



# **A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NEWS FRAMES ON PHILIPPINE POLITICS IN DIGITAL MEDIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The interplay between strategically framed political narratives and weak media literacy makes media consumers susceptible to propaganda and ideologies which raise socio-political and academic concerns. Recent studies on political representation were highly distinctive and subjective against political actors and failed to acknowledge its impact towards broader power structures. Hence, this critical discourse analysis examined the framing strategies of 109 political news reports using Martin and White's Appraisal Theory and Semetko and Valkenburg's Generic News Frames. The analysis revealed that appraisal strategies use affective, legitimation, and moderation words to reinforce both positive and negative portrayals. However, the discursive analysis showed that political news reports employ framing strategies that generally present Philippine politics negatively and imply polarized, performative, self-serving, and suppressive socio-political structures. Dominant strategies construct and maintain power dynamics through blame seeking, human emotions, past actions, political conflicts, moral violations, and adverse economic consequences to depict adversarial, antagonistic, clientelist, elitist, and ideologies. Overall, the qualitative findings proved that news media narratives strategically package political news reports to shape public opinion and partisan behaviors, which demands for better language skills and media literacy. Pedagogical reforms must emphasize the integration of reading comprehension, critical thinking, and civic awareness to mitigate vulnerability to strategic news propaganda. Future research must venture framing strategies in other contexts to assess the breadth of the implications for understanding the interrelationship among language, pedagogy, and power.

**Keywords:** *news frames, Philippine politics, critical discourse analysis, political news, media literacy, language*

## INTRODUCTION

Media literacy has significantly fluctuated in recent years, as people who access information through social media platforms have become more susceptible to well-framed propaganda. This is reflected in their comprehension of strategically constructed news reports that embed partisan propaganda aimed at manipulating public opinion. This digital problem is widely seen in political discourse, with news reports revolving around strife, anomalies, sensationalized content, and ideologies to maximize audience engagement and instigate polarized exchanges. Media sources employ framing strategies to shape news media interpretation and cultivate biased perspective among media consumers, especially those who lack literacy skills and reading comprehension. Hence, the interplay between strategic news framing and weak media literacy skills poses socio-political and educational concerns.

Globally, most studies in media literacy education grapple with misinformation and disinformation as drivers of political mistrust, disagreement, and polarization. In the United States, it was found that students believed misinformation jeopardizes reliability and trust in news media as they view stories about the government as fabricated (Gaultney et al, 2022). Misinformation, which obscures the difference between factual and manipulated content, carries threats to democratic processes as citizens increasingly depend on social media platforms for news consumption. Another study in the US, Germany, and the Czech Republic revealed that citizens view contemporary concepts of 'alternative facts' and 'fake news' as new normalcies in public discourse and conveniently accept information that supports their pre-existing beliefs (Monsees, 2023; Hameleers, 2022). Moreover, Southeast Asian nations have increased vulnerability to fake news and disinformation brought by the lack of digital literacy and overreliance upon online sources (Putra, 2024). In Indonesia, senior high school teachers attempted to integrate political news literacy into civic education; however, qualitative findings exposed concerns about the influence of misinformation on students' diminishing media literacy, civic engagement, and digital behavior (Manurung et al., 2025).

In the Philippines, where political disinformation and fake news crises are exponentially propagated in digital spaces, there were news articles that strategically used textual and visual tactics to exaggerate claims, misleading readers, and creating ambiguity (Mabanag, 2024). A critical discourse analysis found out that political communication by high-ranking leaders relies on planned linguistic strategies aimed at balancing assertiveness with adaptability, which employ euphemisms, hedges, and parenthetical verbs. These strategies purposefully moderate assertions, weaken controversies, and bend responsibility. These features often use emotionally-charged words and rhetorical devices, suggesting that audience perception varies significantly as both positive and negative responses depend on the sentiment understood (Eslit, 2023).

In campaign discourse, politicians are portrayed as a state's hope, a savior, or a person from poverty to enhance publicity. The realm of political campaigning maximizes discursive strategies such as the use of taglines, testimonials, catchy lines and slogans, humor, repetition, and ad hominem, which are disseminated in platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, to influence societal norms, values, beliefs, and ideologies. Critically, the utilization of social and cultural capital tends to reinforce certain hegemonic features of Philippine political advertising (Valdez & Colcol, 2022).

