

Themes, Frames, and Practices: Editorials of Philippine Broadsheets During the 2022 Campaign Period

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the themes and frames of editorials of Philippine newspapers during the 2022 campaign period and into the process of editorial production. Through an interpretivist paradigm and through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the study sought to answer the questions: What issues did the newspaper deem most important during the 2022 campaign period? How were the editorials under each of the themes framed and were the frames independent of the newspaper of publication? How did key newsroom personalities see the role of editorials and what processes did they observe in producing this specialist journalistic work? Thematic content and framing analysis were done on 336 editorials published by four broadsheets between February 8, 2022 and May 7, 2022, and a chi-square analysis was performed to determine the independence of the frames used from the newspaper of publication. Interviews were done with five journalists directly involved in the editorial production process. The study found that the top five themes were the elections, the economy, foreign affairs/ policy, health, and peace and order. Further, the Attribution of Responsibility frame was most used in editorials on the elections, the economy, and health. Conflict was the most dominant theme for foreign affairs/ policy, while Human Interest was dominant for peace and order editorials. The frames adopted and the publications were found to be not independent of each other in four most prevalent themes, except in peace and order editorials where the frames were independent of the newspapers. Finally, interviews with publishers and editorial writers showed that the publications observed different processes in writing editorials, and key newsroom personalities were mindful of the continuing relevance of editorials amid the changing media landscape.

Keywords: *editorials, opinion, opinion journalism, 2022 elections, editorial values*

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Introduction

Editorial opinion could be the most tangible manifestation of the power of the press because of its potential to influence voters and politicians (Firmstone, 2019). Editorials are a distinctive format because they are the only place in a newspaper where the views of the paper as an organization are represented (Firmstone, 2008), and the lack of a byline distinguishes the editorial from other parts of the newspaper (Le, 2010; Hallin & Mancini, 2004) while asserting its function as an official expression of a media position on any issue they choose to highlight over all others in a given context. Editorials enjoy prominent status because their arguments do not merely formulate opinions to be conveyed to the public, but also attack, defend, or give advice to authorities (Van Dijk, 1989) and have an impact on the opinion of people of power in a given society (Watanabe, 2022).

Literature on Philippine editorials has focused on national issues; for instance, Montiel and Dela Paz (2019) looked into how the Scarborough Shoal issue was framed in newspapers in the Philippines as well as in the US and China, and Ragrario (2022) looked into how Rodrigo Duterte's populism was portrayed and said editorials are a political force used by the news media to fulfill its watchdog function in fragile democracies. On the other hand, Pulido (2011) looked into how editorials are structured in order to advance their position.

Research on journalistic works including editorials have been done through the lens of the media's agenda-setting and framing functions, even as these concepts are being challenged by emerging technological trends. Moy et al. (2016) said that the idea that the media set the agenda has been challenged numerous times; in the landscape with media technologies, citizens are also content producers, and legacy media are not the only agenda setters as journalists often look to social media to identify what is currently engaging the public. Meanwhile, frames as the "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974) and their summarizing and highlighting functions (Entman, 1993) have been defined and operationalized in numerous ways and across various contexts (D'Angelo, 2002; Matthes, 2009; Scheffele & Iyengar, 2017). Socrates (2016) stated that the direction of the causality between framing and political actors are still subject to debate. Meanwhile Sisco and Lucas (2014) highlighted the dangers of oversimplifying issues. Rinke et al. (2013) asserted that framing carries an unfulfilled potential of understanding the function of modern democracies and guiding democratic practice. Further, Maher (2001) said that framing was an elusive concept to measure. Nonetheless, interest in frame analysis in communication research has increased dramatically in many countries (Weaver, 2007).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), in their study on the European politics, used five generic frames which they characterized as broadly encompassing structural aspects and general features applicable to different topics, periods, and cultural concepts. Gronemeyer and Porath (2017) studied the applicability of generic frames in Chilean politics; they wanted to determine whether indicators can be similarly grouped according to original study. There have since been studies in other parts of the world, – Spain (Iguarta and Muniz, 2004), Mexico (Muniz, 2011), Chile (Dotson, et al., 2012), Argentina (Aruguete, 2010) all as cited in Gronemeyer and Porath (2016) – and in Kenya (Ireru, 2014), among others, applying the generic frames to different issues in a different context. Results have been mixed and have highlighted the need for further study.

Cushion and Jackson (2019) said election reporting represents one of the most studied areas of journalism studies. From long-standing debates about agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) to interpreting bias, objectivity, and impartiality (D'Alessio, 2012) to more recent inquiries about the mediatization of politics (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014) and the consequences of hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2013), election campaigns have provided the backdrop to many of the most prominent debates and theoretical advances about the media's role in the political process. Semetko et al. (1991) said this was a recognition of the crucial role played by the news media in engaging and informing voters during elections. The influence and role of journalism during campaigns have been examined to determine whether or how they serve their citizens in exercising this democratic function. (Cushion & Thomas, 2018). Indeed, editorial journalism is at its most persuasive during elections (Firmstone, 2019).

Journalism studies have devoted significant attention to analysis of news production routines, investigating criteria, values and habitus influencing agendas and frames in the regular coverage (Pimentel et al., 2021). But journalism also embodies the role of an autonomous institution interested in taking part in the democratic process by stating its position on issues under public scrutiny (Cook 2011; Marques et al., 2019; Thesen, 2016). Despite this, scholarship has traditionally put opinionated journalism in the background (Pimentel et al., 2021) and editorials, the most prestigious text type, have received scant attention (Maddalena & Belmonte, 2011). Editorials need to be studied closely, to better understand their role in shaping contemporary public opinion, policy making, and overall political discourse (Ekman & Krzyżanowski 2021), especially since the digitization of the news media has increased their importance (Bolin, 2016). However, except for Firmstone (2008, 2009) and Hallock (2007), studies have only analyzed either editorial content or investigated editorial practices, not both.

In September 2021, a few months before the start of the campaign period for the May 9, 2022 elections in the Philippines, the polling firm Pulse Asia conducted a survey on Filipinos' top personal concerns and most urgent national concerns. In the survey held from September 6 to 11, 2021 among 1,200 respondents across the country, respondents were asked to name the top three personal aspirations they wanted to happen swiftly in their lives. The top answers were "To stay healthy and avoid illnesses" (70%), "To have a secure and well-paying job or source of income" (47%), "At least to be able to have enough to eat every day" (46%), "To finish schooling or be able to provide schooling for our children" (43%), "To be able to have some savings (32%)", "To avoid being a victim of any serious crime (32%), and "To have my own house and lot" (32%). Another question in the same survey asked respondents to name three issues that should be immediately acted upon by the government. The top responses were controlling inflation (41%), increasing the pay of workers (40%), controlling the spread of COVID-19 (29%), reducing the poverty of many Filipinos (29%), fighting graft and corruption in government (26%), creating more jobs (25%), providing assistance/ subsidy to those who lost their livelihood and jobs because of the COVID-19 pandemic (19%), and enforcing the law on all, whether influential or ordinary people (15%).

