



SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER: DECODING SEMIOTIC IN POLITICAL EDITORIAL CARTOONS OF THE RAPPLER

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Abstract

The editorial cartoons of Rappler serve as a bridge for the public to raise awareness, openly tackle controversies, and discuss discourse about the current events of a certain time. This study analyzes the signs and symbols used in the chosen ten (10) editorial cartoons of the Rappler, a Philippine digital media company, in conveying evident and relevant political issues. This is qualitative research utilized descriptive research design. Semiotic analysis was used to evaluate signs, symbols, and their message based on the chosen cartoons in achieving a comprehensive interpretation by applying Peirce's semiotic analysis approach. The researchers focused on editorial cartoons that mainly discuss political issues that are evident in current situation. The editorial cartoons made by Rappler serve as a vital role for opening discourses and controversies that tackles issues about politics that highly affects the Filipino citizens. These issues include corruption, extrajudicial killings, media fabrication, drugs, abuse of power, being submissive to a neighboring country, impunity, human rights violation, inflation, quality of education in question, plunder, misogynistic government, illegal gambling operation, government manipulation, and incompetent leaders were all discussed in this paper. These political cartoons act as a bridge to address the problems being faced by the citizens. The use of different, but easy symbols and words to show messages in an artistic way which is easier to comprehend without using complex words and lengthy texts. Hence, letting individuals to be aware and spark discourses and controversies can help to aid the gap between the public and the government.

Keywords: Editorial Cartoon, Politics, Rappler, Semiotic Analysis



Introduction

The use of editorial cartoons being published through newspapers, online publishers, and even organizations have all the capability to shape one's mind—how a person thinks and how they believe even a piece of information. This then results in discourse about different thoughts and beliefs from diverse people. In accordance with the study of Mangila (2021), through analyzations led by editorial cartoons from a particular period and place, it could help someone to get a clear glimpse of the reasons why a particular event at that certain time was shaped. Along with editorial cartoons, semiotics is aligned with this. Semiotics are defined as being concerned with meaning being made and even with how the reality is being able to get depicted through signs, sign systems, and processes of signification (Chandler, 2022).

Recently, societal issues have been evident in the world. With this, the media has been a material where people can obtain information regarding a certain topic. Editorial cartoons are also part of this. This material deliberately intends to visualize different issues that have been happening in the world, which assuages to spark different discourses and controversies from it, letting people to get stirred up with diverse opinions. The interplay between semiotics and editorial cartoons is an effective way to depict the symbols from what these editorial cartoons are trying to let people see and read from it without any lengthy texts nor explanation. Semiotic analysis then becomes a significant way to decode messages that it intends to convey through cartoons.

In semiotics, it is a sign that is traditionally defined as 'stands for' (or represents) something else. It could be in any form with the use of words, image, sound, odor, flavor, action, event, object, or anything that has the potential to be interpreted (Chandler, 2022). Semiotics, as Chandler (2022) also suggested, is a concept that serves to become aware of the underlying roles that are present in signs. From this, analyzing signs is relevant for an effective and innovative comprehension regarding emerging topics that concern societal issues.

In accordance with Peirce's (1971) semiotic triangle, he defined semiotics with three (3) ideas—*sign*, *object*, *interpretant*. Peirce defined signs as something that is being depicted but is also everything that stands for something else. Object on the other hand is the "something else" that is being referred to from the signs, which the sign concerns. Something that mainly consists in the real-world physical object or subject. Lastly, the interpretant was defined by Peirce as all that the sign conveys, in connection with the objects that are gained mainly by experience, the analysis or interpretation of the symbols itself.

Hence, semiotic pursues looking behind or underneath the ostensible aspect of texts in order to draw a conclusion from revealing its underlying social and cultural structures that come along with it. Hereof, it "denaturalizes" these meanings to generate insight into the conditions of delineation itself, as well as its effects on how a content could be reproduced and interpreted (Mingers & Willcocks, 2017). In analyzing using semiotics, it is necessary to be able to interpret how these representations were made, and how they formed with the intention of getting its depiction on how it is being portrayed and how it

should be perceived.

In the study of Kuzu (2016), it is concluded that based on the observations that were made during the study, teachers who use cartoon caricatures as a semiotic tool for the student's way of learning contributed to achieving higher student comprehension and content grasp in their essays for their writing courses, than those using traditional Turkish instructional materials. From this, it can be inferred that semiotic analysis through cartoons is an effective way to formulate ideas and to decipher the messages behind signs.

