Unsurprisingly, most posts that demonise pertain to the president himself or any of his allies. For example, in this post by Silent No More, they literally call the president ‘Satan’ and his ally Sandra Cam as ‘devil’:



Silent No More PH

12 March 2019 · 🌐



Dear Fellow Filipinos,

Sharing-

Digong, through his mummified mouthpiece, was expected to swallow his words that he sacked Alexander Balutan as PCSO GM because of serious allegations of corruption, when Balutan came out to debunk the assassination of his character.

He said that he quit, not resigned, over something he was asked to do that he could not stomach, and implored his Digong to conduct an impartial probe of the "serious allegations of corruption" he was said to have been embroiled with. Yes, he was fired for mere allegation that he was the Devil's own by the "I'll be the next Satan" Digong.

Who whispered to Digong's ear these "allegations" if not the Devil woman Sandra Cam, who was so clear wanting so much to have Balutan out from his PCSO position for her to take over, so as for her and her bosom partner jueteng/masiao operator Atong Ang to control and hold the multi-million PCSO enterprise? It should be an opportune time for her to vilify Balutan with Digong because of his, Balutan, putting blame on Digong's TRAIN law for the sharp lotto sales nosedive. That was only 2 days ago before Balutan's sacking.

Let's watch what's next for Digong to do. It's not farfetched that he will appease Balutan with another government post after realizing that he is a battle-tested Philippine Marine warrior, and a major general at that, who is not afraid of Digong's death squad.

We ask Maj. Gen. Alexander Balutan to demand Digong to do, as an imperative, an investigation on the "serious allegations of corruption" that was fired on his person. That was a serious accusation that must have caused serious injury to his honor and person.

Figure 7.20 A screenshot of a post by Silent No More demonising Duterte and his allies

Superficial Gazette also equates being a Duterte supporter to being 'evil'. In this case, as mentioned earlier in this section, demonising all Duterte supporters and giving them such labels fails to recognise the many legitimate reasons why Duterte won the presidency, as we have seen in the arguments made by Teehankee (2016) presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Duterte does not only challenge Benigno Aquino III's regime but challenges the elite democracy — the failure to promote social equity — that has been founded by Corazon Aquino (Teehankee, 2016). By failing to recognise that Duterte won because of the failure of democracy in the past decades and by having a simplistic argument that all Duterte supporters are 'evil,' the danger lies in that hatred is sown against people with a different political ideology instead of trying to understand the underlying causes of how Duterte rose to power and received a strong support from the populace:

 **Superficial Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines**
25 March 2019 · 🌐

Twitter user @chadtinio (now suspended from Twitter, but still on FB as [fb.com/chadtinio](https://www.facebook.com/chadtinio)) reposts "erotic" photos of MINORS on Pornhub, and makes photoshoot promoting RAPE as "art." And unsurprisingly, his non-porn posts and tweets are in support of Duterte.

Whatever human evil you can think of - like supporting, if murder, rape, and sexualization of minors - there are many among the DDS who are proud to have it. This is the kind of scum Duterte fanatics are.

 **Isko #25Diokno**
@iskolarspeaks Following

Please report Twitter user @/chadtinio.

He's been taking "erotic" photos and videos of MINORS and posting the outtakes on Pornhub. Recently, he also posted this "GAHASA: Rape is Art" photoshoot. This isn't art.

Please report and help save those potentially/working with them.

8:05 PM - 25 Mar 2019

1,938 Retweets 3,327 Likes

15 1.9K 3.3K

 Eileen Meneses, Tina Rita and 402 others 20 comments 66 shares

Figure 7.21 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette demonising Duterte supporters

Calls for protests, resignation, and ousters were also commonly used, especially by Dakila and Superficial Gazette. A study by Rapp and Ackerman (2015) found that more socially intolerant individuals are more likely to join non-violent protests and is further amplified when an individual lives in a country where social intolerance is high. While protests are catalysts to social change and are essential to a pluralistic democracy (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2019), protests and other similar actions such as calling for an ouster or resignation of government officials can threaten democratically-elected presidents such as Duterte who overwhelmingly

won the elections and who continued to get a high level of approval and support throughout his six years in office. Can such protests and calls for ousters and resignation then undermine the democratic process of voting? It is in this vein that I considered protests and calls for resignations and ousters as a possible threat to democracy and a reflection of intolerance against certain groups or ideas.

For example, Superficial Gazette liked to post #OustDuterte after it trended amidst the government's lack of response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The hashtag trended globally with over 50,000 tweets at the time (Tomacruz, 2020). However, despite the viral hashtag and the growing frustration among Filipinos at the time, Duterte got a 91% approval rating among Filipinos despite the mishandling of the pandemic (Reed, 2021). This shows that while the hashtag #OustDuterte was trending globally, the people who wanted him out of office were a very small minority compared to the rest of the country. While it is the right of any group or individual to protest against the government, the continued call to oust the president can potentially undermine the will of the majority of the people. Some examples of the post includes:



Superficial Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines

1 February 2020 · 🌐

The Duterte Administration does not care if Filipinos die. Remember, Chinese come first, Filipinos last.

#nCov #coronavirusPH #OustDuterte

HOW THE DUTERTE ADMIN TREATS FILIPINOS:

Funds for health cut by P10 billion
By: Melvin Gascon · Correspondent / @melvingasconINQ Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:17 AM September 23, 2019

Will gov't give free masks? Palace says, 'How can we give when there's none'
Published January 31, 2020 7:34pm By LLANESCA T. PANTI, GMA News

BANTA NG CORONAVIRUS Enero 31, 2020 1:14pm GMT+08:00
Duterte, makikipagpulong sa medical experts sa susunod na linggo (Next week? Ok lang! Di naman ganoon ka importante.)

HOW THE DUTERTE ADMIN TREATS CHINESE:

Richard J. Gordon @DickGordonDG
It took just 6 hrs to ship badly needed Philippine made face masks (1.4M\$)to Wuhan China 4 use vs Corona Virus.I Got d humanitarian request as PRC CEO at 12 midnight,Called Mimel Talusan& BOC staff to help ship d humanitarian cargo w/in 6 hrs this AM. Bravo! PRC & BOC teamwork.
9:57 AM · Jan 26, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone (BOC = Bureau of Customs)

#SUPERFICIALGAZETTE

Figure 7.22 A screenshot of a post by Superficial Gazette calling to oust Duterte

As mentioned earlier, there was only one post that incited violence, and this was a post by Dakila quoting the president. The post was about the water crises and how Duterte plans to handle the lawyers of the said water firm embroiled in the controversy – by dragging them. Knowing that Dakila is an organisation that does not agree with Duterte’s violence and human rights violations, and that their audience have similar views, it can be assumed that this post does not want to perpetuate the violence but was used to show the audience how absurd Duterte’s solution was to the problem. Duterte has had a history of suggesting inane solutions to the country’s problems.

For example, Duterte previously said he would slap COVID-19 virus (Malasig, 2020) and that he would eat the ashfall and pee on the Taal volcano to stop it from erupting (Villasanta, 2020). This post by Dakila is an example of another inane solution but goes further into inciting violence or harm against people:

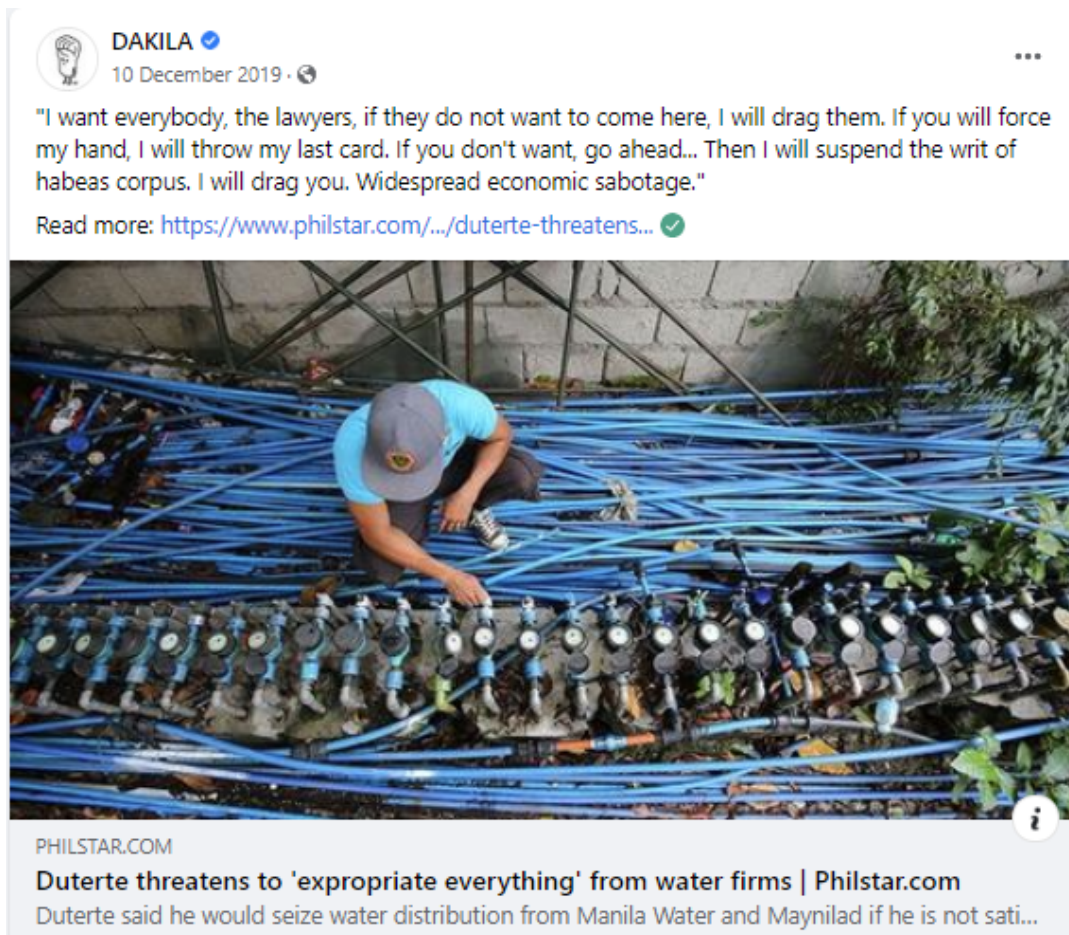


Figure 7.23 A screenshot of a post by Dakila quoting extremist views from Duterte

On the other hand, pro-Duterte influencers posted a total of 641 intolerant posts, and of this 641, 89% were demonising political opponents, organisations, or personalities; 56% were intimidation; 23% posted extremism; 19% incited violence or harm; and less than 1% were stigmatising groups or people or calling for ousters, resignation, or protests.

Many of the posts by pro-Duterte influencers demonised personalities of the opposition as well as groups which they call ‘terrorists’ like the CPP-NPA and those who they believe are allies of these personalities and groups. By demonising these people and these groups, they inspire hatred and contempt and according to Bhatia (2013, p.150), “Demonisation... In other words, portraying the enemy as malicious and repulsive creates feelings that makes killings easier.”

For example, Mocha Uson always pertains to CPP-NPA and the *Makabayan block* as terrorists or enemies of the state. The *Makabayan block* is a progressive coalition of party-lists in the Philippine Congress. By calling these groups terrorists, the influencer uses labelling not only to discredit these groups but perpetuates the narrative that they are enemies of the state, but also desensitises the public to the killings of activists in the *Makabayan block*. In this post by Mocha Uson, the influencer links the Makabayan block to the NPA and calls them a terrorist:



Figure 7.24 A screenshot of a post by Mocha Uson calling the NPA terrorists

In terms of intimidations, some examples were seen in the last chapter where Luminous use their position as lawyers to intimidate people into following COVID-19 lockdown rules. While this is considered a lower level of intolerance in the incivility-intolerance continuum, it can already be seen how intimidation can threaten democracy in a country like the Philippines where laws can curtail people's freedoms and rights:

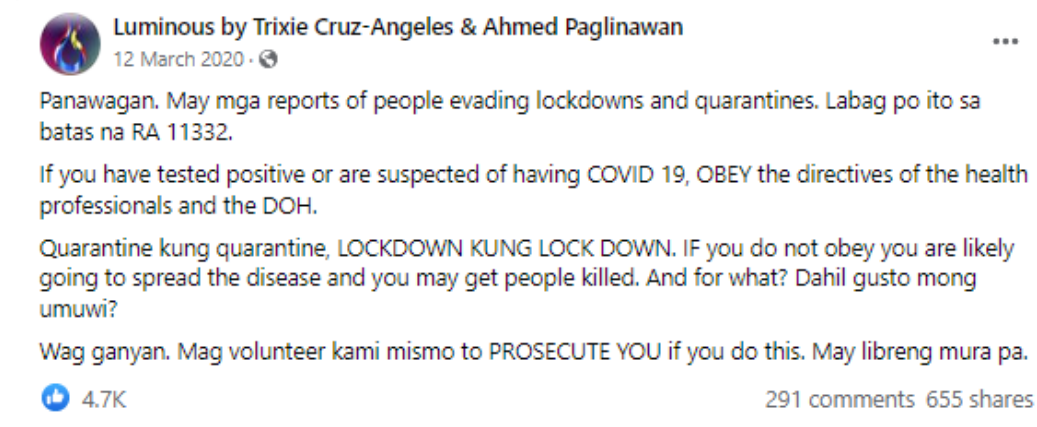


Figure 7.25 A screenshot of a post by Luminous intimidating the public to follow COVID-19 rules

(Translation: This is a call. There are reports of people evading lockdowns and quarantines. This is against the RA 11332 law. If you have tested positive or are suspected of having COVID 19, OBEY the directives of the health professionals and the DOH. Quarantine is quarantine, lockdown is lockdown. IF you do not obey you are likely going to spread the disease and you may get people killed. And for what? Because you want to go home? Don't be like that. We will volunteer to PROSECUTE YOU if you do this. We will even curse you for free.)

Luminous and Mocha Uson lead the anti-Duterte influencer group when it comes to inciting violence and extremism.

Luminous and Mocha both post incitements to violence that are related to the CPP-NPA and the government's war against the communist group. In a post by Luminous, they urge the government to continue the war even after different groups as well as some government officials

urge the president to declare a Christmas cease fire, a customary move by both groups since the launch of the peace talks in the 1980's (Philippine Star, 2019). However, after Duterte labelled them as a terrorist organisation in 2017, the government has not reciprocated the truce. Luminous supports this war and this act of violence by the government:



Figure 7.26 A screenshot of a post by Luminous supporting an all-out war against the CPP-NPA

(Translation: I don't believe in Christmas cease fire even in social media. So even if people cry over this post, I will take responsibility. It's my fault because I support a

president who thinks like this. Not those people who belittle us and say at least we're still alive.)

