

Digital Politics: DDS and Political Propaganda in the context of Baudrillard's Hyperreality

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Abstract

Digital media can shape people's political perspectives as it is used as a medium for communication and information. In the Philippines, the use of Facebook has become an avenue not just for socialization but also, for political discourse. Being considered as one of the world's top Facebook users, Facebook is used by individuals to serve as a platform to construct propaganda networks. Diehard Duterte Supporters (also known as the "DDS") use this digital media platform to rally behind President Duterte, promote his achievements, and also, to defend him against criticisms. On the other hand, Jean Baudrillard believes that media plays a pivotal role in constituting a new realm of experience. Baudrillard's central thesis is that the media serves as a key simulation machine that constitutes a hyperreality. In this paper, the researchers examined how political propagandas is conveyed by selected Die-hard Duterte Supporters (DDS) through Facebook. In light of Jean Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality, the have elucidated the serious concerns regarding the proliferation of political propaganda in social media. As a result, the researchers claim that Facebook pages are used by the DDS as key simulation tools for framing the contents of their political propaganda to match their political objectives and it is therefore described as, "political framing". Political framing of information and content is comparable to Baudrillard's notion of simulation, wherein it involves a judicious process of creating political propaganda which involves filtering, recycling, editing information, selecting content and arguments that ultimately, blurs the distinction between the true information and disinformation, thus, creates hyperreality.

Keywords: Diehard Duterte ` (DDS), hyperreality, political framing, propaganda, simulation



INTRODUCTION

Digital media has become a significant part of citizens' political lives since a growing number of people throughout the world use digital media technologies for information and communication.¹ Digital media are those that refer to the media that are encoded in machine-readable formats which can be created, viewed, conveyed, modified, and maintained using various electronic devices such as; digital images, videos, websites, and social media just to name a few.² Predominantly, it acts as a critical communication and mobilization platform for the people and promotes socio-political components including the propagation of disinformation, information divides, and political polarization.³ Thus, digital media which includes social media websites such as Facebook provide a platform for cognitive, behavioural, and social connections that enable people to network collaboratively.⁴ Hence, these digital media can be used as tools to shape people's perspectives on certain societal or political issues since people can easily access and share information without spending too much money and exerting too much physical effort.

The Philippines is no exception to the countries where digital media influence people's socio-political views. Filipinos spend an average of four hours and fifteen minutes each day on social media in 2021.⁵ Moreover, as of July 2020 the Philippines ranked 6th among the world's top Facebook users having around 76 million users.⁶ It is said that 97 percent of Filipinos who are online have Facebook accounts.⁷ These numbers indicate how large the audience reached by Facebook has,

¹ Gil de Zúñiga & Chen, "Digital Media and Politics: Effects of the Great Information and Communication Divides," 365.

² Das, "Impact of Digital Media on Society," 2743.

³ Gil de Zúñiga & Chen "Digital Media and Politics: Effects of the Great Information and Communication Divides," 366.

⁴ Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia, "Towards Cyberactivism 2.0? Understanding the Use of Social Media and Other Information Technologies for Political Activism and Social Movements," 366.

⁵ Chua, "PH Remains Top in Social Media, Internet Usage Worldwide."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Etter, "What Happens when the Government Uses Facebook as a Weapon."

consequently, become a platform for some to construct a propaganda network. According to Etter, Duterte hired strategists to help him transform his online presence as reputable as it can be, creating an army of Facebook personalities and bloggers worldwide that would build up his favorable reputation.⁸

Digital media, particularly Facebook, had a significant part in President Duterte's landslide victory over his opponents in the 2016 presidential election. The key for this win was Duterte's dedicated and loyal supporters and popularly known as the Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS). They are social media users who appear to criticize Duterte's detractors and support the administration and they have both verified and questionable accounts.⁹ These individuals are referred to as trolls. Political trolling is not new or a unique phenomenon in the Philippines. Political communication strategists have long been "weaponizing" various media platforms to generate for their clients a competitive advantage over their political opponents.¹⁰ This tactic is characterized as the art of deliberately, cleverly, and secretly pissing people off, usually through the internet, using dialogue.¹¹ Moreover, the most essential part of trolling is convincing your victim that they are either: (1) truly believe in what you are saying, no matter how outrageous, or (2) give your victim malicious instructions, under the guise of help.¹² Until today, DDS continuously provides the Filipinos with propaganda to convince them that the administration is on its right path and doing an excellent job despite the criticisms, both locally and internationally.

Nevertheless, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who is considered by many scholars as the most advanced media theorist in the so-called postmodernity, believes that the media plays a pivotal role in constituting a new realm of experience. There was a point in time that the media was believed to mirror or represent reality, however, nowadays it constitutes a hyperreal. Baudrillard's central thesis is that

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cabañes & Cornelio, "The Rise of Trolls in the Philippines (and What We Can Do about It)," 1.

¹⁰ Burroughs, "Obama trolling: Memes, salutes and an agonistic politics in the 2012 presidential election," 260.

¹¹ Fuller et. al., "Troll Theory."

¹² Ibid., 2.

the media serves as a key simulation machine that constitutes this hyperreality.

Using reflective analysis,¹³ this paper analyzes the propaganda of selected DDS on their Facebook page and how it is related to Baudrillard's notion of simulation and hyperreality. Primarily, this paper is structured as follows: In section II, the researchers looked into the political propaganda conveyed by four selected DDS through Facebook, namely Mocha Uson blog, Thinking Pinoy, Banat By and Daily Duterte. The researchers discussed how they conveyed their political propaganda in their Facebook posts on selected national issues, such as COVID-19 pandemic, dispute on the West Philippine Sea, the 2022 National elections, and the war on drugs. In section III, the researchers examined Jean Baudrillard's notions of simulacra, simulation and hyperreality, and, in section IV, the researchers discussed how political propaganda conveyed by DDS through political framing is related to Baudrillard's notion of simulation, thus, exposing how political framing creates a hyperreality that leads to how individuals perceive reality, and how it shapes their political beliefs and opinions relative to national issues.

