

NARRATIVES OF POWER AND MEMORY: A RHETORICAL-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF PHILIPPINE POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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ABSTRACT

Political discourse in the digital era is shaped by emotional persuasion, historical memory, and rapidly circulating online communication. In the Philippines, political narratives now operate within highly networked digital environments where symbolic messaging and affective engagement significantly influence public political interpretation. Although existing scholarship has examined populism, digital campaigning, and political communication, limited attention has been given to how rhetoric, historical memory, and digital mediation intersect within contemporary Philippine political discourse. This study examined how narratives of power and memory were constructed and circulated within Philippine political discourse during the 2016 and 2022 electoral periods. Using a qualitative rhetorical-historical approach, the study analyzed publicly accessible campaign speeches, televised interviews, campaign advertisements, official social media content, and related digital communication materials. The analysis was informed by rhetorical theory, collective memory studies, and digital political communication scholarship. The findings revealed that political discourse relied heavily on affect-driven narratives centered on crisis, discipline, unity, restoration, and national identity. Historical references and collective memory were strategically employed to reinforce political legitimacy, strengthen symbolic continuity, and evoke nostalgic forms of public identification. The study further found that digital media platforms amplified these narratives through repetition, audience engagement, and rapid online circulation. Comparative analysis between the 2016 and 2022 electoral periods also demonstrated shifts in rhetorical framing, from crisis-oriented populist discourse toward narratives emphasizing continuity, reconciliation, and national restoration. The study offers an integrated rhetorical-historical perspective for understanding how emotional persuasion, historical memory, and digital mediation interact within contemporary Philippine political discourse. It contributes to broader discussions on political communication, digital populism, memory politics, and democratic discourse in increasingly networked media environments.

Keywords: political communication; rhetorical discourse; historical memory; populist communication; digital campaigning; Philippine elections

1. INTRODUCTION

Political campaigns have increasingly become struggles over meaning, identity, and symbolic authority rather than mere competitions between policy platforms or electoral promises. In many democratic societies today, political communication operates through symbolically charged narratives, performative leadership, and digitally amplified messaging capable of shaping how citizens interpret political reality. Social media platforms, in particular, have transformed the structure of electoral communication by allowing political actors to engage audiences directly through personalized and emotionally resonant content that circulates rapidly across networked digital environments (Chadwick, 2017; Enli, 2017). Within these environments, political persuasion is no longer confined to formal speeches, televised debates, or party machinery. Instead, it increasingly depends on symbolic storytelling, affective engagement, and the strategic circulation of narratives that simplify complex political conditions into recognizable persuasive forms. As Moffitt (2022) argues, contemporary populist communication thrives through performance, emotional identification, and media visibility, especially in digitally mediated political spaces where visibility itself becomes a form of power.

The growing centrality of historical memory in political discourse further complicates this transformation. Political actors frequently invoke narratives of national decline, collective struggle, or nostalgic restoration to legitimize authority and mobilize support. Historical references within campaign discourse are rarely neutral descriptions of the past; they function rhetorically by framing present political realities through selective interpretations of historical events and collective memory (Assmann, 2011). In digitally networked societies, these narratives circulate continuously through social media posts, videos, memes, and algorithmically amplified content that reinforce emotional attachment and symbolic political identity. Digital political communication therefore operates not only through information dissemination but also through the construction of affective publics capable of sustaining shared emotional and ideological orientations (Papacharissi, 2015). Similar developments have also been observed across Southeast Asia, where social media platforms more heavily highly personalized and persuasive forms of electoral campaigning that bypass traditional institutional communication structures (Tapsell, 2021). These developments have intensified concerns regarding how democratic discourse is shaped by sentiment-driven persuasive narratives that blur the boundaries between political communication, entertainment, and historical interpretation.

The Philippines offers a particularly significant context for examining these dynamics. Electoral politics in the country has long been associated with personality-centered leadership, symbolic politics, patronage relations, and media-driven campaigning. Yet the emergence of digitally mediated electoral communication has substantially transformed how campaign narratives are produced, circulated, and contested. The 2016 presidential election, for instance, illustrated how emotionally charged rhetoric centered on fear, discipline, and anti-establishment frustration could generate strong affective political identification. Duterte's campaign strategically framed national problems through narratives of crime, disorder, and institutional weakness while presenting decisive leadership as the solution to social anxiety (Curato, 2017). By contrast, the 2022 presidential election demonstrated the increasing role of historical memory and digital amplification in political persuasion. Narratives of unity, national recovery, and nostalgia associated with the Marcos political legacy circulated widely across Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, particularly among younger audiences exposed to highly networked and algorithmically curated campaign content (Ong & Cabañes, 2018; Sinpeng et al., 2020). These developments suggest that contemporary Philippine campaign discourse now operates within hybrid media systems where rhetoric, digital circulation, and historical memory continuously interact in shaping public political perception.

Ideally, democratic campaign communication should encourage informed public deliberation grounded in critical discussion, political accountability, and substantive evaluation of governance. Electoral discourse is expected to provide citizens with opportunities to examine competing visions of

national development and democratic leadership. Yet contemporary campaign environments increasingly privilege audience-oriented narratives over sustained policy-oriented engagement. Digital platforms reward brevity, repetition, emotional intensity, and symbolic simplification, making emotionally resonant messages more visible and more politically influential than nuanced political discussion. Historical narratives, meanwhile, are often detached from historical complexity and reframed into simplified symbolic accounts capable of reinforcing political legitimacy and emotional loyalty. The issue is not rhetoric itself, which is inevitable in democratic politics, but the growing dependence of electoral persuasion on emotionally amplified narratives that shape collective memory and public interpretation with limited critical scrutiny.