Meanwhile, in a critical discourse analysis of Duterte's State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs), political communicative strategies are shared extensively online, resulting in far-reaching consequences in the digital world. Based on the speech act theory, the former president used seven speech acts in the SONAs, with Assertive, Directive, and Commissive Acts being the most prominent. Rhetorical assertiveness and command were particularly notable in the 2019 SONA with 68 occurrences and the 2020 SONA with 84 occurrences. The high frequency of both assertive and directive types suggests a presidential focus on performative governance, aimed at enforcing state narratives, political power, and public sentiment (Ybañez et al., 2025).

Complementing this analysis, it was found that Duterte's 5th SONA took advantage of ambiguous and erroneous presupposition triggers, implying the vital role of language in communicating and interpreting political intentions. The frequent use of the phrase "rest assured" in connection with commitments to human rights exemplified the deliberate use of ambiguity, which implicitly alludes to the heightened or worsened human rights crisis associated with the government's war on drugs. Understanding political presupposition is crucial for enhancing the comprehension of political speeches (Murillo & Yeh, 2021).

In an investigation of a political interview using a combination of CDA and Image Restoration Theory, it was understood that government-authorized interviews and press releases sustain Rodrigo Duterte's populist persona. These conversations utilized strategies that either restore tarnished image or uphold public appeal. The maintenance of this public persona was critical for a president's political power and legacy building. In this context, interviews opened contested sites, where politicians present or restore favorable images through their utterances, carefully threading with vulnerabilities and inconsistencies (Navera, 2022).

Furthermore, Dutertismo and populism, as normative theoretical frameworks, within Philippine democracy identified two prevailing views: the deliberative perspective, which emphasizes consensus-building and populist-determined democracy, and the agonistic model, which views conflict as an essential component of populism. Consequently, democracy became a postponed synthesis between consensus-building and the recognition of conflict, allowing for a more comprehensive grasp of democratic complexity and political discourse in the Philippines (Parcon, 2021).

However, despite the extensive review of available and accessible literature, there is a lacuna of existing studies on critical discourse analyses of news frames in digital spaces. Anchored on these current problematic circumstances in the political landscape,

this study analyzed news frames about Philippine politics in digital media. Although there were scholars who ventured on the linguistic and discursive strategies of political news coverage, there remained a gap due to the lack of research that focuses on generic news frames in digital environments and their implication to media literacy education.

Specifically, in Malaysia, Wahab et al. (2025) examined the political ideology bias behind the Malaysian Unity Government in television media narratives. Findings revealed that government press conferences solely present favorable portrayals and curated visuals to reinforce state-centric discourse that puts balanced reporting and media pluralism in the background. However, this study did not involve textual resources in digital news media. In addition, Soriano et al. (2021) explored frames and narratives in television news stories about the Duterte administration, in which research findings discovered that state reports present the government as over-privileged in crystallizing government narratives to justify extrajudicial killings and view drug-related deaths as collateral to the pursuit of public safety. Apparently, this study is subjective due to extreme specificity and potential for bias, failing to account for other players and agencies.

With the limited research on news frames about Philippine politics in digital mainstream media, this critical discourse analysis filled the lacuna by analyzing generic news frames in presenting the statements, actions, decisions, anomalies, and relations of the Philippine national government.

This critical discourse analysis concentrated on the inspection of framing strategies present in digital news reports to illustrate Philippine politics, analyzing how media reportage projects socio-political structures to the public. This, however, did not analyze the entire report, which excluded photos, graphics, animations, videos, and infographics in the analysis. Hence, only textual contents became the focal point of this critical discourse analysis to extract the linguistic choices, framing strategies, and underlying socio-political relationships.

Ultimately, this critical discourse analysis examined how framing strategies in news reports about Philippine politics reflect socio-political structures and imply gaps in media and literacy in education. This analysis also uncovered how linguistic strategies and discursive practices in digital media establish and sustain political structures using news frames in representing political entities and ideologies.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the linguistic markers in digital news reports about Philippine politics?
2. What are the framing strategies present in digital news reports about Philippine politics?
3. How do digital news reports reflect broader socio-political structures in the Philippine political landscape?

## METHODOLOGY

This study specifically employed critical discourse analysis to delve into the framing strategies of digital news reports about the Philippine political discourse, specifically on generic news frames, the role of media in the portrayal of socio-political structures, and its implications for media literacy education.