Diehard Duterte Supporter and their Political Propaganda

A year before the end of his term and after a year of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte has maintained his high approval and trust ratings. According to PUBLiCUS Asia Inc., an independent pollster, Duterte registered an overall approval rating of 65% and has acquired a trust rating of 55% in a survey conducted in December 2020,¹⁴ this is despite the challenges and criticism in his administration like the issues covered in the following discussion.

¹³ Reflective analysis uses reflection to analyze certain problem, phenomenon or situation. Reflection is a crucial cognitive practice in the research field. Reflection aims at understanding the forms of intelligibility by which the world is made meaningful; in the heuristic context of the research work, reflecting means to elucidate the epistemic acts developed in the midst of inquiry process (see Mortari, 2015).

¹⁴ Valente, "Duterte Maintains High Approval, Trust Ratings."

According to Contreras, one of the factors why Duterte was able to maintain a high approval and trust rating aside from his popularity since he was elected in 2016 was because he has a dedicated and loyal political base that always sees him in a positive light even if he has done something bad.¹⁵ These people are called Diehard Duterte Supporters (DDS). DDS is a collective name which is adopted by political hardliners who rally around Pres. Duterte. These people have their unwavering loyalty and support to Duterte and defend him.¹⁶ For them, he can solve people's frustrations of society's status quo, can be the liberator who can solve the persistent social ills, and instill in others a sense of orderliness, respect and responsibility.¹⁷ DDS are giving their political positions and spreading their political pro-Duterte propaganda in different issues of the country and they use a variety of social media channels like Facebook, to express their support for the president. Under Duterte's administration, the bloggers who refer themselves as DDS, are legitimized through various ways, including access to those in power, consultancy contracts, and "allowances" from the PCOO.¹⁸ Pro-Duterte bloggers receive unusual privileges from the Presidential Communications Operations Office to consolidate support for the popular president and silence critics.¹⁹ Furthermore, according to Gutierrez, the PCOO uses pro-Duterte bloggers to broadcast favorable news about the government in addition to the monitoring of the unfavorable publicity on the administration.²⁰

In this section, the researchers present how the four selected DDS use Facebook to spread political propaganda about various national issues. Though the DDS Facebook pages are very active in posting on social media about their reactions and positions on every issue that concerns the government and the country, this paper will focus and limit its discussion on posts related to issues on the COVID-19

¹⁵ ANC 24/7, "Political Science Prof: Duterte's High Approval Ratings Not Necessarily Due to Handling of Pandemic."

¹⁶ Contreras, "Labels and political tagging."

¹⁷ Antazo & Felipe, "Rise of the Duterte Phenomenon: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," 16.

¹⁸ Gutierrez, "State-sponsored Hate: The Rise of the Pro-Duterte Bloggers."

¹⁹ Contreras, "Trump and the Diehard Duterte Supporters."

²⁰ Gutierrez, "State-sponsored Hate."

pandemic, dispute on the West Philippine Sea, the 2022 National elections, and the war on drugs.

The DDS that are included in this are the following: a. Mocha Uson blog²¹ which is owned by Mocha Uson, the screen name of Esther Margaux “Mocha” Justiniano Uson, and has more than 5.7 million Facebook followers; b. Thinking Pinoy²² is a pen name of Rey Joseph (RJ) Nieto and has 1.7 million Facebook followers; c. Banat By²³ or Bryan Cristobal in real life has more than 400 thousand Facebook followers; and d. Daily Duterte²⁴ with more than 350 thousand Facebook followers. These four were chosen primarily because of their big number of followers which have the potential to influence other Facebook users about the information they are posting in favor of the Duterte administration.

a. COVID-19 Pandemic

One of the biggest challenges of the Duterte administration is how to handle the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The pandemic redirected government priorities and shifted its focus to address the needs of the people. Yet, despite government actions, criticisms emerge. The DDS, however, make sure that they counter all criticisms of Duterte and promote the government’s response in addressing the health crisis.

The selected DDS covered news or information that only catered for the advantage of the government in the COVID-19 response. They make sure that their Facebook pages are filled with positive or constructive information about the government’s actions to show that it is doing its job to serve and protect the people in this difficult time. Some of the issues in Covid-19 where they show support and give helpful information include government actions on lockdowns, relief operations,

²¹ See Mocha Uson Blog (@Mochablogger. <https://www.facebook.com/Mochablogger>, accessed May 30, 2021.

²² See Thinking Pinoy. <https://www.facebook.com/TheThinkingPinoy>, accessed May 30, 2021.

²³ See Banat By (@BanatBy). <https://www.facebook.com/BanatBy>, accessed May 30, 2021.

²⁴ See Daily Duterte (@dailyduterte). <https://www.facebook.com/dailyduterte>, accessed May 30, 2021.

mitigation response, information dissemination, and vaccination plans of the government. For example, on February 21, 2021 Mocha Uson Blog shared an article with the headline “*Bong Go top influencer on Covid-19 education campaign – study*”²⁵. Aside from being a senator, Go is also considered as Duterte’s trusted ally. . This post garnered more than 800 reactions, 15 shares, and 42 comments. According to this post, the senator was one of the most influential voices during the coronavirus pandemic and it really helps that high government officials are seen as authoritative and decisive.²⁶

When critics questioned the government’s vaccination plan, the Daily Duterte Facebook page shared a post on the detailed vaccination plan of the government on March 30, 2021, to counter them.²⁷ The shared post is about the Philippine National Deployment and Vaccination plan for COVID-19 vaccines. According to this post, it was fake news and misinformation that the government has no vaccination plan, and this was a deception made by the opposition (*dilawans*²⁸). Moreover, the Daily Duterte Facebook page shared a post regarding the vaccine statistics of the country to support that the vaccination program is on track.²⁹

²⁵ Mocha Uson Blog, Bong Go top influencer on Covid-19 education campaign – study.”

