"Die-Hard Supporters": Overseas Filipino Workers' Online Grassroots Campaign for Duterte in the 2016 Philippine Elections

Aranda, Danna

Abstract

The success of the maverick politician Rodrigo Duterte in the 2016 election is cited as a result of the weaponization of social media—whereby professional, tech-savvy strategists mobilized public opinion through a networked system of disinformation. Yet, there is evidence of grassroots campaign support that emerged via online platforms. Those who have mobilized include Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), who have used Facebook groups to rally in support of Duterte. This research looks at the activities of two OFW Facebook groups to understand precisely how and why they organized for Duterte. Employing a dual-stage thematic analysis on posts and comments by group members between March 28 – May 9, 2016, three key findings emerged. First, motivations for supporting Duterte varied greatly among users and are far more complex than Duterte’s mandate to crack-down on corruption, crime, and drugs. Second, group behavior deviates from top-heavy explanations of online campaign mobilization, as these groups operated autonomously from Duterte’s official campaign. Finally, these groups were not amorphous and had, as the most active members and organizers, certain intermediaries. These grassroots intermediaries sought to amplify support for Duterte by organizing events, using diversionary tactics, and helping to propagate fake news. These findings suggest that while these groups were operating independently, they were not devoid of influence from Duterte’s official social

---

1 This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

2 Danna Aranda recently completed her MSc in Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She holds an Honours BA in Political Science from the University of Toronto.
media campaign.

**INTRODUCTION**

While much has been written on the effective affective populism that elected the eccentric Rodrigo Duterte, what simultaneously makes the 2016 Philippine presidential elections interesting is the prominence of social media in mobilizing the public. Among the many groups to be represented across these social media platforms, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) joined various third-party Facebook groups—airing their support as “Duterte die-hard supporters.” Considering Facebook’s extensive role in the Philippines and as the top social media platform in 2016, it has become the dominant avenue to connect with friends and family particularly for those living abroad. During Duterte’s 2016 campaign, OFWs’ heavy social media engagement coincided with an Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) turnout of 31 percent, which has doubled from 2013. It is also the highest turnout recorded since OAV was introduced in 2004. Most overseas voters supported Duterte, acquiring 72 percent of the OAV vote, with Manuel Roxas and Miriam Defensor achieving a meek 10.4 and 9.4 percent, respectively.

Beyond engaging in online political campaigning, various group members opted to organize offline, advocating for Duterte. Events like potlucks, picnics, and small rallies took place in public spaces to spread the word and acquire maximum support for their cause. Photos and videos of these events were publicized across OFW-focused Facebook groups, further engaging group members, other users outside the groups, and increasing page activity. While scholarly and journalistic accounts have emphasized the machinery of Duterte’s “army of trolls”, gaps remain between third-party and grassroots political promotion that emerged from social media during the 2016 campaign. Looking beyond the paid actors and professional “trolls” involved in this “networked disinformation,” this research analyzes the activities of OFWs on Facebook by grassroots intermediaries and the general public, particularly on how they mobilized and why they mobilized behind

---

4 “#PHVote 2016 Overseas Absentee Voting Results.”
someone like Duterte online. It aims to disentangle the “porous boundaries” between manufactured and legitimate support and look specifically at those citizens who have found an outlet for their thoughts on platforms like Facebook.\(^6\)

The paper is situated into the debate on the effects of social media on democracy, either as a conduit to more participatory forms or merely a perpetuation of top-down, spectacle-driven politicking that pervaded even before the digital era.

Drawing on Facebook data, I collected 141 documents of posts and comments from two OFW Facebook groups dedicated to Duterte. I conducted a thematic analysis of the data using the qualitative software *NVivo* to look for emergent and pressing themes throughout a six-week capture period, from late March to the election date on May 9, 2016. In addition to exercising patterned coding for six primary themes, the analysis paid careful attention to the online groups’ behaviours, particularly on identifying the primary mediators of online discussion and the progression of specific topics.

Analysis of the data raises a few notable findings. First, the rationale behind Duterte’s voters do not rely solely on his ambitions to crack down on crime, drugs, and corruption. While six primary themes emerged from the thematic analysis, various sub-themes were identified. Second, fervent online support for Duterte deviates from top-heavy explanations of social media mobilization that emphasize the management and manipulation of the public, as these Facebook groups were more grassroots and independent in their organization. Such findings counter the narrative that Duterte’s social media popularity campaign was purely the product of a top-heavy operation conceived of by cunning strategists. Instead, these Facebook groups operated separately—though not entirely devoid of influence—from Duterte’s official campaign.

Finally, the existence of autonomous intermediaries in these Facebook groups fueled support for Duterte and withdrew the spotlight from other candidates. These actors facilitated online and offline group behaviour, used diversionary tactics, and disseminated fake news. Their activities reveal that these groups, while independent, function similarly to Duterte’s political campaign, employing trolls and influencers to exploit the internet for electoral gain. This alignment in agenda and structure with the official campaign speaks more broadly to the success in stimulating voters to *personalize* Duterte’s platform. The research does not negate the paid support that Duterte and his campaign team relied upon;

\(^6\) Ong and Cabañes, 28.
however, it demonstrates that the two groups’ activism were representative of a multitude of motivations that cultivated Duterte’s political persona.

**Literature Review**

*Duterte’s Populist Challenge*

Contrary to other populist leaders, Duterte’s ascent to power amassed strong support from all strata of the socioeconomic ladder. As Teehankee and Thompson articulated, Duterte’s presidential success was not limited to “a revolt of the poor”—as is commonly associated with populism—as it was also propelled by elites and a successful new middle class that included OFWs. Nevertheless, Duterte’s rhetoric has appealed to the poorest of voters—despite his supposive “war on the poor” which promised to eradicate drug dealers and addicts. Among the divergent approaches in making sense of Duterte’s ascension, his success in agitating the country’s elite democracy remains a ubiquitous chord, claiming to eradicate the same evils that his leadership upholds.

