

Constructing Myths via Art of Controversy: A Semiotic Analysis on Political Cartoons

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Abstract

This paper sought to analyze the different ways of expressing opinions the author utilized in Philippine editorial cartoons and argued how humor in the political cartoons serve to present crucial issues and criticize political leaders and their contemptible practices. The researcher attempted to observe the myths implied by the signs and if it correlates with the myth created by the citizens as part of the society. The researcher used the 10 political cartoons related to COVID-19 found in the Philippine Daily Inquirer Newspaper between March 20th and April 20th in the year 2020. Utilizing Berger's (2004) notion of humor as code violations, the semiotic variation of the Incongruity Theory of Humor and Barthes's (1991) connotative (in Chandler, 2005) and mythological meaning of the sign, the study examined the meanings of the humorous signifiers in the editorial cartoons and analyzed how they constructed myths of modern (Philippine) society which appear natural and normal. These cartoons that are shown in this survey are very relevant to the issues that Filipinos are facing now. The researcher realized that the political cartoons could have been better explained in phrases as far as the analysis and integration of respondents' ideas is concerned.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this age of digitization, modes, and mediums of communication change, new “languages” emerge. Among the recent mediums utilized by individuals in expressing thoughts and ideas are political cartoons. In the curriculum guide, Understanding the World of Political Cartoons, Lang et al. (n.d.) defined political cartoons as pictures “found in newspapers across the globe [which] generally are thought-provoking and strive to educate the viewer about a current issue (p. 6).” They also added that:

The ideas expressed within the cartoon reflect the views of the artist; for this reason, political cartoons are commonly referred to as editorial cartoons. In a newspaper, editorials are articles presenting a columnist's point of view or opinion, so an editorial cartoon is a cartoon that expresses the viewpoint of a cartoonist (p.7).

Morris (1992 as cited in Tariq et al., 2016) believed that “cartoon is a weapon in the cartoonist's hands, who can hit whatever he feels like followed by freedom of speech (p. 78).” He explored in his studies the power of political cartoons in the democratic process. In this sense, according to Fetsko (2001), “the political cartoon has a very subjective viewpoint (p. 3),” in which the expression of these political views would often be considered

controversial. Thus, “cartoons have proved a powerful vehicle for swaying public opinion and criticizing or praising political figures (Lang et al., n.d., p. 6).”

Recently, however, some scholars have acknowledged the value of cartoons in political expression. Dr. Mendoza, in her study on Semiotic Concepts of Editorial Cartoons, concluded that “the editorial cartoons illustrate the Filipinos’ perception... concerning the concerns, anomalies, and popularity and the infamous personalities involved which have been the cartoonists’ medium to freely mirror the views of the common folks” when she studied and analyzed the editorial cartoons concerning 2013 Presidential elections from Philippine Daily Inquirer. Therefore, Editorial cartoons may highlight a societal issue that contributes to developing social consciousness in the reader; making cartoons enables the creators to express their receptions and reactions to pressing social issues.

Withal, “cartoons are a collection of symbols... that mean different things to different people (Lang et al., n.d., p. 21)”. This means that any objects can be used to present and satirize social ills and provide an insight into social trends and account for how particular events make particular shared meanings for a particular social group.

Research Questions

This paper sought to analyze the different ways of expressing opinions the author utilized in Philippine political cartoons. It argued how humor serves to present crucial issues and criticize political leaders and their vile practices.

1. What are the elements utilized in political cartoons?
2. What are the meanings implied by signs in political cartoons?
3. What myths are drawn and presented by the respondents from the political cartoons?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Cartoons

Political cartoons are hand-drawn images that occupy a single visual frame, often accompanied by written text serving as an indicator of dialogue or narration (Matthews, 2011). Cartoons have different purposes, whether they seek to amuse, as does comic art; make life more bearable, as does the social cartoon; or bring order through governmental action, as does the successful political cartoon (Fetsko, 2001, p. 3).