Resolution 10695 of the Commission on Elections, issued February 10, 2021, prescribed a calendar of activities for the May 9, 2022 elections. According to the resolution, the campaign period for candidates for President, Vice President, Senator, and party-list groups would be from February 8, 2022 (Tuesday) to May 7, 2022 (Saturday).

Editorials of the four Philippine broadsheets published between the campaign period, and were also available on their online platforms, were used for this study. The Philippine Daily Inquirer and the Philippine Star were included because the Reuters Digital News Report (2023) cited the PDI at 28% weekly usage, and the Philippine Star at 27% weekly usage, as the top two newspapers in the country. The online versions of these papers also figured prominently in the survey for weekly reach: PDI online at 36% weekly usage, and Philippine Star online at 24%. The same Reuters report showed brand trust scores of these media organizations at 68% for both PDI and Philippine Star. Two other broadsheets, the Manila Standard and the Manila Times, were also included in the study. The Manila Standard is owned by Rep. Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, first cousin of then-presidential candidate Ferdinand Marcos Jr., while The Manila Times is the Philippines' oldest newspaper, being established in October 1898. Using a thematic analysis and a frame analysis, the study looked into which themes were most prevalent as editorial topics during the campaign period, what frames were used in the top five themes, and whether the frames were independent of the

newspapers that published the editorial. Finally, five journalists previously or currently involved in the production of editorials in their respective newsrooms were interviewed to gain an insight into their decision-making process.

Given all these, this study posed the following research questions: (1) What themes and issues did the four newspapers use in their editorials during the 2022 campaign period and how did these reflect current conditions in the country at that time? (2) How were the editorials under each of the top five themes framed, and did such frames depend on the newspaper of publication and articulate the position of the media owners and other considerations? Finally, (3) what newsroom practices and decision-making factors were observed in producing these editorials during the 2022 campaign period, and how did key newsroom personalities perceive the role of editorials in the information age?

Related Literature

McCombs and Shaw's (1972) pioneering study in agenda setting established that the news media alert individuals to what they think is the most important issue, taking off from "the world outside and the pictures in our heads" (Lippman, 1922). The central idea of agenda setting is that by giving differential attention to certain issues, the media set the agenda of public discourse. By covering some issues and ignoring others, the media influence which issues people view as important and which they view as unimportant (Iyengar, 2019). Meanwhile, Goffman (1974) called frames the "schemata of interpretation" and this idea was elaborated by Entman (1993, 2007) who defined framing as the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation. Gitlin (1980) earlier said frames help journalists process large amounts of information quickly and routinely package it for efficient relay to their audiences. Media frames define problems, specify causes, convey moral assessments, and endorse remedies (Gitlin, 2003). Frames organize events and issues, stressing certain aspects of a given topic and affecting audience interpretations (Druckman, 2001; Gitlin, 1980; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Tuchman, 1972). Indeed, frames extend beyond topics (Brüggemann 2014; Carragee & Roefs, 2004), move from cognitive accessibility into applicability (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017) and are repeatedly and reliably used (Entman et al., 2009).

Scholars define and operationalize frames in various ways (D'Angelo, 2002; Matthes, 2009; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2017). Iyengar (1991) said that most political issues can carry an episodic or thematic frame. Neuman et al. (1992) identified the group of dominant frames used by US media referring to a diverse range of events, while Cabalin (2013)'s work on student protests in Chile looked at framing the

education issue as circumstantial or systemic. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) conducted a study using five generic frames – attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality, and economy – in the coverage of European politics, saying these broadly encompass structural aspects and general features applicable to different topics, periods, and cultural contexts. Gronemeyer and Porath (2017) sought to find out how generic Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) “generic” frames were, and found that some frames were more generic than others. Iguarta and Muniz (2004) looked at immigration in Spain, Muniz (2011) looked at migration in Mexico, Aruguete (2010) looked at the privatization of a government telecommunication agency, Dotson, et al. (2012) looked at climate change, and yielded the same results but noted that additional frames were sometimes necessary (Aruguete, 2010). Specific frames are more typical of some themes than others (Ballesteros, 2015; de Vreese, 2005; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Lawrence, 2010). Elections, specifically, provide a rich ground for these framing studies as editorial journalism is most persuasive during elections (Firmstone, 2019).

Matthes (2011) said that frames are part of a culture, they guide how the elite construct information, they affect journalists' information selection, manifest in media texts. Studies mentioned above looked only into the content of news media, including editorials. Firmstone (2019) stated that only a relatively small body of research has focused on the routine practices and role orientations of editorial journalists and newspaper editorial boards, and that scholars have analyzed only either editorial content or editorial practices – not both. An example of the latter would be her own work which identified four basic routine stages in editorial production (Firmstone, 2008), as well as the work of Pimentel et al. (2021) and Marques and Mont'Alverne (2019) on editorials. These built on Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences identifying factors that affect news content, and on earlier work on news values. Marques and Mont'Alverne (2019) elaborated on editorial-worthiness and identified editorial values and factors that influenced what editorials were about and the positions taken by newsroom decision-makers, while Pimentel et al. (2021) pointed to the social, political and economic context governing such decisions by journalistic institutions.

Methodology

The study is a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, using a thematic content analysis, chi-square analysis, and semi-structured interviews with key newsroom personalities. First, the researcher did a thematic content analysis for all 336 editorials from the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippine Star, Manila Standard, and Manila Times from February 8, 2022 to May 7, 2022. The number

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of editorials varied across newspapers because of the Holy Week and other schedules. The researcher pre-identified themes of the editorials according to the results of the Pulse Asia survey of urgent national concerns and current events during the period.

Table 1
Editorial themes

Theme	Issues
Elections	Conduct of the registration and preparations for the 2022 elections, the Commission on Elections and its officials, Smartmatic, political systems and parties including the party-list system, candidates, candidates' position on national issues, campaign activities, surveys on the "horse race", and election violence
Economy	GDP, inflation, employment, various industries and businesses, energy, infrastructure, ease of doing business, and competitiveness
Health	COVID-19, health workers, vaccines and vaccination efforts, other diseases
Foreign Affairs/ Policy	Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China's acts in the South China Sea/ West Philippine Sea, the Philippines' response to China's acts in the SCS/ WPS, events in other countries as they concern OFWs/ Filipinos in those locations, other events in other countries, natural and man-made disasters in other countries, the Philippines' participation in regional blocs, and international politics and leaders
Peace and Order	The drug war, military and police issues, red-tagging, and criminality
Environment	Climate change mitigation and adaptation, pollution, natural disasters in the Philippines, and conservation methods
Governance	Graft and corruption, initiatives on transparency and accountability
Education and IT	The education system on all levels, pedagogy, history and culture, digital transformation and connectivity
Personalities	Specific individuals not running for office who were singled out and named in the editorial
Special Groups	Specific demographic groups like women, children, senior citizens, persons with disabilities

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Basic Services	The provision by the government and the private sector of transportation and water utilities
Others	Everything else not covered by the above categories, such as religion or holidays

While the themes were not mutually exclusive – some editorials on the elections also touched on the economy, or some economy editorials also had a foreign affairs/ policy angle – the researcher identified the prevalent themes using words and phrases most common in the headline and lead of the editorial. Matthes (2009) established that the unit of analysis in framing studies range from the paragraph to the entire article.