Accordingly, one-hundred nine (109) online news reports published on the social media sites or official websites of prominent news media were purposely selected based on these criteria: (1) they must be about any political statements, actions, decisions, anomalies, and relations; (2) they must be published from May 2022 to October 2025; (3) they must be published in the official websites of reliable news networks such as Philippine Daily Inquirer, Manila Bulletin, Philippine Star, GMA News, Sunstar, among others; and, (4) they must be written using English as the medium.

In an effort to eliminate bias throughout the conduct of the study, the researchers assigned the initial selection of raw data to media consumers—the students—who selected and supplied a total of 109 news reports. At this phase, the researcher asked senior high school students to collect relevant news reports that present information about Philippine politics, encompassing documented actions, decisions, relations, and anomalies among politicians and government agencies. An online form was provided to the students, where they sent the headline, media source, and uniform resource locator (URL) of their chosen news report.

Accordingly, the data analysis was anchored on existing frameworks to guide the analytical process. The data was analyzed based on Fairclough's framework, which established the analysis at description, interpretation, and explanation levels of news reports about Philippine politics. This had constituted a three-tiered analysis of probing on the linguistic choices, framing strategies, and power struggles and relations.

Martin and White's Appraisal Theory and Semetko and Valkenburg's Generic News Frames outlined the analytical process of the news reports. The CDA on discursive strategies began by isolating statements and vocabularies that signal generic news frames and appraisal. Then, statements and locutions were interpreted based on the tenets under generic news frames to accurately label them, according to the expressions' consistency with the characteristics of each frame. These identified statements were categorized as attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality.

Afterwards, the researcher identified words and phrases that indicate the news frames and interpreted them according to their attitude, engagement, and graduation, in terms of the positionality of actors in news frames. These words were analyzed by attaching their denotative meanings and appraisal categories based on how they express, negotiate, and naturalize ideological positions. This analytical stage established a basis to triangulate the textual observations and socio-political references in published news articles.

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## RESULTS

The analysis revealed the strategic use of linguistic markers to appraise portrayal and positionality in political news reports. The use of engagement markers includes titles, affiliations, and professional designations to legitimize authority and reinforce relevance to the discourse. Linguistic markers functioned to introduce voices as credible and authoritative, strengthening the validity of claims in the digital reports. By referring to actors as national leaders, senators, lawyers, analysts, or government officials in individual and collective voices through monogloss and heterogloss reference, the news reports positioned these individuals as legitimate sources of knowledge and expertise in dealing with political events and issues.

Moreover, the analysis found that attitude markers in the news reports generally attempt to humanize political concerns and personalize public issues. Words indicating affect were evident in the expression of delight, disappointment, and gratitude, underscoring emotional consequences and responses to political topics.

Meanwhile, words showing judgment attached ethical and moral standards to affirm trustworthiness, accountability, and public service on government's proactive actions. Most ideological stances in news reports applied judgment to reinforce the display of ethical governance, presenting actions and decisions that align with the tenets of public trust and service. Other news reports portrayed political figures as corrupt and irresponsible, which weakened image maintenance ideologies, brought about by issues concerning corruption and abuse of power.

However, appreciation markers came scarcely in news reports because of the lack of evaluative and descriptive words for political players and events. This conclusion emerged from the fact that journalism fundamentally intends to capture and present stories accurately, without infusing bias through subjective description and partial assessment.

In the analysis of graduation, the linguistic choice functioned as a mechanism for moderating the intensity of the evaluation (force) and sharpening category boundaries (focus). On one hand, force in news reports amplified positive portrayals by intensifying favorable achievement, which focused on the positive outcome obtained from the fight against corruption. Focus in reporting operated by legitimizing democracy and highlighting public resistance. This strategic scaling of intensity attempted to shape

audience perception towards the positive actions of the government and the nationalism of concerned citizens.

On the other hand, force and focus worked differently in negative reports about the government, particularly on controversies and scandals. Words that indicated force often lowered the intensity through softened and euphemized expressions that dissipate direct accusation and criticism. Focus also softened boundaries when challenges to power and authority are reported, minimizing categorical language that can associate officials with issues that can tarnish their name and decrease public support.

Meanwhile, in the analysis of framing strategies using Semetko and Valkenburg's Generic News Frames, communicative strategies served varied purposes depending on the government's image and positionality in the report, exposing socio-political structures and ideologies that either preserve or defy dominance. Attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality, and economic consequences allowed news reporters to package textual content based on officials' actions and statements with implicit biases and ideologies.