According to Edwards and Winkler (1997, as cited in Mushohwe, 2011), cartoons are designed to “comment on events and policies as they define and record topical, political, or social issues in a particular period.” This type of cartoon is named by Fetsko (2001) as a social cartoon. He said that “in such cartoons, the artist aspires to comment about daily life and its problems.” Edwards and Winkler (1997, as cited in Mushohwe, 2011) also added that they “express an independent view or observation on political happenings or social policy,” which is referred to by Fetsko (2001) as political cartoons. He said that “political cartoons have a very subjective viewpoint... [and] its goal is to try to influence the viewer to a particular viewpoint and predisposed him or her to a particular action.”

The term “editorial cartoon” is sometimes referred to as a “political cartoon” or a “newspaper cartoon.” According to Osuagwu (2012), “cartoons are used in the media as one of the devices for attracting attention and facilitation meaning comprehension in editorials (p. 1).” Thus, this research treated these terms interchangeably when appropriate but preferred to label these artifacts “editorial cartoons.” The term political cartoon can be misleading, as these cartoons’ topics are not always about politics. Instead, the cartoon expresses an opinion or making an argument, becomes the primary descriptor of the cartoon. Consequently, the fact that these cartoons address an array of social issues that are not directly related to politics

or the political system, this research will favor the term “editorial cartoon” to refer to these communication artifacts.

Elements of Political Cartoons

The researcher used one primary source: William Fetcko (2001), author of *Using and Analyzing Political Cartoons*. Two other sources supported his cited elements of political cartoons: (1) Ted Goertzel, an author of the *Journal of Political Psychology* and (2) Jonathan Burack, an author of *Editorial Cartoon by Kids*, both cited in Lawate (2012) to understand and interpret political cartoons.

a. Symbolism

According to Fetcko (2001), “symbol means the use of a sign or an object in a work of art to stand for something other than itself (p. 8).” He also added that “symbols call attention to several aspects of an issue, problem, event, or public figure (p. 8).”

b. Distortion

According to Burack, as cited in Lawate (2012), “cartoonists use exaggerations in size, emotions, and shape of a person or object for effect.” In support of this idea, Fetcko (2001) said that this is “a technique that adds meaning to cartoon’s symbols - often to stress the power or weakness, the importance or the insignificance, the dangerousness or helplessness of some person, group, or social force (p. 10).”

c. Stereotypes

According to Fetcko (2001), “stereotyping eliminates anything uniquely individual by exaggerating features associated with an entire group (p. 11).” He further added that “stereotypes have the potential to reinforce harmful prejudices.” In support of this, Lawate (2012) said that “although offensive, it makes a strong point which can be debated upon; it opens grounds for discussion.

d. The irony in words and images

Burack said that “irony makes cartoons witty and points out the flaws in the system - as this makes contradiction and argument.” In support of this idea, Fetcko (2001) said that “irony is one kind of humor - important in many political cartoons.” Moreover, he explained that “a viewpoint is expressed in such an odd way to make that view ridiculous.”

e. Captions

Fetcko (2001) said that “famous saying, slogans, song lyrics, and well-known phrases can be used as captions... to help the other parts of the cartoon make one overall point (p. 16).” However, for Lawate (2012), it is more of an argument, not a slogan because “it provides cartoon a ground for responding and arguing back.”

Semiotics

It is already recognized that how editorial cartoons are expressed are through signs. “Signs in a linguistic point of view are anything that conveys a message: words, images, gestures, voices, and even thoughts; it does not only portray meaning, but they also offer ideologies, worldviews, and lifestyles (Mendoza, 2016).” “Anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as signifying something – referring to or standing for something other than itself (Chandler, 2011).” In the words of Lee (2013), she said:

In Ferdinand de Saussure's study of signs, he emphasized the importance of studying whole systems of signs rather than simply doing individual analysis. He claimed that signs draw meaning and significance from the way they interact with other signs in the system.

Calimbo (2016) added that “according to Saussure, a sign has two components: the signifier (the word, the sound, or image) and the signified (the meaning or the concept the signifier represents). Whereas any text can represent something as what semioticians claim, internet memes are among the texts that are packed with signs (both visual and linguistic) making them excellent objects for semiotic analysis.” Berger (2004) added to this idea that “the focus of semiotics is the signs found in texts which are combinations of signifiers and signifieds (p. 16). Therefore, the relationships that exist among signs are crucial because nothing has meaning in itself. In support of this claim, Berger (2004) said that:

The relationship between the signifier and the signified - and this is crucial - is arbitrary, unmotivated, and unnatural. There is no logical connection between a word and a concept or a signifier and a signified, a point that makes finding meaning in texts interesting and problematic (p. 8).