Due to this, these kinds of cartoons, which focus on politics, are responsible for portraying different contexts, circumstances, situations, countries, and even the people as it acts as a record of what has happened and is happening in a certain period of time. Moreover, political cartoons exaggerate characteristics of those involved in a societal issue in order to portray political figures and address problems directly albeit done in a humorous way (Maryum, 2023).

It is also highlighted in the study of Arañas et al. (2024) by deciphering the symbols found in every editorial cartoon, analysts are highly likely to acquire various insights into the stirred-up opinions of the public. This is because it reflects and responds to the sentiments made by the audiences of these editorial cartoons, thus produces the ability of the people to picture out certain contexts, circumstances, and even situations on how they perceive it and how society perceive it. This then creates an opportunity for the people to comprehend different situations, which involve diverse people and even a country.

This view is supported by Padillo & Serote (2023) where they discussed that political and social topics have long been brought by journalists with the use of editorial cartoons as their medium of conveying messages in relation to what is happening in society. Moreover, it is highlighted that editorial cartoons serve as a tool for people to gain information about current events and problems being faced in their environment and gain knowledge and awareness from it.

Various insights from these aforementioned studies discuss the crucial role of semiotics in their role to decode a message on what is behind a certain editorial cartoon. The interplay between semiotics and editorial cartoons, with their symbol and different interpretations being dependent on whoever may see such, has every ability and power to spark various viewpoints and discourses that can shape people's mind and beliefs. In the context of political issues that continuously arise, editorial cartoons play a vital role as an eye-opener that mainly aims to make people know and be knowledgeable about a certain issue in society that is highly likely to affect them. Through these signs found in editorial cartoons with hidden meanings, deciphering these will serve as a way on how a person can have the ability to interpret its meaning.

In addition to that, it was stated in the paper of Pinto and Mustaffa (2023) that editorial cartoons rely conspicuously on the audience's social and cultural memory. Be it with how they grasp and give meaning to symbols, making it possible to proffer both humor and its connotation. Moreover, it was said that studies, which exhibit semiotic analysis, act as a silent means of conveying a message and a medium of communication. Using symbols



alternately for words can help in contributing to the existence of social representations in means of symbols uncovering each layer of its hidden meanings.

With editorial cartoons in mind, semiotics is evident in this way. As discussed in the study of Atok (2016), editorial cartoons express signs. From this, signs are anything which aids in conveying messages through words, images, gestures, voices, and even thoughts. Signs also do not only depict meaning, but they also help to portray ideologies, worldviews, and even lifestyles. From this, cartoons have been evidently depicting signs that symbolize and represent a certain thing. In lieu of this, as this study aims to focus on cartoons, particularly editorials that focus on those that spark discourses about political issues, the principal role of political cartoons is to escalate knowledge and awareness about important socio-political issues (Akinwale, 2015). Furthermore, political cartoons such as CMFR (2022) had noted, portray symbols for the public pulse, picturing what people feel, elicit laughter, for mostly delivering sharp and humorous comments to make a point.

This study aims to effectively provide significant insights from interpreting and understanding editorial cartoons retrieved from Rappler, a Philippine digital media company. This study includes 10 (ten) editorial cartoons of Rappler that express a relevant and evident social issue in the country, specifically focusing on politics. The researchers also identified and analyzed the types of signifiers, such as labels and symbols that can be depicted from the cartoons. In addition to that, it is also the researchers' objective to contribute to artists, cartoonists, multimedia journalists, and researchers who focus on the study of semiotics with relation to editorial cartoons, particularly politically inclined ones.

Materials and Methods

This is a qualitative study anchored by descriptive research design. This paper offers an informative analysis of an editorial cartoon. This research approach focused on examining symbols, signs, and meanings within the chosen cartoons to achieve a comprehensive analysis. Moreover, with the application of Peirce's (1971) semiotic approach, the explication underneath each layer of hidden meaning from the editorial cartoons can be deciphered. In this context, the cartoons and symbols presented were the sign, the political issues that were depicted served as the object, while the analysis is the interpretant.

On the other hand, Rappler is a Filipino online news website that covers news, multimedia, citizen journalism, and social media. The data consisted of retrieved political editorial cartoons that were published online by the Rappler from November 2023 to November 2024. This period was chosen to capture recent political and social events as shown in Rappler's cartoons. A total of ten (10) editorial cartoons that express a relevant and evident social issue in the country, specifically focusing on politics, were retrieved and analyzed.

