Comparative Analysis of the Political Message Strategies and Transmedia Storytelling Techniques in the 2022 Philippine Presidential Elections

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Abstract
The 2022 Philippines presidential election has been among the most divisive and digitally active in the country's electoral history. Numerous political messaging strategies have been used to create a compelling and persuasive message to engage the electorate. This study contributes to the growing global literature on message and platform studies focusing on political message strategies and transmedia. This research utilized qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews to compare the political message strategies of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. and Leni Robredo. The study evaluated the campaign materials such as multimedia, artworks, and speeches throughout the campaign period. It also explored the use of transmedia storytelling to connect narratives across platforms. The study found that political message framing in Philippine elections revolves around the themes of patriotism, unity, compassion, post-pandemic response, and hope for a better nation. Electoral campaigns are now carried out heavily on social media, efficiently engaging the public. However, traditional political tactics still perform because they can persuade a specific demographic. Transmedia storytelling is a potent tool for communicating political messages to the voting public. Moreover, this comparative analysis further concludes that while both candidates utilized a theme of "pagkakaisa" or "unity," how the message was delivered decided whether it would bring voters together or drive them apart.

Keywords: Elections, Political Communication, Transmedia, Qualitative Content Analysis, Philippines

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Introduction

Integrating marketing in politics has been very beneficial since political candidates try to sell themselves to the electorate. Understanding the basic marketing communication concept can suit candidates since they can easily connect to the voting public (Shama, 1975). Nowadays, campaigners explore innovative communication strategies to optimize their efforts (Towner & Dulio, 2012). Messages during the campaign can help in the election results, controlling the campaign type and the delivery of political messages, which affects the percentage of votes. Lower vote percentages were observed in those campaigns that emphasized negative and issues-oriented advertising appeals (Himelboim et al., 2012).

Modern political campaigns increasingly rely on Facebook to engage with digital audiences and disseminate information (Muñiz et al., 2019). The emergence of the internet has leveraged grassroots campaigning and media as it can provide a broader segment of the online audience. Although, according to Karan et al. (2009), traditional campaigning still complements social media in delivering the message, there is no monopoly of information dissemination channels in political campaigns.

In the Philippines, campaign messages either unite or divide communities. The rise of public opinion has also come to influence the process of election campaigning itself, as seen in the floating and junking of candidates, the party-switching of politicians, and the unraveling of coalitions, all developments noted by informed observers (Hedman, 2010). Politicians are always crafting their political advertisements to understand the plight and chaos of an ordinary Filipino but need more to grasp the actual on-ground scenario (Malindog-Uy, 2021). Recently, though, Bodegon-Hikino (2022) explored the dynamics of political campaigns in the country, noting that election campaign in the Philippines highlights jingles and repetitive and sometimes obnoxious songs. It is a traditional approach that is still effective because it is highly remarkable.

With the growing use of social media, a story from a politician can be retold on various platforms. In the Philippines, for example, politicians will use colors, personal narratives, photographs with emotional appeal, and videos featuring common people so that people on social media can react and even produce a story from their point of view. Transmedia is an emerging concept in political campaigning since the audience can participate in the storytelling scene. According to Rutledge (2012), narratives in transmedia have always been participatory. The creativity of transmedia and social collaborations for audiences elevated their engagement and involvement in the story.

Moreover, a political campaign is now a battle of message strategy, wherein it is the art of crafting a creative plan for a message using elements of verbal, nonverbal, rational, emotional, and unique cognitive strategies (Simmons, 2021). While the content of a political message matters, the manner in which it is conveyed can have a significant impact. How it is said can spell the difference in persuading the electorate to vote (Neema, 2013).

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the political message strategies of Bongbong Marcos and Leni Robredo in their electoral campaign.
2. To explore the potential of transmedia storytelling as a communication strategy for an electoral campaign.