Conversely, Pierce’s main focus was on the relationship between a sign and its subject. He identified three main types of signs - index, icon, and symbol. These types are characterized by three different modes of relationship to their object. Firstly, an index is a sign that has a direct relationship to its subject in terms of physical or causal contiguity. Secondly, an icon is a sign that bears similarity or resemblance to its subject. Thirdly, a symbol is a sign that is not directly connected or similar to a subject but is a purely conventional symbol connected to their objects under the agreement to rules or habitual connection.

Subsequently, according to Aiello (2006), “semiotics aims to look systematically at how textual strategies are deployed to convey certain meanings.” She also cited the words of Jewitt and Oyama (2001), stating that “semiotics resources are used both by producers and viewers as cognitive resources to make sense of visual messages (p. 91).” Thus, “meanings are not fixed, or certain... [as its attribution] to semiotic resources is limited... [given that it can be constrained] by favoring certain interpretations” (Aiello, 2006).

Withal, the researcher will focus on both index and symbol as “indexes are the most motivated and symbols are purely conventional signs (Fiske, 1990 as cited in Aiello, 2006).”

Humor

One of the elements of political cartoons is humor. Lee (2013) said that “a cartoon is a drawing, representational or symbolic, that makes a satirical, witty, or humorous point.” In support of this claim, Fetsko (2001) said that humor is vital to any editorial cartoon as it expresses viewpoints in odd ways to ridicule and point out flaws. Calimbo (2016) also added through Berger’s (1993) words that “humor involves a code violation making it the semiotic variation of the concept of incongruity (p. 4).” Besides, incongruity theory, which is probably the most widely accepted theory of humor, holds that “all humor involves some kind of a difference between what one expects and what one gets” (Berger, 1993, as cited in Calimbo, 2016, p. 4). A good description of the incongruity theory is found in the following words uttered by Schopenhauer (1883, as cited in Mulder and Nijhold, n.d.):

The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and the laugh itself is just an expression of this incongruity (p.4).

Moreover, Rutter (1997, as cited in Mulder and Nijhold, n.d.) also explained that:

When jokes are examined in the light of the incongruity theory, two objects in the joke are presented through a single concept, or ‘frame.’ The concept becomes applied to both objects, and the objects become similar. As the joke progresses, it becomes apparent that this concept only applies to one of the two objects, and thus, the difference between

the objects or their concepts becomes apparent. This is what is called incongruity (p.4).

Myths

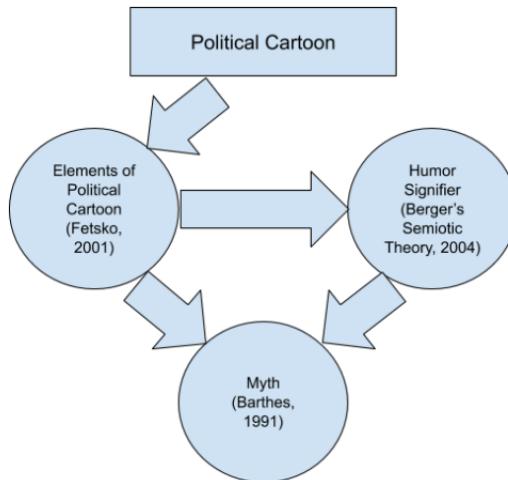
After analyzing humor, this study will create myths with the social context where the corpus is framed upon. Analyzing this corpus, linguistic, visual, and other kinds of the sign will denote meaning and set off a range of connotations attached to the sign. Barthes calls this social phenomenon, the bringing-together of signs and their connotations to shape a particular message, the making of “myth” (Motiei and Majidi, 2017, p. 62). They added that, in the words of Bignell (2002, as cited in Motiei and Majidi, 2017, p. 62), “myth does not refer to mythology in the usual sense of traditional stories, but to ways of thinking about people, products, places, or ideas which are structured to send particular messages to the reader or viewer of the text (p.16).” This definition is supported by Durkheim, as cited in Leeuwen (2005), stressing that “myths are modeled after rites, conceptual categories after social life, and classification after social organization.”