In attribution of responsibility, three framing strategies emerged: (1) expert opinion, (2) blame seeking, and (3) heroic narrative. Expert opinion signals attribution of responsibility to relevant expertise through consultation, advice, review, and verification. Attribution to experts legitimizes dominant political structures and protects the image of the government, especially in their legal, medical, and legislative moves. Expert opinion also neutralizes complaints and accusation by providing informed rejection of controversies, most evident in the denial of the drug use accusation towards President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and the review of corruption charges against Vice President Sara Duterte. This framing strategy constitutes authoritarianism that makes the top-level administration the sole legitimate source of power, weakening those who stand against them.

Blame seeking also attributes responsibility. However, this framing strategy comes by condemning an individual who failed to deliver results or violated any legal grounds. Blame puts an individual at the center of anomalies and problem, presenting him as responsible for systemic setbacks and administrative breakdowns. This strategy is evident in news reports about the massive flood control scandal in the Philippines. Blame seeking takes on punitive and penal accountability lenses, which position the complainants as political moralists.

In contrast, heroic narrative attributes responsibility through self-legitimation and self-credit. News reports about positive outcomes recognize specific officials' self-proclaimed contributions, while positioning the administration as a proactive and responsive political institution. Heroic narratives attribute credit to leaders in the success of collective efforts against social issues, implying their self-representation as the face of the solution and progress. This frame is seen through the statements of President Marcos Jr. about the administration's effort to combat corruption and expose the flood control scandal.

In human interest, three framing strategies were observed: (1) human emotion, (2) personal history, and (3) alliances. Human emotions highlight officials' affective faculty, as seen in their reactions to political events. Affirmative and negative responses often personalize governmental problems and undermine expected outcomes. Emotions anchor on representative metonymy to present individual emotions as the response of the entire institution and humanize the government to make it more relatable and authentic. This strategy propagates personalism and populism that sets political discourse based on emotion and reaction to adhere to public affect and interests.

Personal history also displays human interest by ascribing individual stories in the news reports based on former affiliations and past actions. Retrospective narratives provide background information about political actors and establish relevance to the discourse. However, the analysis suggests that personal history indicates elite reinforcement, credibility strengthening, and sustained positionality, while some news reports depoliticize individuals by introducing their occupational identity behind politics.

Another human-interest framing strategy revolves around alliances, pertaining to kinship and relationship. News reports use personal and political associations to substantiate elite powers and hierarchical institutions, revealing the deep-rooted culture of political dynasties in the Philippines. This framing strategy is evident in the reports about the alliance-building among family members and coalition members that aims to protect identities and reputations, insinuating institutionalist and in-group ideologies among elites and oligarchs in the political landscape.

In the conflict generic frame, four framing strategies became clear: (1) government against the corrupt, (2) advocates versus unjust officials, (3) divided administration, and (4) dynasty feud. Firstly, the government-versus-corrupt-politicians narrative entails the administration's publicized effort to eradicate corruption and abuse of power. News reports with this frame position the government in a positive light, underscoring their efforts to punish officials who amassed public funds and abused their authority. Pro-government narratives empower statist and clientelist ideologies by exaggerating a constitutional obligation through statements about eliminating corruption in the interest of the people. This framing strategy is observed in the new reports about the investigation of the anomalous flood control projects.

Another pro-government framing strategy captures narratives about advocates fighting against unjust officials. News reports package citizens' resistance against abusive and corrupt politicians as a conflict between two parties. This strategy is common in reports about common people and individuals in authority who stood against unethical governance by filing legal charges and public callout. Advocates challenge dominant political structures, censuring corruption, intimidation, injustice, and negligence. Political unrest may arise as the media antagonizes officials who corrupt their power, therefore depicting an unpleasant image to the public and demonstrating activist ideologies.

In contrary, news reports also cling on packaging conflicts through a divided administration frame. News reports about the lack of unity within the national government,

most especially the rivalry between President Marcos Jr. and Vice President Duterte, displayed warring officials and polarized support. Supporters and enablers of the two camps exacerbate the existing conflict, which the media takes advantage of, and imply a political competition ideology for the hold of power. This framing strategy disseminates political antagonism and factionalism, leading to dealignment among national leaders and their supporters.

Lastly, the dynasty feud is a conspicuous framing strategy, centered on the clan rivalry between the Dutertes and Marcoses. Media companies boost the frequency and depth of coverage about the conflict after their electoral bloc broke down. This brings the notion that the Philippine political landscape is generally engulfed by political dynasties that monopolize the distribution of authority in local and national government units. The power struggle among dynasties instigates publicizing accusations and issues that besmirch the namesake of the opposing clan and cultivate zero-sum dynamics.

