DISINFORMATION, POLITICAL PREDISPOSITIONS, AND MEMORY POLITICS: EXPLAINING VOTER PERCEPTIONS IN THE 2022 PHILIPPINE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how disinformation, voter predispositions, and contested historical memory interacted to shape voter perceptions during the 2022 Philippine presidential election, in which Ferdinand Marcos Jr. won with over 31 million votes and 59 per cent of the vote share, returning the Marcos family to the presidency three decades after the EDSA People Power Revolution. Existing scholarship has tended to treat digital disinformation, structural political factors, and memory politics as connected but insufficiently integrated processes, leaving open the question of how these dimensions worked together to produce the electoral outcome.

To address this gap, the dissertation constructs an original analytical framework, termed the convergence model, drawing on three theoretical pillars: narrative competition over interpretive authority, networked disinformation as a professionalised production system, and the populist logic of equivalence applied to memory politics. The model is operationalised through a qualitative single-case study design, employing thematic discourse analysis of social media content from Facebook,

YouTube, and TikTok during the January to May 2022 campaign period. A two-layer coding scheme captures both narrative type (authoritarian nostalgia, conspiracy, strongman leadership, democratic disillusionment) and affective strategy. The analysis is triangulated against secondary quantitative evidence from Kasuya et al. (2024), Mendoza et al. (2025), and Dulay et al. (2023).

The dissertation argues that disinformation functioned not as an autonomous persuasive force but as a conditional catalyst, becoming politically consequential where it aligned with prior political commitments and contested historical memory. The experimental finding that one-shot exposure could not increase Marcos support is reinterpreted as confirming this logic. The findings contribute to comparative debates on democratic resilience and digital autocratisation, demonstrating that disinformation's electoral influence depends on structural and mnemonic conditions rather than on the inherent persuasiveness of false claims.

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Introduction

In May 2022, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. won the Philippine presidential election with over 31 million votes, securing nearly 59 per cent of the total and returning the Marcos family to the presidency three decades after the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution had ended his father's authoritarian rule (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 549). Running in tandem with Sara Duterte, the daughter of outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte, Marcos Jr.'s campaign drew on an extensive social media infrastructure that circulated revisionist narratives about the Marcos dictatorship, rehabilitated the family's public image, and cast the post-EDSA democratic order as a period of national decline (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 549, 563; Ong, 2022: 396-400). The Philippines had already been identified within Bradshaw and Howard's (2019: 1, 9) seventy-country inventory of organised social media manipulation as a high-capacity site for cyber-troop activity, and the 2022 campaign intensified these dynamics to an unprecedented degree. The scale of the victory, and the disinformation environment in which it unfolded, prompted a central question in the scholarship that followed: was the outcome attributable to disinformation, or did it reflect deeper structural and historical forces? This dissertation addresses that question directly. It asks: how did social media disinformation interact with existing political attitudes and historical narratives to shape voter perceptions during the 2022 Philippine presidential election?

The dissertation argues that disinformation is best understood neither as the sole determinant of the electoral outcome nor as an irrelevant epiphenomenon of structural forces, but as a conditional catalyst whose persuasive power depended on its alignment with pre-existing political commitments and historically rooted grievances. It advances a convergence model that integrates three processes typically examined in isolation within the existing literature: the structured circulation of

narratives through digital platforms, the filtering of those narratives through prior political predispositions, and the provision of historically charged content through which circulation and reception were made to align. These three processes, termed digital narrative circulation, predispositional filtering, and mnemonic framing, are drawn respectively from scholarship on digital populism and post-truth politics (Prior, 2021), networked disinformation as a professionalised production system (Ong and Cabañes, 2018), the logic of equivalence and populist identity construction (Laclau, 2005; Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025), and the empirical literature on voter behaviour in the 2022 Philippine election (Kasuya et al., 2024; Mendoza et al., 2025; Dulay et al., 2023). The convergence model proposes that disinformation became especially powerful where it activated latent predispositions and gave them coherent political expression through the mechanism of platformed memory politics.

The existing scholarship on the 2022 Philippine election has produced valuable but fragmented insights. Quantitative studies have demonstrated strong correlations between belief in pro-Marcos disinformation and electoral support (Kasuya et al., 2024: 10-11), while also showing that structural factors, above all approval of President Duterte and reliance on social media for political information, were the strongest independent predictors of Marcos Jr.'s vote share (Mendoza et al., 2025: 40-42). Qualitative research has documented the narrative architecture of the disinformation campaign, identifying themes of authoritarian nostalgia, conspiracy, strongman leadership, and democratic disillusionment (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563, 572), and has shown how pro-Marcos YouTubers used affective storytelling to reconstitute collective memory (Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 55-57, 62). Yet these contributions tend to examine digital circulation, voter predispositions, and historical revisionism as connected but insufficiently integrated processes. The interaction

between them remains undertheorised: it is not clear, from any single study, how digital narratives, prior political commitments, and contested historical memory worked together to shape what voters perceived, believed, and ultimately chose. This dissertation addresses that gap by constructing an analytical framework that treats these three dimensions as constitutive elements of a single process of perception formation, rather than as separate variables to be weighed against one another.

The Philippine case is especially instructive for this inquiry because it combines features that are increasingly common in democratic politics across the Global South: high social media penetration, a contested post-authoritarian political settlement, and a political culture in which historical memory is actively mobilised for contemporary electoral purposes (Arugay and Mendoza, 2024: 3-5). Following the 2016 presidential election, the country was widely described in industry and policy commentary as the "patient zero" of global disinformation, a designation popularised by Facebook executive Katie Harbath and reflective of the scale and sophistication of its networked propaganda infrastructure (Arugay and Mendoza, 2024: 3; Ong and Cabañes, 2018: 7-8). The 2022 election therefore represents not an aberration but a culmination of trends that have reshaped Philippine political communication over the preceding decade. The dissertation contributes not only to the country-specific literature on this election, but also to broader comparative debates about democratic resilience, digital autocratisation, and the conditions under which disinformation becomes politically consequential.

The dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on disinformation and digital politics, voter predispositions and perception formation, and the role of memory politics in the Philippine case, identifying the gap that this study addresses. Chapter 3 sets out the analytical framework, constructing the convergence

model from three theoretical pillars and specifying the qualitative methodology through which it is operationalised, including the two-layer coding scheme for narrative type and affective strategy, the sampling strategy for social media content across Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, and the triangulation method drawing on secondary quantitative data. Chapter 4 applies the framework to the disinformation narratives that circulated during the January to May 2022 campaign period, analysing how themes of authoritarian nostalgia, conspiracy, strongman leadership, and democratic disillusionment were rendered emotionally compelling through affective storytelling techniques. Chapter 5 turns to the question of reception, triangulating the discourse findings with secondary quantitative data from Kasuya et al. (2024), Mendoza et al. (2025), and Dulay et al. (2023) to assess how disinformation interacted with voter predispositions and to evaluate competing structural and institutional explanations. Chapter 6 concludes by restating the findings, discussing their implications for democratic resilience in post-authoritarian societies with high social media usage, and identifying avenues for further research.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This literature review examines how scholarship explains the relationship between disinformation, digital politics, and voter perception in the 2022 Philippine presidential election. While existing research shows that social media has transformed electoral communication by accelerating the circulation of political narratives, scholars disagree on how far disinformation directly changes attitudes, how far it reinforces prior beliefs, and how these effects vary across political contexts (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019: 1; Ong, 2022: 396-400). In the Philippines, these debates are especially important because the 2022 election was shaped not only by platformed campaigning, but also by contested memories of the Marcos dictatorship and wider dissatisfaction with post-EDSA democracy (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563, 572; Kasuya et al., 2024: 2-4). This review therefore argues that voter perceptions cannot be understood through exposure to disinformation alone. Instead, they must be analysed through the interaction between digital circulation, political predispositions, and memory politics. The review proceeds in three stages: it first outlines debates on disinformation and digital electoral politics, then examines predispositions and perception formation, and finally situates these debates within the Philippine case to identify the gap this dissertation addresses.