Furthermore, this paper was conducted under qualitative research, which specifically utilized descriptive research design. This provides detailed information of the analysis of the words, symbols, and signs that were included in the editorial cartoons to achieve a comprehensive analysis. After gathering the ten (10) political editorial cartoons,

the researchers then utilized semiotic analysis to analyze these retrieved editorial cartoons by Rappler. This subjective semiotic allows the researcher to analyze a unique personal understanding of the signs and elements in editorial cartoons. Hence, the dynamic nature recognizes that the meaning is not fixed. It can change over time and across different contexts, making it an ever-evolving process.

Results

The results of this study provided a comprehensive cognizance about the editorial cartoons from Rappler, which mainly focuses to political issues in the Philippines. By conducting semiotic analysis based on the words, symbols, and their interpretation, these results, in chronological order arranged by date, have been found out and so were made.

Table 1. Political Editorial Cartoons

Cartoon	Symbols	Analysis
 <p>Figure 1. It takes a woman to boldly stand up to a misogynist administration (<i>Isang matapang na babaeng tatayo laban sa misogynist na administrasyon</i>) (November 20, 2023)</p>	<p>The Government of the Philippines at sight: It represents misogynist view.</p> <p>Caricature of former Senator Leila de Lima: It symbolizes de Lima as a powerful woman who is ready to put up a fight for her rights to face the misogynist members of the administration.</p> <p>A huge, rusty mechanical hand: It represents the seven years of unjustified imprisonment of her in jail for keeping her from being a hindrance in the violence of Duterte's administration.</p>	<p>De Lima's story is very inspirational for women. A woman whose seven years of life was deprived from her due to a misogynist administration of the Philippines, a span of years where you can watch a Grade 1 student graduate from Primary School. Now, after being found to be not truly guilty against accusations of the former President Rodrigo Duterte and his misogynist administration, she confidently and firmly stands up against them, and against their twisted ego.</p>
 <p>Figure 2. Downplay of Charter Change (<i>Cha-Cha pwera!</i>) (January 15, 2024)</p>	<p>Man in native hat: Represents every Filipino.</p> <p>Cellphone: Refers to the medium where the advertisement about a simplistic view that EDSA revolution and the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines is the main</p>	<p>The picture shows a man being coerced into viewing an advertisement by Vice President Sara Duterte and President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. who is holding the cellphone as the medium that shows an advertisement about Charter Change. Based on</p>

Words

Cha-Cha: a Philippine political issue that being use for campaign and political advantage.

cause of the problems being faced in the Philippines, as well as in its economy.

Caricature of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.:

The main person involved who is behind the simplistic view about EDSA Revolution and the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines.

the image, the two are collaborating by manipulating the citizen through publication of an advertisement that can lead to a widespread of misinformation and historical revisionism. And by doing so, they can trick the Filipinos into believing something that did not happen in history as they are doing it to gain a political advantage for their own benefit.

Caricature of Vice President Sara Duterte:

Refers to the image of the Vice President Sara Duterte while she holds the eye of the viewer who represents every Filipino, forcing them to see the Cha-Cha advertisement that can be seen through the cellphone.



Figure 3. Justice, Philippine style: Acquitted of plunder, but there's an accomplice (*Justice, Philippine style: Acquitted sa plunder, pero may kabig naman*) (January 22, 2024)

The Scales of Justice: To represent an equal balanced system in which the scale will weigh the evidence and arguments presented in the court to ensure a fair verdict.

Caricature of Jinggoy Estrada:

Refers to the image of a prominent senator and how he plays with the scales of justice.

The editorial cartoon depicts a troubling picture of how the corruption and impunity continue to thrive in the Philippines, with the pork barrel scam. The pork barrel scam is one of the biggest corruption scandals in the Philippines, and it involves of sending public funds into unknown projects. The likes of Senator Jinggoy Estrada, former senator Juan Ponce Enrile, and Senator Bong Revilla, just proves how corruption and impunity continue to prosper. While the aides and staff face the consequences and punishment, the three acquitted senators manage to evade true accountability

Words

Pork Barrel Scam: The pork barrel scam is one of the massive corruption scandals in the Philippines involving the misuse of public funds.

Caricature of Juan Ponce Enrile:

Refers to the image of a former prominent senator and secretary defense of the Philippines, showing how he rests on the scales of justice.