Two hundred thirty-four (234) out of 336 editorials fell under the top five themes of Elections, Economy, Foreign Affairs/ Policy, Health, and Peace and Order. The resulting 234 editorials under the top five themes were then examined under the generic frames proposed by Semetko and Valkenberg (2000). The dominant frame of each editorial under each of the five themes was derived among Attribution of Responsibility, Human Interest, Morality, Conflict, and Economy. Again, the frames used by the newspapers were not mutually exclusive, and the researcher looked at words and phrases in the headline, lead, and concluding paragraph of the editorial to determine its dominant frame. Ragrario (2022) said that the subject, story tone – indicated by critical, supportive, or subtle position – and wording lead to the construction of the editorial frame.

Table 2
Generic frames, Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000

Frame	Description
Attribution of responsibility	an editorial that names or calls out an agency/ office or individual with the ability, responsibility to solve/ alleviate a problem or tasked to solve a problem, whether public or private
Human interest	an editorial that uses a human face, emotion to generate readers' interest or empathy in an issue or event
Conflict	an editorial that reflects, suggests, or exposes disagreement, disparities, or competition between parties-individuals or groups
Morality	an editorial that contains moral messages, invokes religious beliefs or social prescriptions
Economics	an editorial that focuses on public or private finances, economic issues.

Using these categories, the study identified the most dominant frame of an editorial under each of the top five themes and then used the chi-square test of independence to determine a frame's independence from the newspaper of publication. The chi-square test of independence was most appropriate for this purpose. It is a statistical hypothesis test used to determine whether two variables – in this case, the newspaper and the frame used – were related or not. For this study, the null hypothesis (H_0) was that the newspapers and the frames were independent of each other, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is that the newspapers and the frames were not independent.

A test of independence was performed for each of the top five themes. For each of the themes, the researcher used a table for actual values, and then another table for expected values. The expected value is calculated by multiplying the total number of editorials per newspaper, and the number of editorials per frame (row by column), and then dividing the answer by the grand total of editorial samples (n) under that theme.

Alpha value was determined at 0.05, which means a risk that in 5% of the time, the two variables were not related when in fact they were. The value 0.05 is used in most social science studies. The degree of freedom is 12 – the number of rows (four newspapers) minus one, multiplied by the number of columns (five frames) minus one.

The chi-square test was carried out by obtaining the difference between the expected value and the actual value for each frame for each newspaper; then squaring the product; dividing the answer by the expected value; calculating the grand sum of all rows and columns; and, finally, comparing this sum to the right-tail distribution value corresponding to 0.05 alpha and 12 degrees of freedom. According to the chi-square table, this value is “21.02607”.

Finally, qualitative, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with five supposed current or former editorial writers/ newsroom executives directly involved in the production of editorials were conducted between May 18, 2023 and June 23, 2023.

Findings and Discussion

This analysis covered all editorials from the four newspapers from February 8, 2022 to May 7, 2022. The thematic analysis yielded that out of the 336 editorials studied, 234 or 69.64% were on the top five themes: Elections (63 editorials), economy (58), foreign affairs/ policy (48), health (35), and peace and order (30). The themes deemed most important by the individual newspapers did not necessarily reflect the percentage shares or the ranking of topics in all four broadsheets taken together. While there were plenty of similarities, there were

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also notable differences between the individual broadsheets and the aggregate numbers.

Table 3

The following table shows the top five themes used in the four newspapers studied, n=234.

Theme	PDI	PS	MS	MT	Total	% of total (336)
Elections	20	19	14	10	63	18.75
Economy	17	13	13	15	58	17.26
Foreign Affairs/ Policy	8	2	13	25	48	14.29
Health	6	14	6	9	35	10.42
Peace and Order	7	13	6	5	30	8.93
Total	58	61	52	64	234	69.64

Table 4

The following table shows the distribution of all themes in the four newspapers studied, n=336.

All 4 Papers n=336	PDI n=87	Philippine Star n=87	Manila Standard n=73	Manila Times n=89
1 Elections (18.75%)	1 Elections (22.99%)	1 Elections (21.84%)	1 Elections (19.18%)	1 Foreign Affairs/ Policy (28.09%)
2 Economy (17.26%)	2 Economy (19.54%)	2 Health (16.09)	2-3 Economy, Foreign Affairs/ policy (17.81%)	2 Economy (16.85%)
3 Foreign Policy/ Affairs (14.29%)	3-4 Foreign Policy/ Affairs and Education and IT (9.20%)	3-4 Economy (14.94%)	3	3 Elections (11.24%)
4 Health (10.42%)	4	4 Peace and Order (13.79%)	4-7 Health, Peace and Order, Education/ IT, Special Groups (8.22%)	4-5 Health and Environment (10.11%)

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All 4 Papers n=336	PDI n=87	Philippine Star n=87	Manila Standard n=73	Manila Times n=89
5 Peace and Order (9.23%)	5-6 Peace and order and Special Groups (8.05%)	5 Education/IT (9.20%)	5	5
6 Education and IT (7.74%)	6	6 Governance (5.75%)	6	6 Personalities (6.74%)
7-9 Environment, Governance, Special Groups (4.76%)	7-8 Health, Governance (6.9%)	7 Environment (4.6%)	7	7 Peace and Order (5.62%)
8	8	8-9 Basic Services and Others (3.45%)	8 Governance (5.48%)	8-9 Education/IT and Basic Services (4.49%)
9	9-12 Environment, Personalities, Basic Services, Others (2.3%)	9	9 Personalities (4.11%)	9
10 Personalities (3.57%)	10	10-11 Foreign Affairs/ Policy and Special Groups (2.30)	10-11 Environment and Basic Services (1.37%)	10-11 Governance and Special Groups (1.12%)
11 Basic Services (2.98%)	11	11	11	11
12 Others (1.49%)	12	12 Personalities (1.15%)	12 Others (0%)	12 Others (0%)

In the Philippine Daily Inquirer (n=87), elections was the most prevalent theme, with 20 out of 87 editorials (22.99%) on this topic. This was followed by

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the economy (17 editorials or 19.54%), and foreign affairs and policy (8 editorials or 9.20%). There were as many editorials on education and information technology as there were on foreign affairs and policy, putting the former in the same rank, 3-4, as the latter. Peace and order (7 editorials, or 8.05%) was tied with special groups, at rank 5-6. While COVID was still present during the campaign period, health-related editorials only numbered 6, accounting for 6.90% of the total 87 editorials of PDI. Health editorials were tied with governance editorials, ranked 7-8. The remainder of the identified themes – environment, personalities, basic services, and others – took up the 9th to 12th places, all having 2.3% of 87 editorials of the PDI.