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Daily Duterte, “Wala ba Talaga Vaccination Plan?”

²⁸ “*Dilaw*” or yellow is the color of Robredo’s political party, the Liberal Party. Propagandists and supporters of President Rodrigo Duterte have been using “*dilawans*” as a derogatory term for his critics. (see Cepeda, 2018). But the Yellow, “*dilaw*” in Filipino, plus black were the colors of protest after anti-Marcos opposition leader Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino Jr. was assassinated in 1983, paving the way for the rise to power of his widow Cory Aquino via the 1986 “people power” uprising and the same color was used by her son Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III for his “*Daang Matuwid*” campaign, which swept him to victory in 2010 presidential elections on the back of public clamor for a clean government.(see Domingo, 2019).

²⁹ Daily Duterte, “The government’s vaccination program implementation is on track.”

Other criticisms emerged when community pantries³⁰ arose as a new way of “*bayanihan*” for the Filipinos. For the critics this emerging community pantries shows a poor response of the government to the pandemic, because of this, the DDS counter them claiming that the community pantries are used as a tool to politicize against the government and actually do not help the government to mitigate the virus but actually help to spread it fast because many cannot observe minimum health protocols. For instance, Banat by in a shared post on Facebook said that community pantries are used as bait by the opposition to criticize the government.³¹

The selected DDS almost share the same sentiments and comments about the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their timely Facebook posts give the impression to the followers that the government is indeed doing its job to address issues in this COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

b. Dispute on the West Philippine Sea

According to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the Philippines has the exclusive sovereign rights over the West Philippine Sea (WPS), and that China’s “nine-dash line” is invalid.³² In this case, most people agree that we got a convincing win. However, Duterte’s position on the tribunal is different as to how the opposition would want him to address the ruling. Apparently, the President is silent and also passive about the issue, which makes it more controversial since he has the authority to assert a certain position on the WPS given the fact of the tribunal ruling.

Given this position, the DDS defends the alleged passive position that Duterte exhibits as he seemed to disregard the arbitral ruling. They support Duterte on his position regarding the issue. The DDS attacked the tribunal ruling as useless and blamed the previous administrations, particularly the Aquino Administration and America, for why the

³⁰ Community pantries are the result of the efforts of concerned citizens to somehow meet the primary needs of people. The main concept of these pantries is to encourage people to give whatever they can and get from the pantry what they only need. (see Gozum, et. al, 2021).

³¹ Banat By, “Bakit Ba Ang Gulo Gulo Ng Community Pantry Na Yan???”

³² Santos, “PH wins Arbitration Case Over South China Sea.”

country has experienced this situation in the WPS. Moreover, the DDS argued that the alternative way to win our position against China on the WPS would be war, which the Philippines cannot afford and win since the previous administration did not prioritize the modernization of the military and the Philippine National Police.

For example, in a short video shared by the Thinking Pinoy last July 6, 2019, Amb. Rosario Manalo in 2018 explained the fundamental flaw of the Philippine-initiated SCS Arbitration versus China. Manalo, a credible career diplomat, political scientist, and an educator, claims that there is a flaw in the Arbitration case which states that we did not set up the arbitration case correctly when the case was filed about the *Kalayaan* group of islands.³³ Moreover, Manalo said that Duterte is correct when he sets aside for a moment the arbitral ruling then picks or uses it at the right time. Manalo, however, rejected the thought that she is becoming a traitor to her own country, and that she is just pointing out the flaw of the arbitration. This post of Thinking Pinoy garnered 13,000 reactions, 1,000 comments, and 883,000 views. Moreover, in another post of Thinking Pinoy attacking the opposition, TP said that the *dilawans* love the WPS so much that they give it away to China. This post garnered 836 comments, 1,100 shares, and 13,000 reactions.

Banat by, at one hand, in his Facebook video post last April 10, 2021 claimed that in history, America is a good speaker who could promise anything to its allies, and would say that they are willing to help the Philippines if needed, yet, when conflict arises, they are nowhere to be found for help and Philippines will face the consequences.³⁴ This Facebook post garnered more than 1,200 reactions, 154 comments, and 55,000 views. Moreover, Mocha Uson's blog posted last May 7, 2021, a news article published by the Philstar global saying that according to DFA, the UN tribunal cannot enforce ruling on China sea row.³⁵ Furthermore, the DDS claim that during Duterte's administration, no island is lost or is claimed by another country that rightfully belongs

³³ Thinking Pinoy, "Amb. Rosario Manalo in 2018 explains the fundamental flaw of the PH-initiated SCS Arbitration Case vs. China."

³⁴ Banat By, "West Philippines Sea"

³⁵ Mocha Uson Blog, "Noong panahon nila sabi ng opisina ni dating DFA Sec.del Rosario UN tribunal cannot enforce ruling on China sea row, ngayong wala na sila dapat ng i enforce?"

to the Philippines, and that Duterte is doing his job well in taking good care of our territory.

c. 2022 National Elections

As Duterte's term draws to a close in 2022, the question of who will be the next president has arisen. The fact that Duterte can no longer be re-elected, names of his possible successors began to emerge. Clearly, the DDS does not want the next president to come from the opposition which they believe cannot bring change to the country. That is why the DDS continue to attack potential presidential candidates who oppose the president.