Caricature of Bong

Revilla: Refers to the image of a prominent senator and how he messes around with the scales of justice.

The grave behind Bong Revilla: Symbolizes the memory of the late Richard Cambre, who served as the chief of staff of Senator Bong Revilla.

and walk free and continue to serve in public office. This just shows how the justice system in the Philippines failed to do its job—that the wealth and influence can bend the rules in one's favor.

Lastly, the cartoon highlights on how unfair, unequal, and unbalance the justice system in the Philippines. It indicates that if someone has wealth and influence, justice will serve and protect you, and if not, it will come for you.



Figure 4. The breakup valentine of Sara and Marcos (*Ang break-up valentine ni Sara at Marcos*) (February 12, 2024)

Caricature of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.: One of the two main person involved with the issues involving unity with Vice President Sara Duterte.

Caricature of Vice President Sara Duterte: The other main character of the editorial cartoon with involvement to issues about unity with the Philippine President.

Couple Heart: It represents the strength of the united relationship of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte.

Ruined Table: A symbol that shows the conflict between President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte affecting the Filipino people.

The cartoon illustrates the bittersweet relationship between the current President and Vice President of the Philippines. The cartoon presents a restaurant setting where the two political figures who hold the highest positions in the government share the same table while drinking the same wine. It was also shown that the two were using their hands to create a heart gesture, which is a common pose for lovers, emphasizing the unity of their relationship that resulted in an overwhelming victory at the 2022 presidential elections.

Despite sharing the same table, doing the heart gesture, and drinking the same wine, there is a hand holding a knife on the top of the table that symbolizes the hidden hostility and

**Sweaty Face and Stressful Facial Expression:**

This represents the pressure and tension between President Marcos Jr. and Vice President Duterte while pretending to be civil to each other.

Fine dining Restaurant:

This symbolizes that President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte's relationship is a scheme for formality purposes only.

Glasses of Red Wine Spilling:

It is a symbol that shows the greediness to power that is shared by President Marcos, Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte.

Hand Holding a Knife:

This symbol represents the ill-conceived plans of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte towards the country that could affect the Filipino citizens.

Mindanao cut down from the map of the Philippines:

This symbolizes the division or separation, highlighting the conflicts and independence movements, particularly in Mindanao, the hometown of the Vice President.

hatred between these leaders. This not only highlights their hypocrisy but also reflects the insincerity of the unity they promised. Such animosity directly affects the citizens of the country they claim to serve, creating a division in public opinion and weakening public trust in governance.

Furthermore, it shows the true hidden intentions of their action, such as using unity as a facade to gain public trust. Minor details such as Mindanao being sliced off the Philippines' map and people watching from behind apply to the Filipinos being affected by the conflict and personal interests of these two leaders.

Melting Candle: This represents the intensity of tensions and hatred between President Marcos Jr. and Vice President Duterte.



Figure 5. Rodrigo Duterte's diplomacy with China: Kneeling with his forehead closely on the ground (*Diplomasya ni Rodrigo Duterte sa Tsina: Nakaluhod nang dikit ang noo sa lupa*) (May 6, 2024)

Philippine Flag Being Wringed: The Philippine flag represents the country's sovereignty and identity. Its wringing symbolizes the exploitation and draining of the nation's resources, pride, and dignity by both internal and external forces.

Panatang Shoal (Scarborough Shoal): The pool of water beneath the flag represents Panatang Shoal, a contested maritime area in the West Philippine Sea. It symbolizes the region's strategic importance and the ongoing territorial disputes, particularly with China.

Duterte Wringing the Flag: The image of Duterte wringing the flag reflects criticism of his policies, which are seen as compromising national sovereignty and resources. It highlights controversial decisions, such as his perceived softness toward China in territorial disputes.

Person Holding Duterte's Head: The figure holding Duterte's head represents external powers, like China, or other influential entities

This image appears to depict a person wringing out a piece of fabric that resembles the Philippine flag. The act of the character kneeling while wringing out a Philippine flag into water might symbolize a subservient posture, implying that national pride or sovereignty is being compromised or "squeezed out." If the basin or water represents

China's influence, the cartoon could be suggesting that the Philippines' actions under its leader are benefiting or aligning too closely with China's interests, possibly at the cost of Filipino dignity, sovereignty, or resources. Water is central to the South China Sea dispute. The act of wringing the flag into water could also symbolize how territorial disputes over the sea have drained the Philippines of its political strength, public trust, or even marine resources. Many Filipinos have expressed frustration over their government's perceived inability to assert territorial rights effectively. This is often seen as bowing

that are seen as shaping his actions. It symbolizes a perceived loss of autonomy and submission to foreign influence.