In the Philippine Star (n=87), the elections also topped the agenda (19 editorials or 21.84%), followed by health (14 editorials or 16.09%). At third place was the economy (13 editorials, or 14.94%), and fourth was peace and order (12 editorials or 13.79%), with education and IT taking fifth place (8 editorials, or 9.20%). Governance was the 6th most prevalent theme at the Philippine Star (5, or 5.75%), followed by the environment (4 editorials, or 4.6%). Tied for ranks 8-9 were basic services and others (each with 3 editorials or 3.45% of the total). Tied for ranks 10-11 were foreign affairs/ policy and special groups (2 editorials each, or 2.3%). The least prevalent theme was personalities (1 editorial, or 1.15%).

Among all four broadsheets studied, the Manila Standard had the least editorials published during the period studied: only 73 days out of the total 89 days covered by the campaign period. In fact, the number of days when the Standard had no editorials (16) was higher than the number of days it published its most prevalent editorial theme (14 editorials on the elections, or 19.18% out of 73). Tied for the second and third most prevalent themes were the economy and foreign affairs and policy, each with 13 editorials or 17.81% of the total number of editorials. Tied for fourth to seventh places were the themes of health, peace and order, education and IT, and special groups (each with six editorials, or 8.22%). There were four editorials on governance out of the total 73 for 5.48%, three editorials on personalities for 4.11%, and one editorial each for the environment and basic services for 1.37%.

Only the Manila Times had an editorial for every day during the campaign period, publishing on all days of the Holy Week, and, like the Philippine Daily Inquirer and the Philippine Star had an opinion page every day of the week. It was also only The Manila Times that did not have elections as its editorials' most prevalent theme. The Manila Times had 25 out of 89 editorials (28.09%) on foreign affairs/ policy, followed by the economy (15 editorials or 16.85%). Elections was only third most prevalent, with 10 editorials (11.24%) during the 89-day period. Tied for 4th and 5th place in terms of prevalence were health and

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environment, with 9 editorials or 10.11% of the total. Personalities was at rank 6, with 4 stories out of 89 or 6.74% of the total. This was the highest prevalence of the personalities theme among all four newspapers studied. Peace and order was the seventh most prevalent theme with 5 editorials or 5.62%. Tied for 8th and 9th place were education/ IT and basic services, with 4 editorials or 4.49% of the total. Sharing the 10th and 11th places were the themes governance and special groups, each with 1 editorial of 1.12% of the total.

The findings show that aside from the low priority of foreign affairs/ policy in the Philippine Star, the five prevalent themes were generally observed in all newspapers even as their ranking varied from newspaper to newspaper. Three of these five themes, with the exception of the elections and foreign affairs/ policy, were well within the Pulse Asia survey of urgent national concerns eight months before the conduct of the elections. These top themes represent issues of public repercussion, as presented by the positioning of quality papers (Albright, 1995; Firmstone, 2008, 2009).

In Taiwan, Chen's (2003) study of the 1996 presidential elections yielded that five issues, including law and order and economic development, dominated the public priority issue agenda. The study of Amenaghawon (2020) confirms this, when he said that journalists select the topic that they will present and how they will be presented, determining the issues that their audiences think about and how they should think about them. The subsequent study of Searles and Banda (2019) reinforces the need for questioning journalistic judgment during an election campaign. An important observation however is that even as Firmstone (2019) wrote that editorial journalism is most persuasive during elections because it is then that newspapers traditionally declare support for candidates and political parties, and even as 18.75% of all editorials analyzed were under the election theme in the present study, no editorial in any newspaper included in the study endorsed or overtly supported any candidate.

The subsequent framing analysis applied to the 234 editorials under the top five themes showed that Attribution of Responsibility was the dominant frame applied by the newspapers to stories on the elections, the economy, and health. The conflict frame was dominant in editorials about foreign affairs and policy, while human interest was the dominant frame in editorials on peace and order.

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Table 5

The following table summarizes the dominant frames as well as the results of the independence test per theme.

Editorial Theme	Dominant Frames	Chi-square value vs. 21.02607	Frame-Paper Relationship
Elections	1. Attribution of Responsibility (65%) 2. Morality (13%)	25.09039657	Not independent
Economy	1. Attribution of Responsibility (47%) 2. Conflict (25%)	37.45125781	Not independent
Foreign Affairs/ Policy	1. Conflict (38%) 2. Morality (23%)	30.53785742	Not independent
Health	1. Attribution of Responsibility (69%) 2. Human Interest (20%)	24.82638889	Not independent
Peace and Order	1. Human Interest (63%) 2. Attribution of Responsibility (30%)	17.7894	Independent

Table 6

The following table shows the frames used by each newspaper under the election theme, n=63.

	Frame 1 Responsibility	Frame 2 Human Interest	Frame 3 Conflict	Frame 4 Morality	Frame 5 Economics	TOTAL
PDI	15	1	0	4	0	20
PS	14	1	3	1	0	19
MS	8	4	0	2	0	14
MT	4	1	2	1	2	10
TOTAL	41	7	5	8	2	63

Sixty-five per cent of the election-related editorials had the Attribution of Responsibility frame. These primarily discussed who bore the responsibility to make the elections free and honest. They reminded the voters of their responsibility to make the right decision in choosing leaders and be discerning about the information they receive, the Comelec to conduct honest and orderly

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elections, or lawmakers to do something about election anomalies like the problematic party-list system.

Amid the proliferation of trolls and disinformation plus possible attempts to create a bandwagon effect, the Comelec sees a silver lining: perhaps Congress – whether the current one or the next – will see the need to pass laws to curb the practices that undermine a free and informed vote. (Guidelines for Surveys, Philippine Star, February 17)

On closer examination, it may just be that certain candidates and their supporters are successfully exploiting loopholes in the country's laws against vote-buying to obtain the same ultimate effect on voters – gain their favor at the ballot box on May 9 in exchange for monetary considerations – without actually breaking them. (Vote-buying loopholes, Philippine Daily Inquirer, March 30)

The next dominant theme was the Morality frame, where citizens (in voting the right candidates) and the government (in conducting credible elections) were expected to do their part, not only because it was their obligation but because it was their moral duty to their country and was the right thing to do, or mentioned the role of religious groups in people's decision-making process.