Thus, according to Bignell (2002, as cited in Motiei and Majidi, 2017, p. 62), “we shall see myth is not an innocent language, but one that picks up existing signs and their connotations, and orders them purposefully to play a particular social role.”

The study’s main objective was to analyze and reveal the meaning of editorial cartoons using semiotics.

3. Theoretical Perspectives

Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Conceptual Framework of the Study



This study discussed the elements embedded in political cartoons. After analyzing these cartoons, the researcher triangulated the study and correlated the myths created by the respondents vis-a-vis the signs and signification of it to convey societal, cultural, and historical views.

4. METHODOLOGY

The subject of the study for this research is the editorial cartoons found in the archives of Philippine Daily Inquirer Newspaper. In selecting the cartoons as the corpus for this research, the researcher used the 10 political cartoons related to COVID-19 found in the Philippine Daily Inquirer Newspaper between March 20th and April 20th in 2020 retrieved from <https://opinion.inquirer.net/category/editorial/page/>. These political cartoons were

selected because of their visual imageries caricaturing individuals dealing with the pandemic - political leaders and frontliners - and their shady practices and measures towards the pandemic itself, which became an issue for them to be criticized throughout the Philippines.

Online Survey Questionnaires

After selecting the samples, it has to be surveyed through an accurate target audience from Facebook. It is more accurate to do this survey through social media and the most convenient way to reach the target audience. The target audience will be 20 people from ages 20-24. The online survey questions are as follows:

The questionnaire consists of ten (10) political cartoons, and each cartoon has three questions;

1. What is your idea about this cartoon in a word or phrase?
2. What is your idea about this cartoon in a sentence?
3. What are the objects which can be found in this cartoon?

This questionnaire helped the researcher get an idea of how these target audiences view and create myths according to the signs presented in political cartoons.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Figure 1. Unconscionable Days



As suggested by William Fetcko (2001), the element present in this cartoon is distortion and symbol. The signifier is the sound associated with or image of something, the signified is the idea or concept of the thing, and the sign is the object that combines the signifier and the signified into a meaningful unit (Calimbo, 2018). This in this cartoon's symbol is distorted, making it more exaggerated to create a notion that even though there is an existing law that directs government personnel to simplify their procedures to expedite government transactions, they still cannot implement it. In a more superficial sense, the tape signifies the hindrances that a man should overcome to get what he is rightful and entitled to.

As it is contextualized in the Philippine bureaucracy, Red Tape refers to paper works, unnecessary bureaucratic documents, requirements, forms, and procedural obsession in delivering public service (Gabriel, 2018). In the time of former president Gloria Arroyo, Republic Act 9485 or the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007 was enacted to improve the efficiency in delivering government service to the public by reducing bureaucratic red tape, preventing graft and corruption, and providing penalties thereof.

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. - *It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote integrity, accountability, proper management of public affairs and public property as well as to establish effective practices aimed at the prevention of graft and corruption in government. Towards this end, the State shall maintain honesty and responsibility among its public officials and employees and shall take appropriate*

measures to promote transparency in each agency with regard to the manner of transacting with the public, which shall encompass a program for the adoption of simplified procedures that will reduce red tape and expedite transactions in government.

The contrast between the object and the man becomes the key humor signifier in this political cartoon. According to Berger (1993, as cited in Calimbo, 2016, p. 4), incongruity theory holds that “all humor involves some kind of a difference between what one expects and what one gets.” A distortion of reality is seen in this cartoon. In a real sense, the tape is used by a man to patch up a good. However, in the figure, a man is wrapped in tape, which hinders him from reaching for the good. It is absurd to create a tape that could wrap a man as he is not considered good.