In the morality frame, two framing strategies were observed: (1) ethical governance and (2) moral violations. News reports about ethical governance reflects value-laden governance through statements that depict Philippine politics being governed by universal values and general truth. This strategy specifies accountability, transparency, and truth as the major parameters of a virtuous government. Ethics frames also package the administration based on established values that serve as cornerstones of political integrity to solicit public trust and better representation, propagating moralism and legalism to develop a brand of ethical governance.

However, news reports about moral violations deal with statements and actions that flout the tenets of ethical governance. This frame stems from the declaration and call for accountability based on morality and conscience. Moral turpitude among government officials puts the entire government on a negative footing, which results in public criticism and divided opinion. This instills the rule-of-law ideology where public officials are pressed with charges of moral and legal violations. However, in most news reports, strategic ambiguity and denial are applied to protect faces and authority.

Finally, in the economic consequences generic frame, two contrasting framing strategies emerged: (1) promised progress and (2) adverse effects on people. Pro-government framing strategies also highlight officials' vision of economic development and sustainability. This is illustrated through the administration's remarks about economic progress, emphasizing the positive outcomes when the government eliminate corruption and implement reforms. Progressivist frames boost political support and strengthen power structures as the public provides support for improvement, which politicians use to frame their statements about economic growth.

The adverse-economic-consequences framing strategy highlights how economic and financial disruptions harm lives. There were also cases where the effects are predicted based on existing political conditions and natural disasters that eventually translate into a disadvantage for the public. Negative effects on people positions the government in public scrutiny, especially for situations that emerged from unfinished

projects and lack of preparedness, as people demand for accountability on matters that the government must initiate and handle, highlighting how economic consequences demonstrate humanism in a crisis framing ideology.

## DISCUSSION

Strategically framed news reports contain linguistic and communicative strategies that reinforce political propaganda and ideologies that the media intentionally or inadvertently infuse in their reportage. Diction and framing strategies generate messages that entail positionality, promote political ideologies, and sustain power structures.

The analysis of political news reports highlights a sophisticated use of linguistic markers to shape public perception and establish authority. By employing engagement markers, reports legitimize external voices through both monoglossic and heteroglossic references, positioning actors as authoritative sources of knowledge.

Attitude markers further influence the narrative by using affect to humanize political issues through emotion and judgment to frame actions within ethical or moral standards. While this often reinforces the image of ethical governance, it is also used to critique corruption and power abuses. Appreciation markers are rare, reflecting a journalistic effort to maintain perceived objectivity by avoiding descriptive bias.

Crucially, the mechanism of graduation serves as a gateway for political evaluation. In positive contexts, graduation is used to amplify achievements and sharpen the image of a functional democracy. Conversely, in reports regarding scandals or controversies, these tools are often used to weaken criticism. Through softened force and blurred focus, the language minimizes direct accusations and euphemizes challenges to authority, strategically shielding political figures from the full weight of public scrutiny.

Fundamentally, linguistic choice establishes the explicit content and implicit message in news frames. The analysis of framing strategies found out that the government often cite experts like forensic investigators to legitimize political actions and project objectivity. Expert citation increases news trustworthiness more than general public opinion (Beckers, 2022). However, authority fallacy may arise when selective media framing distorts expert input to fuel biased narratives or disinformation (Nowakowska-Głuszak, 2026). Ultimately, expert involvement is a double-edged sword that can either bolster institutional credibility through clarity or be manipulated to shield administrative agendas.

News reports on government anomalies frequently employ a blame-seeking frame to attribute liability and responsibility, often manifesting as scapegoating by leaders and targeted attacks against the opposition. Fault-finding orientations encourage strategic disavowal, allowing politicians to dodge accountability. Flinders and Hinterleitner (2025) termed this strategy 'performative theatrics' aimed at deflecting public backlash. Media outlets also curate these narratives to intensify pressure on government-affiliated agents,

often requiring institutional levers like probes or sanctions to validate the spectacle (Heinkelmann-Wild et al., 2023; Naz, 2025). This frame serves as a conditional strategy where selective reporting mediates the tension between punitive accountability and actual political reform.

