

When there is “unity” in the family: Contexts, meanings, and actions of Manila voters in electing Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the 2022 Elections

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Abstract

This qualitative study sought to understand the context and process of the conversations and stories leading to electoral behavior and actions of families in Manila City during the 2022 Philippine presidential elections. The study explored their media exposure, the nature and process of political participation of those in their household, and the relationships outside their families that shaped their vote for Marcos Jr. We conducted focus group discussions with three families in Manila City who voted for Marcos Jr. Using Coordinated Management of Meaning of Pearce and Cronnen, the study found that participant families in Manila City coordinated meanings through the strong inside voices in the family, supplemented by the echo chambers of new media and distrust of traditional media, as well as the negative interactions in their community. These factors led several Manila voters further into their echo chambers and social enclaves. The campaign platform of “Unity” captured the unity among the families in voting for Marcos Jr. because of their shared mental scripts of his accomplishments, their perception of other candidates, and the perceived Marcos name and legacy. Select Manila voters supported Marcos Jr. hoping for the good of their families and the nation.

Keywords: 2022 Philippine elections, Marcos, Manila City, familism, echo chambers

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How to cite this article in APA

Calicdan-Del Campo, R., Daswani, V., & San Juan, M. J. (2025). When there is “unity” in the family: Contexts, meanings, and actions of Manila voters in electing Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the 2022 Elections. *Plaridel*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.52518/2025-02dcdasj>

Introduction

The Philippines held a divisive and polarizing national election in May 2022, with Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of former president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., winning in a landslide (De Leon, 2022a). Of the 55,290,821 who voted on May 9, 2022, an estimate of 56.25% or a total of 31,104,175 voted for Marcos Jr. (COMELEC, 2022). The election had the highest turnout since 2010, with Marcos Jr.'s alliances from political strongholds and vote-rich areas giving him his victory. He won in the three most vote-rich cities in the nation: Quezon City, Manila City, and Davao City (De Leon, 2022b; Statista Research Department, 2018). The traditional approach of the campaign rallies and message of “unity” of Marcos Jr., known here as Bongbong Marcos or BBM, became the saving grace of the whole campaign that led to his win (De Asis, 2022).

Manila was supposed to be the stronghold of former Manila Mayor Isko “Yorme” Domagoso Moreno. With the highest approval rating among Metro Manila mayors (“Isko gets highest approval rating among NCR Mayors—survey,” 2021), Moreno had distinguished himself in a single term as mayor. He was expected to win in his bailiwick because of his ambitious infrastructure program, the city’s COVID-19 response, and his dynamic, social media-savvy brand of leadership (“Isko Moreno beaten by Marcos in home turf Manila,” 2022). Nevertheless, Marcos Jr. won, with a total of 356,167 (31.4%) votes (ABS-CBN, 2022), albeit the narrowest one in the National Capital Region. Moreno got 26% of the votes, and Robredo only 17%. Why did Manila choose Marcos Jr. over Moreno? What conversations did the voters have in their homes and within their communities, which led to this? What media influences were they exposed to, and what stories did they tell about their decision to support Marcos Jr.?

The bulk of political communication research takes a quantitative approach (Portus, 2008) to studying the influence of mass media to voters. This study examines pivotal points in the 2022 election, with respect to meaning making and electoral behavior in a geographic space in Metro Manila. This study also adds to the literature on political campaign typologies, be they expressed on broadcast, through grassroots activities, and even through the political self-actualization of citizens (Velmonte, 2019).

Familism and electoral behavior

The family forms the most important unit in society where love for the children and respect for the elderly materialize. Filipino family members commit life-altering individual choices (Bartolome et al., 2017; Genilo, 2021) for the sake of unity, interdependence, and harmony with their kin.

Filipino households put higher regards on the husband's opinion (Gozum, 2020), while rebuttals from children are considered disrespectful.

This greatly affects electoral behavior and action because Filipino parents, in general, take on authoritarian character; and because a Filipino family is led by the husband and maintained by the wife (Gozum, 2020), their opinions and perspective take priority. A similar study also states that family takes on a crucial role in shaping an individual's voting preference (Capadocia et al., 2008). The family members practice a sense of family responsibility, where care, respect, and affection for the elderly can be observed; otherwise, the parents exercise disciplinary actions.

Considering the significance of family in Philippine social and political life, this study looks at conversations happening within households as critical in determining political participation and support for Marcos Jr. By conversations, we consider both discussions surrounding the electoral messaging of unity within families, as well as those that take place beyond the family but discussed and processed further in the solace of homes. Interpersonal communication and interactions among family member voters can range from being open and free flowing to bifurcated and muted.

Media in politics

Apart from kinship, Andra Brichacek (2016) discussed that news media also plays a crucial role in political participation through framing practices and agenda-setting imperatives of news media, which demonstrate that media can be influential in political polarization.

The author elaborated that news media does not only represent candidates through compelling visual communication, nor share poll predictions and data journalism-based fact-checking (Brichacek, 2016), the media also has the power to influence political swings and decisions amongst the public and even politicians' actions and incentives (Clinton & Enamorado, 2014).

Media content and forms such as mainstream and social media play pivotal roles in facilitating political discourse. In the US context, according to Susanna Dilliplane (2014), partisan news exposure has an impact on vote choice activation and conversion. The author noted: "habitual levels of exposure to such programs appear to sway partisans away from their own party and into the arms of the opposing party" (p. 91). In the Philippines, the Statista Research Department in 2018 revealed the percentage of the population in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao who changed political views because of their social media exposure. Visayas garnered the highest record, with 71% of the respondents shifting their political views because of what

they saw on social media. This was followed by Luzon, with 52%, and Mindanao, with 44%.

Voters seek information to know more about political candidates and their current affairs. Alcott and Gentzkow (2017) explained that aside from information-seeking utility, voters have psychological utility in which they need to confirm and consume information based on their priorly accessed news. The audience as voters tend to rely on like-minded information which they have initially accessed. Disproportionation on political information exposure slanted towards political partisanship enables the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles through media, in particular social media (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Bail, et al., 2018; Dilliplane, 2014).