Caricature of former President Rodrigo Duterte:

This caricature of the former President Rodrigo Duterte indicates that he is the one who is mainly responsible for the erosion of patriotic values due to him being submissive to China.



Figure 6. How did an alleged Chinese asset become a mayor? (*Paano nangyari na naging mayor ang isa umanong Chinese asset?*) (May 20, 2024)

Words

“I cannot remember, Your Honor.” (*“Your honor, hindi ko na po maalala”*): The infamous words spoken by the dismissed Bamban, Tarlac mayor Alice Guo during the senate hearing.

Man giving Birth: Refers to every Filipino citizen that was shocked to the sudden appearance of Bamban mayor Alice Guo.

Newborn Lady: Represents as the dismissed Bamban, Tarlac mayor Alice Guo, a foreigner who manipulates the system in the Philippines.

The Caricature of Senator Risa Hontiveros:

Represents a politician who is willing to save her country from being colonized.

The Caricature of Senator Win Gatchalian:

Represents a politician who is willing to fight against corruption in the country.

This editorial cartoon depicts that a Chinese foreigner known as Bamban, Tarlac mayor Alice Guo, can deceive many Filipinos as long as they have the power and influenced in the government. The reason that the dismissed Mayor Alice Guo can run and seat in an important government position is because of the corrupt and dishonest politicians.

Additionally, it demonstrates the loopholes of the Philippine legal system, which Alice Guo also exploited to gain power, portraying her as an alleged illegal alien. The use of legal loopholes such as the application for delayed registration of birth shows how easily the Philippines' system can be abused for personal or criminal gain. Guo's

involvement in Philippine Offshore Gaming Operations (POGO) raises concerns about foreign infiltration and organized crime in the country.

The infamous phrases "Your honor hindi ko na po maalala" shows how she still manipulates the government system in the Philippines regardless of the facts and evidence presented against her. Additionally, the words spoken by the dismissed Bamban Mayor Alice Guo became a meme in the Philippines, not only for the reason of being perceived as a public frustration, but it also because of Alice Guo sticking with her script.

Furthermore, the cards and chips surrounding them imply the illegal activities of POGO in our country. Senator Hontiveros and Gatchalian who kept on questioning the identity of Dismissed Bamban mayor Alice Guo are those politicians who are willing to fight against the corruption and colonization.



Casino: It represents the path to gambling and symbolizes how POGO can function in the Philippines.

Cards and Casino Chips: Represents the front view of

The image depicts that the former President Duterte enables the operation of POGO (Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators) in the Philippines, which causes some innocent Filipinos

Figure 7. All Roads Lead to

Duterte (*Lahat ng daan ay patungo kay Duterte*) (June 10, 2024)

Words

POGO: This depicts how POGO is a source of illegal gambling operations that are widespread in the Philippines.

POGO, where it appears to be a typical casino where gambling and playing are done to conceal the real purpose behind it.

Caricature of former President Rodrigo Duterte with Businessman's in the Casino: Represents as his invitation for Offshore Gaming Operator to set up in the Philippines.

Filipinos sitting in the POGO chips (Casino chip): It represents that POGO exploits innocent Filipinos, enslaving them to operate the business.

who're looking for a job to be recruited inside the POGO business and become the slaves that operates the business. Behind those POGO chips is an illegal act that deprives the freedom of human rights. Online gambling activities on the surface, but enslavement of innocent lives behind the scenes, a business that former President Duterte Legalized to operate in the Philippines.



Figure 8. Just Four More Years Mr. Marcos, Slacking Off is No Longer Possible (*Apat na taon na lang Ginoong Marcos, 'di na puwede ang papetiks-petiks*) (July 22, 2024)

Words

Education: The text "EDUCATION" in the image likely represents the political context significantly influences the effectiveness of the education system in the Philippines, with political leadership, policies, and

Caricature of President Ferdinand E. Marcos, Jr.: The caricature of President Ferdinand E. Marcos Jr. exaggerates his physical features, highlighting perceived shortcomings and problematic aspects of his reign, thereby influencing public conversation through satire.