The selected DDS attacks and discredits vice-president Leni Robredo of the Liberal party, Former Senator Antonio Trillanes III who already expressed his intention to run for president, and the United Opposition who launched the *ISambayanan* that attempts to bring together the scattered opposition to defeat Duterte Administration and its possible running president. For instance, Mocha Uson Blog's Facebook post last May 10, 2021 claimed that attempts of Former Associate Justice Carpio to criticize the government is because of the upcoming 2022 elections, the post also claimed that Carpio and *ISambayanan* do this because they are afraid of the presidential candidate that will be endorsed by the president.³⁶ This post garnered more than 800 reactions, 300 comments, and 65 shares. The Facebook post of Daily Duterte last May 17, 2021, cited the reaction of Panelo, chief presidential legal counsel, to Trillanes' bid for the presidency in the 2022 elections. According to this post, Panelo was in disbelief over Trillanes' presidential ambition saying that Trillanes is "thick-faced".³⁷ Moreover, in one of the posts of Thinking Pinoy, it discredits Robredo's presidential bid saying that even though voters will not vote for Duterte, it does not guarantee that voters will come to her.

³⁶ Mocha Uson Blog, "Lahat ng propaganda at paninira nila Carpio ng ISambayan at ng oposisyon ay isa lamang ang dahilan, ang parating na 2022 Election."

³⁷ Daily Duterte, "Former senator Antonio Trillanes IV is in for 'nightmares' once he pursues the presidency in 2022."

Thus, for the 2022 election, the selected DDS are endorsing two politicians namely, Sen. Bong Go and Mayor Sarah Duterte, both are allies of Duterte. In a shared post of Daily Duterte on May 4, 2021 about the Facebook group with the name “*ituloy ang pagbabago*” posted a photo of Mayor Sarah Duterte where there is a tag line which says, “*Ituloy ang pagbabago movement*”, with the caption that if people are satisfied with Duterte’s leadership, then Filipinos have to continue it implying that Sarah Duterte will continue her father’s legacy.³⁸

It can also be noted that most of the posts of the four selected DDS were bannered numerous accomplishments of Bong Go. For example, the Daily Duterte Facebook page posts several actions of Sen. Bong Go during this time of pandemic. Few of these posts include: a. Go’s action to extend aid to nearly a thousand struggling workers to help them cope with the adverse impact of the pandemic; b. Go’s additional assistance to hundreds of victims of Typhoon Rolly; c. his announcement of the 70 million targets to be vaccinated in 2021; and d. Go asks the IATF to provide detailed guidelines for A4 priority groups to ensure safe, efficient, and orderly vaccination nationwide. As days pass by, there are positive remarks about Go in these DDS Facebook groups which appear to be a propaganda to spread support to Go, just in case he will run for president.

d. War on Drugs

In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte swiftly fulfilled a campaign pledge after winning a landslide victory in June 2016, initiating a so-called “war on drugs.” He publicly backed the arrest and execution of alleged drug users and sellers, even promising the cops that they would face no consequences for their acts.³⁹ The “war on drugs” is a phrase that is used to refer to a government-led initiative that aims to stop illegal drug use, distribution and trade. Duterte promised that in six months, he will eradicate drugs in the country.⁴⁰ This has led to human rights violations and more than 8,000 related

³⁸ Daily Duterte, “Kung satisfied ka sa accomplishments ni President Rodrigo Duterte, ituloy ang pagbabago.”

³⁹ Patel, “In Examining the Philippines’ Drug War, the ICC Takes a Positive but Challenging Step.”

⁴⁰ History, “War on Drugs.”

deaths since Duterte took office.⁴¹ Despite this number of casualties, the DDS continuously support Duterte's "war on drugs" by saying that it is necessary and timely. Moreover, the DDS also cite the benefits that people will get from this government's action to illuminate drugs in the country. They assert that illegal drugs are the sources of all crimes in the society. In fact, a poll conducted by the SWS returned a rating of "excellent" for Duterte's three-year campaign, with 82% satisfied due to a perception of fewer drugs and crime in the country.⁴²

For example, in a brief video clip which was posted by Mocha Uson in December 2016, months after Duterte took office, it was claimed that the crime rate fell to 31% in five months of the Duterte's Presidency where more than 12 billion worth of illegal drugs were confiscated in 23,000 operations just in 2016.⁴³ Uson also asked what would happen in our society if this was not addressed by Duterte, she also called for continuous support for the war on drugs because this action will save the next generation. This short video clip garnered 329 comments and 181,000 views. Furthermore, when a teenager named Kian Delos Santos was killed in a war on a drug operation, Mocha Uson had a live video streaming asking the people whether to stop the war on drugs or not after Kian's demise.⁴⁴ The Poll recorded 49,228 reactions voting to continue the war on drugs and only 1,104 reactions voted to stop it. This garnered 19,000 comments and 416,000 views.

On the other hand, in a shared post by Daily Duterte from Pebbles Duque on April 13, 2021, it was stated that Duterte's war on Drugs is not a failure.⁴⁵ The aforesaid article suggested that illegal substances should not be allowed to resurface and that we should not go back to the state of fear because of these drugs. This post was supported by several accomplishments of Duterte's war on drugs, such as : a. total value of seized drugs, CPECs and Laboratory equipment, Php. 57. 81 billion; b. Dismantled dens (712) and clandestine laboratories (18) with

⁴¹ BBC, "Philippines drugs war: UN report criticises permission to kill"

⁴² Reuters, "Filipinos Give Thumbs Up to Duterte's 'Excellent' Drugs War: Poll."

⁴³ Mocha Uson Blog, "Duterte's War on Drugs."

⁴⁴ Mocha Uson Blog, "Dapat na bang itigil ang WAR ON DRUGS dahil sa pangyayari kay KIAN???"

⁴⁵ Daily Duterte, "Duterte is not a Failure."

a total of 730; c. drug-cleared barangays (21, 252) and yet to be cleared barangays (13, 836); and d. high-value targets arrested, 11, 479.