Existing scholarship has examined different aspects of this phenomenon. Research on political communication has explored how digital media platforms reshape electoral visibility, voter engagement, and political participation within hybrid media environments (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Chadwick, 2017). Other studies have examined the role of emotional communication and affective publics in structuring contemporary political engagement, particularly in online spaces where emotional circulation influences political interpretation and participation (Papacharissi, 2015). Scholarship on populism and political discourse has further demonstrated how rhetorical strategies construct symbolic distinctions between “the people” and political elites while reinforcing ideological identities through emotionally charged narratives (Laclau, 2005; Wodak, 2021). Within the Philippine context, studies have also examined populist leadership, digital disinformation networks, and online political brokerage during recent electoral cycles (Curato, 2017; Ong & Cabañes, 2018). Research on digital campaigning in Southeast Asia additionally highlights how social media platforms have become central mechanisms for political influence, networked persuasion, and electoral mobilization (Sinpeng et al., 2020; Soriano & Gaw, 2022).

Despite these contributions, important gaps remain in the literature. Existing studies frequently examine rhetoric, digital campaigning, populist communication, and historical memory as separate analytical domains. Research focusing on rhetorical persuasion often emphasizes emotional appeals and campaign performance without fully examining how historical narratives contribute to political legitimacy and affective identification. Studies on digital politics commonly prioritize disinformation, platform dynamics, or algorithmic circulation while paying comparatively less attention to the rhetorical and historical structure of campaign discourse itself. Likewise, scholarship on memory politics frequently investigates historical revisionism and collective remembrance independently of the persuasive rhetorical mechanisms through which these narratives acquire political force in electoral contexts. In the Philippine setting, relatively limited scholarship has systematically examined how rhetoric and historical memory interact simultaneously within digitally amplified campaign discourse. This absence creates an important analytical gap in understanding how narratives of power and memory operate together in contemporary democratic persuasion.

The consequences of this gap extend beyond electoral outcomes alone. Campaign discourse shapes not only voting preferences but also collective memory, democratic culture, and public understanding of national identity and political legitimacy. Narratives repeatedly circulated through digital platforms may normalize selective interpretations of historical events, reinforce symbolic authority, and reshape how citizens understand governance and citizenship. Indirectly, these communicative processes may contribute to political polarization, weakened historical accountability, and reduced critical engagement with democratic institutions. In societies where political participation increasingly unfolds through digitally mediated communication, understanding the interaction between emotional rhetoric and historical memory becomes essential for democratic literacy and critical civic engagement.

Responding to these concerns, this study examines how narratives of power and memory operate within Philippine presidential campaign discourse during the 2016 and 2022 elections. Drawing from rhetorical theory, discourse analysis, populist communication, and memory studies, the paper investigates how candidates employed emotional appeals, symbolic language, credibility construction, and historical framing to shape political meaning within digitally mediated campaign environments. The study proceeds from the assumption that campaign discourse functions simultaneously as rhetorical persuasion and memory construction, where political legitimacy is reinforced through emotionally

resonant narratives connected to collective historical consciousness. By integrating rhetorical analysis with historical discourse analysis, the study proposes a rhetorical-historical analytical framework for understanding how emotional rhetoric, historical memory, and digital political communication intersect in contemporary electoral campaigns.

Specifically, the study aims to: (1) analyze the dominant rhetorical strategies employed in Philippine presidential campaign discourse during the 2016 and 2022 elections; (2) examine how historical memory and symbolic narratives were mobilized to construct political legitimacy and candidate identity; (3) identify how digitally mediated campaign environments amplified persuasive political narratives; and (4) provide an integrated analytical approach for examining campaign discourse in emerging digital democracies.

The study contributes to political communication scholarship in several ways. Theoretically, it expands discussions on rhetorical persuasion, populist communication, and memory politics by examining how these dimensions intersect within digitally mediated electoral discourse. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of combining rhetorical analysis with historical discourse analysis in examining political communication within hybrid media systems. Beyond academic scholarship, the study also carries broader democratic implications. As emotionally driven political narratives increasingly circulate through digital platforms, understanding how rhetoric and historical memory shape public interpretation becomes increasingly important for democratic accountability, media literacy, and critical civic participation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Political Rhetoric and the Transformation of Democratic Persuasion

Political rhetoric has always been inseparable from democratic politics because political authority depends not only on formal institutions but also on the capacity to persuade people that particular leaders, policies, and visions of society deserve legitimacy. Elections are therefore not simply administrative procedures for selecting leaders. They are also moments when competing narratives about national identity, morality, public order, and collective aspiration are publicly negotiated. Long before the rise of digital media, rhetorical scholars had already emphasized that political persuasion relies heavily on credibility, emotional appeal, and symbolic framing. Aristotle's classical framework of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* remains influential precisely because these persuasive strategies continue to shape how political actors communicate with the public, even within contemporary media environments.

What has changed, however, is the speed, scale, and emotional intensity through which political rhetoric now circulates. Digital communication platforms have altered the structure of political persuasion by rewarding immediacy, visibility, and emotional engagement. Political communication no longer depends primarily on formal speeches or televised interviews. Candidates are now expected to remain continuously visible online, often through short-form and emotionally personalized messaging that creates impressions of authenticity and accessibility. Enli (2017) describes this process as "mediated authenticity," where politicians cultivate relatability through carefully constructed performances of sincerity in digital spaces. Her analysis is especially useful in explaining why emotional familiarity has become politically valuable in online environments. At the same time, the study focuses largely on personal authenticity as media performance and pays less attention to how broader historical narratives reinforce political legitimacy.

A similar emphasis on emotional communication appears in Papacharissi's (2015) discussion of "affective publics." According to her argument, digital political engagement increasingly develops

around shared emotional expression rather than around stable ideological positions. Political participation in online environments is therefore shaped not only by information exchange but also by the circulation of anger, hope, fear, resentment, and solidarity. This perspective helps explain why emotionally charged campaign narratives often spread more rapidly online than complex policy discussions. Still, Papacharissi's work concentrates more on emotional circulation within networked publics than on the rhetorical construction of campaign discourse itself. The emotional dimension of political participation becomes visible, but the symbolic and historical structures that make particular narratives persuasive are less fully explored.