Podium: Represents authority and leadership, suggesting a platform for discussing important issues, likely related to education or governance.

Police Line: Indicates a barrier to justice or accountability, suggesting that there are serious issues regarding human rights that are being

The image shows a chaotic environment in which several socio-economic concerns have an impact. Depicts a pressing call to action regarding governance and accountability.

Featuring Mr. Marcos at the forefront, the scene highlights the urgency for reforms, particularly in education, as indicated by the chalkboard reading "EDUCATION."

Surrounding elements suggest critical societal challenges, including economic issues like inflation. The overall tone conveys frustration over inaction and underscores the demand for responsibility, emphasizing

resource distribution playing a crucial role.

Inflation: The text "INFLATION" in the image refers to economic issues related to the rising cost of goods and services.

Human Rights: The text symbolizes issues related to justice and equality.

Do Not Cross Police Line: The "DO NOT CROSS POLICE LINE" near the "human rights" slogans highlight governmental actions obstructing human rights, especially in education, emphasizing the need for advocacy against potential abuses.

ignored or obstructed.

Inflation Can: Represents economic challenges, illustrating how rising costs impact education and access to resources for students.

Human Figures: Reflect the community affected by these issues, representing students, educators, or citizens who are impacted by governmental policies and societal challenges.

Trash: Represents neglect or the consequences of poor governance, suggesting that educational resources are being wasted or that the environment for learning is deteriorating.

that after four years, there is no more room for delay in addressing significant issues. This illustration serves as a poignant reminder of the need for leadership to prioritize pressing matters that affect the community.



Figure 9. Is this the beginning of the end of the Davao Death Squad? (*Ito na ba ang simula ng katapusan ng Davao Death Squad?*) (October 14, 2024)

Words

Tokhang: A program during the administration of former President Rodrigo Duterte, which cost many people's lives.

Caricature of Former President Rodrigo Duterte: Duterte being the one in the center implies that he is being greatly involved with the DDS (Davao Death Squad), especially when he served as a Mayor in Davao.

Caricature of Senator Bong Go: Since he is a close ally, an assistant, of the former President Rodrigo Duterte, he is allegedly seen as being involved with the DDS (Davao Death Squad).

Caricature of retired police officer Ronald

The implementation of DDS (Davao Death Squad) is such a violent and aggressive strategy for war on drugs, which led to thousands of deaths, even those with questionable circumstances, dismissing the essence of human rights. Media fabrication, corruption, extrajudicial killings, and an absurd reward system was seen being connected with the said organized entity, Davao Death Squad, which former President Rodrigo Duterte, Senator Bong Go, retired police officer and Senator Ronald "Bato" Dela Rosa, and retired

“Bato” Dela Rosa: Dela Rosa is also one of the former President Rodrigo Duterte’s ally as he is being involved with the DDS (Davao Death Squad).

police colonel Royina Grama are all involved. This then talks about how evidently dirty the law enforcement and the government are in the Philippines.

Caricature of retired police colonel Royina Garma: Due to Garma’s position as a public official, a police officer, it symbolizes how dirty the law enforcement and the government itself in the Philippines.

Teardrops coming from Royina Garma: Symbolizes as guilt and remorse of the consequence of her actions.

Dripping blood: Symbolizes as the death of innocents, indicating the people responsible for the killings.

Conference microphone: Represents as a tool for exchanging arguments and testimonies during senate hearings.

Documents: Symbolizes as recorded materials to provide evidence during the investigation.



The Blindfolded Lady Justice: Senator Risa Hontiveros, known as the Blindfolded Lady Justice, represents the judicial system's core ideals of fairness, equality, and

The editorial cartoon highlights how the "drug war killings" during former President Rodrigo Duterte's administration have become one of the most bitter issues in Philippine

Figure 10. Duterte in the Senate: Last man standing is a woman (*Duterte sa Senado: Ang huling lalaki ay isang babae.*) (November 4, 2024)

Words

Drug War Killings: The drug war launched by President Duterte has had a significant and controversial impact on Philippine society. While it aimed to combat criminality and the drug problem, it led to thousands of deaths and widespread human rights violations. These actions should not be ignored. Fair investigations and justice for the victims are essential, along with finding innovative ways to address the drug problem without compromising human dignity.

impartiality. Wearing a blindfold over her eyes, she represents objectivity and the determination to serve justice without bias or influence from social status, financial fortune, or political power.