Jean Baudrillard: Simulation, Simulacra and Hyperreality

Jean Baudrillard is one of the most important and controversial theorists who is associated with postmodernity⁴⁶ period which consists of various events and movements which includes the rise of media technologies, the dominance of the internet, rejection of metanarratives, and unified ideas or truths that are universal and objective, just to name a few.⁴⁷ According to postmodernists, truth is socially produced, relative, subjective, and has no objective reference to external reality.⁴⁸ Baudrillard's work blends philosophy, social science, and an idiosyncratic cultural metaphysics to focus on key historical events and phenomena, consequently, he is widely regarded as a "major guru" of French postmodern theory because of his strong and sharp criticism of contemporary society, culture, and thought.⁴⁹ One of the central premises in Baudrillard's theory of a digital postmodern world is that the media, simulations, and what he refers to as "cyberblitz" represent a new sphere of experience, a new stage of history, and a new form of society.⁵⁰ We are now in the period of simulations in which the media, characterized by the proliferation of signs, models, and information have become the primary determinants of social experience.⁵¹ We are now situated in a structure by which simulations are becoming more observable than the reality that it tries to represent. This is what Jean Baudrillard describes in his postmodern media theory, the death of the

⁴⁶ See Feorillo Demeterio, "Understanding the Postmodern Culture and Philosophy."

⁴⁷ The DDS phenomenon is already within the context of postmodernity since the period is characterized by the dominance of digital technologies and the proliferation of social media platforms which resulted in the massive and rapid spread of information, propagandas, virtual identities and many others.

⁴⁸ Arif, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Ultra-modernism: The Difference and the Continuity," 4.

⁴⁹ Kellner, "Jean Baudrillard."

⁵⁰ Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: from Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, 60.

⁵¹ Best & Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, 118.

real and the “precession of simulacra”. In this section, the researchers discuss Baudrillard’s notion of simulation, simulacra and hyperreality.

a. Simulation

Simulations are used in contexts such as: simulation of technology for performance, testing, training, education, video games, television shows, news, movies, and many others. Simulation, generally, is a process of copying, feigning, reenacting, imitating, or simulating a particular thing, event, or phenomena. An earthquake drill is one good example of simulation as it attempts to simulate a particular scenario of what to do when an earthquake occurs and how to avoid imminent danger however, none of the danger itself. Similarly, doctors and nurses simulate medical procedures. Next are those from the TV shows where actors and actresses simulate a particular scenario, those in animated movies whose characters are very realistic or “lifelike”, and likewise those that are in the news where they attempt to represent a particular information or events to their audiences. In other words, simulations attempt to model real-life or hypothetical events to provide a lifelike experience through a process of reenactment and imitation. Nevertheless, putting the concept of simulation in Baudrillard’s postmodern media theory brings profound consequences. The concept of simulation is very vital in Baudrillard’s media theory wherein he writes:

To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn’t. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not simply to feign: ‘Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and make believe he is ill. Some who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms.’ (Littre) Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false’, between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’.⁵²

Baudrillard describes simulation by citing a case of psychosomatic disorder whose conditions appear to be exact replicas

⁵² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 167-168

of actual disorder however untreatable using traditional medical techniques. In the given case, the simulation destroys all the underlying concepts of truth about the disorder. When an individual simulates that they are insane, that individual produces “true” symptoms, and the line between “real and imaginary” and “true and false” is threatened. The individual cannot be treated sane or not insane because symptoms are being produced. Consequently, Baudrillard argues that psychology and medicine stop at this point because symptoms can no longer be accepted as a fact of nature or capable of being treated because there are no longer objective causes or “true illnesses”.⁵³ For Baudrillard, simulation is not just anymore a process of simulating a particular thing, situation, or phenomena, but it leads us into a circular universe in which the sign is not exchanged for meaning, but merely for another sign.⁵⁴ Hence, Baudrillard draws a crucial distinction between dissimulation and simulation in which he implies that both terms involve feigning and faking, but whereas dissimulation masks reality, and so ultimately reaffirms it, simulation devours the real and leaves behind nothing but commutating signs, self-referring simulacra that feign a relation to an obsolete real.⁵⁵ Baudrillard therefore elucidates that a successful simulation will not just simply deceive one into believing something false but signifies the destruction of an original reality that it has replaced.

b. The Orders of Simulacra

Baudrillard asserts that there are distinct stages by which signs evolve to a simulacrum. Consequently, Baudrillard outlines four stages of simulation which are also linked to different historical periods. He said:

Such would be the successive phases of the image: 1. it is the reflection of a basic reality; 2. it masks and perverts a basic reality; 3. it masks the absence of a basic reality; 4. it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum.⁵⁶

⁵³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 168.

⁵⁴ Sandoz, “Simulation, Simulacrum (1).”

⁵⁵ Best & Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, 100-101.

⁵⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 170.

According to Baudrillard, the first stage is linked to the medieval period. In this stage, signs truthfully represent reality. For example, in the medieval period individuals could determine the rank or social status of others by just looking at their clothes and appearance.⁵⁷ Those who are wearing expensive fabrics and clothes represent that they belong to the higher class, while those who are wearing worn-out and uncomfortable clothes represent that they belong to a lower class. Thus, the sign in this period still corresponds to its referent and therefore one can still distinguish what is simulated and what it actually represents. In this period, the simulacra has not yet evolved since the sign is still attached to its referent.⁵⁸

However, in the second stage, the sign begins to distort reality and misrepresents it. This stage is linked to the renaissance period. In this period, competition for the meaning of signs starts. Simulacra aims to re-establish an ideal image of nature, consequently, imitations and counterfeits enter the scene such as sculptures, paintings, and etc.⁵⁹ For example, if an artist draws a painting of a subject (such as a person or landscapes of nature), the painting may possess varied interpretations or to some extent modifications based on the interpretation of the painter. Thus, the subject being painted may not be as accurately represented in the painting. However, it is also important to note here that individuals can still distinguish the original from the imitation; the original subject from the painting. For Baudrillard, this period corresponds to the “first order of simulacra”. The sign, as an art, possesses multiple and various meanings.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the third stage is linked to the period of the industrial revolution. In this period, the sign begins to hide the fact that there is no underlying reality. The distinction between the real and the copy began to blur due to the mass production and proliferation of copies that look indistinguishable from the real. An example of this is the mass reproduction of things such as photographs, books, and newspapers

⁵⁷ Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, 78.