These developments become even more visible in studies on populist communication. Laclau (2005) argues that populism operates through the construction of symbolic political identities that simplify diverse social grievances into emotionally recognizable narratives. In this framework, "the people" are rhetorically constructed in opposition to political elites or perceived threats to national order. Laclau's contribution remains important because it shifts attention away from viewing populism purely as ideology and instead treats it as a discursive process of political articulation. Yet his analysis remains highly theoretical and was developed before the rise of contemporary digital campaigning. As a result, it offers limited insight into how populist narratives circulate within algorithmically driven media systems.

Moffitt (2022) addresses this issue more directly by describing populism as a political style rooted in performance, spectacle, and media visibility. Recent scholarship further demonstrates that digital populism increasingly operates through personalized and affect-driven communication systems that privilege emotional visibility and direct leader-follower engagement within social media environments (Gerbaudo, 2018). Political actors, according to Moffitt, frequently dramatize crisis and conflict in order to sustain emotional attention and political relevance. His work is particularly valuable because it situates populist rhetoric within contemporary media environments where emotional intensity often determines political visibility. Yet even here, the role of historical memory receives only limited discussion. Populist communication is largely examined through crisis performance and symbolic antagonism rather than through the strategic mobilization of collective memory.

The relationship between rhetoric and media systems also appears prominently in Chadwick's (2017) concept of the hybrid media system. Chadwick argues that political communication now moves across interconnected media spaces where traditional journalism, social media platforms, influencers, and audiences continuously interact. Political narratives are repeatedly reframed, circulated, contested, and amplified across multiple communication channels. Bossetta (2018), examining the 2016 United States presidential election, similarly found that different digital platforms encourage distinct rhetorical styles. Twitter amplified conflict-oriented political messaging, Instagram promoted visual personalization, while Facebook encouraged emotionally communal interaction. The literature suggests significantly deepen understanding of how media structures influence political persuasion. Nevertheless, they focus more heavily on communicative systems and platform behavior than on how historical narratives become embedded within campaign rhetoric.

In the Philippine context, these dynamics have become progressively in recent elections. Curato (2017), examining Duterte's political rise, explains how narratives of fear, frustration, and anti-elite resentment resonated strongly with citizens dissatisfied with institutional governance and public insecurity. Her analysis is important because it situates populist rhetoric within broader democratic anxieties rather than treating it merely as charismatic performance. Even so, the study primarily emphasizes emotional populism and leadership style. The interaction between rhetorical persuasion and historical memory remains less clearly examined.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that contemporary political persuasion now on emotional communication, symbolic performance, and digitally mediated visibility. Yet despite substantial

scholarship on rhetoric and populist communication, relatively limited attention has been given to how historical memory contributes to persuasive political discourse. Emotional narratives are often examined separately from the historical meanings that strengthen political legitimacy and collective identification.

2.2 Political Discourse, Populism, and the Construction of Political Meaning

Political discourse studies generally begin from the assumption that language does not simply describe political reality but actively shapes it. Political actors influence how citizens interpret governance, morality, legitimacy, and national identity through selective framing and symbolic representation. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse functions as a form of social practice through which power relations and ideological assumptions become normalized within everyday communication. His work remains foundational because it demonstrates how political language contributes to the reproduction of broader social structures and institutional authority.

Van Dijk (2006) similarly emphasizes that political discourse operates ideologically by organizing public understanding through selective representation. Political actors foreground particular social anxieties, identities, and narratives while minimizing alternative interpretations of political reality. This perspective is especially useful in election studies because campaigns often intensify symbolic struggles over morality, leadership, and national belonging. Yet, both Fairclough and van Dijk developed their frameworks before contemporary social media environments transformed the speed and visibility of political communication. Their analyses therefore provide limited engagement with the emotional acceleration and participatory dynamics characteristic of digital politics today.

More recent scholarship on populism attempts to address these changing conditions. Wodak (2021), for example, argues that populist discourse frequently normalizes exclusionary politics by presenting emotionally charged narratives of insecurity, corruption, and national decline as common-sense political reasoning. Her analysis contributes significantly to understanding how emotionally simplified narratives can legitimize authoritarian or exclusionary tendencies within democratic societies. Still, her work largely focuses on European political contexts and provides less direct engagement with Southeast Asian media cultures where populism intersects with different historical and political conditions.

Within the Philippine setting, studies on political discourse have increasingly examined emotional mobilization and digital influence during electoral campaigns. Curato (2017) explains how Duterte's rhetoric transformed public frustration into emotionally persuasive narratives centered on order, discipline, and decisive leadership. Meanwhile, Sinpeng et al. (2020) demonstrate that social media became central to electoral mobilization during the 2016 Philippine election by enabling highly personalized interaction between political figures and supporters. Their findings reveal how digital communication intensifies emotional political identification and strengthens affective forms of political participation. Still, these studies focus more strongly on emotional mobilization and online engagement than on the role of historical narrative in shaping political legitimacy.

Soriano and Gaw (2022) further argue that digital political influence in the Philippines increasingly operates through influencer culture, entertainment logics, and algorithmic visibility. Related research by Soriano and Gaw (2022) also demonstrates how YouTube influencers and alternative media personalities contributed to the normalization and amplification of anti-media populist narratives during recent Philippine elections. Their findings highlight how influencer culture and networked political brokerage increasingly shape public political interpretation within platform-driven communication environments. Political communication within social media environments becomes intertwined with

celebrity performance, humor, and online participation. Current scholarship indicates is important because it highlights how political messaging is embedded within everyday digital culture rather than confined to formal political spaces. Yet the study prioritizes platform structures and online political brokerage more than the rhetorical and historical composition of campaign narratives themselves.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that political discourse is central to the construction of political meaning, emotional identification, and ideological legitimacy. At the same time, a recurring limitation remains visible across the literature. Historical memory is frequently treated as secondary to discussions of populism, digital campaigning, and emotional persuasion, even though appeals to the past often strengthen symbolic political authority and collective identification.