Whatever one's religious orientation, Holy Week in the Philippines is typically a time to pause – for many different reasons. Let's take the opportunity to ponder how next month's decision will affect the succeeding years in our nation's history. Let there be quiet, and let us make use of that quiet to let some basic truths emerge. (Taking pause, taking stock, Manila Standard, April 11)

No PH election is complete without churches and other religious institutions waving the banner for the candidates of their choice. Among the prominent players in this game are the Iglesia ni Cristo, Catholic priests and bishops, lay groups like El Shaddai, and Bible-based sects like the Jesus Is Lord Church. (Avoiding the Holy Vote trap, Manila Times, May 6)

Notable here is that 29% of the Manila Standard's election-themed editorials had a human interest frame. This exceeded the number of election-themed editorials with a morality frame. The newspaper identified specific stakeholders

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in the elections, for example Comelec commissioners or spokesmen who were the human face of the agency and called them out for their excesses or their inaction with regard to the preparation for the elections.

The Comelec may have control over the military during the election period, but the commissioner (Comelec Commissioner Rey Bulay) is sadly mistaken if he believes he also has the authority to suspend the Constitution and throw out our Bill of Rights (The arrogance of authority, *Manila Standard*, April 25).

The resulting chi-square figure for the election-themed editorials was 25.09039657, necessitating the rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, the frame and paper were not independent.

Table 7

The following table shows the frames used by each newspaper under the economy theme, n=58.

	Frame 1 Respon- sibility	Frame 2 Human Interest	Frame 3 Conflict	Frame 4 Morality	Frame 5 Econom- ics	TOTAL
PDI	7	2	6	1	1	17
PS	7	0	5	0	1	13
MS	2	0	0	1	9	13
MT	11	0	3	0	1	15
TOTAL	27	2	14	2	12	58

The most prevalent frame used for economy-themed stories was also Attribution of Responsibility (47%), followed by Conflict (25%), and Economics (21%). Per newspaper, 41 % of the Inquirer’s 17 economy-themed editorials were framed as Attribution of Responsibility while 35 % was framed as Conflict. For the Philippine Star, more than half or 54% of economy-themed editorials were framed as Attribution of Responsibility, with another 38% framed as Conflict. For the Manila Times, 75 % of its 15 economy-themed editorials were framed as Attribution of Responsibility.

Following are excerpts from editorials that were coded as Attribution of Responsibility:

This makes voters’ choices in the upcoming elections critical. The country must disprove many analysts’ projections that it will be the regional laggard in pandemic recovery (Declining economic freedom, *Philippine Star*, February 18).

Meantime, as the country's economic managers meet today to discuss rising fuel prices, it is hoped that the government could come up with measures to help alleviate troubled consumers' plight now (Relief needed now, Philippine Daily Inquirer, March 7).

The following are samples of excerpts of editorials on Conflict:

Only after the facts have been established by unbiased experts should we listen to the advocates of both sides. And after this, then the question of whether we should get into nuclear energy can be posed to the country's political policymakers. (Insanity over nuclear energy, PDI March 16)

It is no surprise that the most recent proposal to import sugar has caused a storm of protest from the local sugar farmers and processing industry because every such plan provokes such resistance. With all respect to the domestic producers, who do raise some valid points that must be addressed, the current importation plan is necessary to address more immediate concerns affecting most of the country. (Sugar importation is a necessary evil, MT, April 16)

This shows that the three newspapers were aware of who in society, specifically the government, carried the ultimate blame for economic problems, or the ultimate task of improving the economy. Their editorials offered suggestions on how these actors can carry out the responsibility. The Conflict frame, on the other hand, highlights winners and losers, or parties/ individuals/ groups that have different interests clashing against each other. These editorials point out various groups or stakeholders in an economic issue with disparate interests.

Seventy-five percent of Manila Standard's economy-related editorials were framed under Economics. The newspaper had a fixed schedule of putting out editorials written by its business editor, who by virtue of specialization focused on identifying financial losses or gains, costs and expenses, and the economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action. The Manila Standard's economy-framed, economy-themed editorials pulled up the aggregate total of economy frames to 21%. These numbers, particularly the low percentage of economy-themed editorials with a Human Interest frame (just 2 out of 57 or 3.5%) show that broadsheets failed to illustrate the real effects of economic issues on the lives of the common Filipino or there was no need to do this, given their acknowledged readership. The resulting chi-square figure for economy-themed

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editorials was 37.45125781, necessitating the rejection of the null hypothesis. Thus, the frame and newspapers were not independent.

Table 8

The following table shows the frames used by each newspaper under the foreign affairs/ policy theme, n=47.

	Frame 1 Respon- sibility	Frame 2 Human Interest	Frame 3 Conflict	Frame 4 Morality	Frame 5 Econom- ics	TOTAL
PDI	3	1	0	3	1	8
PS	0	0	0	1	0	1
MS	3	5	1	4	0	13
MT	0	3	17	3	2	25
TOTAL	6	9	18	11	3	47

The Manila Times had the highest number of foreign affairs/ policy themed editorials at 53% of the total, followed by the Manila Standard at 28%. For foreign affairs/ policy editorials, the Conflict frame was most dominant at 38%. This is a reasonably expected result since the Conflict frame identifies groups or states that are in opposition to each other. Events at that time showed conflict involving Russia and Ukraine, and China and the Philippines, among others. This total, however, was influenced by numbers from the Manila Times which had 17 editorials among a total of 25 using the Conflict frame.

As it is, one would think Europe has more important things to worry about right now with the threat of a continent-rattling war looming in Ukraine, and with several countries having just suffered substantial damage from a series of winter storms. The European parliament should avoid annoying what friends it has, and withdraw this foolish resolution. (EU threat is irresponsible and unfair, Manila Times, February 23)

The second most dominant frame was Morality at 23%. Morality refers to religious or social prescriptions on how parties or states are expected to behave.

We understand the need to be cautious in foreign policy and not to ruffle any feathers unnecessarily, but statements such as this – released as well by other countries with little skin in the game – suffer one major flaw. In calling on both sides to use diplomatic and peaceful means, they suggest that both parties were somehow responsible for going to war...even if only by words, we should call out the elephant and condemn the

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Russian invasion. (Calling out the elephant, Manila Standard, March 1)

The Inquirer’s editorials were more often framed as Attribution of Responsibility and Morality (both at 37.5%). The Manila Standard tried to use a Human Interest frame most often (5 out of 13, or 38%) to bring its message on foreign affairs to its readers. For the entire campaign period, the Philippine Star had only one foreign affairs/ policy-themed editorial, and it used the Morality frame in conveying its message.

The resulting chi-square figure for foreign affairs/ policy-themed editorials was 30.53785742, necessitating the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. Thus, framing was not independent from the newspaper of publication.

Table 9

The following table shows the frames used by each newspaper under the health theme, n=35.