The prevailing scholarly interpretation of Duterte’s rise to prominence focuses on the weaknesses of liberal democratic politics in the Philippines. Thompson provides an account of the failures of liberal reformism, typified as a “bourgeois political storyline,” that prophesizes “re-establishing democracy, fighting corruption, and improving the efficiency of governance.” Simultaneously, liberal reformism neglects conflicts regarding equality, distribution, and class-based appeals. He highlights that the first half of the Benigno Aquino III presidency—marked by steady economic growth and the crackdown of corrupt politicians—starkly contrasted with the second half of his leadership, which, as a result, quickly eroded the notion of liberal reformism’s efficacy. High poverty, high unemployment, crumbling infrastructure, and minimal progress in the health and education sectors persisted under Aquino’s reformist leadership—all of which Duterte challenged, advocating for a more “effective” alternative of a “bloodied

---

7 Thompson and Teehankee, “Duterte Victory a Repudiation of Aquino.”
10 Thompson, “Bloodied Democracy,” 42.
democracy” with extralegal solutions for the maintenance of law and order.\textsuperscript{11}

Teehankee posits that Duterte’s rejection of the “regime narrative” of reformism—propagated by well-off, English-speaking, Manila elites—constitutes a re-imagination of Philippine nationalism.\textsuperscript{12} In this reading, Duterte’s anti-liberalism and nationalism traces its historical origins to American colonization. American rule over the Philippine islands imposed a “collective anxiety around questions of freedom and sovereignty.” By teaching Filipinos about political freedom and self-government “in the form of the forceful imposition of a direct rule,” colonization produced a fertile ground for nationalist challengers striving to represent “the Filipino people,” among them, the former head of state (1965-1986) who established an authoritarian regime, Ferdinand Marcos, and more recently, Duterte.\textsuperscript{13} While the current Filipino Liberal party—the contemporary beacons of postcolonial liberalism—fails to connect with everyday Filipinos’ experiences, Duterte’s anti-liberal and anti-elite discourse “was a potent formula” for those suffocating “from the hypocrisy of the EDSA discourse.”\textsuperscript{14}

Another account of Duterte’s ascension focuses instead on “the people.” Particularly, it examines the sovereignty of the masses and their “activation” by Duterte’s “crass” demeanour that “shed light on the citizens’ [...] hopes [...] and anxieties, exposed powerful institutions’ hypocrisies, and provided the vocabulary to capture the public’s brewing anger against the unfulfilled promise of elite democracy.”\textsuperscript{15} Curato argues that Duterte’s success is due to his ability to forge a relationship with the public, who employ “moral assessments” when electing to bestow their political support.\textsuperscript{16} Contrary to critics of populism who

\begin{flushleft}
15 Curato, “We Need To Talk About Roddy,” 5.
\end{flushleft}
find the public to be prone to political deception, populist supporters make “moral calculations” to determine which candidates they should put their trust in. Kusaka obtains a similar conclusion, highlighting the value of moral politics in the country post-EDSA; varying moral discourses foster a distinction between the “good” and the “evil” that struggle for hegemony.\(^{17}\) Under this morality-focused arrangement, candidates with inferior organization and funding have the potential to dominate elections, with voters casting their votes based on superior “moral discourses.”\(^{18}\) In 2016, Filipino politics strayed from Aquino’s exclusive moral framework of “us-versus-the-corrupt,” opting for Duterte’s more inclusive “moral we” that support the project of “discipline.”\(^{19}\) Those antagonistic to Duterte’s rhetoric—namely corrupt politicians, those against his extra-legal measures, crooks, and criminals—comprise the “immoral” they. Duterte’s platform allows individuals, traditionally the poor who are excluded from the “good us—”, to participate in his political project.

Finally, scholars assess Duterte’s success as congruent with times of “communicative abundance,”\(^{20}\) where his language and crass demeanour have encapsulated the public’s frustrations against the failed elite democracy. These approaches do not dismiss Duterte’s win as “mediated populism” where “the candidate with the best-told narrative is well placed to win media attention and ultimately voter support.”\(^{21}\) Instead, as Cabañes and Cornelio point out, digital media has allowed public sentiment to be articulated and amplified.\(^{22}\) Thus, as much as the 2016 elections may have been “personality- and media-driven,”\(^{23}\) candidates’ messages continue to capitalize on existing public desires; for messages to become viral, they have to “speak to the felt experiences of many people that were being neglected in the broader public discourses.”\(^{24}\)

\(^{19}\) Kusaka, “Bandit Grabbed the State,” 62-64.
\(^{21}\) McCargo, “Duterte’s Mediated Populism,” 189.
\(^{22}\) Cabañes and Cornelio, “The Rise of Trolls in the Philippines (and What We Can Do about It).”
\(^{24}\) Cabañes and Cornelio, “The Rise of Trolls in the Philippines (and What We Can Do about
**What about Social Media?**

Complementary to Duterte’s populism, his campaign’s grassroots support kindled throughout different sectors of Philippine society. The “citizen-led political action that [had disrupted] traditional campaign practices” extended beyond offline campaign practices and manifested online. Duterte’s online support from zealous supporters facilitated his electoral success, uplifting their leader and attacking his opponents and their supporters. For many journalists and academics, such impassioned behaviours of “Dutertards” online represents a cautionary tale of the “weaponization” of social media where Duterte-sponsored trolling and disinformation take precedence in “shap[ing] public opinion, tear[ing] down reputations, and crippl[ing] traditional media institutions.”

Although it is not novel for political candidates to use social media as a facet of their broader campaign strategy, the use of social media to mobilize public opinion via disinformation strategies, targeting mechanisms, and trolling have become concerning for many supporters of democracy in recent years. For Stromer-Galley, the kind of Internet-based democratization envisaged in electoral politics has not yet occurred, merely serving to encourage the spectacle-driven campaigning that existed in the pre-digital era. Digital communication technologies (DCTs) do not necessarily promote a kind of two-way communication by opening up new platforms for the public to engage in elections. Rather, it perpetuates the public as being “campaigned at but not campaigned with,” as strategists control interactivity with public-minimizing discourse and instead focusing on strategic messaging with a broader “yet more targeted reach.” Concerns regarding the (mis)use of social media that originate

---


26 Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope,” 103.

