FROM THE WORDS OF A STRONGMAN:
A Textual Analysis of
President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's Talk to the People Speeches During the Election Season vis-à-vis Audience's Social Media Engagements

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ABSTRACT

Using the Habermasian Public Sphere as a framework, the research examined President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's Talk to the People Speeches from April 11 to May 12, 2022, vis-à-vis the comments found during his live speeches on the Inquirer Facebook page. The study described the emergent themes in PRRD's speeches and interpreted the arising discourses among various audiences on social media, particularly Facebook, concerning these speeches. The researcher was convinced that a careful examination of political discourses is a must, even more so now because of the rampant disinformation and spread of fake news, not to mention political propaganda and some attempts at historical revisionism. PRRD's speeches were thematically analyzed, while the comments were triangulated using frequency distribution and textual analysis. The findings revealed that the themes that emerged in Duterte's speeches were the same as his former ones, where he praises his allies and lambasts his critics in public while convincing the audience that he is anti-corruption and has led a clean government. As shown in most of the comments analyzed, most of his supporters continued to show loyalty despite his major blunders. The paper concluded that the former President used his platform to subtly gain future favors from the incoming administration while still maintaining his strongman façade. Facebook, as a digital Public Sphere, challenged Habermas' original model since Duterte as the State and the Netizens as the People shared the same sentiments and overlapped, blurring the lines of their distinction. The researcher recommended that teachers in all grade levels teach the

students critical thinking combined with fact-checking and use political discourses as a springboard for practice.

Introduction

"They say I'm a bully. You're all fools. I am really a bully, son of a bitch. I am really a bully, especially to the enemies of the state."

- Pres. Rodrigo Roa Duterte
SONA 2017 (Salaverria, 2017)

Philippines' strongman. Duterte Harry. DU30. PRRD. These were just some of the names associated with Rodrigo Roa Duterte, the free-spirited former President, known for his friendly demeanor towards China and his condescending dealing toward the US. He continued to top the satisfaction ratings despite accusations of authoritarianism and bigotry toward criticisms (Perry, 2021).

It can be recalled that the populist leader won in a landslide victory in 2016 when he charmed the public with his promises of 6-month eradication of the country's drug problem (BBC News, 2022). During his 6-year reign, he was called out for his misogynistic comments, claims of sexual abuse, human rights violations, and the purge of thousands of Filipinos due to his ever-controversial War on Drugs.

PRRD's supporters were called Diehard Duterte Supporters or DDS. Sometimes its meaning was linked to the controversial Davao Death Squad (an alleged vigilante group in Davao City), a group of political extremists that defended Duterte's ways of governance. As time passed by, DDS may now refer to any person who blindly follows PRRD (which often has a negative connotation and can be regarded as an insult). Duterte's victory in 2016 showed that even without political machinery, his supporters got hold of an effective political tool that led him to the presidency—social media.

Social media has become a tool for politicians to reach a wide array of audiences. Barack Obama won the 2008 United States presidential election using social media and mobilizing the general public online. Trump's social media presence was the most salient factor behind his success in the 2016 presidential election. Using Twitter and Facebook ads allowed him to trample his opponents and win. This trend in political campaigning was also picked up by PRRD's supporters in 2016 and continued until his last days in office.

Facebook, as a communicative space, has often been regarded as the Digital Public Sphere since access is guaranteed to all citizens, though imperfectly because not everyone has internet access. Every person at

least 13 years of age can set up an account and become a user. According to Habermas and his colleagues, "*a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body [...] where they confer in an unrestricted fashion*" (1974). Facebook users, now called *netizens*, were private individuals (albeit some are fake accounts or members of troll farms) engaging in public conversations through the comment sections of various news pages. Netizens still discuss and exchange opinions freely though Facebook has a policy against nudity or other sexually suggestive content, hate speech, credible threats, or direct attacks on an individual or group, and content that contains self-harm or excessive violence. They still discuss and exchange opinions in a free-flowing manner despite the aforementioned Facebook's community policies. Thus, this paper analyzed the competing discourses that arose in Facebook as a digital public sphere.

Literature Review

Because of the President's colorful and distinctive language, his discourses have become a popular area of study among analysts. His stylistic and reasoning strategies (Sabio & Lintao, 2018), linguistic features (Remorosa, 2018; Tamano et al., 2021), swear words (Berowa, 2019), speech acts features, and rhetoric strategies (Medriano & De Vera, 2019), dominant speech acts (Devanadera & Alieto, 2019; Gelilang et al., 2021), micro-features of his discourses (Lemana & Gatcho, 2020), transitivity processes (Salayo, 2020) and use of presupposition triggers (Murillo & Yeh, 2021) were just some of the texts that were studied to uncover more of Duterte's distinctive way of communication. They have examined texts to expose underlying social issues and ideologies (Remorosa, 2018; Salayo, 2020; Tamano et al., 2021), his view on the Philippines' relation to other countries (Chaerunnisa & Dewi, 2019), his pragmatic functions (Berowa, 2019; Devanadera & Alieto, 2019), how he presented himself and his opponents (Lemana & Gatcho, 2020), and his political intentions (Murillo & Yeh, 2021).

Researches also used diverse materials to make sense of Duterte's overall communicative stance. Some of these researches have utilized his state of the nation addresses (Salvaleon, 2018; Dimaculangan & Dimaculangan, 2018, Remorosa, 2018; Quijano, 2019), his speeches during his first 100 days (Berowa, 2019), and his first six months in the office (Sabio & Lintao, 2018), news reports, public debates, survey results, and official policy documents (Juego, 2018), inaugural speeches, ASEAN

chairmanship acceptance, manifestoes, international conferences, and state visit speeches (Remorosa, 2018), interviews (Chaerunnisa & Dewi, 2019; Lemana & Gatcho, 2020), speeches delivered before the academe, the press, and diplomats (Medriano & De Vera, 2019), commemorative speeches (Devanadera & Alieto, 2019), his speeches about COVID-19 (Salayo, 2020; Tamano et al., 2021) and his streamed March 12, 2020 address via PTV4's Youtube Channel (Gelilang et al., 2021).