Social media sites such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) facilitate information sharing and political dialogue. However, ideological segregation is greatly magnified through the affordance of personalized media followings and affiliation (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Voters who seek voting information in social media are inclined to believe information that best fits one's existing beliefs (Dilliplane, 2014). The thin slices of information that guide voting decisions may be affected by deceptive mechanisms of fake news, trend distribution, hijacking, and creation (Prier, 2017). Cyberbase attacks of communication systems, such as social media, that further political dialogue disrupt civil conversations and political knowledge building on society's current affairs such as political elections. In fact, "people who get news from Facebook (or other social media) are less likely to receive evidence about the true state of the world that would counter an ideologically aligned but false story" (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 221)

This study focused particularly on those who cast their ballots in Manila and sought to understand the contexts and meanings in voting for Marcos Jr. To begin, Philippine political participation through electoral behavior, kinship, and media exposure need to be understood.

Research Problem

Founded on the importance of ideas of family and representations in the media on citizens' electoral behavior, this study asked: How did families in Manila City manage meanings and coordinate actions in voting for Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the 2022 national elections?

To adequately answer this, the study further delved into the following:

1. What media exposure did families in Manila have that shaped their political participation in favor of Marcos Jr.?

2. How did families who voted for Marcos Jr. express their political participation?
3. Beyond their families, what existing conversations and relationships influenced their political participation in favor of Marcos Jr.?

Exploring the different sources of information the voters were exposed to, including media, conversations at home, and conversations and interactions beyond the home through the stories they told aided in drawing a more complete picture of the sense-making and decision-making of the participants of the study.

Coordinated management of meaning

Differences in political worldviews and individual frames of references posit possibilities of accommodation and disagreement among voters, which intersects with political rhetoric, communication patterns, and embedded contexts. Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) of Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronnen is a theory with three aspects: interpretative, critical, and social. CMM, throughout its phases, has forwarded various models of communication pattern analysis, including the Hierarchy, Serpentine, LUUUUTT, and Daisy models (Pearce, 2005).

CMM views interpersonal communication at the center, where the production and reproduction of meanings and actions happen. Conversations build the primary social process of human life, as illustrated through the artist Maurits Cornelis Escher's *Bond of Union* (1956), which catalyzes social construction. CMM centers on analyzing communication patterns and enriching conversation experiences of and among individuals, particularly their Lived, Unknown, Untold, Unheard, Untellable stories, story Telling, and stories Told, which is the LUUUUTT model. Communication is an integrative meaning-making process by looking at patterns, relationships, and systems. Family discussions may have *told* and *lived* stories of their coordinated conversations and actions.

CMM highlights context frames that individuals bring into communication. These context frames include:

- Content. The actual message being conveyed in the process.
- Speech Act. The manner and intent of communicating sets the tone of the conversation, meaning-making, and response.
- Episode. The current situations experienced by the communication participants establish the context of meanings and actions.
- Life Script. The ideas, perceptions, habits, and beliefs that characterize a person reflects how conversations will be perceived and acted upon.

- Relationship. The connection that an individual has with other persons (including strangers, friends, and family) in the conversation influences how meanings and actions are created.
- Culture. The way of living to which the communication participants are accustomed shapes the interpretation process and behavioral response.

These context frames comprise the hierarchy of meanings from which individuals determine their course of meaning and action through constitutive and regulative rules (Hedman & Gesch-Karamanlidis, 2015; Littlejohn & Oetzel, 2017). The constitutive rule of meaning sets how an individual shall interpret a certain communication event, while the regulative rule of action directs how an individual shall respond or behave toward a communication event. With the constitutive and regulative rules as contextualized from the hierarchy of meaning, CMM divulges the plurality of communication. This affirms that communication is reflexive as individuals co-exist to create and recreate meanings of each other and the social world (Griffin et al., 2019).

In this study, the Manila residents who voted for Marcos Jr. told their stories and shared the manner in which they were telling these stories within the context frames. The study unearthed the unheard and untold stories of the participants and the interpersonal deontic logical force that shaped their lived and told stories during the 2022 Philippine elections. The perceived deontic logical force was the voters' imperative to persuade the other person to vote for their chosen candidate.

The Daisy Model

Pearce (2002) noted that in a communication situation, an individual who is part of a family or an organization may have speech codes in which the communicator talks like a native based on one's cultural communication patterns. The multiple conversations that a communicator engages in carries deontic logical force drawn from what is ought to be done and culturally forbidden. The expected speech codes and deontic logical force in a family are some of the factors that cultivate the meaning coordination among the household members in various contexts such as election. In particular, the author elaborated that the Daisy Model serves as a CMM tool in mapping the many conversations that shape the meaning making exchange. These conversations in various contexts are dubbed as petals (Pearce, 2002). The Daisy Model of CMM is a useful tool in analyzing the communication patterns of communicators on how one can be mindful of their communication behavior and patterns (Meyers, 2015). In addition, the Daisy Model and its petal structure allows CMM scholars to unfold

the meaning-making process of communication through conversations in various contexts and how it led to coordinated actions of organizations, families, and citizens of a nation. In unearthing the “textured clusters of persons-in-conversations” (Pearce, 2006, p. 6) as represented by the petals of the Daisy Model, we can explicate the polysemic nature of multiple conversations and coordinated actions.

The Daisy Model helps elaborate on the social construction of reality through conversations and stories that bind communicators—families in Manila City in managing meanings and coordinated actions during the 2022 national election. The Daisy Model illustrates those interactions, including past experiences, relationships, and inherited narratives that are used to make interpretations. The image of different petals of a daisy can reflect this (Pearce, 2006), such as experiences and narratives about Martial Law and the EDSA Revolution, as well as relationships with parents, a spouse, an employer, a barangay official, and even media exposure. These conversations serve as the unit of analysis of the study. In reality, these conversations occur in a much more disorganized world, where there are differing opinions and complexities that need to be considered. The richness of the process and the resolution despite the variabilities are what constitute the coordinated management of meaning. The participants who initially debated with others or had differing opinions eventually made up their minds in favor of Marcos Jr. in a real world where struggles, misunderstandings, and disagreements exist, but ultimately harmonized action emerges as ideal.

Methods

This qualitative study explored the meaning and action coordination of three families in Manila City in voting for Marcos Jr. in the 2022 elections. We conducted three focus group discussions: on November 30, 2022 with Family A; on December 5, 2022 with Family B; and on December 12, 2022 with Family C. We used non-probability purposive sampling, with the selection of participants following these criteria: (1) participants of the study were all bonafide residents of and registered voters in Manila City; (2) at least one eligible voter among the family members vets a different presidential candidate from Marcos, Jr. prior the elections; and (3) all eligible voters in the family voted for Marcos, Jr. at the time of election. To attain data saturation, the pool of consenting families of Manila voters who all chose to vote for Marcos Jr. and were willing to participate in face-to-face discussions in late 2022 was limited.