27 Ressa, “Propaganda War.”


29 Stromer-Galley, 2–3.
on the campaign trail often persist after the candidate assumes power.\textsuperscript{30} This has proven true under Duterte’s presidency where journalists and critics are met with the vitriol of his fans composed of paid and unpaid actors that challenge the ability to hold his administration accountable.\textsuperscript{31} In this vein, scholars are thus concerned that civic life has been transformed from “membership to management” as the misuse of DCTs accelerates.\textsuperscript{32} Certainly, the grim intersection of social media and politics is not unique to the Philippines. One comparatively notable case is the United States where foreign provocateurs, social-media bots, fake news, and trolls penetrate the very bone of American democratic politicking.\textsuperscript{33} These methods are said to disrupt “established paradigms of how to run for president” and, more broadly, election campaigning.\textsuperscript{34} In fact, Cambridge Analytica, the microtargeting firm eerily skilled at shaping public opinion, is suspected of having fiddled with the 2016 Philippine elections.\textsuperscript{35} Ong and Cabañes look specifically at the role of social media in the 2016 Philippine elections, investigating the professionalized and institutionalized work structures of paid troll work and how disinformation occurs through a “diverse and loosely interconnected group of hierarchized digital works.”\textsuperscript{36} As their study suggests, there is a permeable intersection between paid and activist work, as the goal of the “architects of disinformation” is to “ignite support at the grassroots level […] to take on the work of persuasion in everyday spaces and rhythms of social media.”\textsuperscript{37} However, the success of igniting grassroots support online relies on how much a professional campaign gives voice to the “latent anxieties,” needs, and desires of the population.\textsuperscript{38} This is quite similar to the process of mobilizing populist publics offline—in short, “management” actually requires careful attention to the desires and activities of the electorate.\textsuperscript{39}

Unlike his competitors, Duterte’s virtual engagement with his fan base
reflects an unresponsive approach. A study conducted by Sinpeng, Gueorguiev, and Arugay, demonstrates that Duterte’s campaign is misaligned with the conventional expectations of effective social media campaigning that give primacy to top-down engagement in generating support online—namely the broadcast models that emphasize the role of political candidates and their campaign teams in generating support.\footnote{Sinpeng, Aim, Dimitar Gueorguiev, and Aries A. Arugay. “Strong Fans, Weak Campaigns: Social Media and Duterte in the 2016 Philippine Election.” \textit{Journal of East Asian Studies}, July 27, 2020, 358-360, https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2020.11} Their research shows a less than clear image of the effectiveness of “giving voice” and rallying constituents via social media, for Duterte significantly lagged behind other candidates in engaging with the general public online. Comparatively, Duterte was “inactive, impersonal, and disengaged,”\footnote{Sinpeng, Gueorguiev, and Arugay, “Strong Fans, Weak Campaigns,” 362.} while his opponents endorsed a more personal approach; Grace Poe was far savvier with her memes and hashtags, Jejomar Binay was more active, and Miriam Defensor Santiago was the self-actualizing communicator.\footnote{Sinpeng, Gueorguiev, and Arugay, “Strong Fans, Weak Campaigns,” 363.} Despite the ineptitude of his virtual persona, Duterte possessed committed and “social media-savvy believers as his base,” meaning his social media following was more grassroots than assumed.\footnote{Aim Sinpeng, “How Duterte Won the Election on Facebook,” New Mandala, May 12, 2016, https://www.newmandala.org/how-duterte-won-the-election-on-facebook/.}

Nevertheless, it is counterproductive to approach online electorate mobilization as vertical or horizontal. Speaking in the American context of the tech-savvy campaigns of Barack Obama and Howard Dean, Kreiss argues that theorists who see in purely black or white, whether dystopic or optimistic in terms of technology’s effects on politics, “miss the hybridity” in the nature of organizing politics with technology.\footnote{Daniel Kreiss, Taking Our Country Back: \textit{The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 194. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199782536.001.0001} Official social media campaigns aim to mobilize people online, but the unpredictable ways that messaging can be received and later articulated by users shapes official campaigns.\footnote{Ong and Cabañes, 28.} As Cabanes and Ong suggest, one distinct strategy in promotional communication is “volatile virality” wherein message amplification takes precedence over “message discipline;” here, the meaning of the message, delivered with popular vernacular,
memes, and the like is left up to interpretation of individuals.\textsuperscript{46} While it may be easy to place Duterte’s success as a part of managing the electorate vis-à-vis DCTs or as emblematic of grassroots models of organizing online, there is more to be derived in the fusion of “management” and “empowerment” in political and online domains. This research asserts that Duterte’s fan-base was “strong” in their independent grassroots support and can be understood from the diverse and personalized motivations uttered by the group members online, some of which have also been taken offline.\textsuperscript{47} At the same time, the Facebook groups’ alignment with Duterte’s official social media campaign in agenda, organization, and strategy speaks to his official campaign project’s strength.

\section*{Methods}

\textit{Data Collection}

Since this dissertation aims to unpack the reasons for how and why OFWs mobilized behind Duterte online, and whether their mobilization was truly grassroots or managed, the starting point for the research was on Facebook—the dominant social media platform in the Philippines in 2016 for online activity during the campaign season. Among the many dedicated Facebook groups for Duterte, I chose the two largest and most active samples: one based in Hong Kong (HK) and the other in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Both locations represent the top destinations for Filipino labour migrants. Given that the information obtained from Facebook on these two groups is vast, implying they are both very active Facebook groups, I narrowed down my data in two ways. First, I specifically considered group members’ activities in these two Facebook groups between March 28 and May 9, when Duterte began to take the lead in social weather stations, thus providing six full weeks of data.\textsuperscript{48} I then logged all posts and comments, which I will call engagements, between that timeline that mention the candidates’ names, namely “Duterte,” “Poe,” “Binay,” “Roxas,” and “Defensor,” and all posts that mention “Election(s),” “President,” and “2016.” I recorded the number of “likes” for all the posts, chronologically ordering all the information based on the date they were posted and documented the gender of the user. I excluded

\textsuperscript{46} Ong and Cabañes, 45-60.
\textsuperscript{47} Sinpeng, Gueorguiev, and Arugay, “Strong Fans, Weak Campaigns,” 6-17
\textsuperscript{48} “Group members” are those users who have added themselves into the group either to follow group posts or engage in posting, sharing, commenting and liking in the group.
all engagements that were reposted, meaning they were shared with Facebook’s “share” feature from another profile, page, or group. Posts that also explicitly said “repost” or “reposted” but mentioned any or a combination of these words were also excluded, because I sought to follow what group members in these two separate groups thought and said themselves. In this way, I approached sifting through the data like an ethnography, being cognizant of who had made the post, when they posted, and in what context they were making such statements online. While there is much to be learned from the reposted content, like the spread of disinformation or the success of Duterte’s official campaign, limitations on Facebook prevented me from tracing the direct origins of these materials along with their reach. Moreover there is also something to be said about reposting versus posting. Reposting can be easier than coming up with an original post and users can also repost without fully reading or comprehending the content of a post.