2.3 Historical Memory and Political Narratives in Electoral Communication

Historical memory has become increasingly important in contemporary political communication because political actors regularly invoke the past to shape present political interpretation. Menke (2023) likewise observes that digital media environments increasingly reshape how collective memory is produced, circulated, and politicized within populist communication. Digital memory practices, according to the study, frequently rely on emotionally condensed narratives optimized for visibility and participation within online platforms. Narratives of national suffering, restoration, decline, or unity are often used to legitimize authority and construct emotional attachment between leaders and the public. Memory, in this sense, functions not simply as recollection but as a political resource capable of shaping identity and collective belonging.

Assmann (2011) explains that cultural memory is socially organized through processes of preservation, reinterpretation, and transmission across generations. Historical memory therefore reflects ongoing political and cultural negotiation rather than neutral historical continuity. Her work is especially valuable because it demonstrates that collective memory is actively constructed and publicly mediated. Even so, Assmann's analysis focuses primarily on broader cultural processes and less directly on how memory operates rhetorically within electoral campaigns.

The growing influence of digital media has further transformed how political memory circulates. Historical narratives now spread rapidly through short videos, memes, influencer content, and algorithmically amplified storytelling. In many cases, emotionally resonant narratives travel more effectively online than historically nuanced explanations. Yet scholarship on digital memory politics often concentrates on misinformation, propaganda, or historical revisionism while paying less attention to the rhetorical mechanisms that make such narratives emotionally persuasive.

This issue is particularly visible in the Philippine context. Research on Philippine digital politics further demonstrates how networked online infrastructures amplify emotionally persuasive political narratives during elections (Sinpeng et al., 2020; Soriano & Gaw, 2022). Their work contributes substantially to understanding how digital disinformation operates organizationally within Philippine politics. However, the study focuses more heavily on communication infrastructures and online coordination than on the rhetorical composition of the narratives themselves.

The 2022 Philippine presidential election further demonstrated the political significance of historical memory in digital campaigning. Talamayan (2025) further argues that nostalgic narratives associated with the Marcos political legacy circulated effectively on YouTube by framing historical memory through emotionally appealing and simplified representations of national prosperity, order, and continuity. The study demonstrates how nostalgia within digital political communication may function not merely as historical remembrance but as affective political persuasion. Narratives of unity, national continuity, and historical restoration circulated extensively across social media platforms, especially

among younger voters whose political engagement increasingly occurs within digitally mediated environments. Despite these developments, relatively limited scholarship has examined how historical narratives interact directly with rhetorical persuasion and emotional political identification.

As a result, the literature remains somewhat fragmented. Studies on memory politics frequently examine historical revisionism independently from campaign rhetoric, while studies on political persuasion often overlook the role of historical memory in constructing symbolic legitimacy. This fragmentation leaves an important gap in understanding how narratives of memory become politically persuasive within digitally mediated electoral communication.

2.4 Digital Campaigning and Hybrid Media Environments

The rise of digital media has fundamentally altered the structure of electoral campaigning. Political communication now unfolds within hybrid media systems where traditional journalism, social media platforms, influencers, and participatory audiences continuously shape political visibility (Chadwick, 2017). Campaign narratives are no longer transmitted solely through speeches, party machinery, or television advertisements. Instead, they circulate through livestreams, memes, reposts, short-form videos, and audience interaction across interconnected digital networks.

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) describe this transformation through the concept of connective action, where digital communication enables highly personalized forms of political participation organized through networked interaction rather than traditional collective structures. Their work significantly contributes to understanding how digital technologies decentralize political engagement and encourage individualized political expression. However, the study focuses more strongly on political mobilization than on rhetorical discourse and symbolic narrative formation.

Digital communication environments also intensify emotional engagement because platform algorithms privilege content capable of generating reaction, visibility, and participation. Papacharissi (2015) argues that emotionally engaging narratives are amplified more easily within digital environments because emotional expression itself becomes central to online political interaction. This observation helps explain why emotionally charged campaign content often achieves greater circulation than detailed policy discussion. Yet emotional amplification alone does not explain why certain political narratives resonate more strongly than others. The rhetorical structure and historical symbolism embedded within campaign discourse remain equally important.

Research on Philippine digital politics further demonstrates how online communication reshapes electoral persuasion. Sinpeng et al. (2020) found that social media campaigning during the 2016 Philippine election strengthened emotional identification between political figures and supporters through highly personalized communication. Ong and Cabañes (2018) likewise reveal how coordinated online systems amplified emotionally persuasive political narratives through networked disinformation strategies. Meanwhile, Soriano and Gaw (2022) show that political influence within digital platforms increasingly depends on influencer culture, entertainment logics, and networked visibility.

These studies collectively demonstrate that digital media environments reshape political communication, emotional participation, and campaign visibility. Nevertheless, much of the literature focuses either on online behavior or platform structures rather than on how rhetoric, historical memory, and digital mediation intersect within campaign discourse itself. Consequently, political communication scholarship still lacks an integrative framework capable of explaining how emotional rhetoric and historical narratives acquire persuasive force within digitally amplified electoral campaigns.