Through the sociological case study approach, the research surfaced the informed standpoints of participant-Manila voters grounded by their family discussions and interactions about the presidential election as a social

and political event (Hancock et al., 2021; Labor, 2021). The study aimed to describe and document Manila voters' political participation and voting practice during the 2022 Philippine national elections in favor of Marcos Jr.. We analyzed the narrative data using thematic analysis, which "allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). The narratives from the FGDs were analyzed through open and axial coding. The axial codes were organized in a thematic manner to address the research objectives. The study highlighted the commonalities and shared meanings in their conversations, stories, and political narratives in favor of Marcos Jr., as revealed through the Daisy Model.

This qualitative study observed research rigor through the utmost observance of credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity. Given the sensitive nature of the data shared by our participants, which are political perspectives and vote, reflexivity as a constructivist criteria of qualitative research credibility and quality were practiced (Yilmaz, 2013). In particular, reflexivity was exercised in our study from conceptualization, data gathering, analysis, and research dissemination. We sought to be conscientious through neutralizing and acknowledging our subjectivity in accounting for the analysis and interpretation of our narrative data (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Reflexivity was practiced through the use of the etic (outsider's) perspective in discussing the families' stand in favor of Marcos Jr. 's presidency; and the emic (insider's) perspective, as Filipino citizens in analyzing Filipino family communication and logical validity about the Martial Law period. Our epistemological premise as researchers is based on the heartfelt desire to understand the events relating to the 2022 national elections, as well as to work towards a better Philippines together for the generations to come.

The study upheld ethical guidelines and principles in the conduct of the research. Beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for persons were of prime consideration in planning the research design, no matter their demographic, background, and opinions. Participants' autonomy was highly guarded before and during data gathering through proper explanation of informed consent and rights of the participants. We allowed for the participants to share at the level they were comfortable with, allowing for safe spaces and open discussions. While some family members participated in friendly discussions and debates, we followed the set ground rules for the time we had with them and ensured practices related to social justice, gender and cultural sensitivity, and the protection of vulnerable groups. Also, to allow for the maximum comfort level of participants, we met the participants in sites that were most natural to and convenient for them. Privacy and confidentiality of the participants, as well as scholarly rigor,

were observed in data analysis (Lomibao & Labor, 2021; Philippine Health Research Ethics Board, 2022).

Participant families

The three participant families come from various socio-economic strata as classified by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS): 1) high with business ownerships; 2) middle class with small business ownerships and considerably stable jobs in the private and government sector; and 3) low-income with employment in the blue-collar job sector and with housing challenges (Dumlao, 2022; Zoleta, 2023). Table 1 below shows the demographic details of the participant-families.

Table 1
Summary of Participant Families' Details

Family Member	Children	Socio-Economic Stratum	Source of Income/Employment	Vote
A1 (husband)	3	High	Business in food distribution and construction that focuses on telecommunication	Marcos Jr.
A2 (wife)				Marcos Jr. despite her family's resistance against Marcos Sr.'s Martial Law
B1 (husband)	5	Low	Tricycle driver	Initially Moreno–shifted to Marcos Jr.
B2 (wife)			Manages <i>sari-sari</i> store	Marcos Jr.
B3 (B1's mother)			Laundry woman	Marcos Jr.
C1 (wife)	2	Middle	Manages a small canteen and a local government official	Torn with Moreno but shifted to Marcos Jr.
C2 (husband)			Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) in South Korea	Marcos Jr.

For further context, A1 and A2 have known each other since kindergarten, having been in a relationship for ten years, in addition to fifteen years of marriage. A1 and his family have supported Marcos since time immemorial, while A2 and her family had expressed resistance to the Marcos regime during the Martial Law and EDSA Revolution era.

During the election period, A1, a first-time voter and A2, who resumed voting since the 1992 national elections, would often discuss their opinions about presidential candidates. A1 decided to exercise his voting rights to show support for Marcos Jr. and become a role model for his children. A2 switched to voting for Marcos Jr. in the hopes of contributing positively to her children's future.

In addition, Family B attended the FGD with the burden of relocating to a new house during the Christmas season, which added to their rising emotions during the conversation. Originally, B1 supported and defended Moreno, while B2 and B3 have been solid BBM supporters, as influenced by the stories of their fathers. This led to arguments between B1 and B3, where B1 purposely withdrew from the debate out of respect and concern for his mother. However, a month before the elections, B2 successfully convinced B1 to vote for Marcos Jr. instead.

C1 and the children live with her mother and father because C2 has been an OFW for ten years. Family C has owned a small canteen for over 34 years, and C1 works as a local government official. Despite having family roots in Ilocos Norte, C1 perceives herself as a true Manileña or *batang Maynila*. Since C2 has been away for work, C1 identified her father as the one who dominates discussions at home.

Results

The three families represented in this study provided data for the coordination stories and conversations in voting for Marcos Jr. Their shared experiences and insights elaborated on the aspects of media exposure, family discussions, and community interactions.

Media exposure shaping political perceptions and preferences

From the coded and analyzed data, there is an observed preference of the participant-voters on social media such as Facebook in seeking information about elections. They resort to digital political partisan groups and messaging platforms to express their political preferences and opinions. This is aligned with them veering away from traditional media sources such as television and media outlets like CNN Philippines and ABS-CBN.

In with new media

The three families confirmed exposure to mediated political content during the 2022 national elections. This affirms the 2024 Reuters Institute Digital News Report in the Philippines (Newman et al., 2024), which revealed that Filipinos preferred online and social media over TV and other traditional news sources. The participant families mostly utilized online platforms rather than traditional media.

They heavily accessed digital media through sources such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and private messaging platforms for political updates. Family A and C followed Facebook pages such as Sas Rogando Sasot, Thinking Pinoy, a BBM Solidarity group (a private chat group among BBM supporters), and a South Korea BBM supporters' group for political updates about Marcos, Jr. These pages would occasionally provide Marcos-related content in their pink-dominated digital feeds. Family B highlighted the use of social media to check Marcos Jr.'s background. All three families resorted to online sources such as videos on TikTok and YouTube to search for Marcos Jr.'s life history, accomplishments, and platforms. Family C considered voting for Moreno, but they opted for Marcos Jr. based on his accomplishments which were evident in his online video campaigns. B1 would watch online videos while waiting for passengers to ride his tricycle and choose videos that gave him more information about Marcos Jr. In fact, B1 considered the online political content that countered accusations against Marcos Jr. and rehabilitated his image as one of the reasons that encouraged him to switch votes from Moreno to Marcos Jr. C1 shares and laughs, "*...yung iba kasi nakipag-away sa ano eh, sa post tapos parang kanya-kanyang manok pero di na po ako sumasagot.... Nilalagay ko lang po dun 'BBM solid'*" [Others fight online to defend their candidate mentioned in a post, but I don't. I just reply with "BBM solid"].