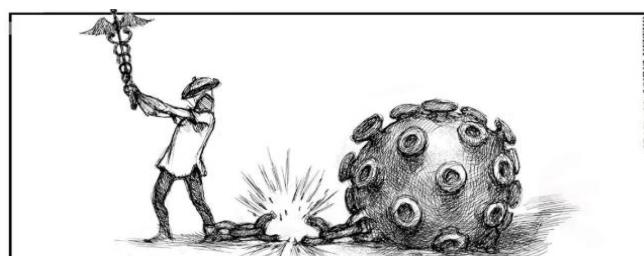
Connotatively, the tape signifies the hindrances that a man should overcome to get what he is rightful and entitled to. Whereas the informal sector suffers from poverty symbolized by a man reaching for a good, the subject of the image (the politicians’ implementation of Anti-Red Tape Law) symbolizes the government’s greed, selfishness, and apathy for allowing such a plan of action despite its urgency as the masses suffer from this pandemic.

Table 1. Respondents’ idea of the cartoon

Respondent 1	Restrictions	There should be no restrictions in getting the aid/relief goods; it is the right of the people!
Respondent 2	Struggle	Red tape is preventing the person to immediately access assistance/funds.
Respondent 3	Obstruction	Red tape has the tendency to delay progress and slows down an individual's effort for advancement.
Respondent 4	Corruption	Red tape hinders the bureaucracy to deliver a decision, especially when there's money involved.
Respondent 5	Inaccessible	Some people are unable to receive or have no access to relief goods and daily necessities from the government because of the complicated processes that people need to undergo first.

According to Barthes (1991), myth represents our time’s dominant ideologies, which becomes ‘natural’ with history. Based on the survey conducted, the words’ *obstruction* (*ed*), *restrictions* (*ed*), *inaccessible*, *struggle*, and *corruption* describe the cartoon’s respondents’ idea. It can be inferred that the idea of red tape is hostile and unacceptable because it prevents those who need to get the aid instantly. Further, red tapes are side effects of a rotten or ineffective system. Thus, the political cartoon suggests that in this time of the pandemic, the government must be lenient enough of its transactions and processes as it is the majority’s welfare that must be put first amidst the citizens’ wretched and pitiful condition.

Figure 2. To Life!



According to the World Health Organization (as cited by Gayo and Yap, n.d.), coronaviruses (CoV) are strains of viruses that cause common, mild illnesses like the common cold and seasonal flu. It added that “[the] health workers observed that the virus could be deadly to those with comorbidity or people who have two or more than chronic illnesses present, especially respiratory illnesses.”

At first, in the figure, there is no binary opposition that can be seen that makes it humorous. It only depicts a problem and a public figure involved in it. The cartoonist used the element of symbol and distortion. It can be seen that a man holding the caduceus unchained himself to the magnified virus. It implies that, when he is chained to the virus, he is vulnerable to it. The caduceus represents the Code of Ethics of Medical Profession's entirety, which he used to unchain himself from it, saving one's life. Thus, adhering to their first fundamental principle, the *Principle of Respect for Life*, which states that :

The right to life is inviolable. Life is a necessary condition for all other human goods. It must be protected and fostered at all its stages, beginning from conception to its natural end (p. 1).

Connotatively, the man represents the entire country, and the caduceus is synecdochical to all the frontliners risking their own lives - selfless and courageous - in making the citizens aware, safe, and free from the virus.

Table 2. Respondents' idea of the cartoon.

Respondent 1	Hope	The only hope for us to get free in this pandemic is if we can invent medicine/vaccine against the covid 19.
Respondent 2	Freedom	We may never know when, but time will surely come. We will be able to break free from this unprecedented event.
Respondent 3	Healthcare	The struggle of people in the field of medicine to stop the pandemic virus in our country.
Respondent 4	Healing of Pilipinas	Strengthening health care and health care providers will free us from the grip of the COVID-19 crisis. So una no ang mga PUM ug PUI dili magpabuyag! (I hope PUM and PUI will not be hardheaded.)
Respondent 5	Solution	Massive testing can stop the Coronavirus outbreak.

Looking closely at the survey, words/phrases like *hope, freedom, healthcare, healing of Pilipinas*, and *solution* suggest that the respondents are aware of the problem as they have clamored and provided possible solutions to be implemented by the government. They were also hopeful and optimistic that everything will soon come to an end, and we will be free from the pandemic. It is everyone's battle. Thus, the cartoon suggests the attitude of a Filipino being spirited and resilient amidst any circumstance.