Again, an example in the past chapters have illustrated about extremist views that will again be used in this section to illustrate extremism. For example, Mocha Uson's posts supporting the drug war to solve the illegal drug problem in the country hold extremist views. According to the UK government's counter extremism strategy (2015, p.9), extremism is "the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and respect and tolerance for different faiths and beliefs. I also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist." Sotlar (2004, p.1) similarly defines extremism as being "fully intolerant toward others and reject democracy as a means of governance and the way of solving problems." Using these definitions, using extrajudicial killings to solve the proliferation of illegal drugs and crimes, as well as the support of such means to an end, is an extremist view. An example of Mocha Uson's post that sells this extremist narrative to her audience:



MOCHA USON BLOG

4 June 2019 · 🌐



Nakikita na natin ang magandang epekto ng WAR ON DRUGS ng Pangulo at ng kanyang administration.
Patuloy tayong sumuporta sa #PartnerForChange project para sa ikabubuti ng ating bayan.

Read more:

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1071177...> See more

See translation

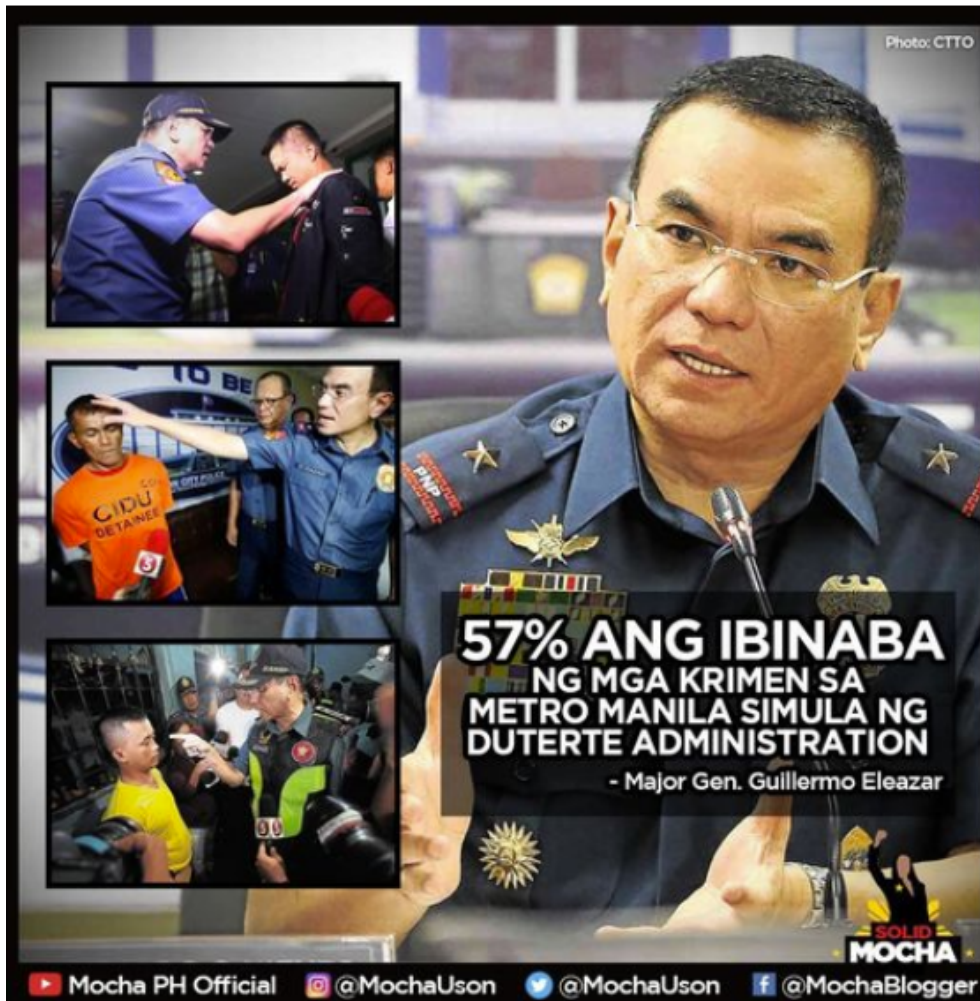


Figure 7.27 A screenshot of a post by Mocha Uson supporting the drug war

(Translation: We can see the good effects of the president's WAR ON DRUGS. Let us continue to support this project for the betterment of the country.)

7.4 The prevalence and intensity of hate speech in the posts by influencers

This section looks at the different kinds of hate speech that were posted by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers. In total, there were only 86 posts that contained hate speech, 93% were posted by pro-Duterte influencers. Hate speech was found in 3% of pro-Duterte influencers' total posts in contrast to 0.2% of anti-Duterte influencers' total posts. While hate speech is found in the minority of content analysed, the hate speech found in the Facebook posts analysed included incitements to violence and extremism – the kind of content that would not have been allowed in mainstream media coverage.

Total number of hate speech posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

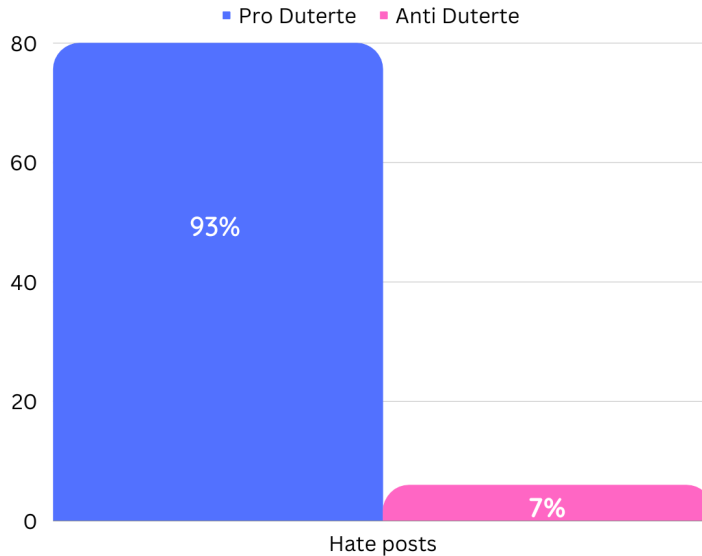


Figure 7.28 A graph showing the total number hate posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

Total number of posts with hate speech vs posts without hate speech by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

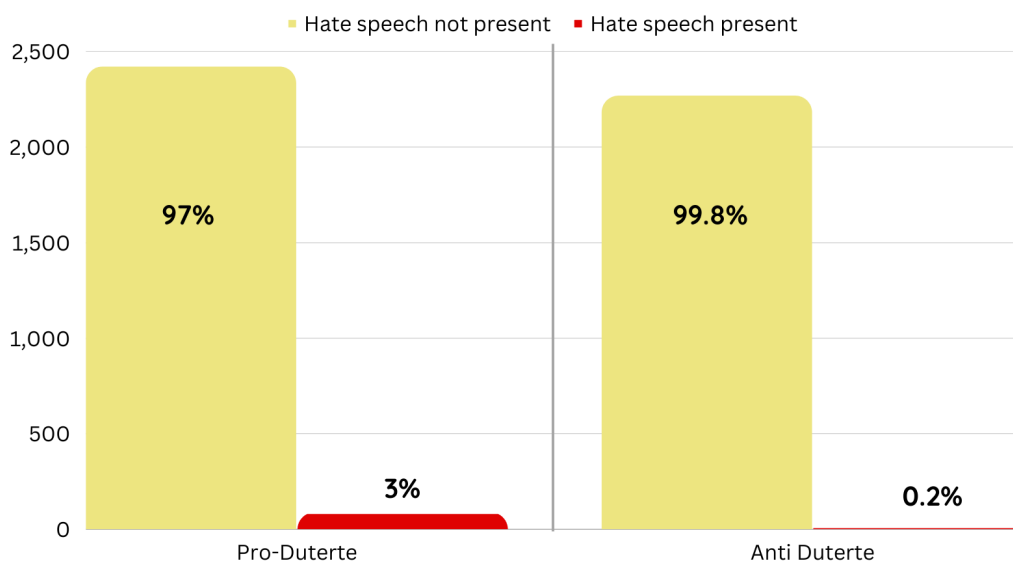


Figure 7.29 A graph showing and comparing the total number hate posts and posts with no hate by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

In terms of the types of hate speech present, hate speech against women was most used by pro-Duterte influencers. Of the 75 posts that were hate speech against women, 76% were demonising women, specifically Vice President Leni Robredo and allies of the opposition. These attacks are overwhelmingly misogynistic, usually an attack on their sexuality and womanhood. They were also found to be mostly either sarcastic and mocking in tone or contained vulgarity and profanity. In fact, some examples of these posts were seen in the previous chapters.

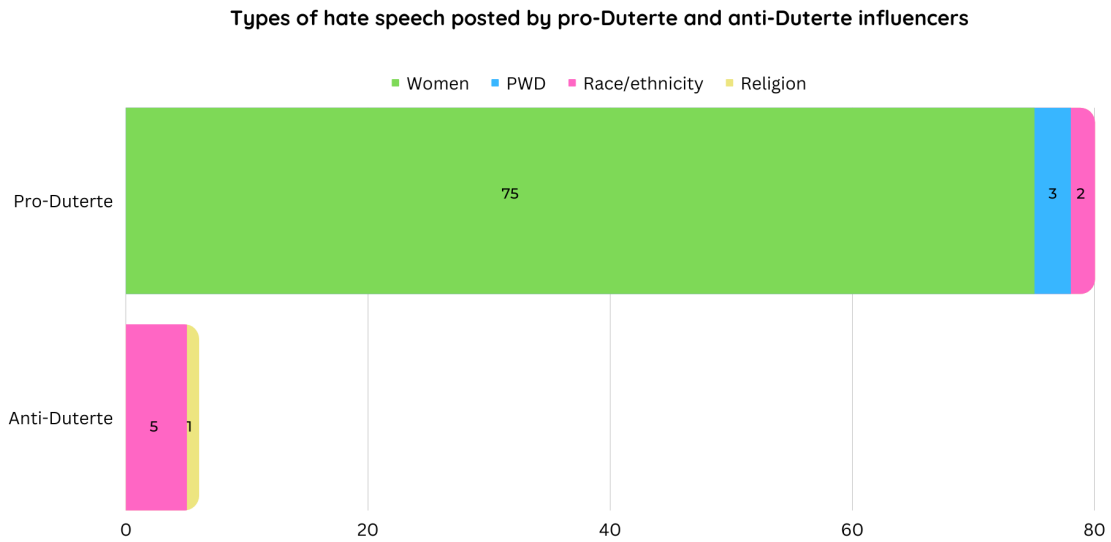


Figure 7.30 A graph showing and comparing the total number of the different kinds of hate posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

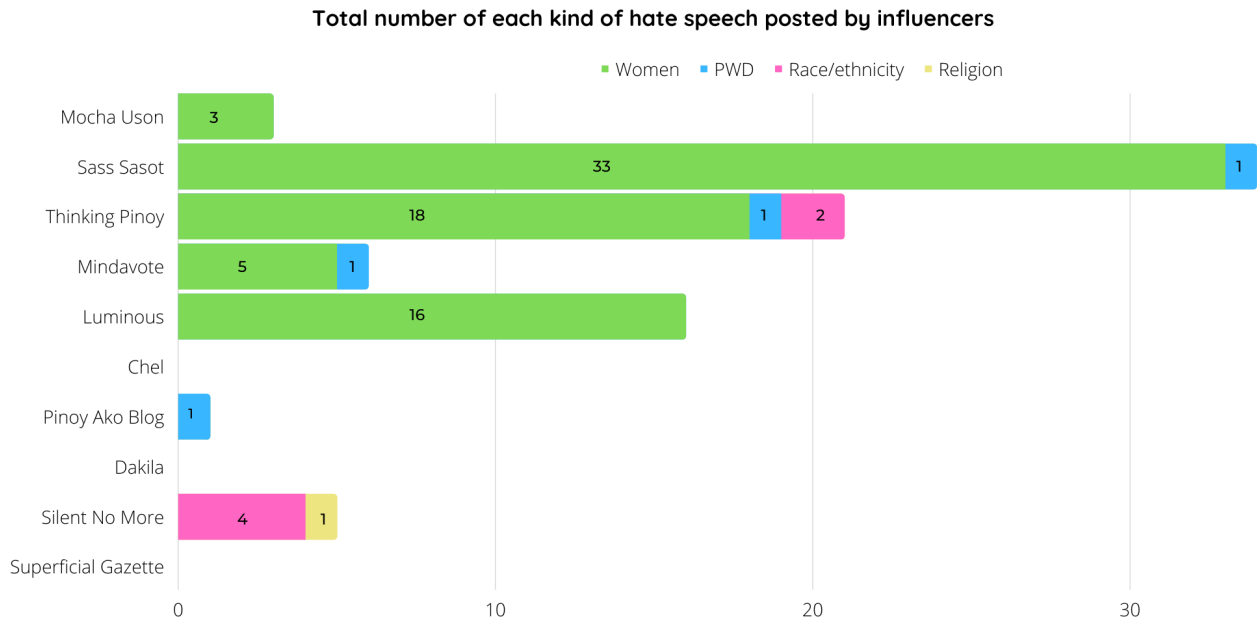


Figure 7.31 A graph showing the total number of the different kinds of uncivil posts by each influencer

In the section above, I gave an example of a post by Sass that falls under vulgarity which also counts as hate speech. In this example, Leni is called ‘*puta ng kano*’ (Americans’ whore). This was coded as hate speech because it falls under the definition of hate against women where sexuality and sexual inuendos are used against women to ridicule them:

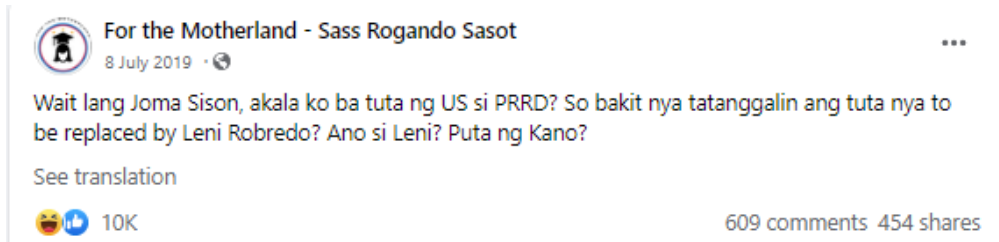


Figure 7.33 A screenshot of Sass Sasot’s post using vulgarity that ridicules women

(Translation: Wait, Joma Sison, I thought PPRD is the puppy of the US? So why would they replace their puppy with Leni Robredo? What is Leni? The Americans’ whore?)