Several theories were also used as the backbone of these studies. The most widespread ones include Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Salvaleon, 2018; Dimaculangan & Dimaculangan, 2018; Quijano, 2019, Salayo, 2020, Tamano et al., 2021), Benoit and Benoit's (2011 in Sabio & Lintao, 2018), Foremling et al.'s (2008 in Sabio & Lintao, 2018) Reasoning Strategies Model, Van Dijk's Macro Strategies of Presentation (Chaerunnisa & Dewi, 2019), Aristotle's Rhetoric (Quijano, 2019; Medriano & De Vera, 2019), Jay's Neuro-Psycho-Social Theory of Speech (Berowa, 2019), Austin's (1955 in Medriano & De Vera, 2019; Devanadera & Alieto, 2019) Speech Act Theory, Chilton's (2004 in Lemana & Gatcho, 2020) Theory of Political Discourse, Matthiessen's (2004 in Salayo, 2020; Tamano et al., 2021) Transitivity System, Searle's (1969 in Gelilang et al., 2021) Classification of Speech Acts, and Yule's (1996 in Murillo & Yeh, 2021) six types of presupposition.

Methodologically, researchers have opted to analyze his speeches in a full circle, employing both quantitative and qualitative strategies (Salvaleon, 2018; Dimaculangan & Dimaculangan, 2018; Sabio & Lintao, 2018; Quijano, 2019; Medriano & De Vera, 2019; Salayo, 2020; Murillo & Yeh, 2021). However, the most frequently used methodology to analyze his speeches was simple Discourse Analysis (Berowa, 2019; Devanadera & Alieto, 2019; Gelilang et al., 2021), which varies from Political Discourse Analysis (Lemana & Gatcho, 2020) to either Van Dijk's (Salvaleon, 2018; Chaerunnisa & Dewi, 2019) or Fairclough's (Dimaculangan & Dimaculangan, 2018; Quijano, 2019; Tamano et al., 2021) Critical Discourse Analysis.

Analyzing PRRD's various speeches has led to several findings about the language of his discourse. Salvaleon (2018) found that Duterte dominantly used mental processes to prove what he has done as a President. Though it did not seem so, his textual function revealed that his whole addresses were coherent, accurate, and logical (Salvaleon, 2018). PRRD's deictic names for various groups of Filipino listeners unite them into one solid community (Dimaculangan & Dimaculangan, 2018).

Duterte sounded more consistent and sincerer with his intentions and claims as conveyed by his employment of these consistent people deictic markers. Remorosa (2018) found that to shorten the distance between him and the audience, PRRD mostly used simple words and straight-to-the-point short sentences instead of complex ones. He employed the first-person plural "we," which promotes solidarity and camaraderie between them and their audience (Quijano, 2019).

Former studies also focused on PRRD's communicative strategies as a President. Sabio and Lintao (2018) found that his persuasion method, perception of reality, and self-presentation emerged in the way he used his reasoning strategies. His reasoning strategies showed that he preferred to present reasons, cite examples, and construct assertions from premises or claims he had mentioned instead of objective sources. Chaerunnisa and Dewi's (2019) findings revealed that the macro discursive strategies used by PRRD are positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, and outside polarization. However, PRRD's communicative style used presuppositions to capture his audience's interest, but many of these are elliptical or *paikot-ikot*, debatable, informal, and implied (Murillo & Yeh, 2021).

PRRD's linguistic functions were also the most researched subject of previous studies. Berowa (2019) examined the President's swearing and found that he swears to express emotions, call others names, avoid repetition, intensify his claims, and build solidarity. Medriano and De Vera (2019) found that the President used his political speeches to put forward his so-called "supremacy" in the government. Duterte was established by Lemana and Gatcho (2020) as someone who asserted power and domination through his manipulative use of language, painting himself positively while commenting negative remarks on others. PRRD's speeches showed that he had a specific and definite plan of action and emotional appeal that convinced the public that he was a political leader that could beat the COVID-19 crisis (Salayo, 2020). While his language choice showed vulnerability, he also manifested his resolve as the country's leader by positioning himself as the person in charge of certain powers granted to him by Congress (Tamano et al., 2021). Lastly, Gelilang et al. (2021) scrutinized PRRD's linguistic preferences and found that his language use was deeply invested in promoting solidarity as a nation.

Various scholars have also taken their time to investigate the recurring issues or themes in PRRD's speeches. Remorosa's (2018)

analysis of Duterte's speeches revealed his political will to foster viable foreign alliances and proposed actions, democracy, wage war against corruption and create safeguards for the economy, and lastly, improve all sectors of the country. Meanwhile, Devanadera and Alieto's (2019) study found PRRD's commemorative speeches to only focus on the government's War on Drugs campaign.

Lastly, Duterte's brand of populism also ignited the curiosity of some researchers. Bonn Juego's (2018) study found that PRRD's populism draws its discursive popularity and legitimacy from the material realities and real-life conditions in the society, while Hapal (2021) reiterated that Duterte's populist rhetoric served as the speech act that argued for and legitimized the securitization of COVID-19.

Given these several studies that focused on President Duterte's various political speeches, one cannot ignore the fact that they, too, have posed several limitations. A limited number of speeches (Dimaculangan & Dimaculangan, 2018; Chaerunnisa & Dewi, 2019; Gelilang et al., 2021; Murillo& Yeh, 2021), diverse and incomparable texts (Remorosa, 2018), and subjective choice (Tamano et al., 2021) of materials to be analyzed were just some of these limitations.