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that contemporary political communication increasingly operates through the interaction of rhetoric, discourse, populism, historical memory, and digital mediation. Studies on rhetoric and populist communication explain how emotional persuasion and symbolic performance shape political legitimacy. Research on discourse analysis demonstrates how political language structures ideological meaning and public interpretation. Scholarship on memory politics reveals how historical narratives reinforce collective identity and symbolic authority, while digital communication studies explain how hybrid media systems amplify emotionally resonant political narratives through networked circulation.

Despite these contributions, the literature remains analytically fragmented. Existing studies frequently examine rhetoric, digital campaigning, populism, or historical memory independently rather than as interconnected dimensions of campaign discourse. Scholarship on rhetorical persuasion often overlooks the role of historical memory in strengthening emotional political legitimacy. Studies on memory politics commonly investigate historical revisionism or collective remembrance without closely examining the rhetorical mechanisms that make such narratives persuasive in electoral contexts. Likewise, research on digital campaigning tends to prioritize platform structures and online political behavior while paying comparatively less attention to how rhetoric and historical narrative interact in shaping political meaning.

Within the Philippine context, this fragmentation becomes especially significant. Existing scholarship has substantially expanded discussions on populist communication, emotional politics, and digital disinformation during recent elections. Yet relatively limited research has systematically examined how rhetorical persuasion and historical memory operate simultaneously within digitally amplified campaign discourse. As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how narratives of power and memory function together in constructing political legitimacy, emotional political identification, and public interpretation within contemporary Philippine electoral communication.

Responding to this gap, the present study examines how rhetorical strategies, historical memory, and digital political communication intersect within Philippine presidential campaign discourse during the 2016 and 2022 elections. By integrating rhetorical analysis with historical discourse analysis, the study proposes a rhetorical-historical analytical framework capable of examining how emotional appeals, symbolic narratives, historical memory, and digital mediation operate together within contemporary democratic persuasion.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative rhetorical and historical discourse analysis to examine how narratives of power and memory operated within Philippine presidential campaign discourse during the 2016 and 2022 elections. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study focused on how political meaning, legitimacy, emotional persuasion, and historical narratives were constructed within campaign communication rather than on measuring electoral behavior quantitatively.

The study combined rhetorical analysis and historical discourse analysis to examine both persuasive strategies and memory-based political narratives. Rhetorical analysis focused on how

candidates used emotional appeals, symbolic language, credibility construction, repetition, and narrative framing to shape political interpretation and public identification. Historical discourse analysis, meanwhile, examined how references to national history, political legacy, nostalgia, and collective memory were mobilized to construct legitimacy and influence public perceptions of leadership and national identity.

The methodological orientation of the study was informed by discourse-centered perspectives advanced by Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2006), which view political discourse as socially situated communication capable of shaping ideology and public interpretation. The study also drew from Creswell and Poth's (2018) discussion of qualitative inquiry as an interpretive process concerned with meaning, context, and socially constructed realities. These perspectives were particularly relevant given the emotionally driven and rapidly circulating nature of contemporary Philippine digital campaign discourse.

3.2 Research Context and Corpus of Analysis

The study focused on the Philippine presidential elections of 2016 and 2022 because both electoral periods marked important shifts in political communication within the country. The 2016 election reflected the growing influence of populist rhetoric and emotionally driven online campaigning, while the 2022 election highlighted the political significance of historical narratives and social media amplification in electoral discourse. Examining both elections allowed the study to explore how rhetorical strategies and memory-based narratives evolved across two highly visible election cycles.

The corpus of analysis consisted of publicly available campaign materials circulated during the official campaign periods of the 2016 and 2022 elections. These materials included campaign speeches, televised interviews, campaign advertisements, official slogans, visual campaign materials, and verified social media posts. The corpus included approximately 70 campaign speeches, 40 televised interviews, 30 campaign advertisements, and selected verified social media materials. Materials were collected primarily from official campaign platforms, verified social media accounts, online news archives, and publicly accessible digital repositories.

Purposive sampling was employed to select campaign materials relevant to the objectives of the study. Selection focused on materials that received substantial public visibility or media circulation and contained recurring themes related to leadership, legitimacy, national identity, unity, crisis, political restoration, and collective memory.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved the systematic retrieval and organization of campaign materials from multiple publicly accessible sources. Campaign speeches and interviews were transcribed when necessary to facilitate textual analysis, while visual materials such as posters, slogans, campaign graphics, and social media images were documented according to recurring symbolic and rhetorical themes.

The collected materials were organized chronologically and grouped according to election cycle, candidate, communication platform, and dominant narrative themes. Attention was given not only to verbal language but also to symbolic imagery, emotionally charged expressions, recurring political phrases, and references to historical events or political legacy.

Because campaign communication increasingly operates across interconnected digital platforms, the study also considered how narratives circulated repeatedly across speeches, advertisements, social media posts, and visual campaign materials. This approach allowed campaign discourse to be examined within its broader communication context rather than as isolated political texts.

3.4 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic rhetorical and historical discourse analysis in examining the collected materials. Analysis began with repeated reading and close examination of campaign texts and visual materials to identify recurring rhetorical strategies, symbolic narratives, emotional appeals, and historical references. Initial coding focused on patterns related to emotional persuasion, credibility construction, leadership framing, national identity, symbolic representation, and political legitimacy.

The analytical process was guided in part by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, particularly in identifying and organizing recurring themes across the collected materials. However, the analysis extended beyond thematic categorization by examining how these themes functioned rhetorically and historically within campaign discourse.

Particular attention was given to how historical narratives and collective memory were incorporated into campaign communication. References to political legacy, national restoration, social order, unity, and nostalgia were analyzed in relation to broader rhetorical objectives and political positioning. The study also examined how these narratives gained persuasive force within digital communication environments characterized by repetition, audience interaction, and networked visibility (Chadwick, 2017).

Comparisons between the 2016 and 2022 elections were incorporated throughout the analysis to identify continuities and shifts in rhetorical strategies, emotional framing, and historical narrative construction across the two election cycles.