Data Analysis

Within the six-week capture period, I logged 92 engagements into a spreadsheet for the UAE cohort and 49 for Hong Kong, which comprises a total of 141 documents, written in Tagalog, English, or a mix of the two. I translated all engagements made in Tagalog. With the data gathered, I conducted a thematic analysis, a method for “systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insights into patterns of meanings (themes) across a data set.” By using a thematic analysis, it accounts for a more systematic organization of implicit and explicit ideas generated during coding. Coding is the process involved in allocating a word or short phrase that “symbolically assigns a summative, salient […] or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data.” I went through three stages of coding: two stages for the first cycle to summarize data segments and one stage of coding for the second cycle to group those summaries into smaller categories. I coded three times to ensure I was both familiar with the data and to be as thorough as possible in my inferential codes. As part of the

---

51 Saldaña, The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers, 236.
first cycle, the first two rounds of coding were done manually on a spreadsheet, consisting of verbatim coding that captures terms and concepts drawn from the Facebook users’ words. The second round of coding I used was concept coding where I looked beyond the text and assigned words or phrases that represent a broader meaning to them. Finally, I generated themes using the qualitative software NVivo in the third round of coding, which was part of the second cycle.

For the final round, I merged the data from Hong Kong and UAE, as the first two rounds produced similar results in terms of emergent themes and concepts and were also matching in terms of when themes emerged. Moreover, the group structures were also similar in that certain intermediaries led conversations and initiatives. Although I had initially planned to analyze the two data sets, I instead compared the six weeks by coding each merged week separately to maintain a comparative point of view. I did a patterned coding, which is more explanatory or inferential and begins to identify emergent themes by pulling together the material from the first two rounds of coding into a more “parsimonious unit of analysis.” NVivo allowed me to systematically code, order, and track the emergent themes throughout the six-week period and helped visualize and quantify the frequency of themes each week. Besides gathering data to answer the “why” of my research question, I provided some explanatory mechanism of “how” OFW’s were mobilizing behind Duterte online and taking their support offline as well. By comparing across the weeks, logging who made the post or comment, and keeping track of the other activities within the Facebook groups, I was able to trace when, why, and how themes emerged.

**Findings and Analysis**

*Thematic Findings: A Mixed Bag of Motivations*

With the data gathered from the two Facebook groups, I identified six prominent themes that emerged across the six weeks: democratic deficit, problems of country, relatability, experience and ability, patriotism and, political

---

53 Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 120.
54 I use the term intermediaries for those individuals who repost more frequently than the average user and get high traffic of likes and shares on their shared content. They are also usually part of the Facebook group’s list of “administrators” who maintain the group.
representation. Under all six themes, there are sub-themes coded as “sub-nodes” on NVivo that specify a feature of the theme a particular user has cited. This portion of the dissertation discusses these themes and their related sub-themes. It aims to highlight the varied motivations and judgements behind Duterte’s support, even for OFWs who reflect the so-called “new” middle class of Philippine society. These motivations and the personal ways users articulated their support for Duterte demonstrate that these groups are truly independent in form; these individuals were not paid actors, nor were they buying into a simplistic campaign program. As the following section on (independent) organizing will also show, these group members were not “bots” or fake account operators as they also participated in pro-Duterte in-person events.

Democratic Deficit

The prevailing theme to emerge from Facebook documents is “democratic deficit,” in which issues and fallbacks concerning democratic institutions were coded. These issues include the influence of traditional political elites, the prevalence of corruption, the need for a transition to federalism, media bias, concern over cheating during elections, and finally clientelism. The most prevalent of these issues concerned the influence of traditional political elites, which, according to my analysis, was often blamed for the other sub-themes in this category. Of course, most of these sub-themes are ultimately tied together, especially given Duterte’s vehement disdain against corruption by elite politicians that he promised to rectify as the strict “dictator” against those “forces of evil.”. This sentiment of a “democratic failure” prevailed as a central grievance throughout the six-week period. For instance, popular discontent with elite corruption is highlighted in the following posts:

“Desperate Trapos will use whatever means within their disposal […] to perpetuate themselves in power. That explains the pressure on government employees by the admin candidates. But everything has limits! you can fool the people once or twice or even thrice. But you [cannot] fool them all the time! Sawang-sawa na ang sambayanan sa pangongorakot ng pera ng bayan!

Appendix A contains a chart that outlines the complete list of themes and sub-themes.
(Translation: we are over corruption taking away the money of society! We want decisive change [...] only Duterte and his party [can] bring that much needed change in the country” (HK, March 31, 2016)

“And then there is Binay, who pretends to care for the masses only to benefit from them personally—to ensure his own family’s political and financial future, and so on” (UAE, April 19, 2016)

These posts exhibit the issues of corruption and the dominance of elite *trapos* in Philippine politics at the demise of “the masses” or “sambayanan.”57 Such sentiments are unsurprising given the EDSA system’s failures that produced fertile conditions for a populist challenger like Duterte. According to Bello, the EDSA project was destroyed by “the deadly combination of elite monopoly and neoliberal economic policies” that perpetuated “a yawning gap between the EDSA Republic’s promise of popular empowerment and wealth redistribution and the reality of massive poverty, scandalous inequality, and pervasive corruption.” 58 Moreover, while Aquino’s *daang matuwid*, or straight path regime, attempted to eliminate corruption, the legitimacy questions that ensued in the latter half of his tenure did not enrich his protégé Roxas’ campaign of *ituloy ang daang matuwid* or “continue the straight path.”

Similarly, the ways in which group members presented their disdain for the elite is particularly compelling. While many group members were keen to bolster their candidate’s platform, they were simultaneously aggressive in spewing incriminating comments against the other candidates and their allies. Take, for example, the following excerpts from different comments,

“Ako po si Mar Roxas, lagging kulelat [...] ako ay credit grabber, inutil, epal, sinungaling, at palpak sa trabaho lang… Dadaya-in ko ang election gaming ang Hocus PCOS Machines.”