There is no doubt that this kind of narrative that perpetuates misogyny has proliferated among the public, with memes and comments used to portray Robredo as a ‘whore’ or a ‘slut.’ An example would be this comment that imposes Robredo’s face on a model with a suggestive pose, with a caption of ‘I’m ready daddy’, a sexual innuendo insinuating Robredo is ready for any sexual activity.



Figure 7.34 A screenshot of a random comment where Leni Robredo’s post is superimposed on sexy model

A more violent example of Sass’s post against Leni Robredo asks the Vice-president to ‘reboot, upgrade, overhaul, and seal’ the ‘hole in her skull.’ While this can be seen as an exaggeration used to portray Leni Robredo as brainless, as often posted by anti-Duterte influencers like Sass, I also recognise that violent speech can often lead to violent actions. So although the post may seem merely as an exaggeration and not a literal invitation to commit any violence, this was still coded this is as hate speech that is also an incitement to violence especially in the context where Robredo and her daughters have already been subject to rape threats and acid attacks:



Figure 7.35 A screenshot of Sass Sasot’s more violent post against Leni Robredo

(In 2014, Canada tightened the use of diplomatic passports after reports of “alleged misuse for travel and personal business.” Leni Robredo, please reboot, upgrade, overhaul, or seal that hole in your skull.”)

On the other hand, there were only six posts by anti-Duterte influencers that were found to contain hate speech. While there was a lot less hate speech by anti-Duterte influencers, most of the hate speech they posted was racist speech about the Chinese. Most of these were posted by Superficial Gazette. They were also found to be sarcastic and mocking in tone and were demonising the group.

In this example, the Superficial Gazette blames China and the Chinese for the many problems that the country is facing like COVID-19 and lack of employment. In this post, they blame the Chinese for spreading the virus in the country and portray China/Chinese as inferior by saying

that test kits that are made-in-China are defective and that COVID-19 drugs from China are fake. While this clearly is a stigmatisation of the Chinese, this goes further to demonise them also using the hashtags *#ChineseFirst* *#FilipinosLast*, they emphasise that the group is worthy of contempt for all the suffering that Filipinos were experiencing:

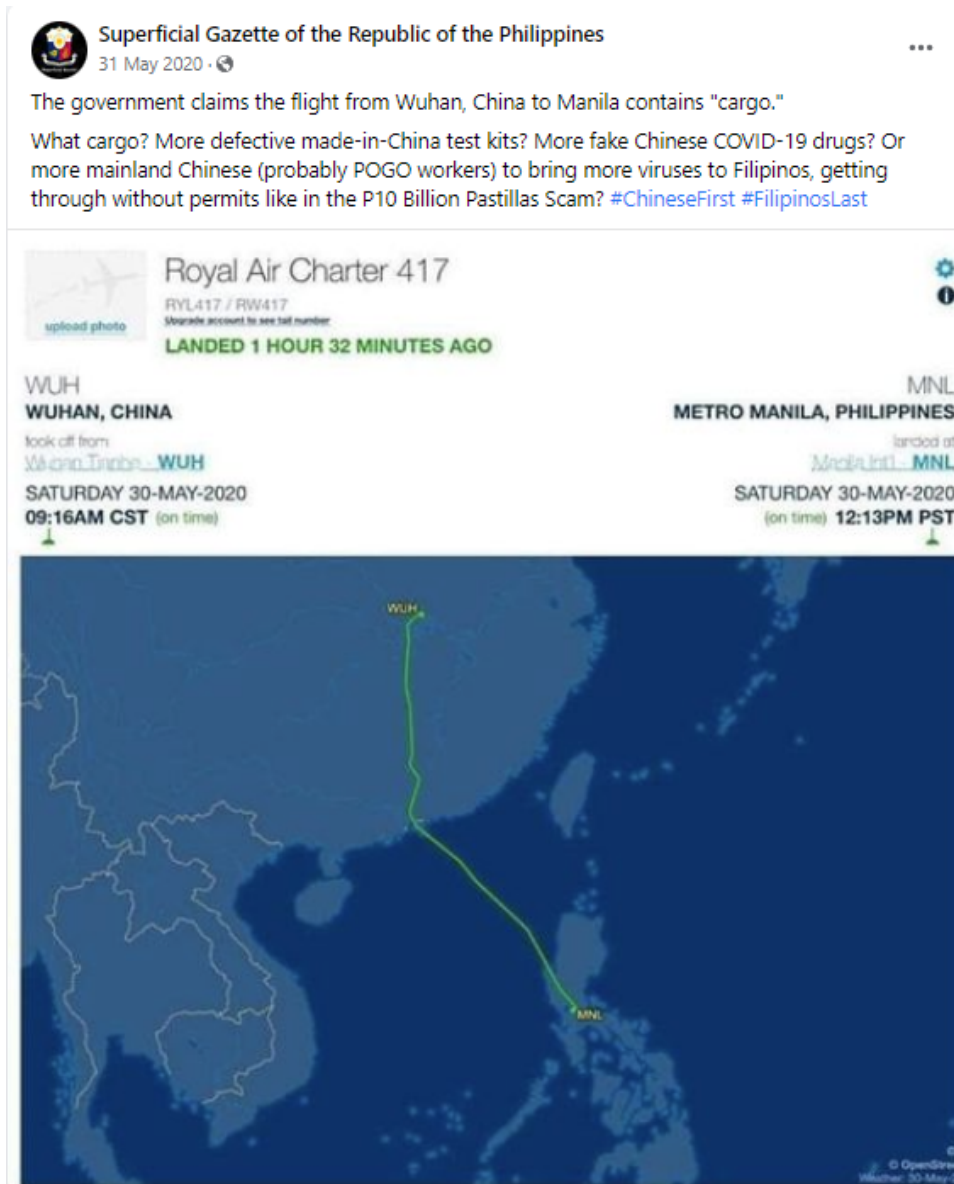


Figure 7.36 A screenshot of Superficial Gazette’s post against the Chinese

7.5 Engagement of uncivil, intolerant, and hate speech posts

In this section, I show the mean engagement of uncivil, intolerant, and hate speech posts. Total engagement numbers were downloaded via Facepager, including total number of shares, reacts, and comments of a post. It is important to note that I did not consider how much of this engagement may be due to inauthentic accounts. I argue that even with engagement from inauthentic accounts, the engagements like commenting and reacting allow for any post to be at the top of the newsfeed while sharing can widen the audience and spread the message quicker. The mean engagement might also be influenced by the gap of number of following, with pro-Duterte influencers having significantly more following than anti-Duterte influencers; as well as posts that have been boosted as an advertisement. I did not take into consideration whether the posts were boosted or not. However, whether the posts' engagement were organic or paid for, it only shows that engagement is a vital part of using Facebook as a channel to spread information.

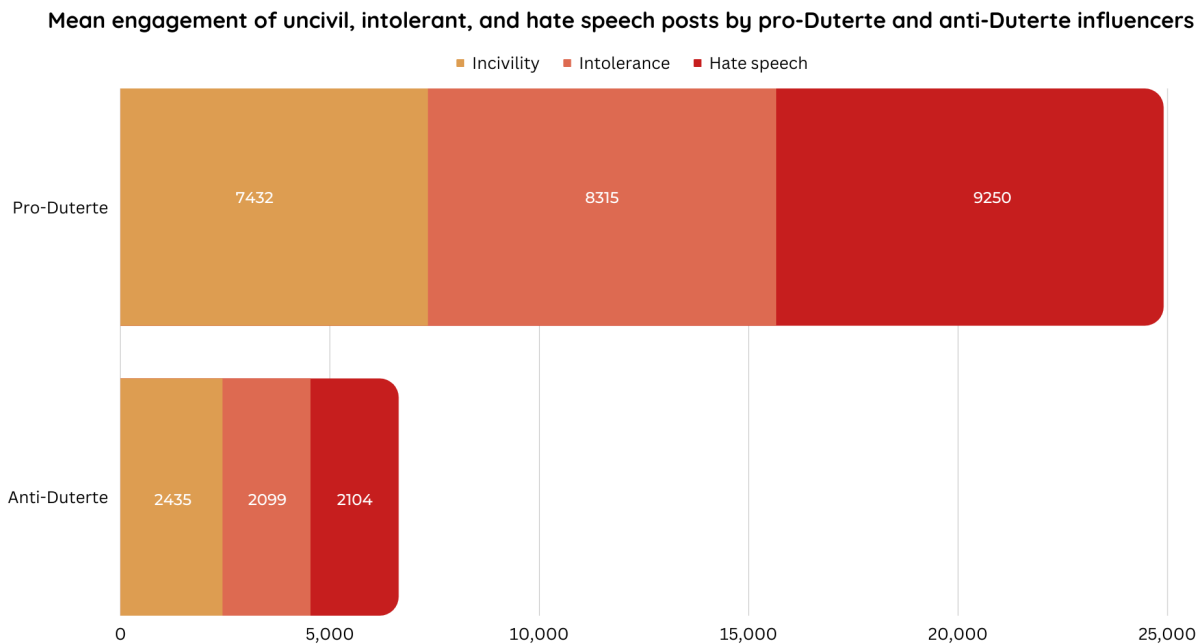


Figure 7.37 A graph that shows and compares the mean engagement of uncivil, intolerant, and hate posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

In the graph above, it can be seen that the mean engagement of uncivil, intolerant, and posts with hate speech by pro-Duterte supporters is around four times more than the engagement of posts by anti-Duterte influencers. This is despite the fact that anti-Duterte influencers posted more incivility and intolerance than pro-Duterte influencers. It can also be noted that the engagement on posts with hate speech by pro-Duterte supporters is more than the engagement on uncivil and intolerant posts, despite hate speech being only 3% of their total number of posts. This drives home the point that although hate speech comprises a minority of the posts, the public can find it more entertaining and what it can do can be more damaging.

Plotting the mean engagement on the incivility-intolerance continuum, one can further see the difference between the engagement on posts by pro-Duterte versus anti-Duterte influencers. Demonisation, denigration, and extremism are the top three most engaged posts by pro-Duterte influencers. It is concerning to see that extremist posts have such a high engagement, especially as I found only 15 posts that contained extremism, compared to 568 posts that were demonising political opponents. The engagement seems disproportionate for a small number of extremist posts, but this shows how extremist views can be spread easily and can resonate with the public. On the other hand, while anti-Duterte influencers posted more uncivil and intolerant posts, their engagement has been twice or three times less than the engagement that pro-Duterte influencers had. One can only assume that uncivil and intolerant posts don't resonate with the audience/following of anti-Duterte influencers, which would make them less shareable and would gain less reactions and comments.

Mean engagement of each kind of incivility and intolerance by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte supporter

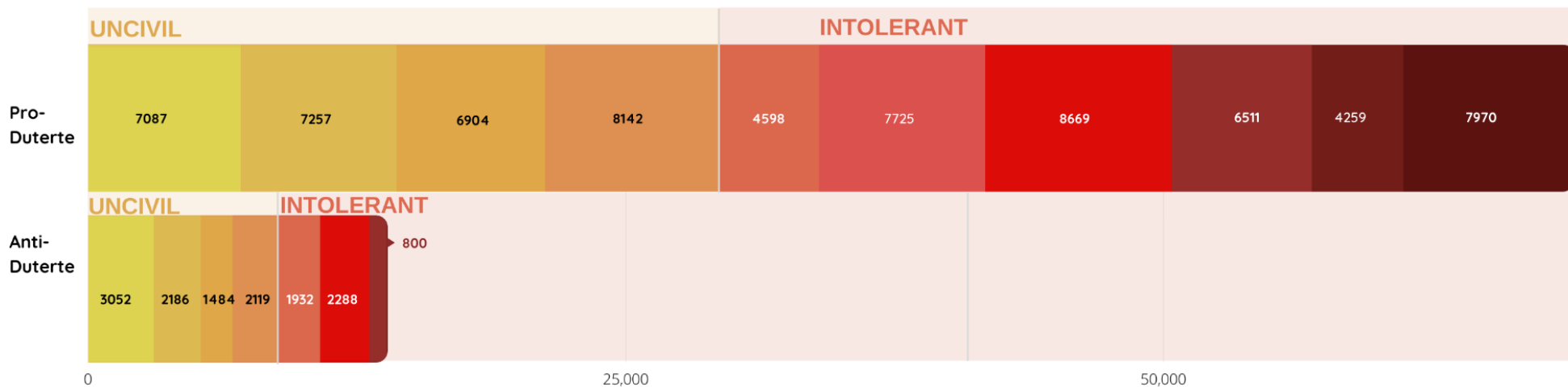


Figure 7.38 A graph that shows the mean engagement for each kind of uncivil and intolerant speech by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

Legend:

- polite, respectful speech
- vulgarity and profanity
- stigmatisation
- inciting violence and harm
- sarcasm and mockery
- denigrating remarks
- demonisation
- extremism
- ad hominem and personal attacks
- intimidation
- calling for ousters, protests, uncivil actions

Perhaps also concerning is the engagement of hate speech on posts by pro-Duterte influencers. The mean engagement for posts by pro-Duterte influencers containing hate is 9250. Hate against race/ethnicity was most engaged with over 10,000 mean engagement, followed by hate against women, with a mean engagement of 9,468. On the other hand, mean engagement on hate posts by anti-Duterte supporters were more than three times lower, with hate on religion and race/ethnicity having almost similar mean engagements at 2473 and 2030, respectively.