Figure 3. Women are leading the way



In this cartoon, the element of symbol, stereotyping, and caption had been incorporated together. The woman is raising the flag with a caption 'compassion' - that represents the entire country, while holding a syringe with a caption 'innovation' - that represents the clamor of medical practitioners to improve healthcare in the country. In the Code of Ethics of Medical Profession Article III Section 3, it is clear that medical professionals should hold utmost dignity in their profession by being compassionate, which states that:

Human Dignity. *Physicians shall be compassionate and approach patients in a courteous and professional manner. Physicians shall conduct physical examinations in a modest, caring, and gender-sensitive manner. Physicians shall ensure that free and informed consent by the patients and precautions to preserve patients' dignity and anonymity prevail at all times (p. 3).*

Whereas, the improvement of healthcare of the country lies in the hand of the medical professional as stated in their Code of Ethics for Medical Professional Article IV Section 4 that:

Improving Quality of Care. *Physicians shall be dedicated to continuous improvement in the quality of healthcare. This entails maintaining clinical competence through lifelong study and working collaboratively with other professionals to enhance patient safety, optimize care outcomes, and the proper use of healthcare resources. Physicians shall actively participate in the development and application of better measures of quality of care (p.4).*

In the Philippine context, according to the National Database of Selected Human Resources for Health, there are 150,311 health workers as of the year December 2017; 74.20% are women, 25.77% are men, and 0.03% are non-binary as per the distribution of selected health providers according to sex. This implies the stereotype of the nursing profession to be a female profession.

There is nothing incongruous or deviant in the images as they depict facial expressions congruent with the emotions implied in the caption texts, thus making these iconic signs (Pierce, in Chandler, 2005). The people are raging with compassion to combat the pandemic through their innovations, making the virus sad as it can not infect others if it sees us united and prepared. In context, this image shows how women leaders across the world responded to the pandemic putting in mind the possible effects of it on her constituents. According to Fincher (n.d.), in countries like Taiwan and New Zealand, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland—all led by women leaders - "they have implemented widespread testing, easy access to quality medical treatment, aggressive contact tracing and tough restrictions on social gatherings."

Regardless of which gender dominates the medical profession, all clamors for medical research approval would improve the country's medical practice. Thus, this cartoon serves as a calling to the government to allocate enough budget for healthcare services.

Table 3. Respondents' idea of the cartoon.

Respondent 1	Unity	If we could only come together as one, (whether you're a doctor, a military, or just part of the common people) we can find a way to beat this virus.
Respondent 2	Healthcare Workers	Our new heroes, the healthcare workers, who are calling out for innovation to improve our healthcare

		system.
Respondent 3	Leadership	A reflection of a great leader is leading with compassion and supporting people's innovation.
Respondent 4	Health Workers	The battle-cry of our frontliners is to have compassion among the affected individuals and bring medical innovations to our fight against COVID-19.
Respondent 5	Value	We need innovation to directly counter the virus, and we need compassion towards other people in this trying time.

The word *value*, *health(care) workers*, *unity*, and *leadership* imply the respondents' fervency towards the frontliners. It can be implied that they are aware of the struggles and adversities; these front liners are experiencing and should combat. Fighting COVID-19 should not include hostility. Thus, this cartoon showed and conveyed its message of compassion to normal individuals seeing it, as they have reflected on the scarcity of medical equipment in the country that might help in facing the pandemic.

Figure 4. Privileged Testing

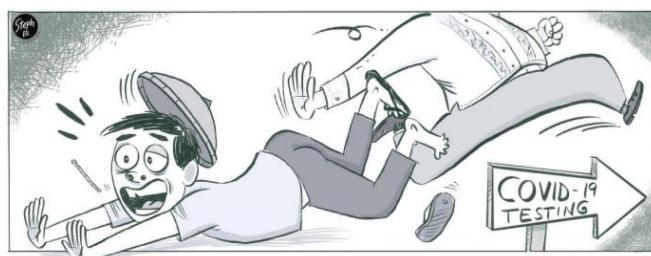


Figure 4 shows the cartoon element, stereotyping, and symbols utilized to create the mood and message it wanted to convey. According to Fetsko (2001), "stereotyping eliminates anything uniquely individual by exaggerating features associated with an entire group. Thus, this cartoon criticizes a politician's physique and how their position puts them on a pedestal of being entitled to laypeople. Further, the politicians elevated position symbolizes their power and authority and the image of the dumped man symbolizes the powerless masses or citizens.