The BBM Solidarity group also included a discussion of livelihood programs to be implemented at the barangay level. C1 mentioned that the camp of Marcos Jr. had designated personnel to coordinate their planned programs.

Distrust of traditional media

Social media and new media sources were what the families relied on more. The only traditional TV program mentioned as a source for political information was Jessica Soho's show, *State of the Nation*. Family B, particularly B3, specified that they heard of Marcos Jr.'s name in the show; mostly, they relied on Facebook for updates and information on the 2022 Philippine presidential election. In general, traditional media for these families has taken the backseat. Family A mentioned that they did not trust media outlets such as CNN Philippines and ABS-CBN, traditional media sources, because of their apparent bias for Robredo. A1 views such outlets as distasteful. She explained that networked disinformation makes it hard to know what is real and what is not; each side pays for their information to get out, making it difficult to know who is telling the truth.

Family C believed that traditional media seldom picked up on Marcos Jr.'s proposals for livelihood programs at the barangay level. The families

felt that the media was dominated by Robredo supporters, including online spaces and posts. Their perception is that it was a pink-dominated world, hence their distrust of traditional media and choosing their own mediated safe spaces.

Mediated safe spaces

Aside from getting political updates about the 2022 national elections, the families utilized media to connect with fellow BBM supporters. Family A and C joined private messaging platforms like Viber and Facebook Messenger where they shared news concerning Marcos Jr. and conversed with fellow supporters about the polarizing political discussions they came across in their spaces. However, these two families also aimed to maintain their virtual feed as a safe space; hence, their silence and refusal to engage in online political arguments of opposing parties.

Mediated communication and interaction can be considered one of the factors of the participants' decision to vote for Marcos Jr., but it is not the main one.

Political participation and discussions in the family

The starting point of understanding the nature and process of political participation of selected Manila voters and their family is the dynamics and power structures of the family. The participants revealed that meaning and action coordination in voting for Marcos Jr. depended heavily on the strong voices in the family. The viewpoints of the family opinion leaders and coordinated discussions favored Marcos Jr. based on comparison with other presidential candidates, understanding of Marcos Jr.'s unity campaign slogan, and admiration towards Marcos Sr. and his Martial Law era.

The participants shared how they lived out their political participation together: supporting electoral debates, peaceful campaigning, subscribing to the main social media platforms of their chosen candidate, purchasing paraphernalia and merchandise, and attending political gatherings. Family A participated in the virtual event to support Marcos Jr.'s camp prior to the campaign period. A2 shared that she liked the campaign's music and organization. B3 and C1 attended Marcos Jr.'s campaign rallies in Bustillos, Manila. The children of B1 and B2 watched the motorcade and sang the campaign jingle, and Family C wore red shirts, ballers, and jackets to show support.

Open discussions in the family

Participant families in Manila, whether vocal or reserved, spoke their mind about the elections. During the campaign season, parents would answer questions from their children about who they were voting for and

why, with an eleven-year-old even telling her mom (C1) to vote for Moreno because he was handsome. Parents addressed their children's questions, keeping communication lines open. Even though the children had not reached voting age, the parents encouraged the children to think critically for themselves and did not expect their children to agree with them or automatically support their candidate. C1 admired this about her daughter. Respect was evident in the way they related to one another during the FGD.

Family B had the most debates, especially between B1 who originally supported Moreno and both B2 and B3, who consider themselves solid BBM supporters. B2 recounted and agreed that they would support Marcos Jr. She recalled, "*Pinush ko talaga siya na mag-Bongbong*" [I pushed him to support Bongbong]. However, B1 would refrain from exhaustive arguments with his mother, B3, to avoid raising her blood pressure and to respect her as the elderly. Even C1 was unsure who her parents voted for and explained that they respected each other's decisions and voting preferences. On a regular basis, family members would express their thoughts with each other on election-related topics, what they saw in the media, what they heard from their friends, and other candidates' actions and platforms. A1 would tell A2 about the BBM-related posts she had seen, and A2 would in turn explain and provide further context. Such discussions would often occur at the dinner table.

The participants of the study were convinced of voting for Marcos Jr. from the beginning of the campaign period, and even before. B2 was adamant about her trust in Marcos Jr. and how he could bring about long-awaited change in the country. All the families were confident about a Marcos Jr. win, including C2 who trusted Marcos Jr.'s promises to overseas Filipino workers. Only B1 switched one month before the elections.

Despite differences, Families B and C mentioned that they respected their choice of *manok*—a term used in cockfighting arenas in gambling for and supporting their bet, which is reminiscent of the interests of gambling in the Philippines. They tend to choose the *llamado* (the cock with the best chance to win) candidate who promised stability at the national level and for every household. The perceived benefits were specific to their needs: for Family A, the growth of their businesses; for Family B, housing and monetary assistance; for Family C, assistance for overseas workers. There was even a discussion among family members on why they did not vote for Moreno. While they appreciated the assistance and development provided by Moreno in Manila, they did not get swayed by others who were trying to convince them or even guilt them into this decision. They instead chose their sure-win rooster—their *llamado*—Marcos Jr.

Understanding the solid BBM rationale

The participant families said they campaigned and voted for Marcos Jr. together based on their shared mental scripts about his edge as a seasoned politician—as a son of a former president, as a former governor, and as a former senator. The strong family support to Marcos Jr. was associated with the appeal of the “unity” slogan. A1 even referred to Marcos Jr.’s campaign strategy as more peaceful and tasteful compared to other candidates. The oral stories of the participants’ fathers and grandfathers about the “glorious” Martial Law era of Marcos Sr. was associated with the assumption and hope that the son will deliver similarly.