Analysis continued until recurring rhetorical and historical patterns became analytically consistent across the collected materials.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Analytical Rigor

Several measures were undertaken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. The use of multiple forms of campaign materials allowed triangulation of recurring rhetorical and narrative patterns across different communication platforms. Examining speeches, visual materials, advertisements, and digital posts together helped reduce overreliance on a single source of political communication.

Interpretive consistency was maintained by grounding thematic interpretations in recurring patterns observed within the collected materials. While theoretical perspectives from rhetoric, discourse analysis, and memory studies informed interpretation, themes were derived primarily from the campaign texts themselves. Political rhetoric was also interpreted in relation to the broader socio-political conditions surrounding the 2016 and 2022 elections, including public dissatisfaction with governance, debates surrounding historical interpretation, and the growing influence of digital political communication.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study relied exclusively on publicly accessible campaign materials and publicly available digital content. No private communications, confidential records, or restricted materials were collected. Since the study focused on public political discourse intended for electoral communication, direct participant recruitment was not required.

Ethical considerations nevertheless remained important throughout the analysis. Campaign materials were interpreted within their original communicative context to avoid selective representation or distortion of meaning. The study also maintained analytical neutrality by focusing on rhetorical strategies, historical narratives, and communicative patterns rather than partisan evaluation of political actors or electoral outcomes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Rhetorical Construction of Political Leadership

The analysis revealed that presidential campaign discourse during the 2016 and 2022 Philippine elections relied heavily on emotionally driven rhetorical strategies in constructing political legitimacy and leadership identity. Across both election cycles, campaign communication framed leadership less through detailed policy articulation and more through affective narratives connected to protection, order, unity, restoration, and national recovery. Candidates were repeatedly positioned not simply as political administrators but as symbolic figures capable of embodying public frustration, aspiration, and collective identity.

The 2016 campaign discourse strongly emphasized narratives of crisis, disorder, and dissatisfaction with institutional governance. Leadership was frequently framed through images of decisiveness, discipline, and political strength. Emotional appeals centered on fear, urgency, frustration, and public insecurity. These findings support Curato's (2017) argument that populist political rhetoric in the Philippines became effective partly because it transformed widespread anxieties regarding governance and public order into emotionally compelling narratives of strong leadership. The findings likewise reinforce Laclau's (2005) view that populist discourse operates by simplifying diverse social grievances into emotionally recognizable political narratives centered on "the people" and perceived political failure.

At the same time, the analysis suggests that contemporary political persuasion extends beyond ideological positioning alone. Campaign narratives increasingly depended on symbolic repetition and emotional visibility across digital platforms. Slogans, emotionally charged phrases, gestures, and visual imagery repeatedly circulated across speeches, campaign advertisements, and social media content. Through repetition, these rhetorical elements gradually acquired symbolic familiarity and emotional force. These findings extend earlier scholarship on populist rhetoric by demonstrating how digital communication environments intensify emotional identification through sustained symbolic exposure rather than through singular political messaging.

In contrast, the 2022 campaign discourse demonstrated a noticeable rhetorical shift. While emotional persuasion remained central, the dominant tone moved away from crisis-centered rhetoric toward narratives of unity, continuity, reconciliation, and national restoration. Emotional appeals relied more heavily on reassurance, optimism, and symbolic continuity than on confrontation or punitive imagery. This partially complicates earlier studies on Philippine populism that primarily emphasize anger, anti-elite rhetoric, and strongman political identity. The findings suggest instead that emotional political persuasion adapts according to changing public conditions and political contexts.

The personalization of campaign communication also continues across both election cycles. Candidates were consistently presented through sentiment based and visually curated content designed to create familiarity and relatability. This observation strongly aligns with Enli's (2017) discussion of mediated authenticity, where political legitimacy increasingly depends on emotional proximity and sustained online visibility. Political persuasion in digital environments therefore appeared to rely not only on rhetorical content but also on continuous emotional presence within networked communication spaces.

The findings further indicate that rhetorical persuasion across both election cycles depended heavily on symbolic repetition. Repeated slogans, emotionally charged keywords, visual motifs, and recurring narratives strengthened symbolic association between candidates and broader political themes such as order, unity, restoration, or national recovery.

Table 1. Dominant Rhetorical Themes in the 2016 and 2022 Presidential Campaigns

Election Period	Dominant Themes	Emotional Appeals	Leadership Image
2016 Election	Crisis, discipline, anti-elite frustration, public order	Fear, anger, urgency	Strong and decisive leadership
2022 Election	Unity, continuity, restoration, reconciliation	Hope, nostalgia, reassurance	Unifying and stabilizing leadership

The table summarizes the dominant rhetorical patterns observed across campaign materials during the 2016 and 2022 Philippine presidential elections. The findings indicate a rhetorical shift from crisis-centered populism toward emotionally restorative narratives emphasizing continuity and unity.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the continuing relevance of rhetorical theory, particularly the role of pathos in shaping political persuasion. However, the findings also suggest that emotional rhetoric in contemporary elections functions differently from traditional campaign communication because digital platforms continuously reproduce and amplify emotional narratives beyond formal campaign spaces. This transformation carries important implications for democratic practice. While emotionally resonant narratives may strengthen political engagement and accessibility, they may also encourage personalization of political authority and reduce emphasis on substantive policy deliberation.

4.2 Historical Memory and the Politics of Nostalgia

Historical memory emerged as a major rhetorical resource within the analyzed campaign discourse, particularly during the 2022 election cycle. References to the nation’s past were strategically mobilized to construct political legitimacy, evoke emotional attachment, and frame contemporary political identity through narratives of continuity, restoration, and collective aspiration. Historical references rarely functioned merely as contextual political background. Instead, they operated as persuasive symbolic resources capable of shaping public interpretation and emotional identification.