57 Trapos is a pejorative term used to refer to traditional politicians; Sambayanan refers to “the people” and society.

(Translation: I am Mar Roxas, always weak/last [...] I am a credit grabber, useless, annoying/stupid, liar, and a failure at work...I am going to cheat the election using the Hocus PCOS Machines) (HK, March 31, 2016)

“Mar Roxas is the king of disaster and the kingdomless king because he is a shameful insensitive leader. He must be thrown out of this planet.” (HK, April 3, 2016)

“Roxas and Binay are banking much with their political machines. Grace, with her secret entities.” (UAE, April 14, 2016)

“Look how, the proverbial “coño” boy, Mar tries so hard to look like the masses, yet fails miserably—Awkward & internally directionless” (UAE, April 19, 2016)

This is complementary to the finding that Duterte’s supporters were heavily active, “armed with convictions and ready to fight for their champion” online despite Duterte’s weak engagement with them. Their behaviours reflected the official campaign’s methods of using media firms, paying influencers, and utilizing up to two million fake account operators equipped to “troll,” propagate disinformation, and shape public opinion. However, these group members did so voluntarily and clearly out of their genuine frustrations over the elites’ grip over Filipino politics and their liability for much of the country’s democratic failures. Simultaneously, their actions were just as aggressive as the tactics of Duterte’s official campaign, suggesting that the activities of these independent users drew inspiration from the official campaign.

Other Problems of the Country

The second-most dominant motivation that I identified throughout the analysis concerns other problems of the country, classified as issues beyond democratic processes. The sub-themes that were brought up include: law and

---

order, under which crime and drugs fall; poverty; rebel groups; and failing infrastructure. Duterte’s message to eradicate crime and drugs in the country is a recurrent trend in the analysis, where law and order remains the top concern listed under the theme. Furthermore, Duterte is presented as the only candidate able to solve burgeoning problems associated with criminality and drug use. The following post provides an example of this:

“Mayor Duterte needs not the Philippines to become its president, but rather the Philippines needs mayor Duterte because he is the only person who can solve the perennial problem of shabu and other illegal drugs, fearless criminals, and decent corrupt govt. officials ! ! !” (UAE, April 27, 2016)

However, the analysis reveals how crime and drugs were not nearly as frequently cited by group members compared to the sub-themes under democratic deficits like corruption and the influence of the elites in Philippine political life. Surprisingly, the findings are not necessarily congruent with the common conception that illegal drugs and crime were “the most important” issue concerning voters, particularly for OFWs. This is not to dismiss the importance that the message of law and order played in the 2016 election, as it unravelled and traversed “latent anxieties” people held over crime and the use of drugs. At the same time, democratic issues like corruption might be a more personal and pressing concern for OFWs, who have, after all, left their families and uprooted their lives back in the Philippines to pursue more lucrative work abroad, and who expect a “secure” political environment for their families back home. As Teehankee put it, “the Duterte phenomenon” was a protest of the emerging middle class who “have suffered from lack of public service […] and silently witnessed their tax money siphoned by corruption despite promises of improved governance.” Because Duterte fashioned corruption and elite monopoly as a detriment of citizens, it is not difficult to envisage why middle-class voters, like OFWs, who have not reaped the benefits of economic growth, prioritized the issue of democratic deficits.

Relatability

Among the other themes to emerge from the analysis is Duterte’s relatability, with varying comments that refer to either his language, action(s), or both. What is most intriguing here is users’ perception of Duterte as a “simple” man who has the “rare quality” of being able to solve the country’s most pressing issues. He is framed as a man for “the people,” as he is “from” the people and wholly separate from those political elites, which is revealed to be one of the two groups’ most significant concerns. OFWs on the Facebook groups alluded to his crass and unfiltered language, charisma, humour, and supposed simplicity juxtaposed to other “elitist” candidates. A few examples of these engagements include:

“He is not that sophisticated. He is that rarity – a plainspoken man who wants the world to work for everyone. Therein lies his greatness. He is an ordinary man with ordinary dreams – the dream of a better life.” (UAE, March 30, 2016)

“The favourite past time of Mayor Rody Duterte 😊
He loves to sing his favourite songs <3 #VoteDuterteCayetano #JustDuit #Du30” (UAE, April 7, 2016)

“Every time he talks about his country and the change he wants to bring, he is very sincere. Para siyang stand-up comedian bago magstart yung 2nd debate sa TV-5[…] nakakatawa (He is like a stand-up comedian before the 2nd debate started on TV05)” (UAE, May 7, 2016)

“As things stand now, however the masses appear to have decided to go for this man who talks the language of the poor and who carried the dreams of the neglected” (UAE, April 29, 2016)

As evidenced by the engagements, Duterte is perceived as a kind of “outsider” to politics who talks and acts like any average Filipino—he sings his favourite songs, he is funny, and he “dreams of a better life” like any aspirant OFW. As Duterte espouses such a demeanour, he projects himself as “an ordinary
person with extraordinary attributes,” able to forge a personal relationship with the people as one not wholly aloof to the realities of those whom politicians should serve.\(^{64}\) Whether he is seen as a kind of comedic politician or a “social bandit,” \(^{65}\) there is no doubt that his unique charisma easily catches people’s attention.

Without relegating Duterte’s success as solely a performance that deceived his supporters, Duterte as a political figure similarly benefits from a culture wherein entertainment media and politics converge—not unique to the Philippines but comparable to the experiences of the US’s Trump or Italy’s Berlusconi.\(^{66}\) In this analogy, Duterte mirrors characters frequently seen in *teleserye* soap operas, in being able to win the electorate’s feelings. In this respect, Duterte supporters are frequently described by elites as lacking common sense, gullible, and lazy. However, on a greater scale, Duterte’s appeal based on his relatability speaks more to the inaccessibility of traditional politicians and institutions for the regular citizen—again symptomatic of the country’s elite democracy.

### Experience and Ability

Frequently cited by Facebook users, Duterte’s experience and ability proves compelling for OFWs; such sub-themes incorporate Davao city, clean track-record, and interestingly, religion. Under this theme, Duterte is revered as someone who has an uncommonly successful record of bringing transformational and positive change compared to the other candidates—exemplified by his campaign promise that “change is coming.” Users have frequently cited the “success story” of Davao city as heralding a new wave of progress for the Philippines. Nevertheless, while mentions of Duterte’s tight grip over Davao and his consequent successes of the city were common, none of the users referred to the glaring trade-offs that come with Duterte’s leadership, which among other things, is notorious for its disregard of the law and human rights. Problematically, Duterte is associated with vigilante killings perpetrated by the elusive Davao Death Squad (DDS). Nonetheless, the UAE Facebook group and other OFWs-for-Duterte groups on social media reference DDS in their group titles as “Duterte Die-Hard Supporters.”