Review of Literature

A political communication campaign is a very specific form of persuasion. Using modified principles in marketing, politicians and their ideas are advertised to a voting public (Powell & Cowart, 2015). The way politicians speak and communicate can be crafted so that it resonates with the voting public as they are targeting a large audience. It is important to answer the right questions during debates or public presentations, wear the right clothes, act reasonably, and be mindful in framing the narrative (Burton et al., 2015). Hence, these campaigns are there to capture the hearts and minds of the electorate. Voters need more time to screen and know the candidates representing their political ideas. The recognition of the candidate is important in gaining the public's vote as they will rely on the provided information ("How to Formulate a Winning Marketing Strategy for a Political Campaign," 2023).

Strategic messaging and positioning should be more noticed. It is difficult to quantify the impact of bad messaging, and it is just as difficult to present any accurate implementation or change the approach of how someone talks. This, however, should be considered a vital part of the communication process because the way the message is designed creates a brand in the audience's mind (Pono, 2016). Framing and using archetypes for the candidate's message in a political campaign is relative to creating a powerful message. A voice from a campaigner who can communicate the audience's desires will surely resonate well, as they can be represented in some ways (Smith, 2021).

Using different communication methods helps the messaging campaign to be more visible to the target electorate. Hancox (2017) evaluated examples of transmedia materials that tell a story and engage people to use a platform for activism and social participation. She said that materials could be a good messaging campaign where the story can resonate well with the audience by involving them in the thinking process. Social media offers a broad platform for sharing information that enables messages to be transmitted across various platforms (Tadic et al., 2017). Strategic use of language and visuals can significantly sway public opinion, giving a candidate a competitive edge (Bloomfield & Tscholl, 2018).

A message that considers culture, the Filipino spirit, and solutions to daily problems has been the theme for politicians' messages in the past campaign. The political campaign has the same strategy as commercial marketing and advertisement in winning the audience to buy a product; it has a good narrative, compelling reason, and authenticity, as stated by Garcia in an interview with Inquirer.net (Go, 2015). When discussing the importance of message framing, Filipino politicians have consistently delivered messages linked to their name, political affiliations, principles, and Filipino traits to have quick recognition during the campaign. In an interview with a Filipino voter (CNN Philippines, 2019), the main reason for patronage is personality and their message (political platform and promise delivery).

Framing of political messages can be perceived in a negative or positive light, depending on how messages are presented. Crafting a message can be tricky since a positive appeal can be interpreted as a persuasive attempt, thus decreasing the source's trustworthiness and the truth (Koch & Peter, 2017). Considering the political communication context, George Lakoff postulates the framing theory in politics by seeing how candidates frame their message to gain the support of the target audience. Furthermore, he analyzes the relation of frames in public relations. He examines how politicians will use mental images against the audience themselves (Rathje, 2017). Image bite analysis of audiovisual segments in which candidates are shown but not necessarily heard employs detailed measurement of candidate depictions,

structural features of newscasts such as camera angles, shot lengths, and durations, and visual framing of candidates. As social media campaigns provide a variety of images, videos, and audio, this coding scheme helps align the candidate's image to a descriptive analysis for a comparative study.

Methodology

The research sample and method provided the necessary information for the research objectives. Online and offline materials of Leni Robredo and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. were collected to analyze data. The research sample for Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) included 220 Online Political Campaign/Marketing Materials from both Leni Robredo and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. from Facebook (60), Tiktok (60), and Twitter (100). Note that it also includes user-generated content to analyze the transmedia concept. Then, there are 12 offline materials, which are Murals (6), Songs (4), and Speeches (6).

Using the online application *Trackalytics* and Manual Coding*,* each social media profile was verified for the number of posts, engagements, and posting frequency. The post should be among the most engaging posts of the month regarding likes, shares, and comments from netizens with content aligned with their campaign message. The political campaign-related post could be the first one, the announcement of candidacy, the campaign themes, candidates' credentials, and campaign rallies.