The findings strongly align with Assmann’s (2011) argument that collective memory is socially mediated and politically constructed rather than passively preserved. Historical narratives within campaign discourse were highly selective, emotionally framed, and symbolically simplified. Rather than engaging with complex historical interpretation, campaign materials frequently emphasized emotionally resonant representations of national pride, stability, order, and continuity. This suggests that the persuasive power of historical memory lies less in factual complexity than in its emotional and symbolic accessibility.

The findings also complement Ong and Cabañes’ (2018) discussion of networked political communication in the Philippines. Historical narratives circulated rapidly through edited videos, memes, visual graphics, symbolic imagery, and emotionally framed online content. However, the present study extends their argument by showing that memory-based persuasion operated not only through explicit disinformation or revisionist narratives but also through subtle forms of symbolic familiarity and nostalgic storytelling. In many cases, campaign communication did not directly contest historical interpretation but instead relied on emotional suggestion and symbolic continuity.

Nostalgic rhetoric became especially visible in campaign visuals, slogans, musical scoring, and short-form online content. Narratives of restoration and continuity often emerged during moments of political uncertainty, institutional distrust, or social polarization. These findings support broader scholarship suggesting that nostalgia becomes politically influential when societies experience instability or dissatisfaction with present conditions. In this context, nostalgia functioned as a stabilizing rhetorical device capable of offering emotionally simplified visions of collective identity and national coherence.

At the same time, the findings reveal important tensions within contemporary memory politics. While historical narratives strengthened emotional political attachment, they also contributed to simplification of complex historical realities. Historical memory became increasingly condensed into emotionally accessible symbols optimized for rapid circulation within digital communication environments. As a result, emotionally persuasive narratives often displaced nuanced historical discussion.

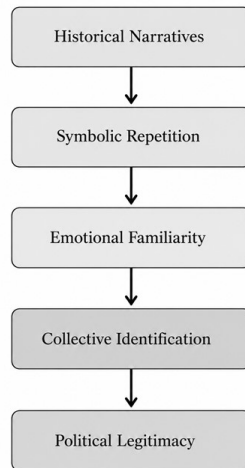


Figure 1. Relationship Between Historical Memory and Political Persuasion in Campaign Discourse

The figure illustrates how historical narratives acquired persuasive political force through symbolic repetition and emotional familiarity within campaign communication.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings contribute to discourse-oriented studies of political memory by demonstrating how rhetorical persuasion and collective memory operate simultaneously within digitally mediated electoral communication. Existing scholarship often treats memory politics and campaign rhetoric separately. The present analysis suggests that these dimensions increasingly function together in shaping political legitimacy and public emotional identification.

The analysis also suggested raising broader democratic concerns. The increasing emotionalization of historical memory within digital campaign environments may strengthen political participation and symbolic engagement, but it may also contribute to historical oversimplification and emotionally polarized political discourse. This highlights the growing importance of media literacy, historical literacy, and critical engagement within digital democratic spaces.

4.3 Digital Media and the Amplification of Campaign Narratives

The study demonstrated that digital media platforms played a central role in shaping the circulation, repetition, and amplification of campaign narratives during both election cycles. Political communication increasingly unfolded within interconnected digital environments where speeches, slogans, symbolic imagery, and emotional narratives circulated continuously through social media, video-sharing platforms, and participatory online spaces. Campaign discourse was no longer confined to formal political speeches or institutional broadcasts. Instead, political narratives became embedded within everyday digital interaction.

These findings strongly support Chadwick's (2017) concept of the hybrid media system, where political communication moves fluidly across traditional and digital media environments. Campaign messages gained visibility not simply through official dissemination but through repetition, audience

interaction, and networked circulation. Supporters frequently reproduced campaign narratives through reposting, editing, remixing, commenting, and meme production, transforming political communication into a decentralized and participatory process.

This pattern likewise aligns with Papacharissi's (2015) argument regarding affective publics. Emotionally charged content consistently generated stronger visibility and engagement than policy-centered communication. Narratives emphasizing crisis, hope, unity, nostalgia, or national pride circulated more widely because they were emotionally accessible and easily adaptable into short-form digital content. Emotional engagement therefore appeared not merely as an outcome of political communication but as a condition for digital visibility itself.

However, the findings also suggest that digital political communication intensifies narrative simplification. Complex governance issues, historical debates, and policy discussions were frequently condensed into emotionally resonant slogans, symbolic imagery, or highly shareable content optimized for rapid circulation. While this increased communicative accessibility, it also reduced opportunities for sustained deliberative engagement and nuanced political discussion.

Another important finding was the growing convergence between political communication and entertainment-oriented digital culture. Campaign narratives increasingly adopted visual aesthetics, humor, music, influencer-style presentation, and short-form video formats commonly associated with entertainment platforms. This observation strongly supports Soriano and Gaw's (2022) argument that political influence in digital environments increasingly operates through networked visibility and influencer culture rather than through traditional institutional communication alone.

These findings carry significant implications for democratic practice. Digital media has undoubtedly expanded opportunities for political participation and audience engagement. At the same time, however, it has intensified emotional polarization, strengthened symbolic simplification, and encouraged personalization of political authority. Political legitimacy increasingly appears tied to emotional visibility and symbolic familiarity rather than sustained policy engagement.

4.4 Continuities, Limitations, and Implications for Future Research

The comparative analysis revealed both continuity and transformation in Philippine presidential campaign discourse. Across both elections, emotional persuasion remained central to political communication, while digital platforms consistently functioned as major sites of symbolic amplification and public engagement. Yet important shifts also emerged. The 2016 election relied more heavily on narratives of crisis, anti-establishment frustration, and disciplinary leadership, whereas the 2022 election increasingly emphasized unity, restoration, continuity, and nostalgic political imagery.