Bloodied Hand with “Drug War Killings”: The blood-covered hand with the words "Drug War Killings" written across it is a powerful and evocative image that represents the terrible human cost of the anti-drug effort. This hand acts as a stark reminder of the lives lost, frequently because of contentious practices like extrajudicial executions, which have permanently altered the course of the nation's history.

The Scales of Justice: The Scales of Justice represent the fundamental idea of fairness in the judicial system. They symbolize the unbiased evaluation of facts, ensuring that every piece of information is thoroughly evaluated in order to ascertain the truth and render a fair conclusion. The scales, which represent equality before the law, serve as a reminder that prejudice, power, and wealth should not influence justice. The balance they reflect is critical to sustaining trust in

history. The killings under Duterte's war on drugs represent a dark chapter in the nation's history. While addressing the drug problem is necessary, it should not come at the cost of thousands of lives, often without due process or justice. The campaign appeared to disproportionately target the poor, suggesting that it was not merely a war on drugs but also a war against the marginalized sectors of society.

the legal system while also upholding all individuals' rights and duties.

Caricature of Former President Rodrigo

Duterte: This caricature depicts former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, emphasizing his aggressive and authoritative demeanor. Duterte was the primary figure behind the controversial "war on drugs," a centerpiece of his administration. This campaign led to thousands of deaths, many attributed to extrajudicial killings, which garnered widespread condemnation from human rights organizations both locally and internationally. His exaggerated expression in the caricature reflects his unapologetic stance and willingness to use force to achieve his goals.

Discussion

This study has investigated the ten (10) editorial cartoons chosen from Rappler where political concerns were dominantly present and were deciphered by conducting an analysis by applying Peirce's (1971) semiotic triangle approach. The chosen editorial cartoons consisted of retrieved political issues that were published online by Rappler from November 2023 to November 2024.

In analyzing various figures in Table 1—Political Editorial Cartoons, the researchers found out that there were numerous political concerns and issues with regards to how government in the Philippines was lacking in terms of good leadership, accountability, quality services, and good governance. It can be seen that these issues were mainly dominant in the political editorial cartoons of Rappler, making it relevant and timely in the current time as it greatly shows that these concerns are what the people are asking for from the government. It highlights the shortcomings of the Philippine system and how corrupt these politicians are as depicted through the words, symbols, signs, caricatures, and interpretations, which serve as a reflection of the public frustration and sentiments.

In Figure 1, it illustrates the former Leila de Lima being in prison for seven (7) years in spite of her not being guilty of false accusations. It shows how unfair the Philippines' justice system is. In Figures 3 and 10, it also highlighted how unequal the justice system is in the Philippines. The three senators acquitted of plunder in Figure 3 are walking freely, with two of them even being re-elected as senators. In contrast, the 'War on Drugs' killings in Figure 10 mainly targeted the marginalized sector rather than the actual drug lords. This shows the imbalance in justice between the innocent lives taken during the Duterte administration and the case of former Senator De Lima, who was imprisoned for years despite not being found guilty, as shown in Figure 1.

Moreover, Figure 2 emphasizes how the campaign ad was used for the propaganda of Charter Change that would benefit the present President and Vice President with their allies. The campaign advertisement was made to change the 1987 Constitution and revise the history of what happened in EDSA, which ousted the dictatorship of Marcos Sr. Moreover, they were pushing the revision of the constitution through the people's initiative.

On the other hand, in Figure 5, it depicts how the former President Rodrigo Duterte's diplomacy is being submissive and overly accommodating with China. Hence, it resulted in enabling the POGO operation in the Philippines, which causes one of the biggest illegal gambling operations in the country in Figure 7. The act of former President Duterte with China in Figure 5 developed a Chinese foreigner who got elected as a mayor—dismissed Bamban mayor Alice Guo in one of the cities in the Philippines in Figure 6 through the exploitation of corrupt politicians and an outdated system.

Meanwhile, in Figure 8, it demonstrates how President Marcos Jr. undermines the socio-economic and educational concerns of the community, highlighting the shortcomings of the President in addressing and taking immediate actions to these important issues. The editorial also depicts the growing frustration and sentiments of the public.

In addition to that, Figures 9 and 10 show how dirty the law enforcement and government are in the Duterte Administration. The Davao Death Squad was created as a violent and aggressive strategy for the war on drugs, which causes the death of many innocent lives, opposing the marginalized sectors.