The most significant offline campaign materials were selected as those that should play a significant role in their campaign. They should also be consistent with the theme of Rosas or Unity, which shares the campaign narrative to be selected for analysis. Offline materials are Songs (Bagong Pilipinas, Rosas, etc.), Murals (Biggest Mural, Volunteer Driven, Community Painting, etc.), and Speeches (Proclamation Rally and Miting De Avance).

Furthermore, campaign strategists answered the semi-structured interview questions. Purposive or judgmental sampling helps qualify a participant based on the set criteria of the study. However, due to the need for more direct contact with the potential participants, a snowball method that helps in networking for potential participants is necessary to finish the study. The key informant should work for the whole period of the national election campaign from November 2021 to May 2022. They should be knowledgeable in political campaign marketing and working in the related field.

The research instrument is Qualitative Content Analysis through manual coding and Computer-Aided Qualitative Analysis Software (CAQAS) to study the political campaign materials during the 2022 Philippine elections, where it was analyzed to evaluate the message behind each campaign. The massive amount of data from all the targeted social media platforms and the selected offline materials needs a basis for proper evaluation, an approach developed from Pratheepwatanawong's (2017) study of Social Networking Sites (SNS) of political candidates during the 2013 Bangkok Gubernatorial campaign served as a framework of coding and data analysis of this study. Using content analysis allows the researcher to analyze and systematically evaluate the data.

The themes that emerged from both manual and computer-aided qualitative tools were evaluated carefully to present the political message strategies of candidates during the campaign. Selective coding was utilized to undermine interesting terms and answers from the participants. Braun and Clarke (2013) claimed that selective coding provides a more

comprehensive analysis. In line with this, data provided by the key informants were cross-checked, and a comparative review of previous research was conducted to triangulate the findings.

Discussion

Political Campaign Analysis

Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, candidate 'No. 7', a part of the Partido Federal ng Pilipinas (PFP), launched his electoral campaign at the world-famous Philippine Arena. He called their campaign and political alliance "UniTeam," a word coined from "Unity" and "Team," as he wanted to focus his campaign messaging on uniting the Filipino people. Bongbong has always consistently used the color 'red' to identify his campaign, team, and supporters. This tactic is essential in Philippine politics as colors and imagery can quickly help the electorate identify a certain candidate.

Bongbong Marcos's campaign slogan contains two central ideas: unity and post-pandemic response. *'Sama Sama* depicts togetherness, a value known in a collective Filipino society. He calls for unity and to work as one to rise from the pandemic. *'Babangon Muli' is* not just a message of 'to rise again.' However, it notably includes the letters of this candidate BBM (BongBong Marcos), a trademark he has used to create a recall and easier recognition.

Bongbong's social media campaign heavily relied on Facebook. His video campaign trails, showing his interaction with supporters, gained sympathy from the public. One of his viral moments was when a lady offered him a small amount of money. While his team rarely utilized TikTok, social media content creators are creating content for him.

On the other hand, Leni Robredo, candidate 'No. 10' formerly under the Liberal Party list (LP), pursued an independent campaign launched in her hometown, Naga City, Bicol. She called it the people's campaign and her political alliance *Tropa,'*a Filipino word referring to a group of friends. Leni recently changed her political color to 'pink' precisely for this campaign to identify her and her advocacies. A color that is fresh and barely used in Philippine politics as this depicts a color often associated with women.

Leni Robredo's slogan contains two central ideas for her campaign: good governance and inclusive development. *'Sa Gobyernong Tapat'* portrays a transparent and honest government, a message that yearns for system reform to provide the best public service to the Filipino people. Honesty is the message that the campaign wants to convey through the reflection of Leni's politics, which she was able to support with her authored laws, the 'full-disclosure bill' and 'freedom of information bill' that promotes government transparency. *'Angat Buhay Lahat'* promotes an inclusive development where every member of society can alleviate their struggles. Leni has been serving the poorest of the poor in her entire political career, and she envisioned the continuity of her service through a development that would include not just infrastructure but also long-term economic and sustainable growth for Filipinos.