⁵⁸ Demeterio & De Leon, “Ang Pilosopiya Ni Jean Baudrillard Bilang Batayang Teoretikal Sa Araling Pilipino,” 116.

⁵⁹ Doug Mann, “Jean Baudrillard: A Very Short Introduction.”

⁶⁰ Demeterio & De Leon. “Ang Pilosopiya Ni Jean Baudrillard Bilang Batayang Teoretikal Sa Araling Pilipino,” 117.

that are quite identical with their referent. This period, according to Baudrillard, corresponds to the “second order of simulacra”. While the sign in the first order exists in paintings and sculptures, it exists in films and photography in the third order.⁶¹ The production of photos and films has imitated the things that they represent so well that individuals can hardly know the difference between the copy and the original, and to some extent, individuals find the representations more appealing than the original. Consequently, the copies in this period threaten to replace the real.⁶²

Lastly, the fourth stage is linked with the information age or postmodernity. Baudrillard claims that in this stage, “we are in the third order of simulacra; no longer that of the counterfeit of an original as in the first order, nor that of the pure series as in the second”.⁶³ The advent of computers, virtual reality, advertising, opinion polls, the media, branded phones, and signature shoes as status symbols, and many others have amplified the evolution of simulation.⁶⁴ Thus, this period is believed to be the “simulation proper”, the result of a long historical process of simulation in which simulation models come to constitute the world, and overtake and finally devour reality.⁶⁵ In this period, the sign no longer bears any relation to reality.⁶⁶ The sign becomes “more real than real” in which it has constituted a new realm of existence of what Baudrillard calls the hyperreal.

Consequently, Baudrillard describes simulation as a process of replacing the “real” with simulated events as when electronic or digitalized images, signs, or spectacles replace “real life” and objects in the real world.⁶⁷ That being said, we can now clearly infer that simulation is the process where reality is usurped and as a result, the simulacrum is produced.

⁶¹ Demeterio & De Leon. “Ang Pilosopiya Ni Jean Baudrillard Bilang Batayang Teoretikal Sa Araling Pilipino,” 117.

⁶² Dino Felluga, *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts*, 282.

⁶³ Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, 79.

⁶⁴ Doug Mann, “Jean Baudrillard: A Very Short Introduction.”

⁶⁵ Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: from Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, 79.

⁶⁶ Daniel Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, 76.

⁶⁷ Best & Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, 101.

c. Simulacra

Simulacrum (simulacra: plural form), for Baudrillard, is a real without an origin or reality.⁶⁸ Let us consider this passage where he re-interprets a fable by Jorge Borges in which he writes:

If we were able to take as the finest allegory of simulation the Borges tale where the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up exactly covering the territory (but where, with the decline of the Empire this map becomes frayed and finally ruined, a few shreds still discernible in the deserts - the metaphysical beauty of this ruined abstraction, bearing witness to an imperial pride and rotting like a carcass, returning to the substance of the soil, rather as an aging double ends up being confused with the real thing).⁶⁹

Also, after citing the fable Baudrillard depicts his concept of simulacra and concludes that:

Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory — *precession of simulacra* — it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. *The desert of the real itself.*⁷⁰

Baudrillard's re-interpretation simply elucidates that the references to the "map" emphasize that dominant reality is a copy, a model of a pre-existing territory. The "shreds" of the territory that "slowly rot across the map" describe how the original is disappearing underneath the dominant copy; and finally, the reality is reduced to an

⁶⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 166.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

isolated void, “the desert of the real” and consequently, in its place is the dominant copy is all that left; the simulacrum. Hence, this is what Baudrillard meant about the precession of simulacra, the map precedes the territory, or in other words, the simulation, copy, or model precedes the reality.

Baudrillard argues that in the so-called postmodern society, people have become so dependent on the mass media, that it has forgotten about the real world from which mass media is produced. For example, according to Best and Kellner, in the television show “Dr. Welby” the image or model of the doctor (simulated Doctor) is often mistaken for the real doctor. Robert Young who is not a doctor but an actor who plays a role, received thousands of letters asking for medical advice and later appeared in advertisements where he advised readers on the wonders of decaffeinated coffee.⁷¹ This example clearly shows that the events in the television programs or events in the media are not anymore taken as simulations but rather are taken for real. Instead of experiencing the real, people are consuming or caught up in watching copies, signs, or models that the mass media is feeding them. According to Baudrillard, signs have been detached from reality, and that the between the real and the simulation has disappeared in which there is no sense in the distinction between the map and the territory; the copy and the original; the simulated doctor and the real doctor; the simulation and the real. In other words, there is no longer any way to distinguish the real from the false, it has imploded. The simulation is not an imitation anymore, it has preceded its referent, and it has increasingly taken a life of its own and consequently referring on its own. Hence, the model has become more real than real. This is what Baudrillard calls simulacra, a model of a real without an origin or reality; a hyperreal.⁷² Simulacra are mere signs and images of the real that come to constitute a new realm of experience, the “hyperreal”.⁷³ In today’s society all we have are simulation, simulations which do not have any objective referent, simulations which lead to hyperreality.

⁷¹ Best & Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, 119.

⁷² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, 166.