BBM over Yorme and Leni

All families wanted to give Marcos Jr. a chance because of Marcos Sr., and believed that he was more capable than the other candidates. B1 explained that he switched from supporting Moreno to voting for Marcos Jr. because Marcos Jr. was not vengeful. B1 verbalized what he thought motivated Marcos Jr. to run: “*Kaya ako tumakbong bilang presidente, hindi para maghiganti, kundi para ibangon yung Pilipinas sa kalugmukan, sa kahirapan*” [That’s why I ran as president—not for revenge, but to bring the Philippines back up from difficulty, from poverty]. The participants also compared the authenticity and experiences of Marcos Jr. with Moreno, who was a great help to Mañilenos especially in the pandemic. The families thought of Moreno’s political journey as abrupt, to go from a first-time, one-term mayor to a presidential candidate. Family B was adamant not to vote for Moreno because he had “sold” Divisoria, a commercial place in Manila City, and they said that this is now in a sorry state.

B1 admires that even when hurtful things were said against Marcos Jr., he chose not to react. C1 agreed with this perspective and explained that Marcos Jr. does not showcase his work in the media. In fact, his supporters perceived that he might be courting his help and leadership through the effort of different local government units and non-government organizations. She also explained that having a male leader was better, so the political throne could be passed from father to son. The preference of a male leader through the use of biologically defining terms in relation to a leader’s capacity was observed. C1 used *lalaki* [male] in relation to good leadership, and C2 referred to Robredo as *babae* [female] as a possible option for other voters.

In addition, Family B shared that they did not vote for Robredo because they felt that even if she won, nothing would happen. Family A heard rumors that if Leni had won, other people would maneuver her, and that she would not really lead. They were also turned off by the negative messaging against other candidates, rather than focusing on her own platform. B1 said that

while they enjoyed seeing memes of Leni, “*Mas seryoso si Marcos*” [Marcos is more serious].

Catchy “unity” campaign

The slogan of Marcos’s campaign in the UniTeam, “*Bagong Pilipinas, Bagong Mukha*” [New Philippines, New Face/Look], is representative of Marcos Jr. as the new face of the Philippines, leading the country into a new era. All three families understood the platform of “unity” spearheaded by the Marcos-Duterte tandem as wanting to bring the whole nation together. C1 mentioned that another UniTeam tagline, *Agila at Tigre* [Eagle and Tiger], brought together the two bailiwicks of Marcos Jr. in the northern part of the Philippines as represented by the tiger and of Sara Duterte in the southern part of the Philippines as represented by the eagle. According to C1, unity as the campaign platform forwards a promise to strengthen and develop the Philippines. Family A and B explained that unity meant going beyond what happened in the past and beyond political colors to create a better society. With the reality of segmented and partisan politics as well as regional ideologies, the banner of unity of the Marcos-Duterte tandem captured the unity among the voters in the families in Manila.

The Marcos family name and legacy

Talking about Marcos Jr. also brought up Marcos Sr.’s former regime, which the families recounted as the glory days of the Philippines. C1 shared that the Marcoses developed the province of Ilocos (which is C1’s province) and made it glorious and that they hoped it could be applied to the whole nation. The stories of peace and order during the time of Marcos Sr., as well as the low cost of living, were recounted by all participants, as told by their parents, specifically their fathers and grandfathers, and which are now being retold to their children. Their perspective of the Philippines under Martial Law, according to C1, when the situation was very restricted and controlled, led her to talk to her daughter and want to give Marcos Jr. a chance. C1 explained to her daughter her choice to vote for Marcos Jr., based on what her own father had told her: “...*si...Bongbong Marcos kasi mas kilala na kasi naman senador tapos dating president yung tatay niya sabi kong ganun...ok ang bansang Pilipinas nung sabi ng lolo mo panahon nila sobrang higpit, mataas ang ano—bakit hindi subukan natin yung anak...*” [Bongbong Marcos is more known as a senator and he is the son of a former president.... According to your grandfather, the Philippines was okay at that time, things were strict and the situation was good. So why don’t we try voting for Marcos Sr.’s son?].

Recalling the stories they had heard and making their own conclusions about Martial Law and the EDSA Revolution, A1 blamed the bloody and

unjust murders during Martial Law on the victims. He explained that their resistance and activism against the government led to the unfortunate but understandable response. A2 emphasized, “Marcos is not bad—Ferdinand, the father. He’s not all bad, *di ba?*” [right?]. Family B referred to how the Marcoses were unjustly judged and considered evil and B3 even referred to Marcos Sr. as a good man. In fact, the source of his missteps could be accredited to his wife and others around him. B1 also shared, “*Hindi naman pala totoo yung mga pagbibintang sa mga Marcos*” [The Marcoses were blamed for things that were untrue]. B2 said that almost everyone is judgmental. While the good of Marcos Sr. set Marcos Jr. up for success in the participants’ eyes, they said that the father’s mistakes should not be paid for by the son.

They perceived the legacy of Marcos Sr. as positive and made equally positive assumptions about Marcos Jr’s capabilities. These stories as recounted by the families contradict the documented corruption and human rights violations of the Marcoses. The Philippine Supreme Court declared that the ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses amounted to US\$627,608,544.95 (Human Rights Violations Victims Memorial Commission [HRVVMC], 2021). The Human Rights Victims’ Claims Board (HRVCB), created through Republic Act No. 10368, determined that 11,103 Martial Law victims are eligible to claim monetary reparations (Institute of Human Rights - UP Law Center, 2020). In this study, the participants praised the positive aspects about Marcos Jr. inherited from his father, while refusing to connect any wrongdoing of the father to the son.

The coordinated stories of the participants about Marcos Jr., the comparison with other candidates, the perceptions of the unity campaign platform, and their rejection of Martial Law-era atrocities are anchored on the strong voices in the families—the fathers and grandfathers. This led to the selected Manila voters choosing Marcos Jr.

Conversations and relationships shaping political participation

Beyond the family, the participants had other key relationships that shaped their conversations about the candidates and elections.

Hard selling of candidates

Family A recalled interacting with those who were vocal about their support for Marcos Jr., those who did not freely disclose their political preferences, such as business partners and employees, and those who were mostly supporters of Robredo like friends, neighbors, and the teachers of their sons.

A1 shared that Robredo supporters would hard sell Robredo as a presidential candidate by persuading and converting voters. A2 was

interrogated by her Robredo-supporting friends to flesh out her presidential bet, only for her love for her children and her hope for their future to be questioned. At times, to end the questioning, A2 would tell people she would vote for Moreno. Moreover, A2 learned from her father that one of their relatives who was a Marcos Jr. supporter and had put up a banner showing his support had allegedly Robredo supporters throwing stones at their house, which had caused a window to break. Because of this violence, Family A opted to ensure their safety and did not put stickers on their cars or posters outside their homes. The family also avoided publicly displaying their support of any political candidate to protect their business.