This figure's contrasting signifiers contribute to the cartoon's humorous effect, such as rich/ poor, privileged/unprivileged, or oppressed/oppressor, highlighted by the image. Though some might think it is not showing any humor, the cartoon portrays a typically bloated politician. They are consequently showing how politics unfairly privileges politicians afraid of facing death that they scrimmage and jump the queue for testing. Thus, unveiling themselves as selfish.

Connotatively, this image vividly indicated ideological beliefs about the nature of wealth, disparity, and inequality present in Philippine society. The politician's action of pushing the man connotes abuse of his authority as he seeks to get tested first, as he is in a government position, over those laypeople, consequently signifying the politician's power to manipulate decisions in certain agencies in matters which threaten himself. Besides that, many senators are working for the people, yet they are nowhere to be found in this pandemic. Thus far, it shows how greedy and selfish are those in the government position that only think of themselves.

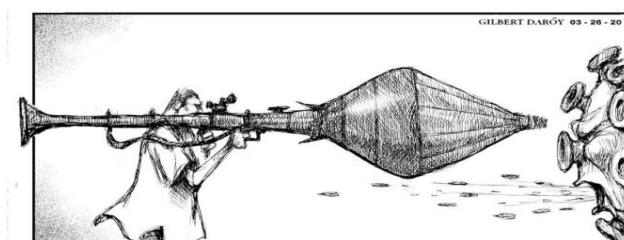
Table 4. Respondents' idea on the cartoon

Respondent 1	Unjust	The brutal disparity between the rich and the poor during the pandemic.
Respondent 2	Unfair	Unfair treatment between rich and poor, rich people are prioritized than the poor who really need the proper attention.
Respondent 3	Privileged	People who belong in a lower class were constrained from their rights, and rich people have more privilege because they have money.
Respondent 4	Selfish	The rich people are taking advantage of their wealth to be the first ones to avail the testing which is only limited.
Respondent 5	VIP	Those who are in urgent need for testing were delayed because of those "VIPs" who did not follow the due process.

The respondents' use of *unjust, unfair, privileged, selfish, and VIP* implied how upset they were with the existing power relations in Philippine society. It can be inferred that the hegemonic struggle is still evident in the country. The concept of hegemony is used by Gramsci (2009, as cited in Storey, 2009):

... to suggest a society in which, despite oppression and exploitation, there is a high degree of consensus, a large measure of social stability; a society in which subordinate groups and classes appear to actively support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, cultural and political meanings, which bind them to, and 'incorporate' them into, the prevailing structures of power.

This privilege testing has not been supported by the respondents, as the politicians are just taking advantage of their position not being considerate to those who need the testing kit more than them.

Figure 5. Playing Catch-Up

Concerning the elements present in the cartoon, it utilized symbol, distortion, and irony. Burack said that "irony makes cartoons witty and points out the system's flaws - as this makes contradiction and argument. The missile symbolizes the government's plans and solutions in dealing with the pandemic - to safeguard its constituents' health. However, the cartoonist conveyed irony by conveying the incongruity of plans by letting the health expert hold the missile. It expresses the idea of catching up with a virus wherein the solutions are not parallel to the problem per se. Moreover, this increases the number of cases of COVID-19 as symbolized by the virus magnified - which is an element of distortion.

Binary contrasts such as violent and nonviolent can be easily gleaned in the image above. The humorous signifiers connote the President's only sought action plan, which citizens considered vague. During his interview, he suggested that this battle against the

pandemic should be led by the military and not by health experts. Consequently, he has been criticized by the netizens as he only sees and considers violence as a solution in this urgent attention.

Further, there could be two connotative meanings this cartoon suggests. First, the only way to combat the virus is through the help of the Philippines' health experts. They are considered heroes and soldiers in this pandemic as they are all equipped with healthcare knowledge. Secondly, this could criticize the government's vague and illogical actions and plans to deal with the pandemic. Nonetheless, either of which meaning the cartoonist wanted to convey, both health experts and militaries are the front liners vulnerable to the virus. They risk their lives for the welfare of the country and its people.