Mean engagement of hate speech posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

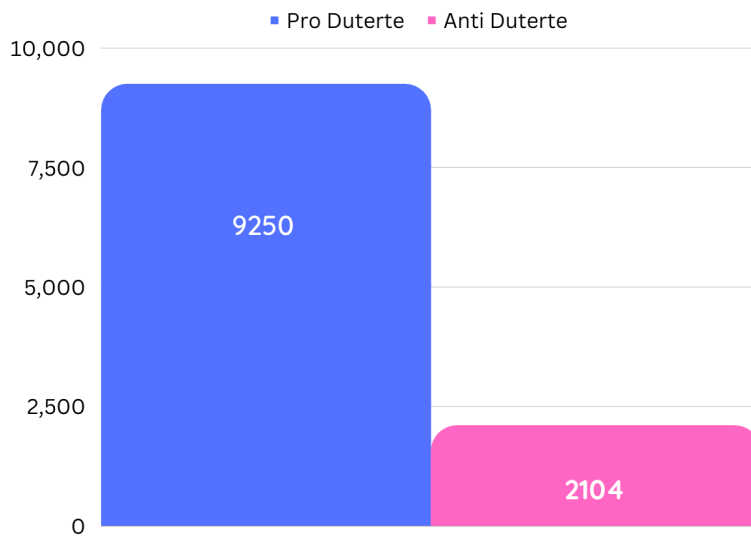


Figure 7.39 A graph that shows and compares the mean engagement of hate posts by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

Mean engagement on each type of hate speech posted by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

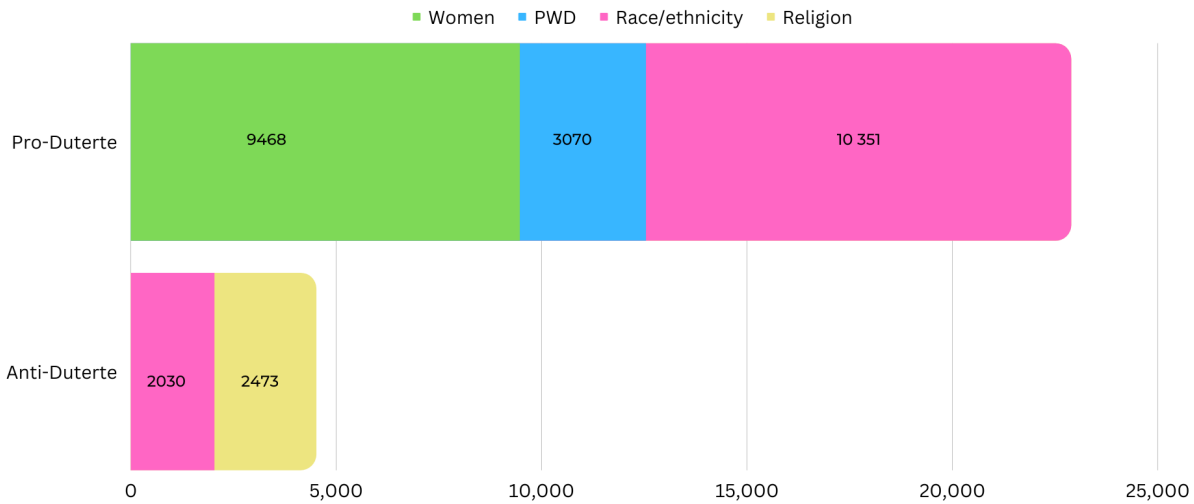


Figure 7.40 A graph that shows and compares the mean engagement of each kind of hate post by pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

7.6 Summary

In this chapter, I presented the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech in the posts by the ten influencers. To measure intensity, the scales of political speech visualisation was developed based on definitions by different scholars showing incivility as a continuum that stretches between low levels of incivility like sarcasm to higher levels of intolerance like extremism. Similarly, it was recognised that hate speech is speech that exists across this continuum. I also recognised that while incivility and intolerance exists in one continuum, their definitions separate them from each other – whereas incivility focuses on tone and does not threaten democracy, intolerance focuses on substance and can pose a threat to democratic discussions and processes. Therefore, incivility and intolerance are not exclusive of each other, and a post can both be uncivil and intolerant at the same time. Knowing this, all the Facebook posts were coded using separate scales for incivility and intolerance.

There were three hypotheses for this chapter. First, that both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers will engage in incivility, intolerance, and hate speech but that the former will post more of this kind of content. This hypothesis was formed based on previous reports and observations that Duterte supporters are vulgar and brash (Curato, 2019), which reflects Duterte's own penchant for this kind of speech. However, I found that, contrary to the hypothesis, anti-Duterte influencers posted more incivility and intolerance than pro-Duterte influencers. I was surprised to find this result, as pro-Duterte influencers are usually painted as the more 'uncivil' influencers, in comparison to Duterte himself and his supporters, while anti-Duterte influencers are painted as the more 'decent' ones by Duterte critics. In his study, Ong et al. (2022) found some worries among the NGO sector that the tone used to talk about human rights might be condescending to the public and could therefore alienate more people. The findings prove that these worries have some foundation when I looked at some of the posts by anti-Duterte influencers. For example, I found that anti-Duterte influencers use uncivil and intolerant language against Duterte supporters which can create more gap instead of bridging differences and trying to reach out to Duterte supporters. Given the big following of these influencers, and that their followers might echo the way they speak, uncivil language and behaviour might turn-off those who they want to persuade rather than engage with them. In chapter 6, it was already mentioned how this might be a problem if anti-Duterte influencers wanted to change narratives.

However, to some extent, some forms of incivility might help promote more democratic discussion. In their study, Ong et al. (2022) also looked at Dakila and how they engage with people online, and were found to use 'radical empathy' and 'disruptive kindness' instead of fighting fire with fire. According to Ong et al.'s (2022, p.57) interview with them, the organisation is "prohibited from using a condescending tone, sarcastic humour, and naming-and-shaming, or mobilizing their own fake accounts to respond to troll comments." However, I found that Dakila engaged in some forms of incivility too, for example, they used sarcasm and denigrating remarks to shame government officials. Some individuals or organisations may feel that incivility is always unhealthy and try to distance themselves from it, without knowing that they themselves engage in some forms of incivility to help protect democracy. In cases like Dakila, Sydnor's (2018) point that some incivility is necessary to

promote democratic discussions and that civility can mask dissent is an important point to consider for organisations and individuals who might be scared to engage in uncivil discussions. One part of the first hypothesis that turned out to be correct is that pro-Duterte influencers will post more hate speech than anti-Duterte influencers. In this study study, I found that while hate speech were found to be far and few in between, at only 1.8% of the 4776 posts I analysed, pro-Duterte influencers posted 93% of (or 80 out of 86) of these hate speech, which were mostly hate against women, and which I will discuss more later.

The second hypothesis is that pro-Duterte influencers will use higher levels or more intense forms of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech compared to anti-Duterte influencers. This hypothesis was only partially correct. First, it was found found that anti-Duterte influencers used medium levels of intolerance like demonising political opposition and calling for ousters, resignations, and protests. This is not surprising, given that anti-Duterte influencers have been expressing their dissent against Duterte and his policies, as seen in Chapter 5. On the other hand, pro-Duterte influencers preferred to post lower levels of incivility like sarcasm and mockery and ad hominem attacks, with political figures of the opposition as subject of these attacks. However, while pro-Duterte influencers posted mostly lower levels of incivility, I also found a few posts by some pro-Duterte influencers that incited violence/harm and were extremist in views. These more extreme and higher levels of intolerance were found exclusively in posts by pro-Duterte influencers. So although anti-Duterte influencers posted more medium levels of intolerance on average, more extreme levels of intolerance were only found in posts by pro-Duterte supporters. Most of these incitements to violence and extremist views reflect the views by pro-Duterte influencers that the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) are 'terrorists' and therefore must be 'cleansed' in the government's all-out war against the communist insurgents. These posts urged the government to continue with its war against the group and celebrated "wins" by the military whenever they had an encounter with the communist group. These kinds of posts clearly pose a serious threat to human life, especially in a political climate where extrajudicial killings have been normalised.

Another finding in this chapter is that where hate speech is present, hate speech against women will be most used by pro-Duterte influencers, especially against women from the opposition and

women critics of Duterte and hate speech against race was used by anti-Duterte influencers, especially against the Chinese. As mentioned earlier, of the total 86 posts with hate speech, 80 were posted by pro-Duterte influencers, and 75 of which were hate speech against women. While the number of posts that contained hate speech were far and few in between, that hate speech was present at all reflects that political polarisation can indeed lead to more hatred. It is a cause for concern that particular groups like women and the Chinese are subject to hatred which can lead to real-world discrimination and violence. It is also important to note that pro-Duterte influencers have a wider reach and their posts are considered more viral than anti-Duterte influencers, which leads to the next point about the engagement that these kinds of posts get from the public.

Maybe quite concerning is what I found with the amount of engagement that uncivil, intolerant, and hate speech posts get. I found an association between the amount of engagement and uncivil, intolerant, and hate posts. Meaning, the engagement may increase if a post is either uncivil or intolerant or contains hate speech. Once again, this shows that although more posts analysed were still civil and intolerant, and that there were only a few cases of hate speech, that these kinds of content seem to be more engaging to the public and can thus sow more polarisation and hatred towards others, a particularly dangerous situation in a country where violence has become the norm.

In chapter 3, findings from Karunungan and Jaminola's (forthcoming) report shows that Filipinos who engage in political discourse are subject to hate speech on Facebook. Karunungan and Jaminola found that reflecting the data on the influencers, most of the hate speech experienced by the respondents involved hate speech against women, ranging from sexual comments to real-world threats of violence like murder and rape. This means that harassment and threats, especially against women, have been normalised in a country whose president constantly demeans, threatens, and harasses women. The present culture that allows for this kind of everyday violence to happen is not only a consequence of electing a strongman but also a reflection of the patriarchal society in the Philippines. Where before, this macho misogynist culture rises to the surface every now and then, electing Duterte has allowed for these sentiments, which were once considered unspeakable, to break the dam and come crashing like a tidal wave no one saw coming.

Chapter 8

Conclusion and Recommendations

“But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.”

— *George Orwell, 1984*

My aim in this thesis was to look at the role of Facebook influencers in shaping the narrative of the Duterte era. I have sought to investigate the different ways in which ten leading opinion-forming Facebook influencers, who have some of the highest followings on the platform as either being pro-Duterte or anti-Duterte, have used rhetorical devices in facilitating effective communication to their audiences. The thesis contends that these influencers are important because they played an important role in shaping debate within the Philippines during the previous President’s controversial time in office. These leading Facebook personalities used rhetorical devices to help shape, support or challenge the image-making of key politicians and policies as well as perpetuating incivility, intolerance, and hate speech.

The thesis explored the role and contribution of Facebook to debate in the Philippines through exploration of three aspects of how social media activities have influenced the country’s political debate. In Chapter 5 I focused on the influencers’ role in permanent campaigning through acclaiming, attacking, and defending characters and policies. In the next chapter I concentrated on five rhetorical devices used to present the issues of human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations. Then in Chapter 7, I examined the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech found in the Facebook posts I analysed. This chapter also looked at the engagement of uncivil, intolerant, and hate posts. In this closing

chapter, I will point to the contributions of this thesis as I draw together the findings of this study, the relevance of such research to the Philippines, and the possibilities of future research in this topic.

Foremost my thesis has sought to contribute to the study of how social media is used for political communication and how it can impact political discourse – a field of research where non-Western countries including many in Asia have been understudied despite being early adopters of technology. Second, this thesis contributes empirically through the application of quantitative content analysis to a specific case study and one that gives us an insight into a different political and cultural landscape compared to most existing research. Last, through creating the scales of political speech visualisation through visualising my data through this visualisation, my study contributes to the conceptual framework on the topics of incivility and intolerance. Before further examining these substantive topics in greater detail I want to turn to and reflect on the intended recipients of my chosen influencers' efforts, that is the Facebook users themselves.

8.1 A note on audiences

Thinking about who their audience is plays a crucial role in how social media influencers used rhetorical devices to shape their narratives. In this thesis pro-Duterte influencers catered to supporters of Duterte and anti-Duterte supporters catered to the critics of Duterte. Naturally, the way they used the rhetorical devices was largely based on who and what their audiences found credible. A source of information for Duterte supporters might not seem credible for anti-Duterte supporters, and vice versa. For example, the Philippine News Agency as a source of information may seem credible only to Duterte supporters while Rappler may seem credible only to anti-Duterte supporters due to preconceived notions about them. This is true in all rhetorical devices I analysed. This is consistent with some studies looking at the importance of tailoring one's message to the audience (Clayton, 2014) and reflects Aristotle's views on the importance of taking into consideration the audience's current attitudes and knowledge.

When I analysed the data, I took into consideration who the influencers might be talking to. I found that based on the rhetorical devices used, both groups of influencers have been speaking to their own echo chambers instead of trying to persuade others to support their cause. This might not be a problem for pro-Duterte influencers whose job is to ensure Duterte and his policies maintain support from the public, but it is more of a problem for anti-Duterte influencers who have been trying to gain more support in protesting against the government with the hope of replacing it with opposition leaders. Ong et al. (2022) found that anti-Duterte influencers ‘preach to the choir’ and ‘build walls’ when communicating about human rights issues. I found a similar trend in our study where anti-Duterte influencers use sarcasm and mockery to talk about the President and his policies. Using this tone would only alienate Duterte supporters and would create a bigger divide instead of bridging information that would help change their attitudes towards said illiberal policies. On the other hand, it is also possible that it was not the goal of anti-Duterte influencers to change the mind of Duterte supporters but rather to engage with their existing audience, circling back to the earlier point that these influencers merely speak to their own echo chambers.

8.2 Character as the main focus of campaigns

The thesis has applied Benoit’s functional theory to explore how the ten featured influencers used acclaims, attacks, and defenses to either boost or maintain the good image of a political figure or smear their reputation. I looked at these rhetorical devices conscious of the Philippines’ highly personalised politics where politicians engaged in permanent campaigning, thereby blurring the lines between governing and campaigning in order to sustain their popularity (Blumenthal, 1980). Benoit’s functional theory served as a theoretical framework with which I analysed a period that witnessed Duterte maintaining his high approval ratings throughout his six years in office and how, on the other hand, the opposition failed to boost their image which culminated in their defeat in the 2019 and 2022 elections.

In the analysis, I found the most used rhetorical device during this period was the attacking of a character. Here pro-Duterte influencers used attacks to smear the names of political figures in the

opposition, using mostly ad hominem and personal attacks with some bordering on hate speech. Pro-Duterte influencers' attacks on character dominate (90% of the total number of attacks by the pro-Duterte group were character attacks). On the other hand, character attacks by anti-Duterte influencers were found only in 47% of the total number of posts that attack, by the anti-Duterte group. This shows that pro-Duterte influencers leveraged the highly personalistic politics of the Philippines while anti-Duterte influencers were more divided in their efforts by also using policy attacks. In addition, the differential use of attacks between the two groups was seen in this study. Anti-Duterte influencers used factual information to besmirch Duterte and his allies while pro-Duterte influencers used more ad hominem attacks. Whereas pro-Duterte influencers would, for example, use derogatory words as 'stupid' or 'ugly', anti-Duterte influencers would use more politicised words like 'tyrant' and 'corrupt' alongside evidence of both. The difference in the way attacks were used by each camp were distinguishable. Based on the 2019 election results and Duterte's approval ratings, it would seem that the tactics of pro-Duterte influencers were successful in maintaining his image while anti-Duterte influencers failed to stop Duterte-allied candidates from gaining power, with 66.6% of the Senate seat having been won by the latter. This is not to say of course that influencers were the sole reason for Duterte's high approval ratings, or for Duterte allies getting elected into power, but they could have been a contributory factor.