Family B interacted with supporters of both Moreno and Robredo who tried to convince them to vote for their candidate. This included a person who rode B1's tricycle, neighbors, an employer, and a barangay captain. B1 recounted the story of the passenger who tried to convince him to vote for Robredo. After initially talking about why he would vote for Marcos Jr. and since the passenger would not relent, B1 recounted, "*Sabi ko, 'Nay, iba-iba kasi tayo ng...iba-iba tayo ng pananaw pagdating sa.... Respetuhan na lang*" [I said, ma'am, we are different...we have different views relating to.... Let us just respect each other].

There were also healthy debates that resulted in some walking away from face-to-face discussions. C1 laughed as she recalled that there were debates and walkouts among friends and coworkers in the barangay who tried to diss Marcos Jr. C2 shared that they would not openly support Marcos Jr., although they had red jackets and a BBM Solidarity group among OFWs.

Muted political preferences.

B3 even denied her support for Marcos Jr. by pretending to vote for Robredo. She explained that she lied because she was afraid of losing her job. But when it came to the chairman of the barangay who told the neighbors to vote for Moreno, B3 stood her ground and told him she would not, even when she was told she could lose her pension—which she did not.

Families A and B chose not to vote for Moreno nor Robredo because of the bashing of the supporters of these candidates. Robredo supporters were perceived as bullies with violent tendencies, and this affected the families' likelihood to vote for the candidate. A1 recalled asking, "*Logical pa ba yung pag-iisip ng mga yan? Bakit tayo sasama dun sa illogical na tingin natin sa pag-iisip, so eh di dun tayo sa kabila*" [Are they still thinking logically? Why should we join those people whom we think are illogical? So let us instead join the other party]. B3 explained, "*Oo, nagsinungaling ako. Baka mamaya, bigla akong palayasin sa pagkatrabaho ko*" [Yes, I lied. I was afraid my employer would fire me].

Supporters of Marcos Jr. refused to engage in political conversations to maintain peace with individuals who had different prepositions. A1 knew of friends who would deny supporting Marcos Jr. and those who pretended to be Robredo supporters instead. Even after the elections, A1 recalled that Robredo supporters would condemn Marcos Jr. supporters and talk about leaving the country. She heard them say: “*Lahat kayong 33 something million, kayo may kasalanan kung anong mangyayari satin*” [All those 33 million who voted for him, you are to blame for the mishaps that will happen to all of us].

Indeed, the 2022 national elections caused a divide on who voters thought was deserving to lead the country. But, regardless of political stand and color, it is undeniable that Filipinos aspire for the betterment of the nation. In less than a year in power, Marcos Jr. supporters in Manila discussed their post-election reflections as part of the continuous meaning-making and action coordination process of the families.

Reflections on the Marcos Presidency

Immediately after voting on May 9, 2022, all participants believed Marcos Jr. would win. B2 encapsulated the responses of the other participants when she said she was confident that Marcos Jr. had already won. Family A avoided conversations with their friends who supported Robredo, and C1 represented all the participants in saying that she is now waiting for the platforms of Marcos Jr. to be fulfilled.

Participants gave Marcos Jr., an average approval rating, which may be considered *pasang-awa* [barely passing]. Some expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction with the way things were being run in government at the time of the FGD. A2 admitted her approval rate of Marcos Jr. was lower now. The families defended their scores by acknowledging that the presidency was in its beginning stages. A1 said he would judge the Marcos Jr. presidency from the last 100 days, not the first 100. They also observed indecisiveness and inconsistency from Marcos Jr. B1 said, “*Wala pa din yung pagbabago*” [The change has not come yet].

Despite the low grade, hopes remained high. The families also had the following advice for Marcos Jr.: be firm and not be swayed by his family or those around him (A2); help with their dire housing and financial problems (B3); fulfill what he said he would do. B2 explained their high hopes: “*Sabi nga niya, di ba, laban namin, laban niya?... Ilaban niya yung Pilipinas para makaahon*” [He said that our fight is his fight, right?... He should fight to uplift the Philippines].

All participant families expressed their desire for greater things for their family and nation, frustration with the rotten political system, and hopes

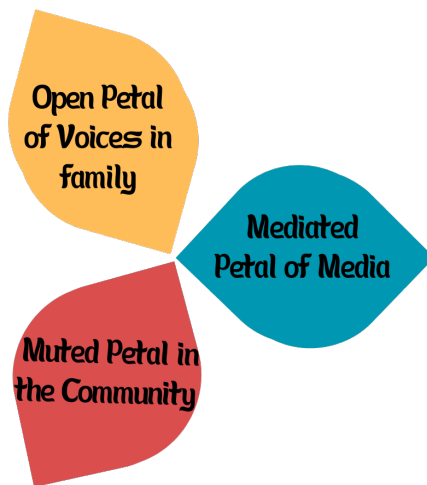
for poverty alleviation. They despaired over previous administrations and the different political parties that have been in power because nothing had changed. C1 had high expectations of the new president. Having given him the lowest approval rating of all participants and being a fellow government employee herself, she expects people to hold him accountable. Family B and C hoped the president would uplift the poor by providing livelihood opportunities and basic social services.

The families who voted for Marcos Jr. basically had two motivations: the good of the family and the good of the nation. They were united in their support, votes, and aspirations. The vote of confidence for Ferdinand Marcos Jr. carries much hope, pressure, and responsibility—for Marcos Jr. to do his duty as the president.

Discussion

The families who voted for Marcos Jr. did so because they perceived that this decision would benefit them. This study showed that the major factors that contributed to this decision were their media exposure, strong voices in the family, and interactions in the community, which are represented by petals in the Daisy Model of CMM.

Figure 1
Conversations and Coordinated Management of Meaning that Led to Voting for Marcos Jr.



Note: This diagram was conceptualized by the researchers based on their findings and analysis

Mediated Petal: Echo chambers of new media

Propaganda was heightened the most during the campaign period to persuade the public to vote for candidates. Scott Althaus and David Tewksbury's (2002) study on personalized media preferences, which was emphasized by Griffin et al., (2019), confirms that media exposure can become fabricated and, with algorithms and echo chambers, cause a segmented reality in terms of political interaction and participation. Specifically, social media operates through an algorithm that curates and recommends content based on user profile history (Bell, 2021). Social media preference and constant use may lead to isolated political content perceptions and possible susceptibility to fabricated information (Primack et al., 2017).