Considering these previous endeavors, the researcher decided to continue the literature on the analyses of PRRD's discourses, this time focusing on his Talk to the People speeches during the 2022 election season vis-a-vis the audience's social media engagements. The current study aimed to answer the questions:

1. How did PRRD communicate his political agenda through his Talk to the People speeches at the height of the 2022 Election Season?
2. How were his speeches reflected in the audience's social media engagements?

To answer these questions, the researcher came up with the following objectives, using the Habermasian framework as the pattern:
1. To describe PRRD's Talk to the People Speeches according to emergent themes
2. To interpret the arising discourses among various audiences in social media concerning PRRD's speeches
3. To explain how Facebook as a platform serves as a digital Public Sphere

The study was conceived under the premise that careful examination of political discourses is a must, even more so now because of the rampant disinformation and spread of fake news, not to mention political propaganda and some attempts at historical revisionism. If more teachers will conduct message analysis, they will be more able to teach this skill to their students. As a communication teacher, the researcher has confidence that she can teach her students more if she knows how to conduct a discourse analysis of several kinds. When students are trained to look at language beyond its surface-level meaning, they cannot be easily deceived or politicized. Lastly, the researcher also considers that knowledge can be found in the real-world setting, which is why she was aiming to study a phenomenon that is not only confined to academia but in a large-scale arena. In short, communication students, discourse analysts, and political advisers can use this study's results.

Framework

According to German Philosopher Jurgen Habermas, the public sphere was the middle ground or an area of compromise between the state and the people (1974). This neutral space was a fundamental part of democracy. Individuals within this space (primarily physical) come together as a public to openly discuss matters of public concern, which in turn forms a public opinion (Habermas et al., 1974). This space was open to all and did not matter on characteristics such as class and, ideally, was universally accessible to all.

A portion of the public sphere came into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. Citizens behaved as a public body when they conferred in an unrestricted fashion, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest.

The Habermasian Public Sphere comprised two primary elements— the State and the People. The State has its representative that shows himself publicly. He or she was the embodiment of an ever-present "higher" power. The authority of political power today still demands representation at the highest level by a head of state. The Society, also known as the People, on the other hand, was a private realm occupying a position in opposition to the state. It stood on the one hand as if in clear contrast to the state. Habermas designated that the State and the Public Sphere do not overlap, as one might suppose. Rather, they confronted

one another as opponents.

In this study, the researcher supposed that social media serves as a digital public sphere, particularly Facebook. However, contrary to the Habermasian context, Facebook was never a neutral ground between the State and the People since issues about algorithms and undemocratizing features of the platform have long been exposed. Instead of physically coming together in an open space to discuss matters of public concern, netizens flock to the comments section of a particular post to give their own viewpoints on different public matters. Like the original Habermasian Public Sphere, Facebook s accessible to all people (albeit debatable) with an internet connection (sometimes just free data). Facebook as the digital Public Sphere come into being when once-private individuals or netizens go to the Comments Section of public posts and express their opinions on various matters, especially political ones. Netizens, as the People, discuss political topics in an open, free, and unconstrained manner, even if Facebook has its Community Standards.

The elements of this study include PRRD as the State and the Netizens as the People. PRRD is the representative of the State that shows himself publicly in his weekly Talk to the People speeches on PTV4, the government's television channel. These speeches, in turn, are broadcasted live on the Facebook pages of different news and media outlets. The Netizens will represent the People in this study. The Netizens' interaction in the Digital Public Sphere will be analyzed via their comments on the live speeches of PRRD.

Research Design

In this study, the researcher used Textual Analysis to analyze PRRD's Talk to the People Speeches and the Netizens' comments in each live video. The themes that emerged in PRRD's Talk to the People (TttP) Speeches from April 11 to May 12, 2022 were described. These were speeches broadcasted within a month before and a day after the May 9 Elections since the research focused on the speeches during the Election Season. The transcripts of the speeches were taken from the official website of the Presidential Communications and Operations Office. Only PRRD's parts in the speeches were analyzed since TttP also included his cabinet members that reported on issues being addressed in their corresponding departments. Speeches were analyzed thematically using Textual Analysis (See Appendix A).

The researcher used two methods to determine the process of

interpretation of the audience concerning PRRD's TttP speeches. First, the researcher looked for a news organization that has aired all of PRRD's five speeches "live" on its Facebook page. Inquirer.Net has met this criterion. The first method for this layer was to analyze the content of the First 20 Most Relevant Comments per live speech, totaling 100 comments for all five speeches (See Appendix B.1). Again, the comments were analyzed thematically using Textual Analysis as the method (See Appendix B.1.1).

However, to triangulate the result of the first method, the researcher opted to do another thematic analysis (See Appendix B.2.1), this time on comments that *actually engaged* with the speech in focus (See Appendix B.2). To determine which comments to analyze, they have to meet the following criteria (Meta Business Help Center, 2022): (1) comment is critical of the topics that were said in the speech; (2) comment either agrees or disagrees with the topic/s in the speech and presents a proof; (3) commented during the airing of the live speech (with time stamp); and/or (4) comment is anything outside "scripted" responses (e.g., You're the best President, PRRD! Woo!)

Results and Discussion

PRRD's five Talk to the People (TttP) Speeches from April 11 to May 12, 2022, were analyzed using Textual Analysis to describe the common emerging themes. Meanwhile, the first 20 Most Relevant comments per live speech and comments that actually engaged with the topics in the speeches were also analyzed using the same method to understand how the Netizens interpret the speeches.

After describing the texts and interpreting how these texts were received by the public, the researcher attempts to explain how PRRD used Facebook as a digital Public Sphere to blur the lines between the State and the People, using the Netizens to disseminate his political will and agenda.