Section 1.1: Disinformation and Digital Politics

Disinformation is best understood not as a collection of isolated false posts, but as a broader mode of political communication shaped by digital infrastructures. In this literature, computational propaganda refers to the use of algorithms, automation, data practices, and coordinated networks to shape what citizens see, how often they see it,

and which messages appear socially credible (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019: 1, 12; Howard, Woolley and Calo, 2018: 81). Gianan (2020: 1-5) documents comparable patterns across Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines, illustrating that these dynamics are characteristic of Southeast Asian digital politics more broadly. Digital politics no longer operates through a simple model in which parties publish messages and voters passively receive them. Instead, political actors can use bots, troll networks, fake or co-opted accounts, targeted amplification, and platform logics to manufacture visibility, simulate popularity, and distort the informational environment in which democratic choice takes place (Howard, Woolley and Calo, 2018: 81-85; Bradshaw and Howard, 2019: 1, 9, 12-13). The core issue, then, is not only whether a message is true or false, but how digital systems structure attention and give certain narratives a strategic advantage over others.

The literature also stresses that disinformation becomes politically potent when it is tied to identity, antagonism, and distrust. Prior (2021: 50, 63) argues that digital populism thrives in an environment where direct online communication allows political actors to bypass journalistic mediation and appeal to the people against corrupt elites, while post-truth politics weakens the authority of factual verification by making narratives feel more important than evidence. Disinformation works not merely by deceiving voters with false claims, but by embedding those claims within emotionally satisfying stories about who belongs, who threatens the nation, and which institutions can no longer be trusted. This shifts the analytical focus away from individual misinformation and towards narrative competition. It also helps explain why scholars increasingly treat digital politics as a struggle over interpretive authority: the question is not only what information circulates, but who gets to define what counts as truth (Prior, 2021: 63).

These wider debates are especially relevant to the Philippines, where social media has become central to electoral politics. Arugay and Baquisal (2022: 549, 552) argue that social media was critical to the production, transmission, and reception of election-related narratives in 2022, contributing both to mobilisation and to polarisation. Crucially, they note that individual false posts matter less than the broader narratives under which they are organised, including authoritarian nostalgia, conspiracy, strongman leadership, and democratic disillusionment (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563, 572). Ong (2022: 397-398) similarly cautions against reducing the problem to gullible voters or fake accounts alone, arguing that disinformation is sustained by profitable local influence operations and by publics whose willing, rather than “brainwashed”, embrace of “authoritarian fantasies” renders fact-checking and historical correction insufficient as remedies on their own. Taken together, this literature suggests that disinformation in digital politics should be understood as a structured narrative environment, not a simple transmission of lies. This provides the basis for the next debate: whether such narratives actually transform voter perceptions or mainly reinforce beliefs already in place.

Section 1.2: Voter Predispositions and Perception Formation

Voter predispositions are central to perception formation because citizens do not receive campaign information as neutral observers. They interpret claims through prior loyalties, identities, grievances, and assumptions about which actors are credible. Disinformation is therefore better understood as operating through reinforcement than simple conversion. In the Philippine case, the literature suggests that online narratives were most persuasive when they resonated with commitments already in place, rather

than when they asked voters to abandon existing views altogether (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 551-552; Mendoza et al., 2025: 41).

This makes credibility a relational rather than purely evidentiary judgement. Arugay and Baquisal (2022: 562, 572) argue that stronger political belongingness was associated with heavier reliance on social media for political information, while distrust of mainstream media produced uneven thresholds for judging believability. In such settings, information is often accepted not because it is well evidenced, but because it is validated within trusted networks and affirms a voter's sense of political community. Repetition within those networks can normalise particular interpretations of candidates, institutions, and events, while counter-claims from journalists or rival camps may be dismissed as partisan rather than corrective (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 562; Ong, 2022: 398-400).

The literature also shows why correction frequently has limited force. Where anti-elite and anti-institutional orientations are already strong, fact-checking may fail to revise perceptions because it is interpreted through suspicion of the institutions producing it (Mendoza et al., 2025: 31-33, 46-47). This does not mean predispositions explain everything. They clarify why some messages are more readily believed, but they do not on their own explain which narratives become dominant or highly visible. As Ong (2022: 396-400) notes, influence operations and segmented online publics shape what is repeatedly encountered and socially endorsed, meaning that predispositions interact with digital infrastructures rather than replace them as an explanation.

The strongest reading of the literature, then, is that voter perceptions in 2022 were shaped through an interaction between prior commitments and digital circulation.

Disinformation was most effective where it aligned with existing identities, distrust, and political belonging, and less effective where it required wholesale attitudinal reversal. Dulay et al. (2023: 1-2, 11-13) reinforce this structural account by demonstrating that approval of President Duterte (continuity), positive perceptions of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and martial law (history), and ethnic-linguistic identity (with Ilocano speakers from the North and Cebuano speakers from the Visayas and Mindanao significantly more likely to support Marcos Jr. than Tagalog speakers) were the strongest independent predictors of the Marcos Jr. vote. This is particularly important in the Philippine case because those predispositions were not only partisan but historical, linking contemporary political judgement to contested memories of the Marcos past (Kasuya et al., 2024: 6-7).

Section 1.3: The Philippines and Memory Politics

The Philippines is not simply another case of election-related disinformation. It is a case in which contemporary political judgement was deeply entangled with struggles over historical meaning. In the 2022 presidential election, assessments of Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos Jr. were inseparable from competing interpretations of the Marcos dictatorship, the legacy of martial law, and the broader post-EDSA democratic order (Kasuya et al., 2024: 2-4). Memory politics is central to this literature because it refers not just to disagreement over the past, but to political conflict over which version of the past should authorise present claims to legitimacy, leadership, and national direction. In the Philippine context, such conflicts shape how voters interpret not only historical facts, but also the credibility of candidates, media sources, and democratic institutions themselves (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563, 567).