Leni is the clear frontrunner on Twitter. Her campaign rallies are always trending; famous hashtags include #InWednesdayWeWearPink, #KulayRosasAngBukas, and #IpanaloNa10ito. Since her campaign is volunteer-driven, lots of Facebook pages will post based on their

unique marketing strategy. Photos and videos from her campaign rallies went viral because of funny placards containing witty statements.

As observed, themes and political branding are integral to the Philippine election campaign. It is widely practical that an inclusive message of "togetherness" and "everyone" is both included in the campaign slogans of Robredo and Marcos as this also tackles the Filipino culture of "Bayanihan Spirit," or helping each other and winning altogether. Furthermore, both campaigns hint at a post-pandemic response as either they wanted to alleviate the status of the people (Bongbong) or reform the current administration to a responsive government (Leni) that both will help the country that suffered from COVID-19 from health, economy, and other factors. This comparison is relevant to Todd's (2014) study, which states that relating to electorates' emotional currency is necessary to persuade them. Campaigns with advocacy that relates to people's current needs can help them remember which candidate to vote for.

However, the message strategy of Bongbong and Leni differs in their presentation of this campaign. Bongbong retained his political color and advocacy of unity while developing the central concept of the country's current trends and issues. Meanwhile, to sway from the old yellow color associated with her former party list, Leni utilized a new campaign color and developed her grassroots approach to a more inclusive and personal theme. It is also evident that Bongbong still clings to the theme, resounding his late father's message and incorporating the same color even with controversies. Leni swayed away from her former political color as disagreements from the Duterte administration have targeted the party list. Hence, the analysis of Pono (2016) argues that while it is difficult to gauge the extent of bad messaging, including the issues related to the candidate, a strategic approach to designing the campaign is necessary. Packaging of either retaining a former image or branding to a new color can either make or break the overall campaign.

> May bagong silang, May bago nang buhay, Bagong bansa, bagong galaw, Sa bagong lipunan. Nagbabago ang lahat, tungo sa pag-unlad at ating itanghal, bagong lipunan! [There is a new birth, there is a new life, new country, new movement, in a new society, everything is changing, towards development. And let's show a new society!] (Plethora, 2021)

In Bongbong's campaign, he utilized two songs. *"Bagong Lipunan"* can directly be translated into a new society. A song revival of Plethora from the campaign jingle of the late president-dictator Marcos Sr. and "*Bagong Pilipinas, Bagong Mukha,"*composed and performed by a famous rapper Andrew E., means the same message of changing the Philippines by electing new leaders. The first sounded like a classic and slow song that captivated the older generation's preferences. In contrast, the second one was an impactful campaign jingle that even kids could sing along to. Emerging themes from the songs created for Bongbong Marcos are *new beginnings, change, and support.*

> At alam ko ang aking kaya, alam ko ang hindi, alam ko ang kailangan upang makapagsilbi. Hangga't may kabutihan, hangga't may pag-ibig, liwanag ang mananaig. [And I know what I can do, and I know what I can't, I know what is needed to serve. If there is goodness, if there is love, light will prevail.] (Flip Music Records PH, 2022)

Nica Del Rosario wrote Leni's campaign songs. Her trending song ROSAS, translated to a "rose flower" or "pink," complimented the candidate's campaign message of being an empowered woman who can rally the Philippines to bloom from the crisis. This is an inspirational type of song that resonated with the youth as it motivates people to volunteer for good, knowing that there is a trusted leader. Her campaign song 'Kay Leni Tayo' also describes characteristics one can connect to Leni, such as courage, strength, and heart [to serve]. Common themes of her songs are *inclusive government, public service, and resiliency.*

Moreover, Bongbong's songs can be classified as traditional song jingles in Philippine politics, where common themes include changing for the better, new governance, hope, and serving the people. Leni's songs have provided a more complex take on public service. The line *If there is love, the light will prevail"* can simply be attributed to the fact that if we exist with love as a nation, we can get through everything.