The unknown danger of extensive social media trust was demonstrated in the Cambridge Analytica (CA) case. In the documentary *The Great Hack* (Amer & Noujaim, 2019), the CA case exposed the unethical harvesting of Facebook users' data as means of analyzing and identifying so-called "persuadables"—voters who have higher possibility for political swing. Persuadables are targeted through digital rhetoric with disinformation (false, imposter, manipulated, and fabricated content) and mal-information (leaks, harassment, and hate speech) as a form of psychographic weapon to pivot the persuadables toward political propaganda. According to Paige Occeñola (2019), Christopher Wylie, who is a former data scientist in CA, mentioned that the Philippines is one of CA's petri dishes in pretesting the CA methodology. Through a proxy company named Strategic Communications Laboratory, CA was able to pivot results of various Philippine elections and branding of corrupt political dynasties in the Philippines (Occeñola, 2019; Robles, 2018).

Family A mentioned that after watching a few videos of Marcos Jr., their feed would recommend more of the same. The social media algorithm provided canned and personalized BBM-related posts on their feeds and search histories during the 2022 election period. Erica Bell (2021) revealed that this forwarded social media polarization, where users seize resistance towards opposing views. This follows the political polarization experienced by the participating families towards the pink community. The political content, somehow, induced the families to become unresponsive and resistant towards information and updates from the opposing party. Living in one's social media echo chamber, therefore, influences the political behavior and psychological responses of the voters in the digital space.

Their access to and reliance on social media and alternative forms of media manifests the declining preference on traditional media, reflective of the 2024 Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2024). The participants

pinpoint the decreasing preference of traditional media and the increasing inclination of online and social media to disseminate information. With the same reason, the participating families perceived the bias of traditional media to Robredo as distasteful. This drew families closer to the echo chamber of isolated political content on social media in favor of Marcos Jr. and pulled the families away from getting a holistic view of the 2022 national elections. The push for a rehabilitated image of the Marcos family, specifically putting Marcos Jr. in a positive light, aided in the propagation of news and historical perspectives skewed in Marcos's favor.

The participants' media choices were one factor for voting (Capadocia et al., 2008 in Tolentino, et al., 2016), and it strengthened them to stand for Marcos Jr. The families trusted social media more than traditional media, even with the possibility of skewed echo chambers. Propaganda machines, as seen through the CA case and other malefic digital rhetoric on social media platforms, intend to break society to shape it. Magnifying political polarization segments and drives society towards the favored and paying political team—at the expense of data privacy and democratic integrity. Propaganda led online discourses through fake news, trend hijacking, and trend creation distorts the supposed natural flow of online political conversations and election narratives. “He who controls the trend will control the narrative—and, ultimately, the narrative controls the will of the people” (Prier, 2017, p. 81). Political interactions and experiences cultivated within social media filter bubbles are easily manipulated by firms and political entities. This occurrence is similar to the 2016 US presidential election (Alcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Bail et al., 2018). We have to be critical in the acknowledgement of multiple realities that are propagandist-led and algorithmically-shaped in the digital world.

In addition to media exposure, the strong voices in the family and the interactions in the community also served as contributing factors to their decision-making.

Open Petal: Strong voices influencing the family

Family members were open to sharing their thoughts with minimal inhibitions, a communication practice represented by open petals. They trusted one another with their thoughts and did not fear being silenced nor bullied. While they had friendly banter with one another during the FGD and at times put the other person's story at the forefront, communication remained intact within the family.

Voters in Manila families negotiate differences by yielding to the strong voices in the patriarchal and hierarchical household. The fathers serve as pillars in the home, or *haligi ng tahanan*, and the mothers serve as the light

in the home, or *ilaw ng tahanan*. They put high regard on the narratives and decisions of the father figure in their families. We may note that the bifurcation point of meaning coordination is manifested through the high regard of family members with the stories of opinion leaders about Martial Law and Marcos Sr. This is reflective of Filipino culture and the value of family in terms of high regard to the elderly. This analysis affirms 25 years of local studies about Filipino families. The strong sense of Filipino familism is evident through the values of giving premium to children's concerns, high regard for the elderly, and respect to the authority of parents, usually led by the father, whose opinion and perspectives are greatly heard (Gozum, 2020; Morillo et al., 2013). The fathers of the present families and the older generation have a bigger say on how their children and even their grandchildren form meaning and perceive social reality. Family members and household political discussions are crucial and hold power in shaping one's political opinion and vote through communication and oral stories from the elderly and authority figures, which leads to shared interpretations of the family members (Capadocia et al., 2008; Montiel, 2002). In this study's case, the shared mental script is that Marcos Jr. is the better choice compared to other candidates because of his perceived political experience, appealing unity campaign, and political family legacy.

Family members in a Filipino household commit themselves to their kin, even when making life-altering individual choices, such as transformative political participation (Bartolome et al., 2018; Genilo, 2021). In addition, Lourdes Carandang's Tagasalo Theory (1987, as cited in Udarbe, 2001) supports the kinship commitment through the concept of a *tagasalo* (caretaking) persona in a Filipino household. The need for harmony forwards the need for "more open communication among family members leads to another of tagasalo's concerns" (p. 56). This stems from tagasalo's intention of pleasing the parents by sparing them the trouble and as a means of demonstrating influence in the family dynamics. This sense of familism in Filipino households is supported even with migrated families in America (Wolf, 1997). Even in a Western culture set-up, "Filipino Americans showed a strong belief in hierarchy within the family, including compliance with older adults and the child's obedience to parents" (Choi et al., 2017, par. 45).

Findings of this study support the sense of familism as manifested in the case of a parent's authority towards adolescents despite the expected alternative influences of peers and mass media. Our study shows that Filipino familism is prolonged, with in-depth family commitment extending into adulthood. The adult children continue to defer to and highly regard the opinions of the older generation.

Given the crucial influence of strong family voices, stakeholders of

this study should take into consideration the formation and shaping of the opinion of these family opinion leaders or meaning-coordination leaders. These strong voices in the household may fall prey to primary source effects leading them to believe the first information they see from their perceived credible source without critical verification. Also, strong voices in the family and its members may be affected by illusory truth effects of fake news, in which repeated and constant exposure to information or mis and dis information may lead them to believe without fact checking (Siar, 2021), manifestations of which include fabricated, isolated, and polarized political stories. There is susceptibility of elderly family members with fake news in the current post-truth era (Hern, 2019), which is also prevalent in the North and South American context (Brashier & Schacter, 2020; Pecho-Ninapaytan et al., 2021). This may greatly affect how families coordinate meaning and actions that are crucial not just within the household but in the community and society as well.