This case-specific context matters because the 2022 election unfolded in a political environment already shaped by digital polarisation, democratic fatigue, and the normalisation of strongman rhetoric. Arugay and Baquisal (2022: 551-552, 563) argue that the campaign's most resonant narratives were not random falsehoods but interrelated themes of authoritarian nostalgia, conspiracy, strongman leadership, and democratic disillusionment. These narratives gained traction because they linked present frustrations to an emotionally compelling reinterpretation of the past. Rather than openly defending dictatorship, pro-Marcos messaging reframed the Marcos era as a time of order, discipline, infrastructure, and national strength, while casting the post-Marcos democratic period as one of decline, elite failure, and missed opportunity (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563, 572). Memory politics therefore worked by making historical revisionism appear politically relevant to present concerns.

The literature also shows that this mnemonic struggle was not confined to formal campaign messaging. Ong (2022: 396-400) argues that the 2022 election should be understood within a wider discourse in which the Marcos family benefited from long-running efforts to rehabilitate their name and recast criticism as partisan hostility. Memory politics operated through networked publics, influencer cultures, and repeated narrative circulation rather than through one-off acts of deception. Historical claims gained force when embedded in familiar digital routines and endorsed within trusted communities, allowing revisionist interpretations to take on the appearance of common sense (Ong, 2022: 398-400). This suggests that the authority of historical narratives depends not only on factual accuracy but also on social validation, repetition, and affective fit with prior commitments.

Recent work on YouTube deepens this point by showing how historical revisionism could be made intimate, emotional, and apparently non-ideological.

Talamayan and Candelaria (2025: 55-57, 69) argue that pro-Marcos YouTubers fostered nostalgia for a supposed golden age by using storytelling, personal testimony, imagery, and selective memory to present the Marcos era as prosperous, disciplined, and morally coherent, while minimising the documented violence and corruption of martial law. Their argument explains how collective memory can be manipulated not only through explicit propaganda, but through vernacular forms of digital storytelling that feel personal and authentic. These narratives constructed a populist moral opposition between virtuous ordinary Filipinos and corrupt elites or hostile critics, thereby making a romanticised past serve present political identification (Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 62, 69).

At the same time, the literature is careful not to reduce the 2022 outcome to memory politics alone. Kasuya et al. (2024: 6-7) show that dictatorship-related disinformation interacted with prior loyalties and produced uneven responses across audiences, suggesting that contested historical claims do not persuade uniformly even when they circulate widely. This places memory politics within a broader model of conditional perception formation. The Philippine case illustrates that disinformation becomes especially powerful when it attaches itself to unresolved historical conflict, but its effects remain mediated by predispositions, trust, and group identity. The key implication is that the 2022 election should be analysed not simply as a contest over campaign information, but as a struggle over historical meaning conducted through digital platforms.

Section 1.4: Identifying the Gap

Overall, the literature establishes three important points. First, disinformation in digital politics is not simply false content, but a structured narrative environment shaped by platforms, networks, and strategic amplification (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019: 1, 12). Second, voter perceptions are filtered through prior loyalties, distrust, and political belonging, which means that online narratives often reinforce rather than wholly transform existing views (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 551-552; Ong, 2022: 398-400). Third, in the Philippines, these dynamics were inseparable from memory politics, as the 2022 election became a struggle over how the Marcos past should be remembered and politically mobilised (Kasuya et al., 2024: 2-4; Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 69).

However, the interaction between these dynamics remains underdeveloped. Existing scholarship tends to examine digital disinformation, voter predispositions, and historical revisionism as connected but insufficiently integrated processes. Two questions in particular remain unresolved: whether the 2022 outcome is better explained by digital narratives, by structural factors such as Duterte approval, continuity voting, and socio-economic grievances (Mendoza et al., 2025; Dulay et al., 2023), or by their interaction; and how digital circulation, prior political commitments, and contested historical memory worked together to shape voter perceptions. This dissertation addresses both questions by analysing disinformation not as an isolated cause, but as a force whose persuasive power depended on its alignment with existing identities and mnemonic frames. It therefore links platformed narratives to historically rooted political sense-making.

Chapter 2: Analytical Framework and Methodology

This chapter sets out the analytical framework and methodology that guide the dissertation's investigation of how social media disinformation interacted with existing political attitudes and historical narratives to shape voter perceptions during the 2022 Philippine presidential election. The preceding literature review established that scholarship on this topic tends to examine digital disinformation, voter predispositions, and historical revisionism as connected but insufficiently integrated processes (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 551-552; Kasuya et al., 2024: 6-7; Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 69). While that chapter mapped the scholarly terrain, this chapter extracts specific operational tools from it, constructing an integrated framework that treats voter perceptions as products of the convergence between digital narrative circulation, predispositional filtering, and mnemonic framing. It then specifies the qualitative methods, sampling strategy, and coding categories through which this framework is applied, before concluding with an honest account of the study's limitations.

Section 2.1: Analytical Framework

The framework rests on the proposition that disinformation did not operate in isolation during the 2022 Philippine presidential election. Rather, its persuasive force depended on the alignment between three analytically distinct but empirically interconnected processes: the structured circulation of narratives through digital platforms, the filtering of those narratives through prior political commitments, and the provision of historically charged content that made such alignment possible. Each process is theorised by drawing on a specific strand of the existing literature and extracting a concept that can be operationalised in the analysis.

The first pillar concerns the digital infrastructure of disinformation. Prior (2021: 50, 57, 63) argues that digital populism thrives in an environment in which political actors can bypass journalistic mediation and appeal directly to “the people” against corrupt elites. In such conditions, post-truth politics weakens the authority of factual verification by making narratives feel more important than evidence (Prior, 2021: 59, 63). This is not merely a matter of individual false claims; it is a structural shift in how political credibility is established, away from institutional gatekeeping and towards affective resonance within networked publics. The concept drawn from Prior (2021) for this dissertation is therefore narrative competition over interpretive authority: the analytical focus falls not on whether a given post is factually accurate, but on how digital systems give certain narratives a strategic advantage over others in the contest to define political reality.

This structural account is deepened by Ong and Cabañes’ (2018: 7-8, 37-40) concept of networked disinformation, which reframes the phenomenon as a professionalised production system rather than a collection of random falsehoods. Their ethnographic research reveals that disinformation campaigns in the Philippines are designed and executed by hierarchical teams of political operators who draw on advertising and public relations techniques, including positive branding, diversionary tactics, digital black operations, and signal scrambling (Ong and Cabañes, 2018: 37-48). This concept is critical because it explains the mechanisms through which narrative visibility is manufactured: content does not simply go viral by accident but is pushed, amplified, and strategically timed to dominate the information environment. The dissertation therefore treats disinformation not as spontaneous misinformation but as a structured mode of political communication embedded within commercial and patronage networks (Ong, 2022: 397-398).

The second pillar concerns voter predispositions. As the literature review established, citizens do not receive campaign narratives as neutral observers; they interpret them through prior loyalties, institutional distrust, group identities, and socio-economic grievances (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 551-552, 562; Mendoza et al., 2025: 41, 46-47). The key insight is that disinformation operates primarily through reinforcement rather than conversion: online narratives are most persuasive when they resonate with commitments already in place, and least effective when they require wholesale attitudinal reversal (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 562, 572; Kasuya et al., 2024: 6-7). Credibility, in this reading, is relational rather than purely evidentiary; information is accepted not because it is well substantiated, but because it is validated within trusted networks and affirms a voter's sense of political community (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 562; Ong, 2022: 398-400). This pillar informs the analysis by directing attention to the predispositional conditions under which particular narratives gained traction, including attitudes towards authoritarianism, approval of the Duterte presidency, distrust of mainstream media, and socio-economic dissatisfaction.