The State: PRRD's Talk to the People Speeches

For the Text Level, PRRD's April 11 to May 12, 2022 Talk to the People Speeches were analyzed. The corpus consisted of a total of five speeches; four of which were delivered before the May 9 elections, while one was delivered three days after the elections. The researcher was able to categorize the texts into eight themes, namely: (1) Talk to the People as Venue for Transparency, (2) Foreshadowing of Farewells, (3)

Commending the Ally, (4) Crucifying the Enemy, (5) Aversion Towards Corruption, (6) Commitment to an Honest Elections, (7) Maintaining Political Neutrality, and lastly, (8) Entrustment and Hope for the Next Administration.

Talk to the People as Venue for Transparency

Talk to the People (TttP from hereon) was a weekly televised speech of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte (PRRD hereon) together with his cabinet members who reported on various issues of the country. It started last April 3, 2020, two weeks after the Enhanced Community Quarantine was implemented in NCR and Luzon. It was initially known as *Talk to the Nation on COVID-19 of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte* and was changed later on to *Talk to the People of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)* on April 13, 2020 (Transcripts, 2020). It aimed to address the nation regarding the status of the country's "war" against the disease and the government's efforts to address this. It was on August 31, 2021, that it became *Talk to the People of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte*, now encompassing other national issues aside from COVID-19.

In the speeches analyzed, Duterte kept on stating that TttP was an avenue for the people to know the "truth" about what was happening in the country. He also said that he could open up to the public whatever issue there was since their job in the government was not to keep secrets.

> [...] *kaya itong 'Talk to the People' para malaman ninyo kung ano 'yung policy, ano 'yung ginagawa namin at totoo ba itong mga balita.* [Talk to the People is for you to know what policy we are doing, and if the news are true.] If you want the truth, try to hear us because we are simply telling the truth. *Wala kaming tinatago.* [We are not hiding anything.] (Duterte, 2022 April 11)

PRRD also mentioned that he always wanted to report to the people what the government had done and what they still intend to do. He said he wanted the people to know what they wanted to do for the country.

> [This] would be a permanent fixture, [...] *itong mga* [these] 'Talk to the People' because we have to communicate with the people, and the people must understand why *itong mga ito [ay] nangyayari ngayon* [these things that are happening]. (Duterte, 2022 April 18)

He also stated that as the need arises, he will amplify the events that needed to be known by the public. PRRD declared that TttP would be a regular meeting until the end of his term, with the purpose only of telling the people the "truth." He even explained that there were *many truths*, but urged the people to listen only to the government's truth since they were "not paid to lie." He reiterated that they were in the government to work and tell the truth, may it reflect them as bad or good, but he would still be frank with the people.

> We are here again talking to you because it is the program; it's called 'Talk to the People.' It has only one purpose actually: to appraise or to let the nation know what's going on in government at *ano 'yung mga bagay-bagay na maka* [and what are the things] — that would affect our well of course the well-being of the nation and our economy. (Duterte, 2022 April 27)

It was on April 27 that PRRD referred to the elections as a serious concern of the government.

> We are here again to make a report to you of what government has done and what government intends to do and what government wants to do including the citizens in the coming elections is just around the corner, about a week from now. (Duterte, 2022 May 3)

PRRD noted that they would only discuss those issues that he thought have found relevance in people's lives. He said that for the years that he was the President, he and his cabinet members were continually discussing only what was good for the country's welfare.

> We are here gathered for the nth time in my city because we have to keep the lines of communications between government and the people always — not sometimes but most of the time, you should know what's happening to our country. (Duterte, May 12)

Foreshadowing of Farewells

Being in the last days in his office, PRRD often used speech markers that connoted saying goodbye in sometimes subtle, most often obvious manners:

> "I am on the homestretch [...]"; "*[...]habang andito pa ako* [while I am still here]"; "[...] until the last day of my office"; "*Balang araw*, [Soon] *hindi ko na problema 'yan* [that would not be my problem anymore]";

> "[...] I am on my last stretch [...]"; "[...] *hanggang katapusan ng pagka* last day *ng ano* ko [until the end of my last day as President]"; *and* "*[...] maski wala na ako* [even if I'm gone]..." (Duterte, 2022 April 11)

In his April 11 speech, PRRD used the British term *homestretch*, which also meant the last part of an activity or campaign. He may be referring to his last days as President. That was why he wanted his countrymen to know that he and his cabinet members were ready to answer all of their questions about governance. He reiterated that masks will be part of the protocol until his last day in the office since he knew their importance. Even if he knew that he would step down someday, and COVID would not be his problem anymore, he still advised the people to do the things that would make the country better for everybody.

Come April 18, the President continued to emphasize the importance of masks which were evident in the following statements: "[...] until the last day, until I go out of the presidency. *Iyon na lang maiwan ko* [I will leave at least that]"; "[...] until the end of my term"; and "[...] I will be here only for a few days and I will go out" (Duterte, 2022 April 18). He said that it would be a mandatory requirement until his last day; after that, it was the next administration's call to mandate it or not since he was no longer in a position to govern. Other forboding statements were mentioned in April, 27 "[...] I'm in my last mile [...]" and May 3 "*[...] Ilang ano na lang araw hindi na ako Presidente. Magbalik ako diyan pasyente na.* [Only a few days and I won't be President anymore. When I go back there, I will be just a patient.]"

In his May 12 TttP, he compared himself to a teacher that aimed to transfer the heart of a democratic country to his students via his weekly lecture as he stated "*[...] paalis na ako* [I'm leaving.] and "*[...] before I end my presidency [...]*." He also offered thanks to our medical professionals, scientists, and frontliners, for doing a remarkable job ever since the start of the pandemic. During this speech, he also voiced out that he feels

patriotic since, in just a matter of weeks, he shall pass on the government to the newly-elected president. He even verbalized that he was happy, that finally, he could rest from all the problems and hand them to the next leader. He also expressed that he was still thinking of what else to say to the people since he had so many stories to tell as a way to unload whatever it was that weighed on his heart.

Commending the Ally

PRRD had been known to be friends with military men, and he often expressed his regard for the police. In his TttP speeches, praises and sympathy for his loyal followers could be heard.