Acclams were the next most used rhetorical device by both groups of influencers. Benoit's hypothesis that acclams tend to be used the most in a given political situation was not borne out in this study. In fact, out of the 3215 posts that used acclams, attacks, or defenses, only 12% were acclams. Where acclams were present, similar to attacks, they were focused on character more than policies. Acclams by pro-Duterte influencers focused on Duterte's character while acclams by anti-Duterte influencers focused on opposition leaders' character. It should be noted that the number of acclams by pro-Duterte influencers were almost double compared to acclams by anti-Duterte influencers. This could be due to a number of factors such as pro-Duterte influencers like Mocha Uson and Thinking Pinoy having held office as part of the Duterte administration. It was literally this pair's job to post good news about Duterte and his accomplishments as a president. Second, I recognise that there are few opposition leaders that

have held office since 2016, meaning there would be less people to acclaim on the side of anti-Duterte influencers.

According to Benoit (2005), defenses are used to reduce the cost of attacks. By this logic, if a politician wanted to maintain or boost their good image, the number of defenses they make should be proportional to the number of attacks. However, this study found that defenses were even less used out of the three with only 9% of posts using defence as a rhetorical device. This is surprising, given the amount of posts that attack coming from both camps. The number of posts that defend seem disproportionate to the posts that attack. However, despite this, pro-Duterte influencers took more time to defend Duterte and his policies, posting almost 300% more defenses than anti-Duterte influencers. While this study doesn't claim that this is the only reason for the failure of opposition figures such as Leni Robredo to win a seat in the 2022 national elections, the dismissal of attacks hurled at her, may have hurt her campaign to win the presidency. Robredo herself admitted that in her six years in office, her main tactic against disinformation and attacks against her was nonchalance, believing these issues would dissipate on their own. However, the name-calling and the image-making by pro-Duterte influencers that shaped her to be stupid, dull, and gullible (e.g. terms like *'lugaw'* and *'madumb'* have been used by pro-Duterte influencers consistently in her six years in office to portray her as stupid) appeared to have helped shape perceptions of her to this day. Now living as a private citizen, trolls and her haters nonetheless continue to use such names to shame her.

The contemporary Philippines case demonstrates how attacks, acclaims, and defenses can help in the permanent campaigning by politicians. These rhetorical devices can be used in everyday political discourse outside of formal election campaigns to help create certain narratives that would stick to the public years on. Perhaps this is a reflection of some studies that argue that repetition makes things increasingly appear increasingly credible. In fact, a study by Foster et al. (2012, p.321) found that repetition, not the number of sources, increases people's susceptibility to misinformation, highlighting "the power of a single repeated voice." Simply put, when information is repeated over and over, people increasingly believe it to be true. This is not a new theory. As early as 1919, Figgis (1919, p. 35) claimed that "repetition makes reputation." When these influencers repeat acclaims and attacks over the years, the narratives become believable to

the public; without defenses to correct or reply to the attacks, the attacks can only become more believable.

In chapter 5, a lot of the current hypotheses using Benoit's functional theory were not relevant in the Philippine context. The basis of Benoit's theory is of course Western oriented and many studies that have used Benoit's functional theory have examined political campaigning in Western countries. This only brings home the point that there is a lack of research in looking at political communication in campaigning in other contexts including Asia.

8.3 Rhetorical devices used to enforce confirmation bias

The thesis examined how rhetorical devices were used by the ten featured influencers to talk about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations – all three critical topics of national importance that have helped to polarise the Filipino public. Specifically, I illustrated how the featured influencers presented these topics by looking at five rhetorical devices in line with Aristotle's theory of persuasion that the ways to persuade an audience is through *logos* (the argument itself), *pathos* (emotions), and *ethos* (the credibility of the speaker). With this in mind I analysed the data by looking at five rhetorical devices: for *logos* I looked at how influencers used sources of knowledge/information; for *pathos*, I looked at the use of collective appeal and personal appeal; for *ethos*, I looked at the use of quoting other people to lend credibility to arguments; and combining all three I looked at calls to action.

As already acknowledged, the intended audience of the influencers when analysing social media data must be considered. Confirmation bias and political partisanship play a big role in the way information is perceived (Beauvais, 2022; Tandoc, 2019; Suntal et al., 2020). For example, if pro-Duterte supporters already support the war on drugs, any information that supports it, whether it is true or not, will be believable to them. The information only reinforces the beliefs they already hold, consistent with Peters' (2020) argument that confirmation bias is "highly effective for us to be confident about our beliefs even when there is insufficient evidence or subjective motivation available to us to support them." The same would hold true for Duterte critics in the way they would receive and process information.

In terms of the use of sources of knowledge/information, pro-Duterte influencers used mostly probable information, or information that could not be verified if accurate or not, in presenting narratives about human rights and law and order and China-Philippine relations. For example, one constant narrative is the impact of the war on drugs on the crime rate of the country if measured by data from the Philippine National Police. Given such information on drug use in the country has been manufactured to suit Duterte's main campaign platform, this information was considered as probable information and not credible. However, while this kind of information may or may not be true, Duterte supporters who already support the war on drugs might take the information at face value, reinforcing their confirmation bias. A similar thing could be said about Duterte critics in the way they handle information presented to them, although their sources of information were found to be more credible. While I found that anti-Duterte influencers used mostly verifiable facts/information from experts, this does not discount confirmation bias. Duterte critics could use these kinds of information to add to their confirmation bias on how they see Duterte as a president.

COVID-19 is a topic where the use of sources of information posted by pro-Duterte influencers were a mix of verifiable facts and probable information. This is seen, for example, in the posts of Sass Sasot and Thinking Pinoy who shared information that were flagged by Facebook as disinformation. This unverifiable information and/or disinformation was mostly from international "studies" that were later proven wrong. I put quotation marks on the word studies, as I believe these were merely medical assumptions in the early days of COVID-19, with no proper evidence, or else sensationalised information shared from other health influencers. At the same time, pro-Duterte influencers also posted information coming from the Department of Health about the latest COVID-19 data and statistics in the country, which I did not find any reason to be misleading or false. The mixing of these sources of information by pro-Duterte influencers could be problematic during a global pandemic – that disinformation or misinformation about a new virus were shared at all by influencers whose reach is in the millions can be at the cost of the health and lives of the public. The findings of this research correspond with the findings of Sabonsolin (2022) whose study found that between March 14, 2020 to September 14, 2020 (a period of time also covered in my research), 41% of content that were

fact-checked by VERA files were false information on COVID-19. The study also found that the sources of these false information mostly come from Facebook influencer pages that support Duterte, for example, *Duterte-Marcos Real Change*, *Inday Sara Para sa Masa*, and *Ang Pagbabalik Naming mga DDS @ Sara Duterte & BBM Para sa 2022* (Sabonsolin, 2022).

Looking at the use of quotes, pro-Duterte influencers quoted more government officials and ministries while anti-Duterte influencers quoted more experts outside the government (e.g. academia, reports). The use of quotes reflect where the two groups of influencers get their information and where they find credibility. Again, similar to how sources of information were used, this confirms the differences of beliefs between Duterte supporters and Duterte critics. Duterte supporters would most likely believe Duterte, his government, and other individuals or organisations who support him while the opposite is the case for Duterte critics. It would then be logical for Duterte critics to look for information from organisations or individuals who criticise Duterte, while Duterte supporters would immediately distrust information and sources which anti-Duterte influencers trust. In fact, any information from outside the government that criticises Duterte is immediately branded as a plot to destroy the government or else foreign intervention. By quoting only people whose beliefs align with their own, the influencers speak to the audience they already have, catering to the echo chambers they have created, instead of trying to change people's minds.

Chapter 6 also analyses the emotional content featured in the research conducted for this study. Perhaps one use of quotes that was found that not only catered to ethos but also pathos is the use of personal quotes, specifically quoting ordinary people with their personal experiences. For example, this is seen in Mocha Uson's posts in quoting supposed former members of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army CPP-NPA (CPP-NPA) or parents of children who were supposedly recruited to join the CPP-NPA. The CPP-NPA is a communist group that has been branded as terrorists by the Duterte administration and pro-Duterte influencers and who are allegedly recruiting young students to join their cause. By using personal stories and quoting supposed former members of the group, Uson's tactic is to touch the emotions of other parents who might fear what the group might do with their children and what suffering their children might face by joining the CPP-NPA. Of course, this is not to say that the

people quoted were really part of the CPP-NPA or if their experiences were true. The same tactic is used by anti-Duterte influencers when they quoted personal stories of fisherfolk bullied by Chinese vessels in the disputed sea territory. This is seen, for example, in posts by Chel Diokno and Dakila. By quoting fisherfolks in respect of their experiences with the Chinese, anti-Duterte influencers were thereby appealing to emotions associated with nationalism.

Use of collective and personal appeals were also a prominent feature in the influencers posts and these were mostly used to discuss issues on human rights and law and order (46% of all collective appeals were used for human rights and law and order). Pro-Duterte influencers used collective and personal appeals to ask people to continue supporting the war on drugs and keep children ‘safe’ from the CPP-NPA. Anti-Duterte influencers used the same kind of appeals to ask their audience to oppose Duterte’s illiberal policies. There was also a stark difference on how these appeals were used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pro-Duterte influencers used these appeals to ask people to follow government rules, sometimes with a threatening or intimidating tone. For example, Luminous, a page created by two lawyers, even threatens the public who disobey the government that they would help prosecute them. Here the deployment of the “*pasaway*” (people who disobey rules and need disciplining) narrative (Hapal, 2021; Lacsá, 2022), set out by the government to rationalise the militarisation of COVID-19 response can be seen. This was widely disseminated by pro-Duterte influencers. Contrary to the narrative of the *pasaway* being promoted by these influencers, data shows that the Filipino public did in fact follow the rules and regulations. Data by UK think tank YouGov (2020) showed the “Philippines came second out of 27 countries in wearing masks outside the home; second in always washing hands with soap and water; first in always using hand sanitizers and first in always avoiding crowded areas” (Lacsá, 2022, p. 325). In contrast, anti-Duterte influencers appealed to the people to help fight Duterte’s illiberal policies, for example, in lowering the age of criminal responsibility of children and in the passage of the Anti-terrorism Bill.

Some calls to action involved rhetorical devices that combined ethos, pathos, and logos. For any call to action to be heeded, the speaker must first have credibility, the message must appeal to the audience, and the needed action must be logical. This study found most calls to action were online activities that could easily be done by people already online (e.g. like, share, comment). I

also found that anti-Duterte influencers specifically made a number of calls to action that asked their followers to sign petitions against certain policies or asking for the resignation of specific government officials embroiled in controversies. While these petitions did not achieve their goals, they can be seen as a form of engagement that would be attempts to engage people in larger actions (e.g. joining a protest in person) and also make them feel part of a collective (Croesser, 2019).

So how were the rhetorical devices looked at in this study used by influencers to present issues on human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China Philippine relations? The findings in Chapter 6 underline the fact that both groups of influencers use rhetorical devices to talk to their echo chambers, with posts mostly catering to the people who already follow them and believe in their causes. There were no discernible attempts to change people's minds, for example through presenting a different way of thinking. If anti-Duterte influencers, for example, know that Duterte supporters would not change their minds by presenting facts alone, then a new method of communicating must be thought about. A study by Lord et al. (1979) showed that those who opposed the death penalty opposed it more when shown evidence by pro-death penalty people. In their follow-up study, Lord et al. (1984, p.1233) used "consider the opposite" strategy, which asked participants to consider whether they would make the same decisions if exactly the same study would have supported the other side of the issue. Results of the study showed participants overcame their bias. This goes to show that there can be ways to present arguments that can change people's minds but this study did not see any new methods or tactics employed by any of the influencers that could convince people who may have opposing beliefs from them. But perhaps if the goal of the ten influencers was not to change people's minds, and to simply cater to and strengthen their biases, then both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers were successful in doing so.

8.4 The virality of incivility, intolerance, and hate

In Chapter 7, using the scales of political speech visualisation I developed, I looked at the prevalence and intensity of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech present in the Facebook posts of the ten chosen influencers. I found that while both pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers

engaged in incivility and intolerance, anti-Duterte influencers posted more uncivil and intolerant posts than their rivals. This is a surprising finding, given that observations about Duterte supporters frequently described them as “vulgar and brash” (Curato, 2019) while Duterte critics have always called for the return of decency and respect as the norm. In Ong’s et al.’s (2022) study, they found that some people from non-government organisations in the Philippines who campaign for human rights fear that they sound condescending in communicating messages, alienating more people rather than being able to change their views. The findings in this study indicate that this could be accurate when the way anti-Duterte influencers have been uncivil and intolerant towards those who hold different views is looked at. For example, Pinoy Ako Blog frequently uses sarcasm and mockery in their tone. Thinking about how a Duterte supporter would receive this message, reading a post that mocks them and their beliefs is likely to lead to them reacting by defending themselves from what feels like a personal attack. In such cases, incivility and intolerance can lead to a greater level of polarisation. However, some incivility can also help further democratic discussions. Dakila, one of the influencers analysed in this study, said that they like to use radical empathy and disruptive kindness, prohibiting name-calling and shaming on their page (Ong et al., 2022). However, when I analysed their posts, there were in fact name-calling and shaming on their page, particularly targeted mostly at Duterte’s behaviour and character. For example, Dakila calls Duterte a “lewd, chauvinist leader”. While this is based on Duterte’s behaviour and attitude towards women, it is still considered as name calling and is uncivil in tone. Organisations or individuals may feel like they need to always be kind to protect democracy and democratic debates, but Sydnor (2018) gives a poignant reminder that civility can also mask dissent. People must not fear incivility because to some extent it is to be expected as it is a part of a healthy democracy.

Turning to the intensity of incivility in the material that was analysed, I found that anti-Duterte supporters liked to use denigrating remarks, or remarks that attacked someone’s reputation by belittling or denying their importance or validity. Most of these posts attacked Duterte and his allies in positions of power. In the incivility-intolerance continuum, I count denigrating remarks as the highest level of incivility. Pro-Duterte supporters, however, used more ad hominem attacks and sarcasm and mockery, which can be found on the lower end of the incivility-intolerance scale.