	Frame 1 Respon- sibility	Frame 2 Human Interest	Frame 3 Conflict	Frame 4 Morality	Frame 5 Econom- ics	TOTAL
PDI	5	0	0	1	0	6
PS	13	0	0	0	1	14
MS	3	3	0	0	0	6
MT	3	4	2	0	0	9
TOTAL	24	7	2	1	1	35

For health-themed editorials, three of the broadsheets in the study used Attribution of Responsibility as the dominant frame (69%). Broken down, it showed PDI at 83%, Philippine Star at 93%, and the Manila Standard at 53%. This was also expected since during the period covered, the country was still beset by the COVID-19 pandemic and the response of the then-administration was perceived to be inadequate. Thus, the health-themed editorials suggested how the situation could be addressed and improved, and by which actors, specifically in government.

The national and local governments must not be distracted by the upcoming elections in carrying out the vaccination programs. Otherwise the country could face a renewed COVID surge. (Going to waste, Philippine Star, March 29)

In the event that the Inter-Agency Task Force, having reviewed all the parameters and convinced it should give the go-ahead, we ask that people exercise the highest caution, not only for

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their own health but for the health of others in their respective communities. (Need to be careful, Manila Standard, February 26)

The second most dominant frame for health-themed editorials was Human Interest at 20% .

It is almost two years ago that specific areas in the Philippines were put on lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We can remember the uncertainty as we heard the first announcements that classes would be suspended, or that offices would be closed, or that public transportation would stop running. (Coexisting with COVID, Manila Standard, March 10)

The resulting chi-square figure for health-themed editorials was 24.82638889, necessitating the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. The frame and the newspaper are not independent of each other.

Table 10

The following table shows the frames used by each newspaper under the peace and order theme, n=30.

	Frame 1 Respon- sibility	Frame 2 Human Interest	Frame 3 Conflict	Frame 4 Morality	Frame 5 Econom- ics	TOTAL
PDI	1	6	0	0	0	7
PS	6	6	0	0	0	12
MS	1	6	0	0	0	6
MT	2	1	0	2	0	5
TOTAL	9	19	0	2	0	30

Peace and order-themed editorials of the four newspapers during the period in review centered on the victims of injustice or those disadvantaged by the current system. Examples of these are the victims of extra-judicial killings, violence against journalists, a senator who was locked up on apparently trumped-up drug charges, or individuals who had been red-tagged or accused as sympathetic to the communist movement.

The Human Interest frame emerged as the most dominant, representing 19 out of 30 (63%) of all peace and order-themed editorials. Attribution of Responsibility was the second most dominant frame (9 out of 30 editorials, or

30%), with the notion that law enforcement and the achievement of peace and order are largely the domain of the government.

Below are excerpts from editorials coded as Human Interest:

Until last month when their families went public on television to appeal for help in locating their missing kin, there was scant news and hardly any police action on the case of 31 men involved in e-sabong, who were abducted by still-unknown parties from April last year to January this year. Thirty-one men vanish without a trace with no ransom demand and no dead bodies – only their abandoned vehicles – turning up, and there had been no wave of protests from the general public, no peremptory promise to investigate from authorities, not a statement of concern from Department of Justice officials (Where’s the outrage? *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 4).

Physician Natividad “Naty” Castro, who was seized from her San Juan City home on February 18, held incommunicado, brought first to Butuan City and then to Bayugan in Agusan del Sur on charges of kidnapping and serious illegal detention and then detained for 42 days, was released last week (Small victory in a great battle, *Manila Standard*, April 4).

The following excerpt was coded as Attribution of Responsibility:

This is a laudable program, but the PNP must acknowledge that it will take time and a sustained effort on its part before people are convinced that abuses and violent short cuts to law enforcement have been sufficiently excised from the police service (Internal cleansing, *Philippine Star*, April 23).

The resulting chi-square figure for peace and order-themed editorials was 17.7894, necessitating the acceptance of the null hypothesis. The frame and the newspaper were independent of each other for this theme.

Izadi and Saghaye-Birya (2007) and Thesen (2017) , as cited in Pimentel (2022), asserted that the selection and framing of issues in editorials are inherently political since media companies and their professionals do not necessarily provide the same coverage to all agents involved in the democratic process. Thus, it was important to look into the relationship between the frames adopted per topic and the newspaper of publication. According to Pimentel (2022), it is not possible to affirm that journalistic institutions act homogeneously disregarding the social, political, or economic context in which they are inserted.

The frames used in the current study are the five generic frames proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) in their study of Dutch media on European politics, and which they claimed to broadly encompass structural aspects and general features applicable to different topics, periods, and cultural contexts. Gronemeyer and Porath (2017) challenged this generic-ness in their study among newspapers in Chile, and they found that some frames are more generic than others, as is supported by other studies across the world (Cabalin, 2013; Aruguete, 2010 in Gronemeyer & Porath, 2017). Aalberg et al. (2011) studied politics not using the generic frames but determined that it was presented as a strategy/ game, an observation similar to Lawrence's (2010). Thompson (2020) agreed that politics is presented as a competition or game, in terms of who are protagonists and antagonists, citing Ballesteros (2015); de Vreese (2005); Hertog and McLeod, (2001), who wrote that the conflict frame is more typical of political coverage overall.

Cabalin's (2013) study on student protest editorials in Chile showed a framing of the education problem as circumstantial rather than systemic, while Godefroidt et al (2016) found that internationally related issues used the nationalization frame. Some researchers used some of the generic frames but added other frames . Aruguete (2010) as cited by Gronemeyer and Porath (2017) in Argentina said it would be inappropriate to perform direct and uncritical extrapolations of analyzed values in case studies occurring in different political, social and economic contexts, and suggested the use of two other frames -- Conflict with Human Impact and Resolution of Conflicts -- in her study on coverage of the privatization of a government agency. In his study of columns on Kenyan politics, Ileri (2014) used Conflict and Attribution of Responsibility but added the International Interest frame. In a study on the framing of Barack Obama's 2008 candidacy across four countries, Kanjama (2011) , as cited by Ileri (2014), found that Ethnicity was another important frame in African media.

This paper's findings are aligned with these existing studies even as they were used under different themes, as cited by Gronemeyer (2017): immigration (Iguarta & Muniz, 2004), which used Attribution of Responsibility and Conflict, and climate change (Dotson, et al., 2012), which used Economic Consequences and Conflict. Gronemeyer and Porath (2017) concluded that newspapers tended to behave similarly over time and in their application of two most recurrent frames: Conflict and Attribution of Responsibility. Moreover, this study's finding that Human Interest was the dominant frame for peace and order editorials is aligned with Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) who noted that Human Interest was a dominant frame of stories on crime.

Ragrario (2022) suggested that dominant news media should consider consolidating their political clout and pooling editorials against the backdrop of traditional and networked communications. However, the established relationship between editorial frames and the newspaper of publication in four out of five main themes could make pooled editorials difficult. Pimentel (2022) wrote that it is not possible to affirm that journalistic institutions act homogeneously, disregarding the social, political, or economic context in which they are inserted.