Philippine media balances blame-seeking trends with heroic narratives, where politicians engage in credit-grabbing by positioning themselves as the primary drivers of anti-corruption efforts and public service. This framing crafts a likable representation of figures of hope who rescue the citizenry from villains or oppressive social structures, thereby boosting public trust and engagement. Supporting this, contemporary national heroism is often a product of selective media and political lenses, suggesting that leaders gain relevance by projecting images of resilience and assertiveness (Capano et al. 2023; Bigazzi et al., 2023). Heroic narratives simplify complex political change into a battle between a resilient hero, the administration in this case, and the powerful enemies of progress, making the politician's role both more persuasive and central to the national discourse.

Moreover, the emotion frame humanizes Philippine politics by prioritizing sentiments over purely information-based arguments to evoke public sympathy. By anchoring reports on expressions like gratitude, grief, or satisfaction, political news reports shape democratic behavior and influence how citizens process political content, transcending traditional partisanship (Webster & Albertson, 2022). However, it also risks fueling misinformation or conspiracy theories. The prevalence of positive over negative emotions in these reports suggests a strategic media preference for optimistic and populist content, which more effectively secures public acquiescence and engagement (Weismueller et al., 2022).

The human-interest frame leverages personal history to make political news in-depth, framing current decisions as logical extensions of an individual's background and previous contributions. By fusing public roles with private narratives, the media provides a context that increases audience engagement and reach (Figenschou et al., 2023). This privatization of political discourse, as described by van Waarden (2022), uses extra-political connections to project the person behind the politician, satisfying a media dramaturgy that prioritizes personal pegs over abstract policy. Moreover, this strategy bolsters perceived authenticity and trustworthiness, as the interplay between personal details and media exposure fosters a more dependable image of political actors in the eyes of the public (Luebke & Engelmann, 2022).

Another framing strategy also maps political actors' alliances, ranging from professional appointments to personal kinship, to provide a human face to organizational dynamics. Political connections amplify media exposure and build institutional trust, while propagating in-group ideologies (Kosiara-Perdersen et al., 2026; Wood et al., 2023). Alliances can strategically challenge incumbent authority and shift voting patterns (Ong, 2022). This framing utilizes personal and partisan networks to cultivate reputation and sustain cultural norms within democratic structures.

For conflict frames, the government-against-corruption frame portrays the government as a protagonist battling political antagonists to expose corruption and the betrayal of public trust. Media coverage of investigations and digital hearings reinforces this anti-corruption narrative, positioning the state as a transparent, intolerant force against malfeasance (Amagnya, 2024; Idrus et al., 2024). By documenting this conflict, news outlets cultivate public support and proactive digital citizenship. Pro-government frames legitimize the government's role as the primary defender of institutional integrity and clientelist treatment for the public.

In addition, the public-resistance conflict frame shifts focus to citizen-led scrutiny and protest against government malfeasance, positioning the public as a conservative league of anti-corruption advocates. In this case, engagement is driven by civic responsibility and a consequential conscience that holds officials accountable for abusing power (Sakban et al., 2025; Downie, 2023). Furthermore, even in polarized societies, both physical protests and digital e-participation act as critical auditing tools that amplify public intolerance for corruption and demand transparency (Schnell, 2023; Waheduzzaman & Khandaker, 2022).

On the contrary, the divided-administration frame illustrates internal government fragmentation, political antagonism, and factionalist dynamics, specifically on the rift between top national leaders as evidence of a polarized landscape. Divided government is characterized by opposing agenda-setting and veto powers, which typically creates expectations of administrative inefficiency and partisan gridlock (Elliott et al., 2022; Loeper & Dziuda, 2025). While this narrative emphasizes the loss of executive unity, it also suggests the strengthening of checks and balances by preventing a monopoly of power and curbing the unchecked expansion of a single political agenda.

The clan-rivalry frame centers on the feud between political dynasties, such as the Marcos and Duterte families, following the collapse of the UniTeam alliance. Kinship-based groups maintain geographical stability and clientelist control, often triggering intense public fanaticism and regional polarization when their interests clash (Teehankee et al. 2023; Mendoza et al., 2022). Furthermore, clan-based rivalries frequently involve a struggle for a monopoly on power, where local conflicts are publicized to capture national media attention and dismantle an opponent's political namesake (Meliala & Permana, 2023). Clash among political clans highlights how dynastic friction can erode public service while reinforcing territorial divides.

Under morality generic frames, ethical governance is a news framing strategy that links government initiatives to core moral values like accountability, transparency, and truth to build public trust and enhance service quality. While this approach aligns with the moral responsibility of liberal-democratic leaders, a tension often exists between a politician's public persona and their private morality (Downie, 2023). Consequently, despite officials projecting themselves as moral and legal intermediaries, a disconnect is often perceived between a government's projected moral compass and its actual motives.