Looking at the data on the intensity of intolerance, both groups used demonisation the most (86% of intolerant posts were demonisation), which was defined as posts that inspire hatred and contempt, portraying the enemy as malicious and repulsive, and as evil and worthy of contempt. This is distinguishable from denigration in that denigration attacks someone's reputation but does not intend to inspire extreme feelings of hatred. In the scales of political speech visualisation, demonisation is found in the higher level of intolerance, just two categories below extremism. Meanwhile, anti-Duterte influencers also used calls for resignation and ousters against Duterte and some government officials like Department of Health Secretary Francisco Duque and Senator Koko Pimentel. This was considered intolerant and could be a threat to democracy, especially as Duterte was a democratically-elected president who won with an overwhelming number of votes, and his approval rating remained high during his six years in office. However, calling for resignation and ousting can be seen as a common occurrence in countries where social intolerance is high (Rapp and Ackerman, 2015).

Perhaps also notable is that pro-Duterte influencers also posted inciting violence and harm and extremism, the most extreme form of intolerance that can lead to violence in the real world. These posts were mostly about the drug war and the war against the CPP-NPA. Mocha Uson was found to post most of these incitements to violence and harm and extremism and her posts included supporting the extrajudicial killings in the name of the war on drugs as well as the killings of CPP-NPA members during military encounters. Also concerning is the finding that posts that incite violence and hold extremist views were found to have high mean engagement numbers, meaning that these kinds of posts spread more amongst the public.

When it comes to hate speech, pro-Duterte influencers posted more hate speech than anti-Duterte influencers. Almost all of this (94%) was hate speech against women, targeted at women leaders of the opposition and mostly Leni Robredo. Anti-Duterte influencers, meanwhile, posted mostly racist hate speech, with the Chinese as a particular target. The related tension was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic where blame was put on Chinese nationals for the virus. While I only found a total of 86 posts with hate speech, or only 1.8% of the total posts analysed, I found that these had a very high engagement rate and were therefore more potentially dangerous and

damaging than we might think. In fact, there is evidence to show that online hate speech has previously led to real-world violence.

8.5 Limitations of the study and future research

While this research has contributed to the field of political communication and in particular, to the role of social media in political discourse, this research is not without its limitations. Due to these, this study is not generalisable. Nevertheless, the contribution of this thesis is in providing a snapshot of one aspect of the role of social media in politics at a critical juncture of Philippine history. Some of the limitations in the research undertaken for this thesis were necessitated by ethical considerations as well as methodological choices that were made to protect the integrity of my data and my own safety as a researcher-activist.

An obvious limitation of my analysis is that it focuses on ten public Facebook pages within a particular time-frame. This was done for both ethical considerations as well as for reasons of practicality. Data from freely available Facebook pages are considered public domain and therefore can be used for research without consent from their owners. I recognise that there are many pro-Duterte and anti-Duterte influencers who use personal accounts or closed groups rather than Facebook pages. However, getting consent from these influencers can prove to be challenging, especially for pro-Duterte influencers, as I am quite vocal about my activism in the Philippines. It is unlikely that pro-Duterte influencers would allow me to access or use their data. Future research, where possible, should look beyond public Facebook pages, especially as the mode of political campaigning is quickly evolving. In the 2022 national elections, for example, Salazar (2022) of the Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism found that Bongbong Marcos, who eventually won the presidency, used influencer marketing combined with community mobilisation to appear more authentic. Related to this, Ong, Tapsell, and Curato (2019) found that micro and nano influencers were more prominent in the 2019 elections due to their contrived authenticity. While this research focuses on the mega and macro influencers, future research should start looking at the role of micro and nano influencers in political campaigning.

A further limitation of my research is that it used only quantitative content analysis as a method. Initially, a mixed method approach was considered including for example, the incorporation of interviews with the featured influencers if they were agreeable. However, given my status as an activist in the Philippines, it was decided that not only would it be difficult for pro-Duterte influencers to say yes to an interview, it would also most likely be unsafe given my history with one of the influencers who mobilised her followers to attack my personal Facebook page. Additionally, I surmised that while I can get pro-Duterte influencers to say yes to an interview, it would be difficult to gain their trust and potential answers could be manufactured. I suggest that future research on this topic could benefit from qualitative methods in order to get deeper insights from influencers themselves on the tactics they use for political campaigning.

The operationalisation of some concepts used in analysing my data set can be subjective is a further limitation. The concepts of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech can be highly contextual. In this kind of research where a specific case study is used, being able to understand cultural contexts, especially the use of language, is a necessity to understand whether a post is deemed uncivil, intolerant, and/or hate speech. For instance, detecting sarcasm and mockery in a post can be difficult if one is not aware of how these are used in the local language. Hence, to ensure the validity of the method, a second coder, who is also from the Philippines, has been employed to code the data. Future research must take note of these nuances, especially if the data is in another language.

A final limitation of this research is that I did not include an analysis of the audience. This limitation is again largely due to ethical concerns. Initially, this research also aimed to look at the comments section of Facebook pages to compare if the audience employs the same rhetorical tactics and/or uses the same narratives as the influencers. This analysis could have added insight into whether the influencers have indeed influenced their followers. Further discussions about ethics including the right to be forgotten on the Internet, made me decide that using comments from personal accounts without their consent would not be ethical. Additionally, one challenge I could have potentially faced was distinguishing authentic versus inauthentic accounts. However, this study looked at the mean engagement numbers of such posts, which can reflect the virality of uncivil, intolerant, and hate posts among the audience.

8.6 Social impact

This research has the potential to contribute to different groups in the Philippines who are working to better understand how to respond to different compounding issues that surround political communication in the digital age: disinformation, historical revisionism, freedom of speech, political propaganda, and hate speech.

For activists and non-government organisations, this research has shown the power of influencers in shaping the narrative of political issues. However, one important question we need to ask ourselves is: Who are we speaking to? More often than not, we speak to our echo chambers – people who already believe in the same values and ideas as we do. I demonstrated in this research how the narratives and rhetorical devices used to talk about human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China-Philippine relations ultimately cater the influencers' own bubbles, and how they would fail to convince people with opposing beliefs. It might be time to rethink about who we are speaking to and what the best ways are of talking to people outside our bubbles.

Another key question that has been asked is if we should be fighting fire with fire, and many answers have been presented and the subject of debate. In my study, I found that anti-Duterte influencers also engage in uncivil and intolerant discourse. While arguments have been made for the return of civility in online political discourse, incivility also has a place in a democracy, especially in discussing polarising and more difficult issues. Incivility can sometimes stem from strong emotions, which are also valid and must be recognised in the public sphere. Hate speech, of course, is a different topic that should be treated differently, as this can lead to real-world violence.

Speaking of hate speech, for influencers and social media platforms, the big question remains: Who is held accountable for the real-world impacts that stem from actions in the digital space? In this research I presented the dangers of hate speech, especially the wide reach and engagement that hate speech gets from the followers of Facebook influencers. Hate speech fuels real-world divisions and real-world violence. Accountability must be sought from both influencers, who post the content, and social media platforms, who fail to regulate such content.

Politicians in the Philippines have long been dealing with problems that come alongside digital media. In 2012, the Anti-cybercrime law was passed, which punishes online crimes, there are no policies in place that penalizes hate speech. Instead, libel and defamation are seen as crimes, and are constantly used by politicians to sue people who criticize them. If we are to truly protect freedom of speech and if we are to truly protect the public of the harms that digital media can cause, there is a need to revisit policies that are in place, and re-think what policies might be needed to protect democracy

For other researchers and academics studying this topic, there are assumptions from Western studies that need to be challenged and questioned. For example, in using Benoit's theory in the Philippine context, I found that the hypotheses made from results of case studies from Western countries do not apply to the Philippines. Cultures and politics differ among countries and regions, and there is a need for Global South scholars to study political communication through their lens and situate theories in the context of the Global South.

Using the power of social media and influencer culture in propaganda and elections, in a country who was once called the social media capital of the world, clearly has repercussions. These repercussions range from having a more engaged citizenry on digital media to historical distortions, from creating a more polarised discourse around issues to people becoming victims of hate speech. It is my hope that my research contributes to the need to understand digital media and the impacts it may have in politics and democracy.

8.7 Conclusion

This thesis makes a timely and original contribution to the field of political communication through a case study of the Philippines – a country with a democracy threatened by rising illiberal populist sentiments. I have made three distinct contributions, the first of which is empirical. I investigated the use of rhetorical devices by Facebook influencers through quantitative content analysis. By doing so, I have made significant findings such as analysing the main rhetorical devices used by the influencers in their permanent campaigns, in presenting

narratives that are politically divisive, and as well as in analysing the types of incivility, intolerance, and hate speech present in their posts. This thesis illustrates that the use of rhetorical devices by the influencers have been utilised in speaking only to the followers they already have, emphasising the echo chambers that we belong in. The thesis also demonstrates that incivility and intolerance is prevalent even in groups who believe their behaviour to be more “decent” than another group. These two findings are especially important for organisations and individuals who might be trying to change people’s minds about particular issues but have found themselves failing to do so, as in the human rights groups that Ong et al. (2022) mentioned in their study.

The second contribution of this thesis is conceptual, in adding to the discussion of incivility and intolerance through creating an incivility-intolerance continuum as a methodological approach to visualise my findings. While the visualisation is in an early stage of development and can be improved by using more definitions of incivility and intolerance and perhaps by identifying more types of incivility and intolerance, my study nevertheless has attempted to visualise the continuum – a concept that has been put forward by scholars like Sydnor (2018) and Chen (2017). The visualisation of this continuum has not been done before. This visualisation can be replicated in other studies of incivility and intolerance and can evolve if used in different contexts (e.g. different countries may view incivility and intolerance differently).

Last but not the least, I contribute to this field of research by using the Philippines as a case study. My thesis forms part of a wider challenge to de-Westernize research in the field of media and communication, and particularly in respect of developing scholarship sensitive to concerns within and about the global South. Earlier, in chapter one of this thesis, I presented the need to shift from the Euro-American point of view and challenge and reassess theories and scholarship that have been deemed universal but which have largely been based on small, Western case studies. Additionally, Chakravartty and Roy (2017) have pointed to current discourse on the rise of global populism also as Eurocentric. Many of the research published in this field have largely focussed on Western countries with Asian countries overlooked. Countries like the Philippines, which also face a crisis in democracy and where social media has been seen to play a crucial part of politics, have been understudied. However, in order to have a better understanding of the turn to illiberalism of many countries globally, Asian countries like the Philippines, which are

culturally and politically different, must be investigated. My study highlights the differences in the political and cultural landscape of the Philippines compared to other countries where illiberal-populist leaders have risen. It also shows how many western frameworks such as Benoit's functional theory can be applied to a country like the Philippines and would yield results that are different to the current hypotheses that have so far been put forward using the theory. For example, where many studies in the west found that electoral campaigns usually discussed policies more than character, my research found that Facebook campaigns in the Philippines focussed more on character, a reflection of the highly personalistic politics in the country.

Additionally, here there is something of particular importance to be learned in respect of the Philippines' experience and psyche. In *Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology)*, it is said that the Filipinos' main core value is shared identity, which is called *kapwa* (Diwa Mental Health, no date). *Kapwa*, literally translated to English as 'other' but whose concept is considered untranslatable; is embedded in the Southeast Asian history and culture of being tribal and is translated by local researchers as "shared self" (Reyes, 2015), the unity of the self and others, defining a person's humanity (Enriquez, 1992). Reyes (2015) considers *kapwa* as the foundation of Filipino virtue ethics. Reyes (2015, p.39) emphasises that historically, *kapwa* is someone who belongs to the tribe, and someone of another tribe is not *kapwa* and that,

"The whole family and tribal mentality seeks the survival and flourishing of the group rather than the good of individuals and is something that heavily influences the relational dynamics of the Filipino virtues."

However, Reyes (2015) notes that this concept of *kapwa* evolved with Catholicism (Love thy neighbours as yourself) to expand others that are not in the tribe and to bridge one's deepest recess to anyone outside himself/herself, even to strangers (De Guia, 2005). Reyes (2015, p. 107) revisits Southeast Asian history when the region did not have Western concepts of the state and individual rights and used *kapwa* to show respect to others, learned from inside the family: "What it means to treat another person as *kapwa* is learned inside the family, and for that reason treating another as *kapwa* is to treat him or her precisely as family." Mercado (1972) goes so far

as to say that Filipinos can extend their *kapwa* so that it embraces the whole nation and Enriquez (1992, p.54) ties it to “deep respect for the dignity and inherent worth of a fellow human being.”

Having said these, what may be difficult to understand is if this more recent definition of *kapwa* has been lost in the use of social media. Instead of seeing others as the extension of one’s self or as a family, have Filipinos gone back to being more “tribalistic” in protecting the groups they belong in? Has *kapwa* been lost in the echo chambers of social media? And what becomes of *kapwa* when Filipinos start supporting illiberal policies that harm others, like the war on drugs? How can *kapwa* explain the virality of hate speech online? My study alone cannot answer these questions, but highlights the importance of investigating global south countries and the impacts of social media in their politics and culture. It is my hope that my research, along with research from other scholars from the global south, can enable a wider and deeper understanding of the role of social media in the global rise of illiberalism.

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Annex A

Code Book

CODING SCHEME TO EVALUATE THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS IN SHAPING THE IMAGE AND NARRATIVE OF THE DUTERTE ERA ON FACEBOOK

All Facebook posts are to be coded and analysed based on the following instructions:

All Facebook posts that are about human rights and law and order, COVID 19, and China’s relationship with the Philippines, between January 2019 - January 2021. This includes Facebook posts not only talking directly about these topics but includes Facebook posts that are in connection with these issues.

When the post does not explicitly mention the following specific words: “human rights,” “law and order,” “COVID 19,” or “China,” check if the post alludes to any topic or events related to the three issues. For example, “West Philippine Sea” is connected to China; “drug war” is connected to law and order, “freedom of speech” is connected with human rights, etc.

If a Facebook post has more than one topic covered, identify the main topic and the secondary topic. To determine which one is the main topic, see if the majority of the post is dedicated to discussing that topic.

If the Facebook posts include hyperlinks, shared content, images, videos, memes, look at the content and take the content into consideration when coding.

Other coding instructions:

Do not code post duplicates (posts that have been shared more than once)

Do not include videos in the coding.

Variables for Facebook influencer pages

These are used to identify who the influencer is. Leave blank if coding s.

V1 Page Name	1. Mocha Uson 2. Sass Sasot 3. Thinking Pinoy 4. Mindavote 5. Luminous
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	6. Chel Diokno 7. Jover Laurio/Pinoy Ako Blog 8. Dakila 9. Silent No More 10. Superficial Gazette
V2 Page type (based on support/non-support for Duterte)	1. Pro-Duterte 2. Anti-Duterte

Variables for the type of Facebook post

These codes are used to identify the type of post/, the general topic of the posts/, and the popularity of the post/ among the audience.