The third pillar concerns memory politics, which provides the substantive content through which digital circulation and predispositional filtering converged most powerfully in the Philippine case. The 2022 election was not merely a contest over policy or personality; it was a struggle over historical meaning, in which assessments of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. were inseparable from competing interpretations of the Marcos dictatorship, the legacy of martial law, and the broader post-EDSA democratic order (Kasuya et al., 2024: 2-4; Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563, 567). Talamayan and Candelaria (2025: 55-57, 62, 69) demonstrate how pro-Marcos YouTubers employed affective storytelling techniques, including personal testimony, selective recollection, emotional imagery, and calls to action, to construct a nostalgic vision of the Marcos

era as a golden age of order, prosperity, and national strength, while minimising the documented violence and corruption of martial law.

Crucially, Talamayan and Candelaria draw on Laclau's (2005) theory of populism, deploying his paired logics of difference and equivalence to explain how these narratives operated politically. The logic of equivalence, on which the present analysis principally relies, describes the process by which diverse and otherwise unrelated grievances, including economic frustration, democratic fatigue, anti-elite sentiment, and distrust of liberal institutions, are discursively stitched together into a single, simplified political frontier between “the people” and “the elite”, while the logic of difference distinguishes the supporters of populist movements from the institutionalised other (Laclau, 2005: 73-83; Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 60, 69). In the Philippine context, this paired logic operated through nostalgic narratives that did more than defend the Marcos past; they constructed a populist moral opposition in which virtuous ordinary Filipinos were pitted against corrupt elites and hostile critics, thereby making a romanticised past serve present political identification (Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 62, 69). The present study foregrounds the equivalential logic because it explains the mechanism by which memory politics connected individual voter frustrations to a coherent collective demand for a return to Marcos-style governance, while acknowledging that the differential logic accompanies and reinforces it within the same discursive operation.

The framework’s analytical contribution lies in its integration of these three pillars. Networked disinformation circulated revisionist narratives at scale; predispositions filtered which narratives resonated with which audiences; and memory politics provided the historically charged content that enabled the alignment between circulation and reception. Voter perceptions are therefore analysed not as products of

any single force, but as outcomes of a convergence in which disinformation became especially powerful where it attached itself to unresolved historical conflict and pre-existing political commitments. This integrated approach is referred to in the remainder of this dissertation as the convergence model, because it treats voter perceptions as products of the convergence between all three processes rather than as effects of any one factor in isolation.

Section 2.2: Methodology

The convergence model requires a methodology capable of identifying recurring narrative patterns and interpreting their political significance through the three-pillar lens outlined above. The dissertation therefore adopts a qualitative single-case study design, employing thematic discourse analysis as its primary method. The case-oriented logic of the design follows Della Porta (2008: 198-222), who argues that intensive analysis of a single case is appropriate where the analytical objective is to understand the configuration of conditions through which an outcome is produced rather than to estimate the average effect of a variable across cases. The interpretive orientation of the discourse analysis follows Keating (2008: 99-117), whose account of culture in the social sciences treats meaning, narrative, and the discursive construction of political identity as legitimate objects of social-scientific inquiry. This approach is suited to the research question because the study seeks to identify narrative patterns within digital content and to interpret them through a theoretically informed framework, rather than to measure the statistical frequency or causal impact of specific messages (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 549-552). The Philippines in 2022 is treated as an intrinsic case: it is studied not as a proxy for a universal phenomenon, but because its

specific combination of digital saturation, contested historical memory, and post-authoritarian democratic fragility makes it particularly instructive for understanding the interaction between disinformation, predispositions, and memory politics.

The primary dataset comprises publicly available social media content from Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, released during the campaign period from January to May 2022. These three platforms are selected because they were the dominant channels for political communication during the election: YouTube had overtaken Facebook by 2021 to become the most-used social media platform in the Philippines and served as a principal site for long-form revisionist content; Facebook remained the central platform for grassroots political mobilisation and partisan group activity; and TikTok emerged as an increasingly significant medium for short-form political messaging, particularly among younger voters (Arugay, 2022: 6; Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 554-558). Content is sampled through a stratified purposive sampling method consistent with the case-oriented selection logic set out by Della Porta (2008: 207-213), which prioritises the analytical relevance and within-case richness of selected material over statistical representativeness. The sampling combines keyword searches (including terms such as “Marcos,” “golden age,” “martial law,” and “disinformation”), platform recommendation algorithms, and the identification of high-engagement materials. This approach does not claim statistical representativeness; rather, it aims to capture the dominant narrative trends across platforms and content types.

Sampled content is cross-referenced with fact-checking reports from Rappler, Tsek.ph, and independent media organisations to verify the disinformation status of specific claims and to contextualise the narratives within the broader information environment. This triangulation serves a dual purpose: it grounds the discourse

analysis in documented patterns of false or misleading content, and it guards against the risk of treating all pro-Marcos messaging as disinformation without regard for its factual basis.

The analysis proceeds through a two-layer coding scheme derived from the theoretical framework. The first layer codes for narrative type, drawing on the four thematic categories identified by Arugay and Baquisal (2022: 563, 572): authoritarian nostalgia, conspiracy, strongman leadership, and democratic disillusionment. These categories capture the substantive content of the disinformation narratives that circulated during the campaign. The second layer codes for affective strategy, adapted from the storytelling techniques that Talamayan and Candelaria (2025: 55-57, 62-69) identify in their analysis of pro-Marcos YouTube vlogs. From this material the present study derives five operational categories: personal testimony, selective historical recollection, emotional imagery, us-versus-them framing, and calls to action. The five categories are an analytical adaptation of the source's findings rather than a typology Talamayan and Candelaria themselves codify, and they are used here to provide consistent coding handles across platforms. This two-layer approach allows the analysis to address both what narratives circulated and how they were rendered emotionally compelling and politically actionable.

The coding categories are applied through close reading of sampled content and published analyses of the 2022 disinformation landscape. Each item is coded according to the dominant narrative type and the principal affective strategies it deploys. Where content engages more than one narrative type or strategy, multiple codes are assigned. The analysis does not quantify the frequency of codes in statistical terms; instead, it identifies patterns and illustrative examples that illuminate the

mechanisms through which disinformation, predispositions, and memory politics converged.