Muted Petal: Bullied and silenced in community

The conversations that all participants had beyond the family about political preferences and participation were more reserved. The open petals of the Daisy Model in the home are a stark contrast to the muted petals in their communities. They recounted the communication tirades, negative messaging, intense campaigning, and violent reactions from Robredo and Moreno supporters, which forced the families to deny and suppress their support for Marcos Jr. There were times when they chose to stay silent and muted, mainly to steer clear of argumentative discussions and conflicts. They also felt bullied.

In a study conducted on political partisanship and intergroup tensions in the United States, Brittany Cassidy et al. (2022) found that disclosing partisanship causes negative changes in impressions and interactions. Such partisan biases can also serve as threats to relationships and interactions. In the 2022 Philippine elections where many people felt the confidence to randomly ask strangers who they were going to vote for, polarization and negative interactions led to intergroup tensions, causing many to debate, deny, unfriend, or walk away from relationships involving both mediated and interpersonal communication.

This is supported by a sociological study of polarization and persuasion, also in the United States, between conservatives and liberals (Downey, 2022). The divided democracy and polarized opinions lead to an effort to pressure and persuade others to see things from a different perspective. The Philippines was in a culture war in the 2022 national elections, with factions strongly supporting their candidates and others feeling muted, marginalized,

and even bullied. Dennis Downey describes these as enclave deliberations or echo chambers and behavioral extremity that makes building bridges to connect political divides more challenging.

The political polarity and partisanship in the Philippine context is nuanced with *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Enriquez, 1977; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000), particularly on the concepts of *ibang tao* (outsider) and *hindi-ibang tao* (one of us). In looking at Filipinos' *diwang politikal* (political habits and behaviors), we may note that allegiance to a different political color hinders, to a point disarrays, the identification of one's *kapwa* (shared identity) and practice of *pakikipagkapwa* (treating the other person as human being). *Pakikipagkapwa* "means accepting and dealing with the other person as equal...regard for the dignity and being of others." (Enriquez, 1977, p.11–12). Robredo's supporters were criticized for their intellectual elitism and their brash judgment of Marcos Jr. supporters as delusional, stupid, or worse, evil (Palugod, 2022). This turned off the participants who felt that Marcos and—by extension—they were judged by other camps. Therefore, whether these families were muted or chose to stay muted to avoid conflict, their opinions were all challenged, and these extreme actions and efforts at persuasion validated their convictions to support Marcos Jr., built resentment even for well-meaning Moreno and Robredo supporters, and pushed them further into their enclaves, safe spaces, and echo chambers where groupthink can occur. The practical aspect of CMM shows that meaning-making is inherently diverse across cultures and subcultures, such as political parties and leaning (Orbe & Camara, 2010). Thus, this sentiment of being bullied goes against one of the value commitments of CMM, which is respect for articulation of differing views (Pearce, 2005). Stories and opinions that do not align with our values should still be considered, heard, and validated even if we have different political leanings and choices for presidential candidates.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Families in Manila City managed meanings based on their coordinated conversations and stories through open discussions in their households led by the strong voices in the family, access to new media and distrust of traditional media, and interactions in the community that pushed them further into their echo chambers and social enclaves. These represent the petals of the Daisy Model. The families coordinated their action to vote for Ferdinand Marcos Jr. based on their shared mental scripts about Marcos Jr., the other candidates, the "unity" campaign platform, and perceived Marcos name and legacy. This was done in the hopes of creating a better life for their families and the nation.

The media exposure of families in Manila was primarily characterized by social and new media, as well as a distrust for traditional media. They relied on new media sources for Marcos Jr. related political content that support the meaning-making in their homes. While mediated communication was a factor in their decision-making, it was heavily influenced by the strong voices in the family.

Among the families who voted for Marcos Jr., discussions in the home were characterized by open communication, respect, and deference to the elderly. The strong inside voices of the family were based on the patriarchal and hierarchical system of Filipino familism, and remains to be the strongest factor in the coordinated management of meaning and the decision to support and vote for Marcos Jr.

The conversations and relationships outside their families were characterized by intentional political persuasion, negative messaging, and sentiments of being bullied, muted, and silenced. These interactions and the hard selling by supporters of other candidates validated their decision to support their candidate of choice, whom they perceived to have a more peaceful and tasteful campaign. The combination of these factors led to the management of meaning and coordinated action of voters in Manila City to support and elect Marcos Jr.

Surfacing the crucial points that led to the results of the 2022 presidential elections, the findings serve as an impetus for communication scholars to further explore political communication events and aid in understanding the electorate communication behavior of Filipinos, specifically in the evolving digital media age. Media practitioners should bring into mind their responsibilities of upholding credible journalism, serving as the critical watchdog of the state, and representing the true voice and welfare of Filipino voters in a post-truth era. By fleshing out the meaning-making and action coordination of participant families in Manila City, Filipino voters, regardless of their political stands, are also constantly reminded to be critical and reflective with their voting expression and participation, as this decision will not only ripple through the future of their household members, but to the nation as well.

While this study is limited in terms of its breadth, it can dovetail into more studies that enrich our understanding and sentiments of Filipino votes beyond Manila City and Metro Manila, as well as beyond the 2022 national elections. Strong roots of Filipino families, a growing distrust with some forms of media, and polarized discussions are key factors for upcoming and future elections in the Philippines and beyond.

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Grant Support Details

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, R. CDC., V. D., and MJ. SJ.; methodology, R. CDC., V. D., and MJ. SJ.; investigation, R. CDC., V. D., and MJ. SJ.; data curation, R. CDC., V. D., and MJ. SJ.; writing—original draft preparation, R. CDC., V. D., and MJ. SJ.; writing—review and editing, R. CDC., V. D., and MJ. SJ. All authors contributed to the study’s conceptualization, implementation, analysis, and revisions. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: The authors received no specific funding for this work.

Acknowledgements: The researchers would like to extend their gratitude to and acknowledge the valuable insight of Assoc. Prof. Jonalou S. Labor, PhD, from conceptualization to the theorizing and designing of the study. Dr. Labor was the professor of the Comm 210: Approaches in Communication Research class, for which this study was originally conducted. We are grateful to the families who lent us their time and trusted us with their information and perspectives. We dedicate this study to the Filipino voters and our nation.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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