⁷³ Best & Keller, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, 101.

d. Hyperreality and the Implosion in the Media

Hyperreality is simply the inability of the consciousness to distinguish reality from fantasy. Baudrillard argues that hyperrealism is the characteristic mode of postmodernity. Drawing inspiration from Marshall McLuhan's cybernetic concept of implosion, Baudrillard claims that in the postmodern world the boundary between representation and reality implodes and as a result, the very experience and ground of "the real" disappears.⁷⁴ This concept of implosion which Baudrillard adopted from McLuhan, forms an integral part of the term "cyberblitz", which refers to the information overload of media simulations wherein meaning vanishes. Moreover, Baudrillard interprets modernity as a process of explosion of commodification, mechanization, technology and market relations; in contrast to postmodernity that now heralds a process of implosion that breaks down binary oppositions such as reality and simulation.⁷⁵ In other words, implosion can be seen as one of the elements that constitutes hyperreality. In the realm of the hyperreal, the distinction between simulation and the real implodes wherein the real and the imaginary collapse into each other. Reality and simulation are experienced without any difference. Moreover, for Baudrillard the media are the key simulation machines which produce and reproduce signs and information which constitutes this hyperreality. In the past, the media was believed to be a mirror representation of reality, however, nowadays it constitutes a hyperreality, a new reality which is "more real than real", where "the real" becomes a subordinate or worse destroyed. Thus, for Baudrillard the advent of media technologies along with the proliferation of signs and hyperreal, as overly emphasized, is an important component of postmodernity.⁷⁶

The evidence for this hyperreality brought by the mass media is actually everywhere. For example, many individuals write letters to their favorite actors and actresses in soap operas or "teleseryes", offering sympathy to a particular scene and obsessively patronizing them. The spread of fake news in social media which sometimes are taken as real or more real than real. Models in fashion magazines, food commercials, television reality shows undergo a number of processes of editing,

⁷⁴ Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: from Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, 63.

⁷⁵ Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: from Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, 68.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

enhancement, copying and recycling which eventually results in the difficulty in determining whether it is real or unreal, and even to trace the referent.⁷⁷ With this regard, it is quite evident that hyperreality blurs the distinction between the real and the unreal in which its prefix 'hyper' signifies more real than real whereby the real is produced according to a model.⁷⁸ The model or hyperreal becomes an ideal and a determinant of "the real" and the boundary between hyperreality and everyday life is erased, hence, the hyperreal signifies the death of the real; however, it is a theological death: the real dies only to be born or artificially resurrected within the system of signs⁷⁹, as Baudrillard writes:

the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials - worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs, which are a more ductile material than meaning, in that they lend themselves to all systems of equivalence, all binary oppositions and all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself⁸⁰

Moreover, when the real is no longer directly represented and is artificially (re)produced, the hyperreal becomes not unreal or surreal, but more real than real, a real retouched and refurbished in "a hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself".⁸¹ Nonetheless, it is not that what people experience does not exist, but rather, simulations shape themselves, their experiences and their realities. Thus, in a society dominated by simulations, the hyperreal comes to constitute the real, and not only it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between simulations and reality, but the reality of simulation becomes the criterion of the real itself as people imitate and instantiate hyperreal simulation models.⁸²

⁷⁷ Demeterio & De Leon, "Ang Pilosopiya Ni Jean Baudrillard Bilang Batayang Teoretikal Sa Araling Pilipino," 119.

⁷⁸ Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: from Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, 119.

⁷⁹ Best & Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, 102.

⁸⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 167.

⁸¹ Best & Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, 102; Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 72.

⁸² Best & Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, 120.

Baudrillard's analysis of this phenomenon was centered and limited on the mass media of his time, however, the researchers contends that what is happening in the present time, especially in the new media, is a continuation of Baudrillard's view of the same phenomenon. In fact, the advent of new media which includes social media platforms has further amplified the proliferation of hyperreal where information, propaganda, representation, signs, and simulacra proliferate at a very high rate in these platforms and its impact on people's view of reality is quite disturbing.

Using Baudrillard's media theory as a framework, the next section will now examine how political propaganda is conveyed by selected Die-hard Duterte Supporters (DDS) through various media platforms, primarily Facebook.

DDS Political Propaganda as Hyperreality?

Society, culture, and politics have changed with the advent of new media technologies. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, were created to break the barriers of socialization and communication by providing an online public sphere where people can build a network of contacts, create online identities, share their interests, exchange ideas, spread information and the likes . Accessibility to information is one of the key components of Facebook, where it is free and open-ended. Through Facebook, people have the liberty to post and access particular information or news, and can freely engage in discussions by sharing their ideas or opinions about the particular content, and shared content in this platform spreads like wildfire to a large scope of audience especially if it is set for public view. However, aside from being an online public sphere for socialization, it is also used for public discourse regarding politics.

According to David et al., Facebook is a legitimate venue for engagement for both civic and political life where it has become an important source of political news.⁸³ Some Filipinos rely on Facebook for political news, thus, exposing themselves to various political contents which contribute to their political knowledge which in turn, sparks their political interests

⁸³ David et. al., "Reliance on Facebook for News and Its Influence on Political Engagement," 1.

and political engagements. In other words, Facebook is not just an extension of people's social life, but also an extension of their political life where the information conveyed on this platform is increasingly becoming the primary determinant of their political views. Due to the almost "limitless possibilities" and millions of users on Facebook, politicians, influencers, supporters, and critics flock to the social media platform to engage and advance their political interest and political propaganda.

Political propaganda is the information that is used to systematically and deliberately influence or sway public opinion in favor of their political interest and objectives.⁸⁴ In this paper, the researchers selected four DDS who use Facebook to advance their political propaganda, particularly on various national issues. These DDS have a specified goal, which is to spread propaganda that favor the Duterte administration which they intensely support. To achieve this, they advertise through their Facebook pages the administration's programs, accomplishments, responses, and standpoints regarding national issues. The DDS also publishes their reactions and standpoints to counter the critics who also use Facebook to criticize and advance their political interest and "anti-administration" propaganda. Consequently, millions of people who follow the DDS pages are exposed to the contents of their propaganda wherein these contents become the center of discussion, trolling, or debate between the supporters and critics. However, there are crucial concerns here. While social media have democratized public participation and political engagement, it also caused hate, anonymity, fake news, disinformation, trolling, obscurity, and propaganda. Moreover, to echo Baudrillard, the media are key simulation machines that constitute a hyperreality. Drawing from this view, the researchers also contends that Facebook pages can be used as key simulation tools by the DDS to frame the contents of their propaganda to match their political objectives. Propagandas which are shared by these DDS undergo a process which we call as "political framing".