Moreover, the image of a peaceful and “world-class” Davao city does not resemble reality. Instead, the rhetoric of “law and order” is a mirage that detracts from a “concealed but amplified state terror,” aimed at achieving complete political

\(^{64}\) Panizza, *Introduction*, 21.


The notion that Duterte maintains a “clean track record” compared to other candidates similarly deviates from the truth. Compared to the electoral violence in other parts of the Philippines that follow a pattern linked to election cycles and tied to the emergence and entrenchment of political dynasties, the same trend does not follow in Davao. Instead, political violence is perpetrated against unaffiliated civilians, largely lacking political or revolutionary ties. As such, Davao strikes one as a safe location, yet state violence targets a disorganized and fragmented urban population, with no possible means to fight back, and enables Duterte to operate as its “boss” with impunity. Thus, it comes as no surprise that none of the Facebook users mentioned anything regarding the repercussions of a Duterte presidency because his project in Davao was, in itself, operating against the people covertly. Take, for example, the following engagement that idealizes his mayorship in Davao:

“I cannot tell you about the personal morality of Mayor Duterte. I can tell you what he has publicly done – he has turned a backwater city into a global benchmark. And if he wanted to steal us blind, he would have left traces by now.” (UAE, March 30, 2016)

This engagement highlights the “efficacy” of Duterte’s efforts to transform Davao, without scrutinizing the victims of his punitive methods. However, such posts, some of which employed trolling, did recognize and magnify the “more visible” shortcomings of traditional political elites. Along with his mayorship in Davao, this portion of analysis recognizes the user’s perception of Duterte’s “divine intervention” that guides and helps Duterte. This perception is at odds with Duterte’s unfavourable relationship with the Catholic church and inconsistent with his punitive history. Consider the comment, “I’d rather support this ‘sinner’ who depends on the grace of God than those religious leaders and self-righteous politicians who depend on themselves” (UAE, May 7, 2016) or the comment, “this is the God Jesus Christ destiny for him and for all our fellow Filipino’s and for the Philippine country” (UAE, March 28, 2016). Supporting

---

67 Iglesias, “The Duterte Playbook.”
68 Iglesias.
69 Sidel, Capital, Coercion, and Crime, 6.
Duterte, at least for some of the users, is “not just a political choice but also a religious one.” While full of irony, Cornelio and Media point out that some of Duterte’s supporters “welcome a higher purpose in Duterte’s War on Drugs” as it makes Filipinos “realise their moral depravity.”

Patriotism

The theme of patriotism was similarly prevalent among some users, wherein the sub-themes of a shared vision for the country, love of country, and sense of sacrifice were articulated. This patriotism is bi-directional, suggesting that voting for Duterte is a signal of their patriotism, while others mentioned Duterte’s patriotism as highly important. Consider the following comments that invoke their love and shared vision for the country:

“I will cast my vote for Duterte...For the nation...for the peace and order...and for the safety of my granddaughter” (HK, April 18, 2016)

“But I would rather have him because I know he will make us love our country more and become again proud of [our] country” (UAE, April, 18, 2016)

These engagements suggest a kind of service and love for their country, pointing that some of Duterte’s supporters are in fact “activated” and want to take democracy back in their hands. On the other hand, other engagements reference to Duterte’s patriotism:

“Waving and kissing the Philippine flag in his political rallies, he urges all sectors and factions of society to support his agenda for peace and nation building. Surprisingly, the response of the masses is overwhelming. Indeed, another revolution has dawned – a revolution for Radical Change!”

---

70 Cornelio and Media, “Duterte’s Enduring Popularity Is Not Just a Political Choice—It Is Also Religious.”
71 Cornelio and Media.
“You can never win the [hearts] of DU30’s supporters, why? Because we are die hard true. Our Candidate is a true person and possess a true leadership, concern, bravery and love for our country.” (UAE, April 18, 2016)

Political Representation

Finally, the last theme to emerge of the thematic analysis is political representation, under which present two general sub-themes: act of political activity, and OFW interests. Although quite general, this theme references instances where users mention either their feelings of “finally” being represented by an appropriate candidate or instances where they reference feelings of being democratically “activated” by Duterte as “the first presidentiable who sparked desire in every OFW’s heart to participate actively in an election” (UAE, April 23, 2016). Considering the grassroots mobilization that occurred offline during Duterte’s campaign, the findings online do not deviate from what has been recorded in various ethnographic works, which traced offline engagement with Duterte. What is thought-provoking is the varying sorts of organizing online that took place for organizing offline—such as carpooling arrangements to vote at the consulate or volunteering to canvas and protect the vote at the consulate—which will be discussed further in the next section of the dissertation. On the other hand, there were those seemingly futile actions that users shared online as a sign of political action. Take, for example, a male user who included a video of himself endorsing Duterte in his security guard outfit in UAE, with the post’s caption reading “please [encourage] everyone to post a video for Duterte/Cayetano and consider this as our commitment for them for the sake of our beloved Philippines.” The accessibility of social media has allowed OFWs abroad to share their support for Duterte and unite to achieve their varied interests.

[Independent] Organizing of ‘Die-Hard’ Supporters

One of the primary inspirations for this dissertation were the videos shared on my feed by OFWs of other OFWs who were independently congregating in

---

72 It has also been found that OFWs sent money back home for funding paraphernalia like wristbands for Duterte’s campaign. Source: Curato, “Politics of Anxiety, Politics of Hope,” 2016, 104.
public spaces to show support and solidarity for Duterte’s presidential bid. These various “movements” were markedly less formal than typical, Filipino campaign rallies. These in-person events were independently organized, operating freely from the official campaign. Nevertheless, the only caveat is that these groups were influenced by online activist leadership that cohesively tie the group’s solidarity to a more robust agenda. Rather than these Facebook groups existing as amorphous or completely horizontal, activists coalesce around the professionalized side of online electoral campaigning, where certain actors dictate the course of the conversation, mobilize the group’s members, and create trends and diversions. Finally, of the numerous groups for OFWs that exist on Facebook, these groups were very specific in their causes, that is, to mobilize behind Duterte's campaign.