Human rights and law and order are posts/s that mention human rights, topics that fall under the UN declaration of human rights, the war on drugs, and extrajudicial killings.

COVID 19 are posts/s that mention COVID19 or coronavirus and the government’s response to the virus. Posts that mention China but talk about COVID19 will fall under COVID19.

China are posts/s that talk about the relationship between the Philippines and China including the West Philippine Sea, Chinese investments in the Philippines, illegal operations of Chinese companies and illegal Chinese migrants in the Philippines.

Other is a variable for posts/s that talk about socio-economic and political issues that do not fall under human rights and law and order, COVID-19, and China.

V3 Main Topic	1. Human rights and law and order 2. COVID 19 3. China 4. Other
V4 Secondary topic	0. None 1. Human rights and law and order 2. COVID 19 3. China 4. Other
V5 If written text, what language	1. Tagalog 2. English

<p>Note: Do NOT code combination if the post uses borrowed english words that we accept as Tagalog (i.e. na-share).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Bisaya 4. Combination 5. Other
<p>V6 Source type</p> <p>Code ‘Original’ if the post/ is an original thought, idea, or content from the influencer/er.</p> <p>Code ‘re-shared’ if the post is re-shared from other sources. For example, copied government statements or troll statements that have been copied and pasted. Usually there is a ‘CTTO’ citation at the end of the /post when they are re-shared.</p> <p>Do not code re-shared if the post is an external link shared with an original thought/opinion (i.e. link from a news site with a ary)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Original 2. Re-shared
<p>V7 If re-shared, shared from where</p> <p>Code ‘Government’ if post is a re-share/copied from any government statement/.</p> <p>Code ‘Other influencer pages’ if post is copied/shared from other influencer pages.</p> <p>Code news or journalistic content if post is copied/shared from other news pages/sites</p> <p>Code ‘Troll’ content if post is copied/shared from troll posts (e.g. CTTO posts)</p> <p>Code ‘Other’ if the post/ is shared/copied from another source</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 0. None 1. Government 2. Other influencers/ pseudonymous influencers/celebrities 3. News or journalistic content 4. Troll content 5. Other

but does not fall into other categories.	
V8 Total comments	(write this down)
V9 Total shares	(write this down)
V10 Total reacts	(write this down)
V11 Total likes	(write this down)
V12 Total love	(write this down)
V13 Total wow	(write this down)
V14 Total haha	(write this down)
V15 Total sad	(write this down)
V16 Total angry	(write this down)

Facebook influencer posts and audience’s variables (Benoit’s functional approach):

Please indicate whether the post uses Benoit’s functional approach. To do so, read the post thoroughly and determine whether each of the following functional approaches are present or not present.

Variable		
V17 Acclaim	<p>Acclaims are utterances that are intended to enhance the reputation of the speaker. Benoit defines acclaims as positive self-presentation. Facebook posts/s may acclaim by crediting government officials with desirable policy stands and by attributing positive character traits to candidates (e.g., honesty, integrity, experience). Acclaiming a character may also pertain to the character of a group or an organisation (i.e. PDP-Laban, Otso Diretso)</p>	<p>0. Not present 1. Acclaiming a character 2. Acclaiming a policy 3. Both</p>
V18 Attack	<p>Benoit and Wells (1996) discuss the nature of persuasive attack. Like acclaims, persuasive attacks in</p>	<p>0. Not present 1. Attacking a character 2. Attacking a policy</p>

	political advertising may address policy or character. For this research, also code when ‘attack’ when a post is attacking the government in general. This usually falls under attacking a policy (i.e. supporting China, no support for families during COVID, passing a law). Attacking a character may also pertain to the character of a group or an organisation (i.e. NPA, Makabayan bloc)	3. Both
V19 Defense	Themes that explicitly respond to a prior attack on a character or policy	0. Not present 1. Defending a character 2. Defending a policy 3. Both

Facebook post/ variables (rhetorical devices):

These rhetorical devices are most commonly found in political communication. This list of rhetorical devices is partially based on Gerodimos and Justonussen’s (2012) study on Obama’s 2012 Facebook Campaign. Please indicate whether the post uses any of these rhetorical devices. To do so, read the post thoroughly and determine whether each of the following devices are present or not present.

Variable		
V20 Source of knowledge/information/claims/data	Identify the source of information used by the influencer when making a claim.	0. Not present 1. Sourced fact - facts from books, news, articles, websites, television, podcasts, studies etc 2. Firsthand experience - facts based on experience (i.e. ‘In my experience, rehabilitation is better than criminalisation for drug users) 3. Proven facts - facts that everyone accepts as universally true (i.e. The Earth is round) 4. Probable information - information that might be reasonable to believe is a fact but you are not sure because you

		<p>have no access to the information, usually statements from officials (i.e. president announces he has no more funds for covid). Although they are probably true, there is a chance that they might be wrong, either because a mistake has been made or because someone lied. Because this doubt exists, we must attribute probable facts to the people who provide them.</p>
V21 Collective appeal	<p>Based on the definition by Gerodimos and Justonussen (2012), using Aristotle’s Rhetoric and the use of pathos to gain audience sympathy.</p> <p>Posts associating Duterte/the opposition with the reader; or collectively associating the Filipino people or Duterte’s supporters/critics; using “we,” “us” or “our” to include the reader in the process. (i.e. ‘We need to work together to overcome this crisis’)</p> <p>Does not include general “we” statements that seem to refer to a collective entity excluding the reader (e.g. we, the Congress/Senate)</p>	<p>0. Not present 1. Present</p>
V22 Personal appeal	<p>Posts directed at the reader, using the word you. This does not include “we” remarks or general calls to action with no pronouns. Example: Are you with us?</p>	<p>0. Not present 1. Present</p>
V23 Quote	<p>Quotes either made explicitly in quotation marks or without but appearing to be spoken by an individual person. For example, a post quoting the EU on their statement about Duterte’s war on drugs.</p>	<p>0. Not present 1. Quote from other influencers/pseudonymous influencers/celebrities/movies 2. Quote from other government, political figures/organisations</p>

	<p>If quotations are present, please identify which kind.</p>	<p>(could be the United Nations, official statements of other governments)</p> <p>3. Quote from journals/articles/studies/reports/news/books/academics/philosophers</p> <p>4. Fake quotes (disinformation) - for example, quoting the Guinness Book of World Records for saying Duterte is the best president in the universe</p> <p>5. Personal Quote - If they're quoting themselves, for example sharing a personal experience, quoting something they wrote, or what they said in an interview</p> <p>6. Others</p>
<p>V24 Call to action</p>	<p>The use of imperative mood in the sentence structure toward the reader, prompting some sort of action in response to the post. (e.g. let's gather for a protest; use this hashtag to show support)</p> <p>If a call to action is present, please identify which kind -- online or offline, violent or non-violent.</p>	<p>0. Not present</p> <p>1. Non-violent actions online (i.e. share, like, follow, use hashtag, watch video)</p> <p>2. Violent actions online (i.e. silencing -- go to this profile and report; bullying; harassment)</p> <p>3. Non-violent actions offline (peaceful protest, donate)</p> <p>4. Violent actions offline (i.e. Duterte ordering the public to shoot to kill drug users; ending NPA insurgency)</p>

Facebook post/ variables (civility/incivility):

Papacharissi (2004) defines civility as politeness and courtesy, respecting other participants in the debate and not harming their reputation or threatening their face. Coe et al. (2014) defines incivility as speech that is threatening in tone and is disrespectful to the forum, its participants, or its topics. Kenski et al. (2017) lists the following under incivility: name-calling, vulgarity, lying accusation, pejorative, and aspersion. Based on the research of Coe et al. (2014) and Kenski et al. (2017), part of incivility also includes ad hominem attacks, especially derogatory remarks, and vulgarity.

In coding incivility, the coder must focus on how things are said and not what things are said; look at the tone and not the substance (Rossini, 2020). According to Rossini, "In other words, what makes a uncivil

is a particular feature, such as the use of a vulgar word, name-calling, or potentially offensive language that, if removed, would make the same “civil” without changing its substance.” Discourse that threatens democratic pluralism does not fall under incivility (Rossini, 2020).

Emojis in the post can also indicate whether the content is uncivil. According to Na’aman et al. (2017, p.137), one of the uses of emojis is multimodal - “characters that enrich a grammatically-complete text with markers of affect or stance, whether to express an attitude (“Let my work disrespect me one more time... 🙄”), to echo the topic with an iconic repetition (“Mean girls 🗑️”, or to express a gesture that might have accompanied the utterance in face-to-face speech (“Omg why is my mom screaming so early 😭”).” Hu et al. (2017) supports this argument and says emojis, especially facial emojis, are used to express sentiment, strengthen expression, and adjust tone.

<p>V25 Civility</p>	<p>The variable is to code whether the post/ is civil or uncivil.</p> <p>Civil - use this code if the post/ shows civility.</p> <p>Incivility - if incivility is present, identify which kind of incivility it is</p> <p>Please code this as a scale</p>	<p>0. Civility</p> <p>1. Sarcasm and mockery that conveys contempt (i.e. You’re not very smart, are you?), including emojis that may come off as sarcastic</p> <p>2. Ad hominem and Personal attacks/insults not related to their positions in the government (i.e. “You’re stupid/ugly/moron”;)</p> <p>3. Vulgarity and Using profanity, curse words (i.e. fuck, putang ina, gago etc)</p> <p>4. Denigrating remarks at political ideas/policies/politicians attacking the reputation; defame, belittle, deny their importance/validity. Different from ad hominem as the denigration should be related to their position in government or their political ideas (i.e. Congressmen are buwaya/crocodiles; the government is a circus; the president is incompetent doing his job)</p>
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Facebook post/ variables (tolerance/intolerance):

Rossini (2020) distinguishes intolerant discourse from incivility in that whereas uncivil discourse are not threats to political discourse and democracy, intolerance discourse are more serious threats to democratic conversations that can undermine the value of political talk. It focuses on substance rather than the tone.

Intolerance is defined as speech that promotes hate, discrimination, (such as women, LGBTQ+, minoritised ethnic, racial, and religious groups) (Rossini, 2020). Also, a post is to be coded as intolerant when it encourages violence, physical harm on others, extremism of any kind, and militant coups to overthrow a liberal democratic regime. Political intolerance can also be liberalism being intolerant of right-wing ideologies and their supporters (Crawford and Palinski, 2014).

<p>V26 Tolerance</p>	<p>The variable is to code whether the post/ is tolerant/intolerant.</p> <p>Tolerant - Use this code if the post/s show tolerance</p> <p>Intolerant - if intolerance is present, identify which kind it is</p> <p>Please code this as a scale</p>	<p>0. Tolerant</p> <p>1. Intimidation (i.e. Using their position to frighten/threaten someone)</p> <p>2. Shaming or stigmatising a group of people for bigger problems (i.e. ‘the Chinese created COVID’; ‘the oligarchs caused this problem’)</p> <p>3. Demonising political opponents/opposition/other organizations/ personalities - to portray (someone or something) as evil or as worthy of contempt or blame (i.e;they are ‘spawn of the devil’; branding as ‘terrorist’)</p> <p>4. Calling for an ouster, resignation, protests, shutting down of organizations (can be against both government or opposition. I.e. call for ousting Duterte, protesting against Robredo, protesting against policies etc)</p> <p>5. Inciting violence or physical harm on others (i.e. wishing they be killed, raped, etc)</p> <p>6. Extremism (i.e. ‘all communists must be killed’;</p>
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		‘death penalty must be legal again for all drug addicts’)
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Facebook post/ variables (hate speech):

According to Siegel, (2020) while there is no one definition of hate speech, it is considered to be “bias-motivated, hostile, and malicious language targeted at a person or group because of their actual or perceived innate characteristics.” Waltman (2018) adds that hate speech “is an attempt to vandalize the other’s identity to such an extent that the very legitimacy and humanity of the other is called into question.” Chetty and Alathur (2018) defines it as speech that targets protected characteristics like gender, race, and religion. In connection to variables above, hate speech is a manifestation and subtype of intolerance (Rossini, 2020).

Richardson-Self (2018, p. 2) adds this definition of hate speech:

“...hate speech is taken to express hostility to and about historically and contemporarily oppressed groups, and, in so doing, vilifies, degrades, discriminates, maligns, and so on.”

Therefore, in coding hate speech, the coder must look at power dynamics and take into consideration who is being attacked by the speech. Only code a post as hate speech if it attacks historically oppressed and marginalised groups, which in the Philippines means: non-Manilenos (not from Manila), non-Catholic, non-heterosexual, and non-able.

Further, hate speech is not merely speech that expresses hatred (Howard, 2019). If a post says, ‘I hate Duterte’ or ‘I hate the government’, DO NOT code this as hate speech. Hate speech is speech that is directed towards minorities that contribute to their oppression or harm.

Please indicate whether the post uses hate speech. To do so, read the post thoroughly and determine whether each of the following functional approaches are present or not present. If hate speech is present, please identify what kind of hate speech it is based on the categories below.

If hate speech is present, identify who it is attacking. If not present, leave blank. Please use the definitions below to code whether hate speech is present or not in attacking certain groups of people.

Gender and misogynistic attacks include name-calling women for their sexuality and patriarchy-enforcing speech that hurt women and has a goal to shut them down, shut them up, and get them to shape up (Richardson-Self, 2018). The Council of Europe (n.d., p.3) also counts the following as hate speech: “victim blaming and re-victimization, slut shaming, body shaming, brutal and sexualised threats of death, rape, and violence; offensives on appearance, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender roles; false compliments or jokes, using humour to humiliate and ridicule the target.” For example, statements like ‘All women are sluts’ and ‘Women activists deserve to be raped’ are considered hate speech.

LGBTQ+ hate speech occurs when members of the group are threatened, abused, harassed, trolled based

on their gender identity and sexual orientation (Galop, n.d.). It is speech that incites hostility, discrimination, and/or violence (Article 19, 2013). Outing, disclosing someone’s gender identity, sexual orientation, and HIV status without consent, and doxing, publishing private information without consent, are also considered hate speech by the LGBT community (Hubbard, 2020). Example posts and s that are hate speech: “Gays are immoral”; “Gays spread diseases”; “Trans/gay people are mentally ill”; “Trans/Gay people are paedophiles”; “Trans/gay people should be killed”; etc.

Hate speech against people with disability include slurs like ‘retard’, ‘spastic’, ‘tards’ and other terms that denigrate people with disability (Sherry, 2019). It is important to look at the context of how these words are used as terms like ‘retard’ can sometimes be used without pertaining to disability (ibid). If a post/ is aided by a visual (i.e. meme) that mocks or makes fun of a person with disability, this is also considered hate speech.