> *Sabihin ko na sa inyo, magalit man kayo o hindi* [I'm telling you, whether you get mad or not], I choose the military men because *maprangkahan ko sila.* [I can be frank with them.] (Duterte, 2022 April 11)

He has expressed his distaste for bureaucracy, saying it only leads to corruption. Whereas if he appointed military men who only do what was being ordered to them, the process will be better as he stated: "[...] I always take care of my police" (Duterte, 2022 April 27). He recalled when he was still the mayor of Davao, he cared for the police. The same can be said with what he was doing now to shield his policemen from their allegations.

> *[...] Kasi it is my stand na mahirapan kasi ang isang pulis* [Because it is my stand that the police would not find it hard] to secure whatever clearance is needed [...] (Duterte, 2022 May 3)

In his May 3 speech, he enjoined the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) to do away with firearms permits for the police since they may have a hard time securing the requirements if their home address was different from their assigned area.

Lastly, PRRD guaranteed the police and the military that even if he was no longer the President, when the time comes that they would be entangled in a lawsuit in their line of duty, he will be the one to act as their lawyer and said, "[...] I will be there to protect you" (Duterte, 2022 May 12). Further, he encouraged them not to fear even if they could not get someone to defend them since he would act on their behalf.

Crucifying the Enemy

Aside from commending his allies in his speeches, PRRD was also known for lambasting his critics in public. Some of these were politicians, groups, and even international organizations.

The most recent target of the President's verbal attacks was Sen. Richard "Dick" Gordon. To whom he has delivered a special mention: "*Kagaya kay Gordon, magsabi ako, 'P***** i**, magnanakaw ka,'* [Like to Gordon, I will say F**k you, you thief!] (Duterte, 2022 April 11). It was in August 2021 when the Senator led a Senate Committee probe into the "overpriced" medical items purchased at the height of the pandemic by the government. It can be recalled that the President initially called Gordon fat, a *"talsik-laway,"* [saliva spitter] and other ad hominems, accusing him and the other senators of "politicking." Eight months later, Gordon was still the object of the President's wrath in his weekly TttP.

In his April 11 speech, he challenged the senator in a public debate, but not without a threat, saying that he had the senator's alleged case number (about the Php86 million that the senator malversed). He also poked fun at the Senator's way of speaking, saying that the stupid guy [Gordon] could rain saliva on the people he was facing.

PRRD muttered that Gordon acted as if he was *holier than thou* by accusing the President of corruption, but he did not follow the COA findings when the Senator was given a notice of disallowance in one of his projects. He even mentioned that the Senator lived in a well-off subdivision, unlike him. Eventually, he dared the Senator to pay the Php86 million and honor the decisions of the Supreme Court. The President urged the Filipino people not to vote for Gordon, which later resonated with the results of the Senatorial election.

> "[...]especially 'yung mga kalaban ng gobyerno [the enemies of the government] for example the Communist Party of the Philippines [...]" (April 11)

It can be remembered that during PRRD's initial reign, he was making efforts to reconcile with leftist groups (Palatino, 2017) but eventually distanced himself from them (Romero, 2018), saying they were to overthrow the government. In his recent speeches, he tagged the Communist Party of the Philippines as enemies of the government that kept on feeding the public with lies. On May 12, he even asked his Aide-turned-Senator, Bong Go, if *Bayan Muna*, a long-time party-list mainstay, was able to enter the seats allotted for them in Congress, declaring that

all they did was to fool the government. *Bayan Muna* was denied a new mandate after failing to garner enough votes from the recent elections (Bueza, 2022).

Also, one group that has been afflicted by the ire of the President was the Commission on Human Rights. Ever since the start of his presidency, the commission has continually called out his misogynistic remarks in his speeches and the culture of impunity in his War on Drugs. It cannot be forgotten that during PRRD's administration, the House gave CHR a P1000.00 budget for 2018. In his April 27 speech, he challenged the CHR's disbelief on the extreme danger that drugs can bring to our nation.

Aversion Towards Corruption

PRRD once declared that he would not condone even a "whiff" of corruption (Dela Peña, 2021), and it was evident in his speech as he defended his military men and his government's spending, at the same time reprimanding Gordon because of the former's alleged corruptions against him. He stated:

> *Kaya ko ginawa 'yan ibinigay ko sa tatlong military kasi ayaw ko ng corruption* [The reason why I did that... I gave it to three military men... is because I don't want corruption.] (Duterte, 2022 April 11).

> "[...]*'yung 250 billion ba 'yun, nasauli na sa* Treasury. *Sinabi ko na huwag na lang itong galawing amount* [The 250 billion was returned to the Treasury. I said that it is not to be used], leave it as it is" (Duterte, 2022 April 18).

PRRD announced that the money left from the COVID-19 spending was now returned to the Treasury. He recalled that he asked Congress to return the Php250 billion to the Treasury so that the people's money would not be wasted. He also admonished the Filipinos not to believe the lies that some politicians say regarding corruption in his government.

> *Hoy, Gordon, kung gusto ko talagang magyaman, matagal na.* [Hey, Gordon, if I really want to be rich, I could have done so long before.] A thousand times over the opportunities for me to go to corruption and make money. [...] Sus *'yang corruption, Diyos ko po.* [Jesus, that corruption, my God.]" (Duterte, 2022 May 3)

In his May 3 TttP, he clapped back at Gordon, saying that the Senator could count on his fingers the number of times that PRRD acted on his own without the recommendation of the respective departments. He even boasted that his best evidence was that he was elected president while Gordon was not. He also made mention of Gordon's supposed cemetery, which he said the Senator had prepared a good garden.

> [...] *Kung may pera lang sana ako, 'di mayroon rin akong bahay dito [sa Forbes Park]. G*** ka. 'Di ko nga mapagawa-gawa 'yung bahay ko doon sa...* [If I have money, I should have a house here in Forbes Park. You fool. I can't even have my house repaired.] (Duterte, 2022 May 3)

Lastly, he criticized Gordon for having a luxurious house in Forbes Park, a gated private subdivision in Makati. He convinced the people that he did not have the money to have a house in a prestigious community or even make repairs to his house in Davao.