However, the moral violation frame highlights breaches of legal and ethical norms, portraying government officials as irresponsible or guilty when they prioritize political will over moral standards. Media outlets often anchor these reports in moral philosophy, specifically deontological ethics, to emphasize the violation of duties (Bruns & Knop-Huelss, 2023; Quayle & West, 2025). These narratives trigger strong cognitive and affective responses, which can foster social solidarity and collective action among public groups (Pauls et al., 2022). However, public judgment is often filtered through partisanship, and individuals frequently display higher tolerance for moral transgressions when committed by politicians they support compared to those from opposing parties (Walter & Relawsk, 2023).

Lastly, for economic consequences, the economic-progress frame is a dominant media strategy that highlights government commitments to growth, sustainability, and improved financial standing. While governments often form growth coalitions to respond to electoral pressures and recalibrate policy models, this projection of progress faces significant scrutiny (Baccaro & Pontusson, 2023). Economic advancement can lead to increased government debt and unintended economic consequences (Koyama & Rubin, 2022). Furthermore, the inconsistencies between official reports and lived reality, specifically noting that positive economic figures in the Philippines have failed to resolve persistent challenges (Tan, 2024). Consequently, while this framing aims to bolster leadership, it often fails to gain public traction as citizens hinge on their actual economic conditions over projections of growth.

The adverse-effects-to-people frame emphasizes economic and financial consequences of government failure, corruption, and disasters on citizens' well-being, focusing on declining GDP, job losses, and public health risks. This strategy often portrays the marginalized as the primary victims of an anti-poor and elitist system (Quayle & West, 2025). Leaders' self-interest exacerbates this inequality by undermining community-centric models (Rousseau, 2024). Furthermore, corruption inherently benefits the powerful while treating the common people as collateral, reinforcing a narrative where the disadvantaged bear the brunt of societal problems and financial fallout (Johnston, 2024).

Overall, the strategic synergy between linguistic markers and news frames constructs and sustains political ideologies. Subtle linguistic choices perform as the precision instruments that build broader narratives. When these markers are integrated into frames of ethical governance or heroic leadership, they reinforce pro-government ideologies by projecting morality and competence. Conversely, when applied to blames, conflicts, economic consequences, and moral violation, they mobilize public resistance by highlighting systemic failures. Ultimately, the media portrayal acts as a gatekeeper for political evaluation and public trust, which shields power through strategic news reports or exposes it through the stark framing of institutional transgression.

## Conclusions

Media literacy has considerably shifted in recent years, as individuals who rely on social media platforms for information have become increasingly vulnerable to strategically framed propaganda. This is evident in how audiences interpret news reports that contain partisan ideologies designed to influence public perception of the Philippine political landscape.

After the critical discourse analysis of digital news reports, the study concludes that linguistic markers in digital news reports about Philippine politics function as strategic tools for legitimizing authority, shaping public perception, and expressing ideological positioning. Engagement markers establish credibility through titles and institutional affiliations, while attitude markers humanize political issues through emotional and ethical evaluations. Moreover, graduation resources intensify positive portrayals of governance and soften criticism in controversial issues, revealing how language is used to either reinforce or challenge power and authority.

Furthermore, the study substantiates that digital news reports employ varied framing strategies that shape the interpretation of political events, actors, and institutions. Frames such as expert opinion, blame seeking, heroic narrative, human interest, conflict, morality, and economic consequences construct narratives that either legitimize governance or expose corruption and systemic failures. These framing strategies influence public understanding by emphasizing accountability, emotional engagement, political rivalry, and socio-economic impact.

Finally, the study affirms the core notion that digital news reports reflect broader socio-political structures in the Philippines by reproducing and contesting ideologies related to power, governance, populism, and political dynasties. Media discourse reinforces institutional authority through legitimizing frames while also enabling public scrutiny through narratives of corruption, conflict, and moral violation. Ultimately, digital news reporting serves as a site where political dominance, resistance, and ideological struggles are continuously negotiated and represented.

In light of this, media literacy education must be strengthened to equip students with the critical competencies necessary for navigating the increasingly complex digital information environment. English language teachers play an essential role in developing reading comprehension, critical thinking, and cross-referencing skills that enable learners to analyze political news reports objectively and identify ideological framing, misinformation, and disinformation. These macro skills extend beyond language learning because they help students evaluate sources, interpret contexts, and make informed judgments about digital content. Hence, curriculum developers and educators must integrate practical and performance-based media literacy strategies into language instruction to prepare students for responsible participation in digital and civic spaces.