While the first half of data analyzes the mixed motivations of OFWs, looking beyond the sample engagements reveals that these intermediaries were vital in fuelling support for Duterte at the expense of his opponents. This demonstrates, in part, how it was that they mobilized online. These key intermediaries are those who post and repost more frequently than the average user, achieving a high traffic of likes and shares on their content. Generally, they are involved as the Facebook group’s list of “administrators” who pick and choose who can remain in these groups, delete comments and posts of other group members, and change the group title. While unlike social media “influencers” with considerable personal popularity, these average individuals retained the same “influence” over the group members. They invigorated mobilization by (1) organizing individuals online to campaign for Duterte offline, and by (2) using diversionary tactics and fake news to mobilize public opinion. In short, they amplified support and inflamed frustrations of other group members, employing an amalgamation of both appropriate and inappropriate social media strategies.

Terms such as “manipulating” or “management” are not applicable to this situation, as Duterte’s official campaign does not sponsor their activities. Nevertheless, this paper recognizes that these intermediaries do not operate in a vacuum and their Facebook activities are unavoidably linked to the success of the social media efforts of Duterte’s official campaign. To alleviate this, this dissertation delineates between those paid actors who set out to mobilize public opinion versus grassroots intermediaries who, while taking inspiration from the

---

official campaign, still operated and disseminated information in “unpredictable ways,” as acknowledged by Ong and Cabañes’ study. Finally, these observations support the notion that Duterte has “strong fans,” who do not require their leader’s attention and instead draw inspiration from varied personal motivations explained above.

Overseeing Offline Mobilization

By distinguishing between regular group members and mediators, online demographics demonstrate that most users are considered independent and voluntary members, complemented by intermediaries who are the most active in publicizing pro-Duterte content. One of the intermediaries’ tactics is encouraging fellow group members to mobilize their support offline. Take the following engagements from the same intermediary from the UAE:

“DDS Dubai supporters, we need volunteers in our Consulate [...] Poll Watchers daily depends in your day off or your day available who can guide people outside to vote and can secretly campaign for Duterte and party. We ask as well from those volunteers who has a car just to transport some volunteers who want to vote but it is inconvenient to them in going to our Consulate. We ask also for those Volunteers who can provide food, snacks for our Pollwatchers there who stays 12 hrs to watch and protect Duterte’s Votes. Please comment here for those who are willing to volunteer for Duterte [...] Good News for today [...] DUTERTE now lead in recent SWS survey” (April 11, 2016)

“Here in UAE, Many OFWs flocking to embassy and consulate bringing foods for poll watchers and volunteers” (April 12, 2016)

“We encourage Duterte Supporters with vehicles in Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah to carpool voting. Visit

---

to the Philippine Consulate in Dubai to VOTE! (April 23, 2016)

“We need a DDS Volunteer Driver who can drive the van or coaster from 10 am to 5 pm from Rimal Hotel in Deira to our Philippine Consulate to transport people if ever there are excess voters who line up outside the voting center to avoid stay for long hours on queue under the extreme heat of the sun while waiting to vote.” (April 28, 2016)

Compared to the posts of non-intermediaries, these posts by intermediaries accumulated more likes, shares, and comments than any other posts. In the case of UAE, the intermediaries’ efforts proved successful. For instance, group members gleefully broadcasted taking part in these arrangements, such as going to the consulate as a group to cast their ballots. Similarly, soliciting volunteers involved ordinary group members demonstrating support in the comment sections, posting their personal cell phone numbers to be contacted for volunteering and proclaiming total support for Duterte’s campaign. These events, by solidifying group camaraderie offline among attendees, encourage an online feedback-loop, whereby attendees, who post images and videos of these events, thrust more momentum to both Duterte’s official and unofficial campaigns. This phenomenon disproves an oversimplified account that limits the work of generating “hype” and excitement to his official campaign. Moreover, while these activities could have occurred without these intermediaries, in the 2016 election, the organizational capacity of attendees was essential for these events, with organizers seeming to work tirelessly, almost as if it were a full-time job, to maintain the campaign’s inertia. Besides mobilizing individuals, these agents provided useful instructions for group members regarding proper conduct at the consulate, including not to carry or wear campaign paraphernalia, and how to “protect” their votes.

For the Hong Kong Facebook group, although intermediaries did not mobilize voting drives to consulates, there were posts from similar actors who instructed and informed on various campaigns around the city. One such post from an intermediary, included information regarding an upcoming Christmas potluck open to all Duterte supporters. This post generated over 450 likes and over 50 comments. The mediator outlined that Duterte would be chiming in on the celebration via phone to bid his greetings to his supporters. While the event’s affiliations to Duterte’s campaign are unknown, the mediator encouraged members
to bring their own food and invite their friends, appearing more “organic” and informal. In both Facebook groups, OFWs were able to mobilize and achieve solidarity in their movements offline via the efforts of these intermediaries. In particular, it challenges the notion that online political campaigns require professional work in order to be engaging and successful. Considering that Duterte’s social media campaign did not interact closely with constituents online, the motivations behind independent campaigners on social media could have been enough reason for them to be vigorously involved in group organization.

Future research into both HK and UAE, as well as other OFWs-for-Duterte, will likely analyze (1) whether or not these intermediaries worked together as a coordinated unit within and between different Facebook groups; (2) what the motivations are for these key intermediaries to be doing more work than the average group member; and (3) the nature of group camaraderie generated by these online-offline movements and how that may be a catalyst for some OFW group members to partake in future online-offline activities. Finally, I do not eliminate the possibility that the seemingly organic nature of these campaigns may mask more conniving and covert practices between intermediaries and the official campaign.

Diversionary Tactics and Fake News

Besides offline mobilization, intermediaries played a significant role in cultivating a deeper message of cohesion online by preferencing certain subjects through diversionary tactics and circulating fake news. These independent actors worked similarly to Duterte’s professional online campaign organizers in the strategies they employed. The thematic analysis reveals that select themes were amplified in the six-week period—congruent to emergent events in Philippine politics. Similarly, it finds that this amplification was perpetuated by intermediaries. For example, when news broke over the rape joke Duterte made during a campaign rally on April 12, 2016, suggesting he “should have been first”

---

76 Diversionary tactics are typical used by digital influencers that seek to “change the course of a narrative or reframe an issue” when they undermine the branding of a client developed by strategists; Ong and Cabañes, “Architects of Networked Disinformation,” 2018, 56.
in the gang rape that took place in 1989, intermediaries from both the UAE and HK Facebook groups quickly veered the topic away from the controversy. Rather than focusing on the repercussions of his sentiment, which was widely criticized by women and human rights organizations, the group had diverted the subject to the “relatability” of Duterte, particularly in his language. This absolved Duterte of his mistake, painting a picture of him as someone who, just like “the people,” does not always think twice about what they say.