Murals and street artworks are the equivalent of audience-curated content online. Volunteers create a visual representation of the candidates they are supporting. Bongbong's murals used symbols that reflected the developments of the provinces they came from, such as windmills and farmlands. A fascinating move from the camp of Leni is how they turned an insult into a brand. They rode on the common insult to Leni, as people refer to her as "lugaw" or "congee" (*in Filipino slang, refers to a mentally absent person*). They have utilized it to deliver their programs on food security.

Indeed, traditional campaign tactics still complement modern campaigning as they follow the traditional method of political marketing. Kits and other marketing collaterals are needed during campaign rallies to communicate to certain demographics that are not heavily using social media. A mixed-method approach in the campaign is still the key to convincing the electorate.

Transmedia Storytelling Techniques

This research aims to explore the Transmedia Storytelling techniques used in the 2022 Presidential campaign. With the collected content from social media and traditional tools used in the campaign, transmedia storytelling is an emerging concept that can be explored in politics. Hence, this part will illustrate the potential transmedia utilization during the campaigns of Bongbong Marcos and Leni Robredo.

This section provides a framework of transmedia storytelling that can be used in a political campaign. In understanding this concept, the integration of the campaign messages and the platforms used in the 2022 electoral campaign in the Philippines was considered, and a network of connections has been made that led to this framework.

Using Jenkins's (2006) transmedia narrative outline, Gambarato's (2012) analysis of transmedia narratives, Gurel & Tigli's (2014) transmedia and social media, and Penn's (2020) video-first transmedia framework, a political campaign transmedia framework was formed from the examples of Leni Robredo and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos.
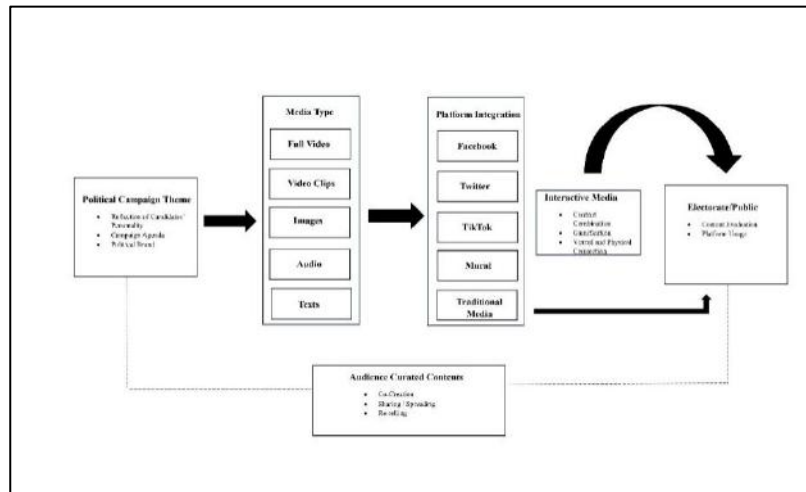
Figure 1: Transmedia Narrative Framework for Political Campaign
(Ampon & Salathong, 2022)

The figure shows the transmedia narrative framework explicitly postulated for political campaigns. The framework aimed to serve as a political message flow chart for campaign strategists to understand the needed integration to reach and persuade the electorate. With the examples from the 2022 Philippine presidential elections message campaign strategies and previous transmedia frameworks and literature, this framework entails an understanding of the concept. Transmedia Storytelling frameworks available in literature constantly input the origin of the story, the media classification, the platform integration, and the target audience. This provides the idea of interactive media, such as gamification and combination of contents, as seen in the complexity of new media. The framework also highlights the importance of audience-curated content. It allows the story to expand through the content creators and ordinary people's vision. The idea of co-creation, spreading, and retelling the story can impact the target audience in a way that might resonate well with them as they are close to the target demographic.

Strategists' Perception

Message strategy and planning about the campaign theme are crucial as they are something that the voting public remembers and identifies the candidates with. During the campaign, candidates sent out numerous messages, and each post that inspired, triggered, motivated, and challenged the electorate started with a comprehensive communication plan before organizing the campaign.