Additionally, the study highlights the urgent need to revitalize media literacy and civic education within the Philippine educational system, including other Southeast Asian

countries. The removal of media and information literacy as a core subject limits students' ability to process political information critically and ethically in an era marked by information crises and digital polarization.

Beyond technical media skills, students must also develop political awareness and participatory citizenship to understand the broader implications of governance, public accountability, and civic engagement. Therefore, curriculum developers and movers must implement a more systematic and pragmatic approach to media literacy education that integrates language learning, ethical digital behavior, and civic responsibility in nurturing informed, critical, and active citizens.

## **Recommendations**

The study examined how language and politics shape public opinion through digital news reports, but its findings were limited by the selected media outlets and textual focus, suggesting the need for broader future research. The following interests are suggested:

- Future studies may conduct critical discourse analyses of media narratives on specific government sectors to further explore how framing strategies influence public opinion and contribute to language studies.
- Future research may also expand analyses to other media forms such as broadcast, print, television, and student publications to compare political framing and media representation across professional and campus journalism.
- Future research may investigate framing strategies and ideologies in other publication genres, such as editorials, features, sports, and science articles, to better understand how the media construct social and political meanings.
- Future studies may confirm the findings through a multi-method study, particularly through in-depth interviews and focus groups with media consumers or news writers to examine their experiences, motivations, and perspectives in framing political narratives and comprehending news reports.

## **Compliance with Ethical Standards**

This study's ethical considerations comprehensively outlined the protocol of its conduct, which includes informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, transparency, and researchers' qualifications.

The researcher attempted to seek the permission of editors and executive officers of mainstream media outlets from which the news reports were gathered. A permission letter, signed by the Research Ethics Committee and Dean of the Graduate Education program, was sent through electronic mail to ask consent to analyze their property and pay respect to the reputation of their company. However, their response did not affect or

delay the continuity of this CDA as the research corpora are posted for public consumption and scrutiny.

This research also adhered to privacy and confidentiality, as it is critical due to the personal, often sensitive and traumatic, nature of qualitative data. News reports' sources and writers were kept private and confidential, only under the researchers' possession and control.

Accordingly, the researcher tagged each corpus with codes to conceal any identifying information. Moreover, the researcher systematically stored physical documents via sealed envelopes in a safe file cabinet and created password-secured digital drives for digital data, which were securely disposed of after completing this research. Moreover, the researcher held pertinent documents with exclusivity and privacy, while keeping confidential information with utmost secrecy.

For transparency, the researcher presented the purpose and logic behind the systematic procedure to members, peers, and readers, excluding confidential information. Audit trails and reflexive journals were kept openly available for external evaluation and validation.

Moreover, the researcher admitted that artificial intelligence (AI) was used, however only maximized for better clarity, structure, and efficiency, especially on grammar-checking and referencing. This step indicated the researcher's awareness of his limitations as a scholar, who sought assistance from technological tools to improve the quality of this critical discourse analysis. The researcher had submitted an AI disclosure statement to provide evidence on the ethical use of AI in the research process.

Ultimately, the researcher, prior to the conduct of this study, had acquired complete academic requirements in a graduate education program, specifically the Master of Arts in Education Major in English. He gained fundamental knowledge of conducting ethical research, which was manifested upon the completion of research-related courses, such as Qualitative Research Writing and Thesis Writing 1. This manifested that the researcher was fully equipped with the necessary skills to propose and complete a comprehensive and in-depth qualitative study.

The researcher received assistance and guidance from academicians, scholars, and experts, who have extensive knowledge in research, particularly in critical discourse analysis. They supported the researcher in validating the procedures, decisions, and analyses by refining the findings with external evaluation and expert-level knowledge on research approaches.

The researcher also regularly consulted with my thesis adviser, who is a Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Linguistics with profound experience in teaching, research writing, advising, and paneling in graduate school. He also obtained an extensive reputation in publications and peer reviews, with highly cited works in the fields of language teaching, linguistics, and social science. Hence, the researcher referred to his research adviser and

trusted his deep knowledge of research, as well as his years of experience guiding graduate students, to guarantee the soundness and robustness of this CDA study. This ensured that data collection and analysis were completed with the highest level of academic excellence.

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