Commitment to Honest and Orderly Elections

It can be recalled that PRRD thought of running for Vice-President last year before he "officially" announced in October 2021 that he would be retiring from politics. Barely a month before the elections, his speeches now include mentions of it as something that was his responsibility as an outgoing President.

> Again, it is my commitment to the nation that the elections will be peaceful and free from violence, [and] intimidation of voters (Duterte, 2022 April 11).

He warned groups that plotted to cause trouble on the day of the elections not to do so since he would still be present to oversee the whole process.

> [...]election day is *malapit na* [fast approaching] *[...] Ang trabaho naming* [Our work] is to keep order *dito sa bayan natin na para plastado lahat* [here in our country so that everything is in order] (Duterte, 2022 April 18)

PRRD put forward that he and those in the government that were not candidates will be out of a job soon, but they still have work to do and that was to keep order in the country, as they were tasked by the Constitution. He pleaded with his political party, as well as the other parties, to follow the rule of law since some candidates resorted to

intimidation and sowing fear among the population. He also reminded those who plan to stir up trouble that he would not allow disorder, intimidation, and violence to hinder the people from exercising their right to vote.

He hammered away that they will see to it that the elections will be fair and honest—those that will act otherwise will be treated as an enemy of the government. He even advised the candidates to behave, or else he will come and question the person and arrest him and his private army that posed as bodyguards.

On May 3, he pounded that we would have orderly, clean, and honest elections. He urged the government to be conscious of this and work towards this end and stated, "*[...]ako* [me] as President, it is my Constitutional duty also to see to it that everything, that the law, the rules are followed" (Duterte, 2022 May 3). He emphasized that the military and the police must focus on this event. PRRD guaranteed the nation ("*guarantor ako*") that the election would be violence and intimidation-free.

> "Let's now go to the elections. It was a peaceful — generally peaceful" (Duterte, 2022 May 12).

Days after the elections, PRRD thanked and commended the COMELEC and all the volunteers for all their diligence and contribution to this year's election.

Maintaining Political Neutrality

PRRD remained silent in endorsing a particular candidate for both President and Vice-President. He maintained that he refused to do so simply to show the people that he was "neutral." Even though he has his political party (PDP-Laban), he distanced himself from them. However, he was fast to make a disclaimer that he only attended rallies for the PDP candidates.

On his April 18 address, PRRD stated, "I will not side with anybody. We will be neutral [...]."He continued that his being neutral goes for the entire economic and political setup because he and his Cabinet were only here not to do wrong, but what was right for the people. He insisted that they would remain neutral and see to it that the true will of the people would reign in the elections.

On May 3, he recapitulated that the reason he was not supporting any candidate, whether by inference, implied, or direct, was because he must be freed of suspicion that he favored one candidate over another. He

appealed to the listeners not to believe those who were making stories just because he was seen raising the hands of some candidates, claiming that he did not know them. Even if he was seen in their company, it did not mean that he endorsed them but only because he had to go where his duty mandated him to. He also enjoined the people to choose whomever candidate they preferred. He later on repeated that listeners better disabuse their minds when listening to hearsays and that they stop getting into guesses and assumptions.

PRRD was quick to deny stating, "*Wala akong kandidato pagka-presidente ngayon hanggang Disyembre* [I will not endorse a presidentiable today and until December]." (2022 May 3). Further, he forbade his Cabinet Members to endorse candidates. He said he just "requested" them during meetings to remain neutral just like him so there would be no second guesses or implications on their part.

Entrustment and Hope for the Next Administration

Despite claiming neutrality, PRRD's recent speeches could be described as warm and welcoming to those about to be elected. He hoped that the next administration would have better preparation and efforts that would contribute to or, at least, remedy the COVID-19 situation. He mentioned in his April 18 address, "[...] But with that, I leave it I said to the next administration *na alam ko mas makaya pa nila kaysa akin* [I know that they can do better]."

On April 27, he mentioned a supposed to be trip to the US that required his presence, which he eventually declined. He sent Sec. Delfin Lorenzana, his Executive Secretary instead. He said that the dates could be problematic (May 11-14, 2022), since, by that time, the people already knew who will be the next President. He said that it was not good that he would make agreements or commitments in that working conference if we were just waiting for the winners to be proclaimed. Specifically, he said "*[...] ang mahirap kasi kung ako ang nandoon* [it is hard if I am there], I might take a stand that would not be acceptable to the next administration" (Duterte, 2022 April 27)

Days after the elections, the results clearly showed that it would be Marcos Jr. who would be the next president. PRRD articulated his hope and optimism toward a new set of elected leaders of the country. He even spoke briefly about the truth regarding the surveys but immediately contented to wait until there was a formal statement or proclamation from the COMELEC before congratulating the winners at the proper time.

His delight was also evident when he said that the election results showed that people go for a democratic system. He then indirectly addressed the President-elect to initiate a Constitutional Convention to remove the party lists from Congress. PRRD even suggested that it be done at the start of the next one's Presidency to avoid accusations that the latter only wanted to change provisions to allow them to run again, just like what he has been accused of in the past.

> *Sana' yung manalo* [I hope those who shall win], *i-advance* — whoever will come out — you have my congratulations well in advance. I am hopeful that you will serve the Filipino people with all your heart and ability, and prioritize the welfare of the general public above everything. (Duterte, 2022 May 12)

PRRD already tasked Sec. Salvador Medialdea to oversee the transition where he would welcome the next president, whomever he or she was, in Malacañang. He also insisted on the continuance of the drug war, which he hoped the next administration would put stronger pressure on than he did. He verbalized his excitement and eagerness to hear the report on who were the clear winners so that he and his team could set the stage for the eventual transfer of power.