Hate speech that attacks ethnicity directly incites violence or hatred against an ethnic group. In the Philippines, this could be seen in extreme regionalism where people from different ethnic communities attack each other (i.e. Tagalogs vs Bisaya) that result in inciting violence and/or perpetuating stereotypes that harm the group identity. Historically, the Bangsamoro and Lumad have been a target of hate speech because of their alleged connections to terrorists and communists, accusations made by police and military (Minority Rights Group International, 2014).

Racism also occurs in the Philippines, most notably against Chinese and black people. Filipinos have slurs like “negro” or “itim” for black people and “ching chong”. Anti-Chinese speech was on the rise when COVID 19 started (Rubio, 2021). A post must be coded as hate speech against ethnicity or race when racial slurs are used, as well as calling for violence against these groups, stigmatising the group as the cause of a larger problem, attacking their physical features to discriminate.

Hate speech in the Philippines will be an attack on minority religions -- protestants, muslims, and other denominations. Catholicism remains to be the major religion of the country. Hate speech against religious minorities also include “incitement to hatred against other believers or atheists in the course of what they consider as preaching for their own religion” (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.). Hate speech against other religions or non-believers include stereotyping, promoting hatred, and incitement of violence against people of those faiths. For example, statements like “All Muslims are terrorists”; “Muslims are full of hate and violence”; etc.

Variable		
V27 Hate Speech	This variable is to code whether the post uses hate speech.	0. Not present 1. Hate speech against Women 2. Hate speech against LGBT+ 3. Hate speech against PWD’s 4. Hate speech against a race or ethnicity 5. Hate speech against

		religion/religious beliefs
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Annex B

Influencer profiles

A. Duterte supporters

1. Mocha Uson

Mocha Uson started as a performer with her sexy girl group, Mocha Girls. During the 2016 elections, her "blog" called "Mocha Uson blog", hosted on Facebook, turned political. Her blog now has a tagline "Boses ng ordinaryong Pilipino" or "The Voice of the Ordinary Filipino." This was a diversion from her previous posts which were mostly about promoting her girl group and sex advice. Her Facebook page rose to fame after posting about her support for Duterte and his anti-drug campaign. Uson now hosts her own "news program" on her Facebook, interviewing officials from the Duterte administration.

She also eventually got her own website that looks like a news website, publishing stories categorised under politics, good news, current events, and editorial. She shares the content of the website on Facebook where her followers are. She is also known for discrediting Philippine media companies such as ABS-CBN, GMA, The Philippine Daily Inquirer, and Rappler and calls them "presstitutes." As a result, DDS flock the Facebook pages of these media companies to discredit them as Mocha did and post comments about being paid by the opposition and not telling the truth. Her Facebook followers are a mix of Duterte supporters and Duterte critics, although most are still from the DDS group. Duterte critics come to her page to call her out and her supporters.

Mocha was appointed as Assistant Secretary of the Presidential Communications

Operations Office in 201, handling the social media department of the office. She resigned in 2018 after a series of controversies. She was appointed as Deputy Executive Director of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in 2019. Uson is now called the "Queen of Fake News" after publishing stories that were proven to be false.

2. Thinking Pinoy

RJ Nieto is behind the Facebook Page Thinking Pinoy (the Thinking Filipino). He is more known for his pen name. Nieto worked as a journalist for a local newspaper in 2010-2011 in the same city where Duterte was Mayor of. Nieto started his blog right before the 2016 election campaign started. Nieto claims his first article got 10-15 thousand hits and his readership got wider after publishing a blog against opposition presidential candidate Mar Roxas.

Similar to Mocha Uson, Nieto has a history of posting fake news on his Facebook page, one of which was accusing opposition Senator Trillanes of being a drug lord. The Senator filed a libel suit against Nieto for the incident. His blogs also became a source of a right-wing newspaper's column about former president Benigno Aquino's alleged corruption. Nieto's website looks more like a blog than a news site. Like Mocha, Nieto was given a position in the government, at the Department of Foreign Affairs, as social media consultant. The stint was brief when he resigned after a Senate hearing on fake news. Nieto now hosts a radio programme broadcasting in Metro Manila and has a column in a newspaper, Manila Bulletin.

Nieto mostly posts against opposition members such as Senators Trillanes, de Lima, and Hontiveros but he also posts against Duterte supporters like Congressman Alan Cayetano. Unlike Mocha or Sass, Nieto also posts about other things aside from politics, including cooking videos, memes, quotes, etc. Nieto blogs in both English and Filipino, depending on content.

3. Sass Sasot

Sass is a transwoman who was known for campaigning for LGBT rights since the early 2000's. She is based in the Netherlands. According to her profile, she has been invited to speak at the UNGA side event in 2015, has published an article in the Journal of Transgenderism, and received an academic award in the Netherlands. She finished her masters in world politics and global justice from the University of Leiden. Sass has used her academic profile to lend credibility to her arguments regarding controversial issues in the Philippines.

Like Mocha, Sass also now runs a website that looks like a news website with headings, "Commentaries," "interviews," "lectures," and "statecraft series." She also uses her Facebook page to share the stories to her followers. Unlike Mocha whose tone and voice is "for the masses," Sass has packaged herself as the intellectual Duterte supporter. Her commentaries and posts are mostly in English. She gives a "deeper" commentary (i.e. uses terms such as "historical trauma"; explains the Philippine-China row on sea boundaries with concepts of "territorialism"). Sass is known amongst Duterte supporters as the international relations expert. She went on a bit of hiatus after her followers attacked her for siding with China in a recent PH-China row.

Sass used to support former President Benigno Aquino, the former opposition leader. She changed her tune when Duterte came to power and started supporting his policies. Former LGBT allies and activists who have worked with Sass have pointed out her change of stand from a progressive campaigner to that of a right-wing enabler.

4. Mindavote

Mindavote is a Facebook page that supports Duterte. They have a website called Mindanation.com which is also the Official Blog Site of Mindavote. They say they are "an online community of Duterte supporters, and advocates of a better, stronger, more law-abiding Philippines" They also claim in their website that "Mindanation.com is your best source for Information about Mindanao, The Philippines, South East Asia, and the world." Like Mocha and Sass' website, Mindanation website looks like a news website

with headings, "News," "Economy," "Technology," "Life," "Entertainment," "Billboard," "Travel," and "Opinion". Their website is run by different Duterte supporters who author the articles.

Mindavote has supported Duterte since he ran for presidency in 2016 and the page started posting about politics in the same year. They are now campaigning for Sara Duterte, Duterte's daughter, for president in the 2022 elections. They post about "positive news" or "achievements" by Duterte and his allies. Notably, they post a lot about Bong Go, Duterte's former aide who was elected in the Senate this year. They produce and publish their own videos and also re-share posts from Mocha Uson.

5. Luminous by Trixie Cruz-Angeles and Ahmed Paglinawan

Luminous by Trixie Cruz-Angeles & Ahmed Paglinawan is a Facebook page owned by a lawyer (Ahmed) and a radio personality/archeologist/lawyer (Trixie). Ahmed is from Davao, where Duterte is from. From the page's about section, they say:

This page began as a literary one. A place for people to share original short works of fiction and for the administrators to write about their theories of Life As We Know It. Or simply a place to put in pictures of Harry (Trixie's dog) and Mazikeen (Trixie's and Harry's cat). But the elections of 2016 made something absolutely clear: personal pages were becoming complicated for the political posts. So, the administrators migrated some of their posts on Rodrigo Duterte and his government to this page. And it has since become what it is now, a page to discuss some issues in the political scene, the laws that apply to them, as well as the administrators' advocacies such as culture and arts. In particular, music, archaeology, literary and visual arts and heritage conservation. Admittedly there has been little time for the advocacies. But we try. Meanwhile, enjoy.

The page criticises opposition leaders and critics like Vice President Robredo, Sen. De Lima, and Florin Hilbay. They mostly post in Filipino. They also post anti-communist. They also share news without commentaries (ex: rising HIV cases and teenage pregnancies), only quoting some parts of the news. Other times they try to explain the law such as "Freedom of Speech" while defending Duterte's remarks. They also support Bongbong Marcos' claims for the Vice Presidency.

B. Duterte critics

1. Silent No More

Silent No More PH is run by anonymous individuals, although DDS blogger RJ Nieto claims Coco Dayao, a former consultant for the Presidential Communications Operations Office, is behind the page. Dayao, a former spokesperson of former President Aquino, denies being the man behind the Facebook page.

The page was created after Duterte was elected president in 2016. The page came about from a Facebook group called "The Silent Majority", which has members who "silently" oppose Duterte, in contrast with Duterte supporters who were "loud" on Facebook. However, after the elections and with many issues linked to Duterte, the page "Silent No More" was created.

The page uses photos, quotes, memes to criticise Duterte and his allies. In 2017, the page caused a national issue when it called senators a "Malacañang Dog" for not signing a resolution calling on the government to stop killing minors. One of the senators tagged in the post filed a libel case against Dayao. The page continues to criticise the government, supports opposition Vice President Leni Robredo, and media outlet Rappler.

The page mostly posts in Filipino. Unlike other pages, Silent No More appeals to emotions and uses concrete call to actions. Notably, all their posts start with "Dear Fellow Filipinos."

2. Dakila

Dakila is a non-profit organisation who have been campaigning about human rights since 2005. They are a group of artists who use art and creative methods to make statements about political issues. According to their Facebook page (n.d.):

The three goals of DAKILA are awareness, education, and involvement - to make the public aware of crucial concerns affecting society, to educate both the audience and, more importantly, themselves about pressing social concerns, which should effectively inform the methods of creative expression and to be consistently and dynamically involved in activities geared toward achieving the common good.

Dakila's Facebook page engages with its audience through the use of photography, visual arts, infographics, and music. This is usually coupled with political statements that condemn or support a policy or a political figure. Dakila sometimes has content produced in partnership with other organisations like Rappler and The Asia Foundation. Dakila's content ranges from sharing news about events in the Philippines, campaigns on different human rights topics like extrajudicial killings, LGBTQ+ rights, labour rights, etc. as well as commemorating historical events like the Marawi siege, the end of Martial Law, and the Maguindanao massacre. Dakila's page is a contrast to other pages critical of Duterte where the others use humour and satire, Dakila is more serious in tone and does not use sarcasm or memes in criticising the government.

3. Chel Diokno

Chel Diokno, a human rights lawyer, ran for a seat in the Senate in the 2019 elections. He serves as the chair of the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), the oldest organisation of human rights lawyers in the Philippines who help victims of abuse by the government, military, and police. Diokno also founded the De La Salle University College of Law.

Diokno, the son of former Senator Jose Diokno -- regarded as the ‘Father of Human Rights Advocacy in the Philippines’, gained popularity when he ran for senate in 2019. He ran in the opposition slate ‘Otso Diretso’ and was known to have championed human rights in his campaign. Prior to this, Diokno did hold a seat in the government but told Rappler in an interview in 2018 that he ‘couldn’t sit and watch it happen,’ pertaining to the extrajudicial killings that was happening under the Duterte government. He told Dizon (2018), “I felt it at the pit of my stomach. It was exactly the same feeling I had 45 years ago [when] I was a young boy and Martial Law was declared. It was the same kind of fear, same kind of state violence. And I knew that something had to be done about it.”.

In 2019, Duterte government filed charges against Diokno and the rest of the ‘Otso Diretso’ members for sedition, cyber libel, libel, *estafa*, harboring a criminal, and obstruction of justice after a non-verified Youtube video named them as part of the plot to oust the president. The matrix of the plot contained names of other politicians and celebrities, but was mocked by the public for being unrealistic. The charges against Diokno and other members of the opposition were dropped in 2020.

Diokno did not win the elections but remained vocal and gained popularity amongst human rights advocates and young people. His Facebook page remains engaged and continuously posts statements and explainers, especially on human rights related policies and events in the country. Diokno has also been vocal about his stand on protecting the West Philippine Sea from being occupied by the Chinese government and its vessels.

4. Jover Laurio/Pinoy Ako Blog

Jover Laurio is the blogger and influencer behind Pinoy Ako Blog (PAB). PAB remained anonymous until 2017, when Jover came forward after Duterte supporter-influencers RJ Nieto and Sass Sasot hunted for the owner of the blog to charge her of libel. After her identity was revealed, attacks and harassment ensued. Laurio eventually needed to hire personal bodyguards for her protection.

Laurio is a law student in the Philippines. Her blog was created in December 2016, 7 months after Duterte was elected to power. Her blog states, "Para sa minamahal naming Pilipinas, Ililigtas ka namin mula sa mga pekeng news, Manlulupig at Misinformed. Ipaglaban ang katotohanan. Para sa bayan, tuloy ang laban!" (To our beloved Philippines, we will save you from fake news, conquerors, and misinformed. Fight for the truth. For the country, the fight continues.)

Laurio mostly posts in Filipino. The Facebook page mostly links to her blog. She is a supporter of Vice President Leni Robredo and blogs about the election case filed by Bongbong Marcos in contention for the vice presidency position. She also calls out those who spread fake news including Mocha Uson, Senator Bong Go, and local officials. She posts blogs about relevant issues and is up to date with what people are talking about: traffic, agriculture, etc. The links to her blog always have taglines or hashtags such as "#DismissBBMProtest" pertaining to Bongbong Marcos' election case and "Weh di nga?" (Oh, really?) pertaining to when a Senator said she is intelligent but doesn't understand why research is needed in agriculture. Laurio seems to catch people's attention through these one liners that are sometimes serious and at other times mocking.

5. Superficial Gazette of the Philippines

The Superficial Gazette of the Philippines, is a page that came out of a joke. It is a parody of the "Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines." The page started in September 2016, four months after Duterte was elected into power. It came about after the Official Gazette of the Philippines' Facebook page started sharing false information about the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his family. The Official Gazette page used to be a good source of information about the Philippines' history but lost credibility after it was revealed that Duterte had appointed a Marcos apologist to run the page.

The Superficial Gazette's first post was a photo with their tagline, "Quality and timely historical revisionism from the best communications team in the solar system." In its about page, it says, "This media channel specialises in political satire. For those who

cannot grasp the aforementioned concept, we highly recommend increasing dietary intake of milk, which is proven to help increase intelligence." Filipinos are known for not being able to recognise satire, so the warning isn't surprising.

The page posts against Duterte, the Marcoses, and other Duterte allies. It posts about issues like the dengue outbreak, PH-China relations, traffic, and the death penalty. Like Malacanang Events and Catering, the page produces its own memes and satire.