> The "Liwanag sa Dilim" [Light in Times of Darkness] is an important message during the election campaign. This reflects the goals not just of Leni but of Filipinos to go out of the dark times either from a pandemic or from the oppressive system we have been through. (Leni Robredo's Campaign Strategist)

Central messaging is a known strategy during the campaign. Aside from ROSAS [Pink: Women Empowerment and Hope] and "Sa Gobyernong Tapat, Angat Buhay Lahat" [In an Honest Government, A better life for everyone]. The idea of helping Filipinos recover from the pandemic through transparent leadership solidifies Leni's marketing point by focusing on something that swerves away from the old and traditional political messaging. Her message campaign is fresh and always calling for action, hence, her volunteer-driven campaign.

Unity works well with BBM as it provides a connection for everyone. With due respect to the opposing side, the critics of BBM's work wonder to sustain his campaign because it does not divide people into groups. Including the positive campaign to only focus on the good side and will not rebut criticism as it plays a typical Filipino heroine narrative. (Bongbong Marcos, Campaign Strategist)

As redundant as it may seem to political analysts and people on social media, the consistency of talking about the message of unity helped the Marcos campaign be recognizable even with non-voters, as he used limited message themes only. A positive campaign, on the other hand, is a technique that focuses only on campaigning and persuading people without involving them in major issues, as explained by strategists.

Leni campaign also includes humor and engaging the youth supporters like the trending placard where people can share their ideas and stories about Leni, her personality, her record, and her political brand. It is so impactful specifically to youth because it promotes positive campaigns for everyone and challenges people to think critically. (Leni Robredo's Campaign Strategist)

Interestingly, Leni is nothing short of humor and personality. The creativity in the campaign throughout is remarkable. The political campaign placards from the audience allowed them to share their perceptions and insights on the message they can associate with the campaign. True enough, this placard messaging serves as the "memes" to captivate online users.

We need to have synchronized messaging. If a message can misalign the message, we need to divert that and think of a way during our daily meeting. There is also intensive research from social media monitoring, public relations writers, marketing, and campaign strategists that will plan and strategically send out content. (Bongbong Marcos, Campaign Strategist)

The consistency of the messaging in all aspects speaks volumes about how organized Bongbong's political messaging is. The collective message concept can help the campaign create one view, making it easier for the candidate to reiterate the campaign message. Research and collaboration with different messaging experts are needed to ensure the quality of the message.

Leni's and Bongbong's political message strategies differ in how they plan out their messaging campaigns. Leni's message strategy includes a new touch to the electoral campaign as she presents topics that are commonly neglected. Her campaign includes a complex and creative messaging process from her and her supporters alike. Meanwhile, Bongbong strategizes so that every bit of information can be related to the central idea of unity.

Conclusion

In the battle of two leading presidential candidates, they both use the concept of "pagkakaisa" or "unity" as a similar message with a different delivery. While it is argued that a political message during any campaign is necessary for winning, there is no denying that how the candidates deliver the message changes the electorate's perception and makes a better impact. The candidate's framing of calling the Filipinos to come together and show strength in unison directly impacts how the message resounds. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos consistently

mentioned *pagkakaisa,"*or that being one is necessary to achieve greatness. He reiterates This broad statement and message in every speech rally, campaign materials, song, mural, and social media post. Leni Robredo also sends a message of *lhagma,"*or joining forces, as if taking the initiative to create a union against a force. Her speech rallied people together to work and volunteer for a cause of the campaign to win not the candidate but the people. Her message of "unity" requires people to work, volunteer, sacrifice, and compromise to achieve better. Unfortunately, it is hard to unite and sacrifice in a country where the public does not have so much on their plate.

In this electoral campaign trail, it is essential to create a simple and understandable message for the public at large because the candidate should sell the message to them. At the same time, developing a message of working with the people is progressive, like a grassroots approach; consideration of the audience's understanding is deemed necessary. If the message is not delivered to the target audience, the communication will not work.

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