The People: How the Audience Responded to PRRD's Speeches via Comments in Inquirer dot Net's Facebook Page

The researcher utilized two methods for analysis. First, the researcher gathered and thematically analyzed the first 20 Most Relevant Comments per live video and got 100 comments.

As seen in Figure 1 below, the majority of the Most Relevant Comments in the Live Videos of PRRD's speeches were those that expressed gratitude towards the President. They called him "The Best President in History," some even said they were proud of him and would miss his weekly addresses. Another commenter compared him to the late President Marcos Sr., saying they were both "best." Very small percentages actually engaged with the speech (asked a question, expressed opinion, agreed, challenged, and ridiculed the president), while other comments may simply be categorized as actually "irrelevant" to the speech (We support Leni-Kiko/BBM-Sara, incoherent comments). Maybe they were tagged as "relevant" because of Facebook's algorithm.

Figure 1

Emergent Themes on the First 20 Comments Per Live Video

Emergent Themes	No. of Comments
Expressing Gratitude Towards the President	76
Ridicule towards the President	3
Supporting BBM-Sara	3
Supporting Leni-Kiko	3
Displeasure towards Other People	2
Urging People to Pray	2
Incoherent	2
Prayer for Elections	2
Challenging the President	2
Expressing Disappointment towards the President	1
Asking a Question	1
Expressing Opinion	1
Agreement with the President	1
Arguing with the Critics of the President	1
Total	**100**

To triangulate this result, the researcher looked for comments in each Live Video that actually *engaged* with the speech (see Methodology section for the criteria). The researcher was able to categorize the comments into ten themes, namely: (1) Appreciation, (2) Agreement, (3) Suggestion, (4) Plea, (5) Accusation), (6) Mockery, (7) Provocation, (8) Disbelief, (9) Resistance, and (10) Criticism. Themes 1 and 2 connote positivity toward the President; 3 and 4 as neutral; and 5 to 10 as negative.

Appreciation

Some of the comments left on PRRD's speeches were messages of appreciation. Some of them were grateful to the President for visiting the affected areas by Typhoon Agaton. They were thankful to him for doing his job and performing his duty as the Chief Executive by bringing the people "ayuda" and investing in infrastructure, as exhibited by his Build Build Build program. Other commenters valued his belief in research regarding masks and his honoring of Lapu-Lapu.

Agreement

Commenters have agreed with PRRD's points in his speeches. They had the same opinion as the president regarding the mandatory wearing of masks and calls for vaccination. They acknowledged the President's decision not to go to the US and put an end to *e-sabong.* They sympathized with him when he forwarded that drugs are the root of all crimes in the Philippines and the enemies of the country are those actually in the government. They also gave merit to PRRD's view on federalism and the abolishment of party lists. Lastly, they agreed that Gordon was *makapal ang mukha.*

Suggestion

Concerning the topics being discussed by PRRD in his speeches, some of the commenters gave suggestions on how to address such issues. On COVID-19, one commenter proposed to stop the campaign rallies and stick with the caravans instead and think of strategies other than lockdowns when there is a surge.

On other societal problems, some commenters advocated that the President should have addressed the problem of deforestation and how to get the areas typhoon-resistant. They also recommended that charges be filed against lawbreakers and the President to organize "generals" that will protect the country against those who want "us" to fail. One indicated that men should have a vasectomy after several children. Others urged the President to bring back the war against drugs and finally to endorse a Presidential candidate.

Plea

Some commenters made urgent and emotional requests towards the President. Some urged others to believe what the President said about the virus. Some appealed that there should be no mandatory vaccination. Others petitioned the President to sign the Sim Card Law and to provide free vaccines every year.

Accusation

For this theme, the researcher found that some comments charged either the President or his government with doing something illegal or wrong. They imputed blame on him and his cabinet members regarding the delay of the true report on the COVID-19 cases and how they used this to brainwash people, thus scaring people of another surge. Some declared PRRD guilty of being a dictator, a protector of big-time drug lords, and a murderer of the poor.

Mockery

Comments on PRRD's speeches were also found to be teasing and contemptuous. One commenter made fun of the background music used during his speech, saying it was from his favorite singer Freddie Aguilar, and the President was about to cry. Some were sarcastic about PRRD, saying that he was outsmarted by the US and the World Health Organization, and the vaccines were effective in causing deaths, not preventing them. Some ridiculed him, saying that he would leave a beautiful legacy – a legacy of cockiness, debts, and problems.

Provocation

Some comments were deliberate to make the President annoyed or angry. A couple of these come in the form of a question (*Why can't you endorse anyone? What is the update on narco-politics? How about the Pharmally scandal? Where now is PhilHealth's 15-billion?*) while others sound more like a challenge (*Show us your SALN).*

Disbelief

Some commenters just cannot accept what PRRD was saying in his speeches at face value. They refused to accept whatever he was saying as true or real. His not endorsing a presidential candidate was met with skepticism since everyone knows that he will support his daughter, Sara, making him indirectly support BBM. Some even dismissed COVID-19 as a "conspiracy" only and was only made for business, just like the swab tests. They believed that vaccines were worthless and that the global elite was just fooling us.

Resistance

Despite the weekly pounding of the President, some commenters still refused to accept some of his mandates about COVID-19. One commenter refused the call to be vaccinated, saying it was only experimental and was still in the trial stage. Some feared for their children aged 5 to 11 years old. Also, when PRRD enjoined the public to not vote for Gordon, one particular commenter said that s/he would do otherwise.