In addition to the discourse analysis, the dissertation draws on secondary empirical data to contextualise its findings within the broader landscape of voter behaviour. Kasuya et al.'s (2024: 6-7, 10-12) survey data on the correlation between belief in pro-Marcos disinformation and electoral support, Mendoza et al.'s (2025: 38-47) logistic regression analysis of the structural determinants of Marcos Jr.'s vote share, and Dulay et al.'s (2023: 1-2, 11-13) findings on Duterte approval, perceptions of Marcos Sr. and martial law, and ethnic-linguistic identity are used to situate the narrative patterns identified through discourse analysis within the attitudinal and demographic context of the 2022 electorate. This triangulation between qualitative discourse analysis and existing quantitative findings enables the study to address the interaction between digital narratives and voter predispositions without requiring the collection of original survey data, which would fall outside the scope and resources of undergraduate-level research.

Section 2.3: Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, platform algorithms restrict transparency, making it difficult to determine the full circulation, reach, or targeting of any given piece of content (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019). The analysis can identify what narratives were publicly visible and highly engaged with, but it cannot reconstruct the precise informational environment experienced by individual voters. Second, discourse analysis identifies narrative patterns and interpretive frames but cannot establish direct causality between exposure to specific content and voting behaviour.

The study therefore speaks to the conditions of possibility for perception formation rather than to proven causal effects. Third, the sampling strategy may overlook content circulated through private or encrypted channels, such as Messenger groups and Viber communities, which are widely used in Philippine political communication but are inaccessible to external researchers (Ong, 2022: 397). Fourth, there is an inherent interpretive dimension to qualitative coding. This risk is mitigated through the use of clearly defined coding categories derived from the existing literature, through triangulation with fact-checking databases and secondary quantitative data, and through the transparent presentation of analytical choices throughout the dissertation.

By incorporating these limitations, the study adopts a cautious and methodologically transparent approach. It does not claim to demonstrate that disinformation caused Marcos Jr.'s electoral victory; rather, it analyses the narrative mechanisms through which disinformation, predispositions, and memory politics interacted to create conditions favourable to particular voter perceptions. This more modest claim is both appropriate to the qualitative methods employed and consistent with the broader scholarly consensus that the 2022 outcome was shaped by multiple intersecting factors rather than by any single cause (Kasuya et al., 2024: 6-7; Mendoza et al., 2025: 46-47; Ong, 2022: 396-400).

Chapter 3: Constructing the Marcos Narrative

This chapter applies the analytical framework set out in Chapter 3 to the disinformation narratives that circulated across Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok during the January-May 2022 Philippine presidential campaign. Drawing on the two-layer coding scheme, the analysis is organised around the four narrative types identified in the literature (authoritarian nostalgia, conspiracy, strongman leadership, and democratic disillusionment) and examines the affective strategies through which each was rendered persuasive (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563, 572; Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 55-57, 62). Although analytically distinct, these narratives were deeply interconnected; their propagation was driven primarily through social media networks sympathetic to Marcos Jr. both before and during the official campaign period (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 562-563). The chapter demonstrates how these narratives formed a coherent discursive architecture that reconstructed the Marcos past as a resource for present political identification.

Section 3.1: Authoritarian Nostalgia

The most prominent narrative type in the 2022 campaign was authoritarian nostalgia: the construction of the Marcos dictatorship as a golden age of order, prosperity, and national strength. Fact-checking consortium Tsek.ph documented an extensive series of social media posts that sought to rehabilitate the Marcos family's image through denial of documented historical abuses such as cronyism and human rights violations, combined with the exaggeration of Marcos Sr.'s achievements as president (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563). Over five hundred Facebook groups and pages produced content on themes including the claim that Marcos brought the

country into the modern world, the denial of human rights compensation claims, and assertions of peace and prosperity under martial law. Half of these topics concerned denialism regarding the ill-treatment of dissidents during the martial law period, and together they attracted some 348 million views (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563). On TikTok, the top reported disinformation category was the parallel claim that the Philippines was the richest country in Asia during Marcos Sr.'s presidency, indicating that authoritarian nostalgia operated across platform formats with distinct affordances (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 563-564).

The affective strategies through which this nostalgia operated are illuminated by Talamayan and Candelaria's (2025: 55-57, 62-66) analysis of pro-Marcos YouTube channels. Their study of 202 videos across five channels reveals a deliberate use of personal testimony, selective historical recollection, and emotional imagery to foster a collective yearning for a mythic past. YouTubers presented the Marcos era as prosperous, disciplined, and morally coherent, while minimising the documented violence and corruption of martial law. Crucially, these narratives did not take the form of explicit political propaganda; they were delivered through vernacular digital storytelling that felt intimate, personal, and apparently non-ideological (Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 55-57). Content creators engaged in counterfactual thinking, imagining what the Philippines could have become had Marcos's rule not been interrupted, and contrasted supposed Marcos-era infrastructure projects with the perceived failures of subsequent administrations (Talamayan and Candelaria, 2025: 66). This storytelling strategy manipulated audiences' emotions by evoking a sense of national loss and indignation, making the idealised past appear more favourable than the present.

Applying the two-layer coding scheme to the sampled content confirms these patterns. A characteristic type of high-engagement Facebook post identified through keyword searches combined archival photographs of Marcos-era infrastructure, such as the San Juanico Bridge or the Philippine Heart Centre, with captions asserting that such projects demonstrated the superiority of Marcos's leadership over subsequent administrations. This content codes as authoritarian nostalgia at the narrative level and deploys selective historical recollection and emotional imagery at the affective level: the visual contrast between monumental infrastructure and present-day urban congestion is designed to evoke a felt sense of decline rather than to advance an evidential argument. Similarly, short-form TikTok content typically combined archival footage with nostalgic music and text overlays claiming economic prosperity under Marcos, coding as authoritarian nostalgia through emotional imagery and calls to action (typically directing viewers to follow pro-Marcos channels).

The Marcos Jr. campaign itself adopted a largely non-confrontational posture, focusing on national unification under the slogan "unity" and rarely initiating direct attacks on other candidates (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 564). Instead, it leaned on political nostalgia, promising to return what had been "lost" both to the family and to the country, and treated references to Marcos Sr.'s presidency as a launching point for claims of decisive leadership, massive infrastructure investment, and nation-building (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 564; Arugay and Mendoza, 2024: 5). Opposition efforts to fact-check false claims about martial law were portrayed by pro-Marcos networks as divisive, vindictive, and hateful, thereby reinforcing the nostalgic framing while discrediting correction (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 564).

Section 3.2: Conspiracy

The second narrative type involved conspiracy theories that served to insulate the Marcos family from legitimate scrutiny and to delegitimise opposition voices. The most viral strand concerned the origins of the Marcos family's wealth. Vera Files' social media monitoring revealed that stories about "Tallano gold," the fabricated claim that Marcos Sr. obtained gold as a lawyer for a wealthy family before entering politics, proliferated from fewer than a thousand posts before 2018 to nearly 14,000 posts by 2021 (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 565). These narratives aimed to establish that the late dictator was already wealthy prior to his presidency, thereby nullifying accusations of kleptocracy. Rappler's data analytics identified five principal social media communities that cross-posted and generated content about the putative gold, led by Marcos legacy groups focused on promoting the purported achievements of the Marcos regime (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 565-566).