Political framing is a judicious process of creating political propaganda which involves filtering, recycling, editing information, selecting content, and arguments that propagandists believe will have the most effect to persuade the people to be in favor of their political

⁸⁴ Soules, "Media, Persuasion and Propaganda."; Smith, "Propaganda."

standpoints. To further maximize the effects of propaganda, they may turn a blind eye or distort important facts and may attempt to divert the attention of the audiences from everything but their own propaganda.⁸⁵ Politically framed propagandas are prevalent in DDS Facebook pages, for example, DDS Mocha Uson posted a photo of a young girl that she claimed was murdered due to drug-related violence in the Philippines. However, it turns out that the photo was actually about a Brazilian girl who was raped and murdered by her grandfather in Brazil way back in 2014. Eventually, Mocha Uson took down that post. Another one is when she posted a photo of a policeman's burial who was killed in a drug operation and challenged four opposition officials namely: Vice President Leni Robredo, Sen. Bam Aquino, Sen. Antonio Trillanes, and Sen. Riza Hontiveros, as to when will they visit the wake. However, it turns out that the photo was from a leading newspaper that was taken a year earlier.⁸⁶ Aside from the examples of propaganda that were also discussed in section two of this paper, these examples are just some of the numerous cases that show how propaganda are politically framed and these are widely shared online to generate responses or to discredit or to advance political interest.

Moreover, politically framed propagandas is similar to Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality. Like hyperreality, the political propaganda also blurs the distinction between true information and disinformation. The contents conveyed in propaganda are politically framed thus, having corrupted referents or worse no referents at all since the propaganda itself devours the real and takes its place. Nevertheless, there will be great difficulties to re-establish or distinguish true information from disinformation even comparing it to the counter propaganda of the opposition since the same logic would apply. Epistemological and ontological claims are invalid since there is no reality in which we could compare these propaganda.⁸⁷ Thus, to hermeneutically extract truth or to even falsify this politically framed propaganda is a very big challenge to deal with.

⁸⁵ Smith, "Propaganda."

⁸⁶ Kajimoto et al., "Information Disorder in Asia: Overview of Misinformation Ecosystem in Indonesia, Japan, and the Philippines," 26.

⁸⁷ Morris, "Simulacra in the Age of Social Media: Baudrillard as the Prophet of Fake News," 8.

Political propagandas was never about publicizing information about what is true or what is false, it is about how information matches the content of the political objective and interest of the propagandist. It is about how to provoke an emotional response or engagement to influence the people in their favor, and ultimately frame and influence people's political views. This is what is currently happening, the DDS publishes political propagandas that will favor the Duterte administration and will attack issues that will go against Duterte. By political framing, the DDS are biased and selective to whatever information to share and to attack. They highlight information that will benefit the Duterte Administration, and discredit authorities or individuals that criticize Duterte. They "frame" the information and convince people that their propagandas is the most reliable truth. DDS followers, on the other hand, without being critical consumes this political propaganda and ultimately, becomes the primary determinant of their political views. This is evident based on how they defended Duterte on several national issues as cited and discussed in section II.

Baudrillard apparently predicted this situation where he suggests that "we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" and "information is directly destructive of meaning and signification".⁸⁸ People are bombarded with political propaganda whose contents are corrupted but yet taken as something pure and real. The information and contents in propaganda are seldom subjected to rigorous scrutiny, if such attempts were made to disprove it, it is usually through a counter-propaganda introduced by the opposing political party. However, as mentioned earlier, there is no reality in which we could compare these propagandas since both undergo political framing. Thus, the avid followers of the DDS and the DDS themselves, being politically framed, have lived this kind of reality and they are no longer critical of the information they receive from the DDS. Those people who are politically framed are in the state of Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality where DDS shared political propaganda becomes their criterion of their political views. These propagandas are simulations, the hyperreal that constitute the real where people have difficulty to distinguish between true information and dissimulation.

⁸⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 79.

CONCLUSION

Baudrillard's position on the media as key simulation machines that constitutes hyperreality plays a central role in understanding the political propaganda conveyed by the DDS in their Facebook pages. DDS used Facebook as simulation tools to frame the contents of their political propaganda to match their political objectives. Political propaganda is the information that is used to systematically and deliberately influence or sway public opinion in favor of their political interest. Like the process of simulation, political propagandas undergo the process of filtering, recycling, editing information, selecting content, and arguments that propagandists believe will have the most effect to persuade the people to be in favor of their political standpoints, and we call this "political framing". The publications of the DDS of their positions about the administration's programs, accomplishments, responses, and standpoints regarding national issues undergo political framing of information. The DDS "frame" the information according to their political propaganda to defend and support Duterte's standpoint on various issues. This framing is similar to Baudrillard's process of simulation that leads to hyperreality. Baudrillard elucidates that a successful simulation will not just simply deceive one into believing something false but signifies the destruction of an original reality that it has replaced. In political framing the information undergoes a series of editing, altering, or framing which results in the destruction of the original information that it has replaced. Thus, politically framed propaganda blurs the distinction between true information and disinformation. Moreover, these politically framed information are taken as the most reliable truth by DDS followers that ultimately influence their political views. At this point, there is a big challenge in front of us. That is, to address the prevalent concerns regarding propaganda, thus, attempt to hermeneutically decipher the hidden meanings and reclaim the truth. But the big question is, is there something to reclaim to begin with? In the Philippines, digital politics in social media will continue to grow and the role of political influencers, supporters and critics will play a pivotal role in its evolution.

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