After analyzing the ten (10) editorial cartoons provided, which focused on politics, issues about the unfair justice system in the Philippines were mostly shown on the editorial cartoons. In addition to that, Anni et al., (n.d.) discussed that the Philippine justice system is swayed because of power—it is bent towards the interests of the elites and who are able to escape being accountable for what they did and continue to commit more crimes against the people who voted for them. This issue mainly tackles the quality of the justice system in the Philippines. This indicates that a poor justice system in the Philippines exists in favor of those who have the upper hand, with those who have a lot of people who back them up, and even how society is being misogynistic towards women who have power.

In addition to that, these political cartoons were able to act as a silent means of communication by conveying its meaning through the signs, objects, and interpretants that



were present in conducting this study. As concluded in the study of Imperial (2020), cartoons are not just used to pose humor. It is also a tool to display political concerns while attracting the reader's attention. Hence, political cartoons assuage people by making them aware of issues that are widely relevant and timely in a country or even the world.

Conclusions

With the cartoonists creative mind, they were able to portray different issues that concern politics in the Philippines. Rappler's editorial contents aim for journalism and ethics to go together because they believe that journalists are effective in what they do when they tell the truth, and only credible information in mind, and accuracy at the core of their mission of truth-telling. The researchers concluded that the editorial cartoons from Rappler were able to depict stories, address the country's issue, and to relate with the public sentiment. Opening the minds of their audiences by contributing as a tool for disseminating credible and factual information, which can greatly help to educate the people with the current events, especially in the Philippines.

The editorial cartoons made by Rappler serves as a vital role for opening discourses and controversies that tackles issues about politics that are highly likely to affect the Filipino citizens. These political cartoons act as a bridge to address the problems being faced by diverse citizens up to the government for the country's development and improvement. The use of different but easy symbols and words to show messages in an artistic way made the message easier to comprehend. Thus, stories were able to get deciphered following with it not using complex words and lengthy texts to make people understand what they want to say.

From the analyses of different editorial cartoons, the theme focused on politics and governance. It was concluded that issues such as corruption, extrajudicial killings, media fabrication, drugs, abuse of power, being submissive to a neighboring country, impunity, human rights violation, inflation, quality of education in question, plunder, misogynistic government, illegal gambling operation, government manipulation, and incompetent leaders were all evident in the scope that the researchers have covered from the political editorial cartoons by Rappler. With editorial cartoons and while visually letting people understand it makes people comprehend it in a simpler way by making it humorous, which even provides entertainment.

Moreover, these political cartoons were able to act as a tool of communication by successfully conveying its meaning through the signs, objects, and interpretants that were present in conducting this study. By applying the semiotic triangle approach of Peirce (1971), the signs (cartoons and symbols), objects (political concerns presented), and interpretants (analysis or interpretation) were also successfully decoded. The researchers were able to distinguish the signs that were present in every political editorial cartoon. Thus, uncovering each layer of its hidden meaning.

In lieu of which, it enhances the media literacy skills of an individual by semiotic analysis view. It serves as a tool to critically evaluate visual representations of the things that are evidently happening in the environment. By deciphering the symbols, it lets



individuals contribute with their opinion and to open discourses and let controversies get tackled openly. Furthermore, decoding messages along with the symbols present in a cartoon helps to address problems and relate with the public sentiment that are being perceived differently by each individual.

Further study could explore different themes aside from politics. Moreover, future research could also expand their semiotic analysis of editorial cartoons from different media publishing platforms or newspaper publishers. In addition, this study implies interpretation of the researchers, which therefore is subject to biases with influencing factors on formulating the decoded interpretation. Hence, future study could use mixed methods as an approach to analyze and evaluate editorial cartoons, with those including from students or professional publishers.

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In compliance with The Threshold journal's guidelines for ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) in research writing, we disclose that we utilized OpenAI's ChatGPT to assist in refining the language and clarity of this manuscript. The AI tool was employed primarily for editing purposes: to improve the coherence of paragraphs, correct grammatical errors, and format the document according to academic standards. All content, data interpretations, and conclusions are the original work of the authors. The use of AI did not influence the research design, data analysis, or the scientific findings of the study; it was strictly confined to helping articulate the authors' intended meaning more effectively. The authors have reviewed and approved all AI-generated suggestions to ensure alignment with the study's results and scholarly integrity. This disclosure is made to maintain transparency in the writing process, upholding the ethical standards set by the publication.

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