Their diversion was so successful that Duterte’s relatability, specifically his “language” came up in week 4 (between April 18-24) as a primary theme, which salvaged, if not strengthened, his image. In the words of one group member from UAE, his “flaws make him unique [compared] to the traditional political failures” (April 21, 2016). The issue was instead brushed aside as “a joke that became a big deal only because it [was] election time” (Hong Kong, April 19, 2016). Group mediators fuelled such perceptions at the onset of the issue’s emergence with comments that have “framed” the issue as something minimal and indicative of Duterte’s greatness. Consider these excerpts from two different intermediaries, the first from UAE garnered 77 likes and the second from HK acquired 366 likes:

“His ‘rape comment’ may have been made in bad taste, but in the Philippines […] a ‘goody-goody’ image doesn’t translate into real improvement & security” (April 19, 2016)

“Blackpropaganda and low class of issue (Duterte Rape joke) will not bring us (Duterte supporters) down…in fact, we multiply…” (April 18, 2019)

The virality of this diversion seeped into week 5 (April 25-May 1) with his supporters fervently defending Duterte, and condemning the media that continued to “deliberately take [his] statements [to] sensationalize them [and] destroy [his] image” (April 25, 2016). In this way, the narrative of relatability successfully detracted negative attention away from the controversy, shifting the negative attention towards the media, which is among the principal critics of Duterte and his supporters. In both HK and UAE groups, media bias remains a pressing concern regarding democratic deficits that has been consistently poised as

---

78 Refer to Appendix C for results on prominent themes and their sub-themes by week.
Another tactic of grassroots intermediaries in bolstering Duterte is the circulation of fake news, which the other group users believe and circulate. While there are countless examples in the Facebook groups of such occurrences, the alarm over the Precinct Count Optical Scanners (PCOS), machines that read ballots, dominated the analysis. Public alarm regarding the machines reached its peak in Week 6, which spans May 2 – 9, 2016. This concern had already proliferated prior to this week, from intermediaries, personal Facebook accounts, and third-party groups, as early as October 2015. That said, intermediaries encouraged this spread with alarmist instructions such as: “The cheating will be inside the voting machine… I repeat don’t leave the precinct if [your] receipt is wrong!” (UAE, May 4, 2016) or a popular repost from an intermediary in Hong Kong that reads “fight the evil designs of hocus PCOS” (HK, May 1, 2016).

The doom-laden messaging was echoed by group users who had bought into the issue and took on the project to broadcast warnings themselves, like, “For Filipinos OFW who [want] change for the better […] just to inform 20 million ballots are already programmed [for] Mar Roxas and Leni Robredo” (HK, May 7, 2017). Interestingly, this warning was replicated in UAE as well, demonstrating that group members are either (1) deriving their information from third-party groups and reposting them without giving credit or (2) are accounts operated by fake actors.

Simultaneously, it is unclear whether or not these grassroots intermediaries produce fake news or merely disseminate them from other channels. This is consistent with Ong and Cabañas’ findings that tracking those responsible for misinformative content is difficult, as it can emanate from the professionalized side as well as “real supporters,” which in turn makes accountability “perpetually displac[ed].” However, intermediary use of fake news undoubtedly convinces and signals other group members to do the same, as intermediaries carry a form of authoritative weight with their popularity and group status as an administrator.

In unpacking a sliver of the fervent online support for Duterte in the 2016 elections, this research has aimed to show that not all of his supporters online were simply “managed” by tech-savvy campaign strategists—as is perpetuated

---

79 Reposts were not included in the thematic analysis but included here for demonstrative purposes.
80 Ong and Cabañas, “Architects of Networked Disinformation,” 2018, 42.
by public conclusions. Instead, in the case of OFW’s rallying behind Duterte, social media provided an avenue for individuals to voice their frustrations and discontents, becoming more involved in the political process. Activities such as ensuring their votes are cast and counted fairly are all promising signs towards more democratic participation. However, this research demonstrates how easily the conversation could be dominated by narratives, true or false, depending on their virality and whoever was making the post. These trends detract from Facebook’s initial mission to “make the world more open and connected,” and instead reveals the toxicity of an open forum that is factually unverified and adequately moderated by its creators. Problematically, Facebook’s algorithm encourages the proliferation of sensationalist posts, based on the counts of likes and comments. In this way, the truth rests not in facts but popularity. As such, while individuals may be more politically engaged and are free to join in on the conversation, there are inevitably architects or intermediaries that shape its course.

CONCLUSION

Through a thematic analysis and cognizance of user activities in two third-party Facebook groups dedicated to Duterte’s campaign, three findings emerged. First, it identifies that motivations for supporting Duterte are a “mixed-bag” and not as simplistic as his project for “real change” vis-à-vis a focus on corruption, crime, and drugs. Second, these groups were grassroots in form as users joined freely and championed Duterte in individualized ways. Finally, it recognizes that while the groups are grassroots, select independent intermediaries helped to mold group behaviours online and offline via organizing in-person events, using diversionary tactics, and propagating fake news. The third-party groups’ organization speaks to the strengths of Duterte’s official campaign.

With that said, the research is not without its limitations. In analyzing how OFWs mobilized online, perhaps the best approach would have been to examine similar groups and record every single post since their inception. The current data sample is not indicative of what the other third-party groups for Duterte on Facebook may have been doing (i.e. if they follow similar group structures and tactics). However, looking at the posts in these two Facebook groups provides an avenue from which to begin extrapolating how some of these third-party groups functioned, which has not yet been the focus of any major research project. Thirdly, a large limitation of the research is on the validity of the codes themselves, as I coded all documents alone. I aimed to remedy this by doing the coding three
times, to review, replace, or (in)validate initial codes.

The findings of the research, while specific to electoral campaigning in the Philippines, contribute to the growing body of literature on the intersection between digital communication technologies and politics—a field that is ever-expanding and increasing in complexity. It highlights the double-edged sword of DCTs as a complex avenue through which the public can participate beyond the rigid boundaries of liberal democracies yet exacerbate spectacle-driven politics in ways incomprehensible but damaging to most citizens. As a result of online participation, citizens’ public information can be seized and weaponized against their own interests unbeknownst to them. In the Philippines, while Duterte’s online supporters may ultimately deepen political divides, their engagement reveals that the Internet, much like politics, is a site of contest, though one not predicated on the idea that politics only lies in the legislature.

REFERENCES