The scale and coordination of these conspiracy narratives reflect the professionalised production system documented by Ong and Cabañes (2018: 37-48). Their research reveals that disinformation campaigns in the Philippines are not spontaneous but are designed through techniques including positive branding, diversionary tactics, and signal scrambling, in which trending hashtags are hijacked or artificially generated to dominate public attention. The conspiracy narratives surrounding Tallano gold and opposition delegitimisation bear the hallmarks of this architecture: they were cross-posted systematically, amplified through coordinated networks, and designed to shift attention away from documented corruption towards fabricated counter-narratives.

The affective strategy at work in these conspiracy narratives was us-versus-them framing. Critics of the Marcos family, including journalists, human rights organisations, the Aquino political dynasty, and liberal institutions, were cast as participants in a coordinated campaign to suppress the truth about the Marcos legacy. Ong (2022: 396-400) argues that the Marcos family benefited from long-running efforts to rehabilitate their name and to recast criticism as partisan hostility. The conspiratorial frame was reinforced by broader anti-establishment distrust: fact-checkers and mainstream media were portrayed not as corrective forces but as self-interested gatekeepers aligned with oligarchic elites. Tsek.ph found that 96 per cent of disinformation targeting the principal opposition candidate, Leni Robredo, was negative, with prominent strands questioning her competence, attacking the Aquino family, and alleging that Robredo had stolen the vice presidency from Marcos Jr. in 2016 (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 570). These narratives channelled anti-establishment sentiments and bred further distrust of electoral integrity.

Section 3.3: Strongman Leadership

The third narrative type positioned Marcos Jr. as the inheritor of a tradition of decisive, leader-centric governance. This narrative drew directly on the normalisation of strongman politics under Rodrigo Duterte's presidency (2016-2022). Arugay and Mendoza (2024: 3-5) frame this normalisation as part of a broader process of digital autocratisation in the Philippines, in which democratic norms and institutions are gradually eroded through the extensive use of disinformation and securitised narratives on social media. The authoritarian nostalgia discourse prevalent since Duterte's 2016 campaign had consistently framed strongman rule within the context of

a broader displacement of values-based reformism, including human rights promotion, constitutionalism, and rule of law, in favour of a concrete programmatic agenda focused on services and projects that ordinary citizens could see and feel (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 564). The Marcos Jr. campaign continued this strategy and appealed to widely held, leader-centric, and anti-pluralistic attitudes, including attachment to a strong executive and scepticism of institutional checks and balances as hindrances to effective governance (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 564).

The affective strategies deployed within this narrative type included calls to action and aspirational imagery. The “UniTeam” alliance between Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte discursively fused nostalgia for the Marcos era with continuity of Duterte-era strongman governance, presenting the tandem as a forward-looking promise anchored in backward-looking authority (Arugay and Mendoza, 2024: 5). Social media content framed Marcos Jr. as a statesman and nationalist, circulating archival footage of Marcos Sr. in contexts designed to evoke admiration for assertive leadership (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 567). The strongman narrative also operated negatively, framing opposition candidates, particularly Robredo, as weak, indecisive, and beholden to Western interests, thereby reducing complex foreign policy positions to a dichotomy between patriotic strength and liberal subservience (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 567).

Section 3.4: Democratic Disillusionment

The fourth narrative type framed the post-EDSA democratic order as having comprehensively failed ordinary Filipinos. The campaign slogan of Marcos Jr., “Babangon Muli” (To Rise Again), discursively drew contrasts between the martial law regime and the supposed decay of post-1986 liberal democracy (Arugay and Baquisal,

2022: 568). The most common narratives focused on the alleged failures of the post-EDSA order under the “Yellows,” the colour associated with the Aquino family who had led the overthrow of Marcos Sr. These included the sluggish pace of public works, the privatisation of state assets, and the return of media companies to elite families (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 568). These grievances were weaponised by disinformation campaigns that portrayed the post-EDSA order and liberalism as the causes of national decline, associating democracy with weakness and indecisiveness.

This is where Laclau’s (2005: 73-83) logic of equivalence becomes analytically most visible. The democratic disillusionment narrative did not simply catalogue individual grievances; it stitched together otherwise diverse frustrations—economic inequality, institutional corruption, elite self-dealing, the perceived vindictiveness of liberal reformers—into a single populist frontier between “the people” and “the elite.” Talamayan and Candelaria (2025: 62, 69) demonstrate how pro-Marcos YouTubers constructed a binary moral opposition in which virtuous ordinary Filipinos were pitted against corrupt elites and hostile critics of the Marcos regime, thereby making a romanticised past serve present political identification. Pulse Asia survey data confirm the salience of this divide: roughly equal proportions of Filipinos viewed the martial law regime and the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution positively, each at approximately 40 per cent, indicating the continuing potency of these historical reference points as fault lines in Philippine political life (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 568-569). The democratic disillusionment narrative thus transformed historically rooted frustrations into a coherent demand for a return to Marcos-style governance.

Section 3.5: The Narrative Architecture

The four narrative types analysed in this chapter did not operate in isolation. Authoritarian nostalgia provided the emotional and historical foundation; conspiracy theories insulated the Marcos family from scrutiny and delegitimised critics; the strongman narrative linked the Marcos past to the Duterte present and offered a model of governance; and democratic disillusionment supplied the populist logic that unified diverse grievances into a single political demand. The affective strategies identified through the second coding layer, including personal testimony, selective recollection, emotional imagery, us-versus-them framing, and calls to action, operated across all four narrative types, giving the disinformation ecosystem its coherence and emotional force. Together, these narratives constructed what Prior (2021: 50, 63) would recognise as a structured challenge to interpretive authority: a comprehensive alternative account of Philippine history and political reality, circulated at scale through the professionalised disinformation infrastructure described by Ong and Cabañes (2018: 37-48). The convergence model developed in Chapter 3, however, holds that narrative construction alone cannot explain voter perceptions; the question that the following chapter addresses is how these narratives interacted with the existing political predispositions of the 2022 electorate.

Chapter 4: Disinformation, Voter Behaviour, and Competing Explanations

The preceding chapter documented how a coherent disinformation architecture was constructed across four interconnected narrative types during the 2022 Philippine presidential campaign. This chapter turns to the question of reception: why did those narratives resonate with voters, and how far can disinformation alone account for the electoral outcome? Drawing on secondary quantitative evidence from Kasuya et al. (2024), Mendoza et al. (2025), and Dulay et al. (2023), the analysis triangulates the discourse findings from Chapter 4 with survey and experimental data on voter attitudes, information consumption, and structural determinants. The chapter argues that the persuasive power of disinformation was conditional rather than autonomous; it depended on its alignment with pre-existing predispositions, and it operated alongside structural factors that were independent of digital narratives. The analysis proceeds in three stages: it first examines disinformation and predispositional alignment, then assesses competing structural and institutional explanations, and finally synthesises these through the convergence model developed in Chapter 3.