Criticism

Expressions of disapproval towards the President were also prevalent in the comments. On COVID-19, some commenters uttered that the use of masks was exaggerated and that what PRRD was saying was already insignificant since there were so many campaign sorties going on. Other commenters found fault in how he handled our economy, the drug war,

and his approach toward the West Philippine Sea. They reiterated that we had the worst debt and GDP, only drug users were apprehended and not the drug lords, and his promises in the last 2016 elections were all unfulfilled. They denounced his absence of a long-term plan and joked that if Lapu-Lapu was alive, "*siya ang unang-unang iitakin.*"

The (Digital) Public Sphere: Facebook's Comments Section

As seen in the data found in the netizens' comments, the Habermasian Public Sphere, originally opposed to the State, was now dismantled. PRRD foreshadowed in his speeches his soon-to-be departure from Malacañang, and these were met with gratitude and appreciation by the Netizens in the Comments Section. His usual antics, commending the ally and crucifying his enemies, were met with agreement, as observed in his supporters' comments. His commitment to honest and free elections was also accepted impetuously, as these netizens gave their suggestions on how the government can make these plans materialize. However, it could also be observed that his political neutrality and mooning over the next administration were met with accusations, mockery, provocation, disbelief, resistance, and criticism by those who do not share his political agenda.

As assumed, Facebook was never a neutral ground between the State and the People when it comes to political issues. The digital machinery of PRRD's supporters makes it so. They were able to create fake and troll accounts to polarize the arising discourse on Facebook. However, one cannot dismiss the fact that the former President really has a substantial number of supporters. These supporters flock to the comments section of PRRD's live videos to give their own viewpoints on whatever he has discussed. Like the original Habermasian Public Sphere, Facebook was accessible to all people with an internet connection, making it an excellent tool to communicate one's political agenda to a vast number of people.

These people, in turn, expressed their political opinions regarding PRRD, and they do so in an open, free, and unconstrained manner, just like the Habermasian Public Sphere. These people were once-private individuals, yet Facebook as a digital Public Sphere enabled them to publicly engage with other netizens using the Comments Section.

PRRD as the representative of the State was able to reach and communicate his political agenda to the audience through his weekly *Talk to the People.* Netizens, in turn, engaged his speeches publicly by
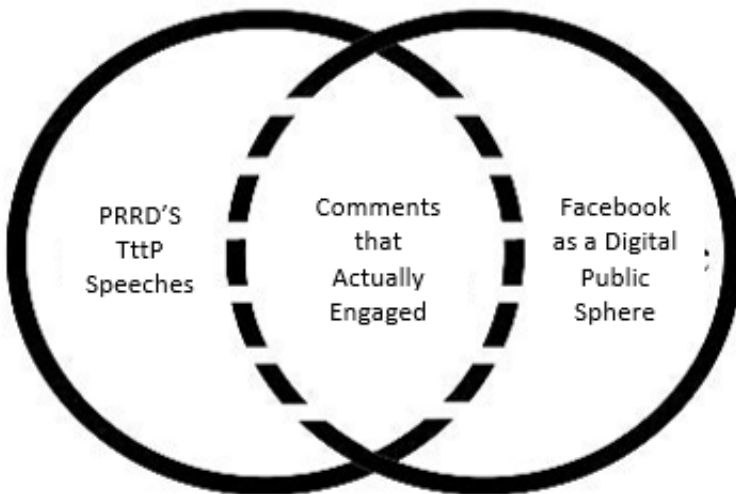
posting their comments in his TttP live videos. We saw how Facebook as the digital Public Sphere allowed the State and the People to overlap, diverging from Habermas' original model.

As observed in the comments in PRRD's speeches, a large majority expressed their gratitude toward the President. Though there were issues of fake and troll accounts that might be infiltrating social media to manipulate the discourse, his daughter's current win in the Vice Presidential seat proved that the Duterte influence still has its hold.

This study would like to argue that Facebook as a digital Public Sphere caused the blurring of the lines between the State and the People. The People were now in agreement with the State instead of opposing it. It stood not to be in contrast to the State, but to serve as an ally for the former's dissemination of power. This study designated that PRRD as the State and the Netizens in the Public Sphere overlap, having one mind and goal: political power. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2
The study's diagrammatic representation of how PRRD's speeches were analyzed with regard to audience comments

Conclusion

Based on the above findings, the researcher has come up with the following conclusions:

1. PRRD's Talk to the People Speeches has focused on several themes. As usual, he opened his speech by reminding the listening public that Talk to the People was a way for them to know what was happening in the country, and the people from the government were doing their best to be transparent with their dealings. He also made it obvious that he was excited to step down from the office by using various word markers. His speeches also showed that he sympathized with and praised his allies while lambasting his critics in public. His annoyance toward corruption was also evident. He has pledged to ensure that the election will be fair and honest while maintaining political neutrality toward the presidential candidates. Lastly, he has entrusted the country's hope to the next administration leaders.

2. The majority of the audiences who watched PRRD's Talk to the People Speeches have expressed appreciation towards the President. For those who actually engaged with his speeches, audiences' arising discourses included positive ones such as appreciation and agreement towards the President, neutral comments such as suggestions and pleas, and negative comments such as accusations, mockery, provocation, disbelief, resistance, and criticism.

3. PRRD has communicated his political agenda by employing his usual strongman facade while subtly currying favor to the incoming administration. Despite his recurring tactics in his public speeches, the President's supporters continued to sustain their number, allowing his daughter to win the VP seat, tagging along her partner, Marcos Jr. In this age of disinformation and media distrust, legacy media's fact-checking efforts and journalistic standards were disregarded by at least 31 million Filipinos, as observed in the results of the May 9 elections. As a digital Public Sphere, Facebook has allowed PRRD to mobilize his supporters and echo his political agenda in their public comments on social media.

Recommendations

Based on the summary of findings and conclusions, the researcher recommends the following:

1. that the teachers at all grade levels use political discourse as a springboard to practice critical analysis;
2. that teachers of all content areas implicitly and explicitly include social issues in their lessons to produce flexible and critical thinkers; and
3. that teachers educate their students on fact-checking and journalistic standards so that political discourses, like this of Duterte, will be strictly scrutinized.

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