To complement the results of the thematic and framing analyses of editorials from the four broadsheets, this researcher conducted interviews among journalists directly involved in editorial production. Studies of journalism to date provide little empirical evidence relating to the specialist journalistic activity of producing editorial opinion on any issue, and only a relatively small body of research has focused on the routine practices and role orientations of editorial journalists and newspaper editorial boards (Firmstone, 2008, 2019). The table below summarizes the findings of the interview.

Questions in the interview fell under five main headings: Practitioners' perception of the functions and attributes of editorials, newsroom practices and routines, factors considered in identifying editorial topics and positions, nature of their election coverage, and insights into the future of editorials. This part of the study responds to the need to explore the role of journalists during campaigns to establish how well they serve citizens ahead of election day (Cushion and Thomas, 2018). The broadsheets are considered elite media, seen as more professional, credible, and valued for their accuracy and fairness as opposed to popular media (Bogoch & Holzman-Gazit, 2008). All respondents used to be senior members of the newsroom, in keeping with Espinosa (2003), as cited in Marques & Mont'Alverne (2021), Ettema (2007), and Hallock (2007) who cited the practice of entrusting the task of editorial writing to those who have had a long time in the organization, and who are given the mission to construct editorial arguments by prioritizing some organizational values.

The respondents demonstrated awareness and mindfulness of their market: not the general public or "everyone" but the "crucial few" (Nery, personal communication) decision-makers and policy-makers in society (Ang, personal communication), and highly-educated readers (Broadsheet editor, personal communication). This is in consonance with Watanabe's study (2022) on editorials which said they had an impact not only on public opinion but also on the opinions of power in a given society. Entman et al. (2009) said that when elites engage in a contest to shape frames in the media, it is often a way of influencing others' elite perceptions and predictions of public opinion and

Table II
The table below shows the salient points of interviews done with five newsroom personalities involved in editorial production.

	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Background	Rolando Estabillo Publisher, Manila Standard	Chin Wong Associate Editor (2004 to present) and former Editorial Writer (2004-2022), Manila Standard	John Nery former Editorial Writer (2000- 2018), PDI	Broadsheet editor	Dante “Klink” Ang II President/ CEO and Editorial Writer, Manila Times
Mode of interview	Face to face May 18, 2023	Email interview May 27, 2023	Face to face May 25, 2023	Email interview May 25, 2023	Face to face June 23, 2023
Newsroom practice	No editorial board meetings are held to decide topic, position, and approach. Pool of editorial writers exists, having assigned days.	Editorial writer thinks of topic, writes the editorial, and sends it to the opinion editor and the newsdesk, who in turn send it to the publisher for final approval.	Members of the editorial writing pool were familiar with institutional leaning. They shared “groupthink” and “spoke in code”	Declined to comment	Four writers make up the editorial pool. Members communicate daily through a group chat on Viber.

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	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Newsroom practice	<p>Editorial writer for the day decides topic and writes the editorial.</p> <p>Approval comes after submission to desk and publisher.</p> <p>Due to lack of funds, editorials are usually approved unless they are libelous.</p>		<p>Opinion editor asked the writer to write on a particular topic.</p> <p>Sometimes, business or sports editors are also asked to write.</p> <p>Editorials were approved by the editor who may or may not have had the explicit go-signal of the editor-in-chief.</p>		<p>Writer for the day proposes topic and position. Discussion is encouraged but Ang ultimately approves.</p> <p>Some topics are the strong suit or "specialization" of some writers.</p> <p>Ideally, the editorial is written a day before submission to allow for review.</p> <p>In case of disagreement, all writers are asked for input but Ang "has more votes."</p>
Editorial purpose and attributes	<p>Editorial should explore both sides of an issue before arriving at a conclusion.</p>	<p>The editorial is the heart and soul of the newspaper.</p>	<p>The editorial does not have to be read by many, just by the "crucial few."</p>	<p>Readers of English-language newspapers in this country have always been limited to</p>	<p>Market does not include all readers but policymakers, businessmen, and other decision-makers</p>

<p>Editorial purpose and attributes</p>	<p>Respondent 1</p> <p>Attributes are fairness, objectivity, elegance in language.</p> <p>Criticism is all right but the editorial must always offer a solution.</p> <p>Editorial writers must remove their personal biases, look at facts, and then write the editorial from them.</p>	<p>Respondent 2</p> <p>A good editorial looks at all the available facts behind an issue and then takes a stand. It must grab the reader's attention and not bore him or her.</p> <p>Criteria is similar to choosing news stories: timeliness, significance, and conflict.</p> <p>Chose topical issues that affected readers and those he felt strongly/ cared about.</p>	<p>Respondent 3</p> <p>The editorial has four purposes: clarify the issues at stake, take a position, create a public square by advancing ideas, and propose new ways of thinking.</p> <p>The credibility of the news outlet amplifies the analysis.</p> <p>An editorial must be compellingly written and powerfully constructed.</p>	<p>Respondent 4</p> <p>a segment of the population that is educated and can afford to pay daily for the paper. These include public officials, businessmen, professionals, and members of the academe.</p> <p>The editorial gives context to the news, helps shape public opinion, and improves the readers' understanding of news and current affairs.</p>	<p>Respondent 5</p> <p>The editorial must do more than comment on an issue. It must always aim to influence policy, argue something, or push for something.</p>
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	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Election coverage	Some opinion writers take advantage of the election season for their personal gain.	MS made an effort to give coverage to all the serious candidates but of course one candidate (Marcos) got preferential treatment. The editorials tried to be fair and did not endorse any candidate.	PDI approached editorial writing differently during elections. It was extra mindful of their standards of covering campaigns. There was no institutional endorsement of any candidate. Increasing focus on the horserace is because the PH remains to be a “procedural democracy.”	Declined to comment	MT devotes resources to elections because political events are important to making the paper relevant, considering their target market.
Other considerations, factors	Editorial writers have an easier job because they just write. Other personalities/ approving	No other considerations		Declined to comment	Manila Times is a business “and there are things that are important to us.”