These findings suggest that Philippine electoral communication is becoming progressively dependent on emotionally resonant storytelling capable of operating effectively within highly networked digital environments. Political legitimacy is no longer constructed solely through institutional authority or policy discourse but increasingly through symbolic narratives linking emotional identity, historical memory, and sustained digital visibility.

Several limitations of the study should nevertheless be acknowledged. First, the analysis focused primarily on publicly accessible campaign materials and did not include audience reception analysis. These observations therefore explain how narratives were constructed and circulated but cannot fully determine how audiences interpreted or negotiated these narratives. Second, the study concentrated on two election cycles within the Philippine context, which may limit broader generalization across other political systems or media environments. Third, although the study examined digital campaign communication, rapidly evolving platform algorithms and engagement structures remain difficult to capture fully through qualitative analysis alone.

These limitations also point toward important directions for future research. Subsequent studies may examine how different demographic groups interpret emotionally charged campaign narratives

across generational, regional, or socio-economic contexts. Comparative studies involving other Southeast Asian democracies may further deepen understanding of how rhetoric, memory, and digital mediation interact within different political cultures. Future research may likewise integrate audience ethnography, computational discourse analysis, or platform studies to examine more systematically how algorithmic visibility shapes political persuasion and memory formation in digital environments.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that contemporary Philippine presidential campaign discourse increasingly operates through the intersection of rhetoric, historical memory, and digital mediation. Emotional persuasion, symbolic repetition, and memory-based narratives have become central mechanisms in constructing political legitimacy and public political identification within contemporary electoral communication.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined how narratives of power and memory operated within Philippine presidential campaign discourse during the 2016 and 2022 elections. Through rhetorical and historical discourse analysis, the findings demonstrated that contemporary electoral communication in the Philippines increasingly depends on the interaction of emotional persuasion, symbolic political performance, historical memory, and digitally mediated communication. Campaign discourse across both election cycles relied heavily on emotionally resonant narratives capable of shaping political legitimacy, public identification, and collective interpretation within highly networked communication environments.

The findings revealed that the 2016 election was largely characterized by crisis-centered and populist rhetoric emphasizing discipline, urgency, public order, and anti-establishment frustration. Leadership was constructed through narratives of decisiveness and political strength, reflecting broader public anxieties regarding governance and institutional insecurity. In contrast, the 2022 election demonstrated a stronger reliance on narratives of unity, continuity, restoration, and nostalgia. Historical memory became increasingly visible within campaign communication, particularly through emotionally framed representations of national identity, political legacy, and collective aspiration. These shifts suggest that emotional political persuasion in the Philippines is not static but adapts according to changing social conditions, political climates, and communication environments.

The study also demonstrated that digital media platforms significantly transformed the circulation and persuasive force of campaign narratives. Political communication increasingly operated through repetition, emotional amplification, visual symbolism, and participatory online engagement. Campaign messages no longer depended solely on formal political speeches or institutional media coverage but circulated continuously through social media platforms, short-form videos, memes, edited visual content, and networked audience interaction. As a result, emotional visibility and symbolic familiarity became increasingly central to political persuasion within contemporary electoral campaigns.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to scholarship on rhetoric, political communication, and memory studies by demonstrating how rhetorical persuasion and collective memory function simultaneously within digitally mediated electoral discourse. Existing studies often examine populism, historical memory, or digital campaigning separately. The present study argues that these dimensions increasingly intersect within contemporary political communication, particularly in highly networked democratic environments where emotional narratives, symbolic repetition, and historical interpretation reinforce one another.

The findings likewise carry broader implications for democratic practice and political communication. While emotionally resonant and digitally accessible campaign narratives may strengthen public engagement and political participation, they may also encourage simplification of historical

discourse, personalization of political authority, and reduction of complex governance issues into emotionally symbolic narratives. The increasing emotionalization of political communication therefore presents both democratic opportunities and democratic risks, particularly within digital environments where rapid circulation often favors symbolic immediacy over sustained critical deliberation.

Several limitations of the study should nevertheless be acknowledged. The analysis focused primarily on publicly accessible campaign materials and therefore did not examine audience interpretation or reception of campaign narratives. The study was likewise limited to two presidential election cycles within the Philippine context, which may restrict broader generalization across different political systems and media environments. In addition, while the study examined digital campaign communication, rapidly evolving algorithmic systems and platform dynamics remain difficult to capture fully through qualitative discourse analysis alone.

In light of these limitations, future research may further examine how different audiences interpret and negotiate emotionally charged political narratives across generational, regional, and socio-economic contexts. Comparative studies involving other Southeast Asian democracies may also deepen understanding of how rhetoric, memory, and digital mediation interact across varying political cultures and media systems. Future research may likewise integrate audience ethnography, computational discourse analysis, or platform-based studies in order to examine more systematically how algorithmic visibility influences political persuasion, memory formation, and democratic participation within digital communication environments.

Overall, the study concludes that contemporary Philippine presidential campaign discourse increasingly operates through the convergence of rhetoric, historical memory, and digital mediation. Emotional persuasion, symbolic repetition, and memory-based political narratives have become central mechanisms in constructing political legitimacy and public political identification in the digital era.

DECLARATION

1. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

2. Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

Generative AI-assisted tools were used solely for language refinement, grammar checking, and organizational support during manuscript preparation. All conceptual development, interpretation, analysis, and final manuscript decisions were performed by the authors.

3. Data availability statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

4. Ethics statement

This study relied exclusively on publicly accessible campaign materials and publicly available digital content, including speeches, campaign advertisements, verified social media posts, and other official campaign communication materials. Since the study did not involve direct human participation, personal data collection, or private information, formal ethics committee approval was not required. Nevertheless, the study observed ethical research practices by ensuring accurate representation of campaign materials and maintaining analytical neutrality throughout the interpretation and discussion of findings.

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6. Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT)

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