Section 4.1: Disinformation and Predispositional Alignment

The convergence model's second pillar, predispositional filtering, holds that disinformation operates primarily through reinforcement rather than conversion: online narratives are most persuasive when they resonate with commitments already in place, and least effective when they require wholesale attitudinal reversal. The most rigorous empirical test of this proposition in the 2022 Philippine case comes from Kasuya et al.'s (2024: 6-14) two-part study. Their first study, based on face-to-face and online surveys conducted in April 2022, found that disinformation about Marcos Sr.'s

dictatorship was widespread among Filipino voters. Approximately 40 per cent of respondents in the nationally representative face-to-face survey reported prior exposure to each of the three principal types of disinformation tested (relating to economic development, human rights, and the Marcos gold myth), and substantial proportions believed these false claims to be true. Among the three types, disinformation about economic development under Marcos Sr. was the most widely believed, with 40 per cent of respondents regarding it as accurate (Kasuya et al., 2024: 8-9). Crucially, strong correlations were found between belief in pro-Marcos disinformation and support for Marcos Jr., with the economic development category showing the most consistent and statistically significant association (Kasuya et al., 2024: 10-11).

However, Kasuya et al.'s (2024: 11-12) second study complicates the causal picture in ways that directly support the reinforcement account. Their online survey experiment, designed to test whether exposure to disinformation directly boosts support for Marcos Jr., produced counterintuitive results. Contrary to expectation, respondents exposed to disinformation treatment actually showed decreased vote intention for Marcos Jr. and reduced favourability towards Marcos Sr.'s presidency. At the same time, fact-checking treatment did successfully correct respondents' belief in specific disinformation claims, but this correction did not translate into changed attitudes towards the Marcos family (Kasuya et al., 2024: 12-13). Further analysis by pre-treatment support levels revealed that the experimental effects were concentrated among existing Marcos Jr. supporters; among non-supporters, baseline feeling-thermometer scores for Marcos Jr. were already very low, producing a floor effect that left the experimental treatments with little room to alter responses (Kasuya et al., 2024: 13-14).

The fact that a one-shot experimental exposure could not increase support for Marcos Jr. is consistent with Kasuya et al.'s (2024: 17) own surmise that years of disinformation operations created an entrenched bidirectional relationship between misperception and Marcos Jr. support, and that the one-shot nature of the treatment was not adequate to disentangle this association. The authors themselves stop short of a definitive causal claim, concluding only that further research is required (Kasuya et al., 2024: 3, 17). This finding is precisely what the convergence model would predict. Disinformation operates not through momentary persuasion but through sustained narrative saturation within trusted digital networks (Ong, 2022: 398-400; Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 562). The narratives analysed in Chapter 4 gained their force not because any individual post changed a voter's mind, but because they were encountered repeatedly, validated within communities of political belonging, and aligned with commitments already in place. The experimental setting stripped away precisely those contextual conditions, including repetition, social validation, and affective fit with prior commitments, that the predispositional filtering pillar identifies as necessary for disinformation to exert influence.

Section 4.2: Structural and Institutional Factors

The convergence model requires that structural factors be assessed not as alternatives to the disinformation account, but as conditions that shaped the predispositional terrain on which digital narratives operated. Mendoza et al.'s (2025: 38-47) logistic regression analysis of a nationally representative pre-election survey provides the strongest quantitative evidence for the role of factors that operated independently of, or in parallel with, the digital disinformation campaign. Their central

finding is that approval of President Duterte was the single most powerful predictor of intention to vote for Marcos Jr. Respondents who strongly approved of Duterte were 5.49 times more likely to intend to vote for Marcos Jr. compared to those who neither approved nor disapproved (Mendoza et al., 2025: 40-42). This relationship held across all three of their regression models and was robust to the inclusion of demographic controls and information source variables.

Information sources also mattered, but in ways that reinforce rather than displace the predispositional account. Reliance on social media for political information was positively and significantly associated with intention to vote for Marcos Jr., with an odds ratio of 1.62, while reliance on mainstream media (newspapers and television news) was inversely correlated, with an odds ratio of 0.56 (Mendoza et al., 2025: 40). This pattern is consistent with the literature's emphasis on segmented information environments: voters who relied on social media encountered the disinformation narratives analysed in Chapter 4 more frequently and within networks that validated rather than challenged those narratives, while voters who relied on mainstream media were exposed to fact-checking and critical coverage that operated in the opposite direction (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 562, 572; Ong, 2022: 398-400). The data also show that 56 per cent of those who planned to vote for Marcos Jr. believed he had Duterte's endorsement, confirming the coattailing dynamic at the heart of Mendoza et al.'s (2025: 42-43) argument.

Dulay et al. (2023: 1-2, 11-13) provide complementary evidence that further complicates any monocausal attribution to disinformation. Their analysis demonstrates that Duterte approval, positive perceptions of Marcos Sr. and martial law, and ethnic-linguistic identity were independently significant predictors of the Marcos Jr. vote. A one-unit increase in Duterte approval was associated with a fourteen percentage point

increase in the probability of voting for Marcos Jr., while a one-unit increase in positive feelings towards Ferdinand Marcos Sr. was associated with a seventeen-percentage point increase. Ilocano speakers from the North and Cebuano speakers from the Visayas and Mindanao were significantly more likely than Tagalog speakers to support Marcos Jr., reflecting strong regional and ethnic patterns. By contrast, age, education, and class were not significant predictors. These findings suggest that the 2022 electorate was not a blank slate upon which digital narratives were inscribed, but a politically structured landscape in which candidate choice was shaped by long-standing patterns of identity, loyalty, and institutional orientation.

These findings indicate that the 2022 electoral outcome cannot be attributed to disinformation alone. Duterte's personal popularity, the desire for policy continuity, socio-economic grievances amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, and long-standing distrust of liberal institutions all constituted predispositional terrain that existed before and independently of the digital campaign. Marcos Jr.'s candidacy succeeded in part because it was positioned as the continuation of Duterte's brand of illiberal populism, thereby inheriting an existing base of support consolidated over six years of strongman governance (Mendoza et al., 2025: 31-33, 46-47). These patterns are consistent with what Arugay and Mendoza (2024: 3-5) describe as digital autocratisation: the gradual erosion of democratic norms through the normalisation of disinformation and illiberal narratives in digital spaces. Nor are they unique to the Philippines; comparable dynamics have been documented across Southeast Asian digital politics more broadly (Gianan, 2020: 1-5). The point is not that disinformation was irrelevant, but that its effects were enabled and amplified by structural conditions that made certain voters receptive to the specific narratives on offer.

Section 4.3: Convergence: How the Interaction Worked

The convergence model developed in Chapter 3 holds that voter perceptions are shaped not by any single factor but by the intersection of digital narrative circulation, predispositional filtering, and mnemonic framing. The evidence examined in this chapter supports that proposition, and the mechanisms can now be specified concretely. Duterte approval created a receptive audience for strongman and democratic disillusionment narratives; the UniTeam alliance between Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte discursively fused nostalgia for the Marcos era with continuity of Duterte-era governance, and this framing resonated because a substantial portion of the electorate already viewed strongman rule favourably (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 564; Arugay and Mendoza, 2024: 5). Institutional distrust lowered the credibility of fact-checking and mainstream media correction; the conspiracy narratives surrounding Tallano gold and the delegitimisation of Robredo gained traction specifically among voters whose trust in liberal institutions was already low (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 565, 570; Ong, 2022: 396-400). Historically rooted attitudes towards the Marcos dictatorship provided the mnemonic material through which authoritarian nostalgia could be rendered emotionally compelling; the counterfactual infrastructure narratives and the secret blueprint claims documented through Talamayan and Candelaria (2025: 62-66) worked because they attached themselves to a genuine, unresolved contestation over the meaning of the Marcos past, one that approximately 40 per cent of Filipinos already viewed in a positive light (Arugay and Baquisal, 2022: 568-569). Disinformation did not create these attitudes. Rather, it activated them, intensified them, and gave them coherent political expression through memory politics.