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	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Other considerations, factors	<p>authorities have other realistic considerations and nuances, which are a big factor in the editorial decision.</p> <p>The nuances are unsaid instead of being on a list of dos and don'ts.</p> <p>Journalism ethics are tempered with concerns on the business side, because other stakeholders must also be considered.</p> <p>News values alone do not dictate how the world rotates.</p>				<p>Father's (Dante Ang Sr.) opinion on certain issues is taken into consideration.</p>

<p>Editorials' prospects and continued relevance</p>	<p>Respondent 1</p> <p>Fewer people read editorials and they have become less influential.</p> <p>Stakeholders who still read probably do so in a cursory manner.</p> <p>Without editorials, everything would be at the mercy of influencers.</p>	<p>Respondent 2</p> <p>Influence of editorials has largely waned. Newspapers do not put effort into writing interesting and thoughtful editorials and do not put enough value on them.</p>	<p>Respondent 3</p> <p>In this age of social media where everyone can be a publisher, perhaps editorials do not have the same kind of authority that they used to have.</p> <p>The way to hold on to the remaining credibility/ rebuild it is to continue to be well-rooted in issues of the day, and make sure that the editorials are well-researched and well-written.</p>	<p>Respondent 4</p> <p>Editorials have gained more importance in light of the ease of spreading disinformation and misinformation on social media.</p>	<p>Respondent 5</p> <p>Editorials will remain relevant in the same way as explanatory journalism, going beyond reporting and talking to analysts and experts. Example is explaining the effect of economic data on the bigger picture.</p> <p>The editorial will comment on, explain, analyze, or push a particular argument.</p>
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thus their political calculations. Respondents from one newspaper (Estabillo, personal communication and Wong, personal communication) acknowledged that editorials should explore various sides before articulating a position. This is similar to Montiel and Dela Paz (2019)'s statement that unlike news reporters, op-ed writers are not assigned to report social facts objectively but rather are expected to provide a variety of viewpoints toward a single social matter.

The ideal practice is to have story conferences, called budget meetings in some cultures, or editorial board meetings. In these regular meetings, editors and editorialists meet to select the possible subjects to be submitted to the editor in chief or owners (Clayman & Reisner, 1998; Mont'Alverne, 2018). Pimentel et al (2021) said each newspaper establishes its own routines when making editorials, and Mont'Alverne et al. (2018) found that the production routines of editorials are affected by specific habitus. In the present study, not all newspapers conducted such meetings: In one newspaper, the editor assigned the topic to the editorial writer; in another, the editorial writer had complete discretion on what to write about, and only in the final step of the process did the published intervene if needed. Another broadsheet used the benefits of technology to hold a virtual meeting – via group chat on Viber.

Firmstone (2008) found four basic routine stages after talking to editorial writers and political reporters: applying editorial values, deciding on general content and line, actual writing, and submitting to the editor for approval. In the current study, the logic of these stages or steps were observed but in an abbreviated fashion, and not all the newspapers accomplished the daily task collegially from start to finish.

One editorial writer in the current study (Wong, personal communication) identified criteria akin to news values in deciding editorial topics and positions, but his superior and one other newsroom leader pointed to other considerations in producing the final product. This hews to what Moy, Tewksbury, & Rinke (2016) called organizational pressures and constraints. Shoemaker and Reese (2014, p. 164) said news companies have routines that influence how the news is produced, and refer to routines as “rules – mostly unwritten – that give the media worker guidance,” similar to what Estabillo refers to as “unsaid nuances” that must be observed in editorial production. In observing the “nuances” that Estabillo refers to (Estabillo, personal communication) and the “things that are important to the business” that Ang cites (Ang, personal communication), editorials represent the official stances of media institutions, allowing the public to understand ideological alignments of the groups driving newspapers (Alves Filho, 2006; Eilders, 1999; Graber 2003). Yet that is not all. Firmstone (2019) asserted that in editorial opinion reflects more than the influence of proprietors,

but is shaped by a complex range of factors. Marques and Mont'Alverne (2019) proposed a criteria of editorial worthiness consisting of 13 editorial factors, or contextual elements influencing editorials, and 12 editorial values which are more directly noticeable in the piece. They further posed a question: Should newspapers make their criteria of editorial worthiness clear to foster their transparency? Respondents to the present study exercised their prerogative by agreeing to answer some questions and not others.

Tools and platforms on the Internet have imposed new challenges to legacy media (Crilly & Gillespie, 2018; Mosco, 2018), and developments in technology and other practices, specifically the shift away from single platforms and toward hybrid media environments (Cushion & Jackson, 2019), have yielded diverse opinion on whether editorials will continue, increase, or decrease their relevance. Bolin (2016) believes that the importance of editorials has increased due to the digitization of the news media landscape and the increased competition for readers, and Wadbring and Ödmark (2016) have emphasized the need for unique content. There is also a need to compete with many others: precisely because of this variety of options, newspapers need to reaffirm their identities to keep their audience and subscribers (Tucker et al., 2018). This agrees with Ang's assessment that in-depth and analytical journalistic works, including editorials, will continue to be relevant in the digital age (Ang, personal communication).

Van Dijk et al (2017) said digital platforms tend to privilege infotainment and breaking news content over traditional, slower news coverage, often leading to the sensationalization of the news. Pimentel et al (2021) also said that even if editorial pieces now compete with considerable amount of opinions circulating through blogs or "independent" media organizations, it is possible to point out a set of elements reinforcing the role that such opinionated texts still exercise to date. This supports Estabillo's statement that editorials remain necessary lest the public be at the mercy of influencers (Estabillo, personal communication)

Tucker et al. (2018) said that newspaper editorials may be going through a paradoxical transition process, and Gross (2021) said that newspapers continue to play an important role in setting the agenda as other sources recycle and repackage their content, so editorials continue to play a crucial role in modern democracies (Cook, 2006, 2011; Sparrow, 2006). Indeed, existing research trajectories and current developments point to new challenges and opportunities for editorial journalism (Firmstone, 2019). These opportunities are contingent on the value that newspapers themselves place in the quality of their own editorials.

Conclusion

The study contributes to the literature about applying generic frames on specific themes used in newspaper editorials, specifically in the Philippine setting and during the time of elections. The four broadsheets represented legacy media and, despite having their respective corporate histories, characteristics, and ownership structures, not one editorial endorsed or maligned a candidate, instead focusing on themes that were of public issues according to a survey on urgent national concerns.

The study was able to answer the research questions articulated at the beginning of this article. The editorials of the four broadsheets during the 2022 campaign period were under the general themes of the elections, the economy, foreign affairs/policy, health, and peace and order, corresponding to an earlier survey of national concerns and coinciding with the coming elections and developments overseas as depicted in the news. Each of the five themes were framed differently across the newspapers, with Attribution of Responsibility being dominant in the themes of elections, the economy, and health. Conflict was dominant in foreign affairs/ policy while Human Interest was dominant in editorials on peace and order. Subsequent analysis yielded that the framing of editorials was not independent from the newspaper of publication in four out of five themes: elections, economy, foreign affairs/ policy, and health, and only in peace and order-themed editorials did the frames exhibit independence from the newspapers of publication. Finally, top journalists and decision-makers in the newsrooms included in the study acknowledge the importance and purpose of editorials, recognize the threats posed by the changing media landscape but believe that editorials will remain relevant in the digital environment because of its unique stature and purpose, even as the newsrooms differ in the process of producing them and in their level of transparency about the processes they undertake in its production.

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