The logic of equivalence, as operationalised through Talamayan and Candelaria's (2025: 62, 69) analysis in Chapter 4, explains how this convergence

worked discursively. Diverse frustrations, including economic dissatisfaction, democratic fatigue, anti-elite sentiment, and Duterte loyalty, were stitched together into a single populist frontier by nostalgic narratives that cast the Marcos past as the antithesis of post-EDSA failure. This is why the Kasuya et al. (2024: 17) experimental finding is so instructive: a one-shot exposure to disinformation could not replicate the persuasive force of sustained narrative circulation within a pre-existing community of political identification. The experimental setting stripped away precisely those contextual conditions, including repetition, social validation, and affective fit with prior commitments, that the convergence model identifies as necessary for disinformation to exert influence. The convergence model therefore proposes that disinformation functioned as a conditional catalyst: a force that crystallised latent predispositions into active electoral support by operating through the digital infrastructure described by Ong and Cabañes (2018: 37-48) and the narrative architecture documented in Chapter 4.

Section 4.4: Evaluating the Convergence Model

This chapter has demonstrated that the relationship between disinformation and voter perceptions in the 2022 Philippine presidential election was neither simple nor unidirectional. Two competing positions in the existing literature remain insufficient: the claim that disinformation alone determined the electoral outcome overstates the autonomy of digital narratives, while the claim that structural factors rendered disinformation irrelevant understates the role of platformed memory politics in activating and giving coherent expression to latent predispositions. The convergence model resolves this tension by showing that these are not competing explanations but

interacting ones: disinformation became persuasive where it aligned with predispositions that were themselves shaped by structural conditions and historical memory (Kasuya et al., 2024: 11-14; Mendoza et al., 2025: 38-47; Dulay et al., 2023: 11-13). This finding responds directly to the research question by showing that disinformation interacted with existing political attitudes and historical narratives not by overriding them, but by activating, reinforcing, and channelling them into a coherent political demand through the mechanism of platformed memory politics.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to answer the question: how did social media disinformation interact with existing political attitudes and historical narratives to shape voter perceptions during the 2022 Philippine presidential election? The answer it has developed, through successive stages of literature review, framework construction, discourse analysis, and triangulation with secondary quantitative evidence, is that disinformation operated as a conditional catalyst. It did not manufacture political attitudes from nothing, nor did it simply reflect preferences that would have existed regardless of the digital environment. Instead, it drew its persuasive force from the alignment between three processes: the structured circulation of revisionist narratives through digital platforms, the filtering of those narratives through prior political commitments, and the reconstitution of collective memory through which diverse grievances were unified into a coherent populist demand. The convergence model advanced in this dissertation captures this interaction by treating voter perceptions as products of the convergence between all three processes, rather than as effects of any single factor in isolation.

The dissertation's principal contribution is the convergence model itself. Existing scholarship on the 2022 Philippine election has tended towards one of two positions: that disinformation was the decisive factor in shaping voter perceptions, or that structural forces such as Duterte's popularity, socio-economic grievances, and ethnic-regional voting patterns rendered digital narratives secondary. The convergence model resolves this tension by demonstrating that these are not competing explanations but interacting ones. Disinformation did not override predispositions; it activated them, intensified them, and gave them coherent political form through the mechanism of platformed memory politics. Equally, predispositions did not make

disinformation irrelevant; they constituted the conditions under which particular narratives became credible, socially validated, and politically actionable. The model's value lies in its capacity to hold these dimensions together analytically, explaining how digital circulation, prior commitments, and contested historical meaning combined to produce the specific configuration of voter perceptions observed in 2022.

The findings carry significant implications for understanding democratic resilience in post-authoritarian societies with high social media usage. If disinformation functions as a conditional catalyst rather than an autonomous force, then interventions focused solely on correcting false content are likely to prove insufficient. Kasuya et al.'s (2024: 12-13) experimental finding that fact-checking successfully corrected belief in specific claims but failed to shift underlying attitudes towards the Marcos family illustrates this point precisely: correcting individual falsehoods does not address the predispositional and mnemonic conditions that make disinformation persuasive in the first place. This suggests that democratic resilience requires engagement not only with the supply side of disinformation, through platform regulation, fact-checking, and media literacy, but also with the demand side: the institutional distrust, democratic fatigue, and unresolved historical conflicts that provide fertile ground for revisionist narratives.

These patterns are consistent with what Arugay and Mendoza (2024: 3-5) describe as digital autocratisation: the gradual erosion of democratic norms and institutions through the extensive use of disinformation and securitised narratives on social media. The Philippine case illustrates how digital autocratisation operates not through overt authoritarian imposition but through the normalisation of illiberal narratives within democratic electoral processes. The convergence model suggests that this process is especially dangerous in contexts where post-authoritarian

settlements remain contested, because unresolved historical conflicts provide the mnemonic raw material through which populist narratives can be constructed, circulated, and made to feel like common sense. The implication for comparative politics is that scholars and policymakers should attend not only to the volume and content of disinformation, but to the historical and predispositional landscape in which it operates.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Thematic discourse analysis identifies narrative patterns and interpretive frames but cannot establish direct causality between exposure to specific content and voting behaviour. The dissertation therefore speaks to the conditions of possibility for perception formation rather than to proven causal effects. The sampling strategy may have missed content circulated through private or encrypted channels, such as Messenger groups and Viber communities, which are widely used in Philippine political communication but are inaccessible to external researchers (Ong, 2022: 397). The secondary quantitative data drawn from Kasuya et al. (2024), Mendoza et al. (2025), and Dulay et al. (2023) are products of other scholars' research designs and do not constitute original primary data collection. Finally, the convergence model has been demonstrated for a single case; its generalisability to other post-authoritarian contexts would benefit from comparative testing.

These limitations point towards productive avenues for further research. Comparative studies of convergence dynamics in other Southeast Asian elections, particularly Indonesia and Myanmar, where similar combinations of digital saturation, contested historical memory, and democratic fragility obtain, would test whether the model's explanatory power extends beyond the Philippine case. Longitudinal research tracking how predispositions evolve under sustained disinformation exposure would

address the causal dimension that the present study's cross-sectional design cannot capture. Primary survey research incorporating the convergence model's three dimensions as independent variables could generate quantitative evidence for the interaction effects that this dissertation has identified qualitatively. The 2025 Philippine midterm elections, conducted in the same digital environment but under different political conditions, offer an immediate opportunity for such work.

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