Table 5. Respondents' idea on the cartoon

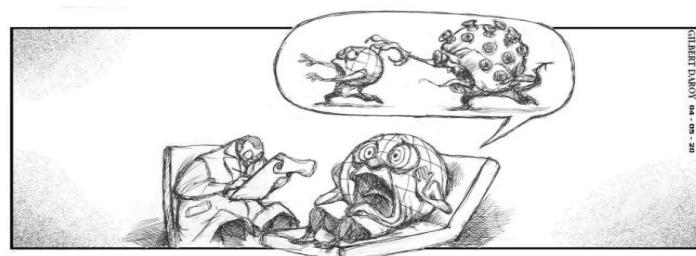
Respondent 1	Fight	The government fights the virus through medical ability and militarization.
Respondent 2	Soldier	Health workers are the frontline soldiers against COVID 19.
Respondent 3	Valor	For me, this cartoon implies that we need some force to stop the virus from spreading, and it makes no sense to put all the work to the doctors. We have to admit that we need military force in a society where ignorance is at the highest rate.
Respondent 4	Destruction	The destruction of coronavirus is achieved through extensive research.
Respondent 5	Force	We cannot win this if we use force.

From the respondents' use of the words *fight, soldier, valor, destruction, and force*, the researcher understood the people's myth about the pandemic. They consider it a war, where citizens, health experts, soldiers, and those in higher positions must come together. It can be inferred that they believe a mandate would force everyone to work hand in hand to end the country's pandemic, and support in health care would be beneficial in this circumstance. Moreover, this could be true and possible as supported by Gramsci (as cited in Storey, 2009) stating that:

In times of crisis, when moral and intellectual leadership is not enough to secure continued authority, the processes of hegemony are replaced, temporarily, by the coercive power of the 'repressive state apparatus': the army, the police, the prison system, etc.

Some argue that at times like this, it is not feasible to be coercive. However, some think it would be better since Filipino's are hard-headed and unabiding to the laws by nature. Further, fighting the pandemic is making sure everyone adheres to protocols and maintaining social order. If it becomes compromised, then it would be harder to get rid of the pandemic.

Figure 6. Extra Days of Anxiety



The elements of symbolism and distortion are evident in this cartoon. The image of a man lying on the bed is distorted by putting the globe as ahead. Which in that case, the globe symbolizes the entire world dealing with stress and anxiety due to isolation amidst COVID-19. For example, those who are ill would seek a physician because they are worried sick and anxious that they might have the virus to rush themselves to the hospital. Thus, making the hospital more crowded and a greater chance for them to acquire the virus.

The entire world - represented by a man's distorted image - signifies how the COVID-19 situation made everyone anxious, panicky and stressed. Everyone has many concerns about school or work, their finances, their ability to participate in meaningful community and social events, and hobbies - all these which cannot be done amidst the COVID-19 outbreak. If they do, they will end up seeing a physician.

Table 6. Respondents' idea of the cartoon

Respondent 1	Anxiety	Being a PUM/PUI or having covid-19 makes people anxious they think they'll die, but truth is with proper treatment and a healthy immune system they can survive it.
Respondent 2	Illiterateness	Lack of knowledge about COVID 19 is driving public panic.
Respondent 3	Pandemic	This pandemic is threatening our lives all over the world.
Respondent 4	Corona scares the world	This pandemic brought a worldwide scare.
Respondent 5	Fear	What we think greatly affects our physical health.

The researcher inferred that the use of words *anxiety*, *illiterateness*, *pandemic*, *fear*, and the phrase *corona scares the world* to describe what the cartoon signifies correlated to what they are also feeling - frightened situation. Considering their responses, they believe that mental health is jeopardized during this pandemic. It has also turned people's lives across the globe. Nonetheless, as long as the citizens are doing their part - staying at home and being honest to the medical practitioners, there is nothing to be anxious about.

Figure 7. At the Frontlines



The element present in this cartoon is symbolism. The magnified virus symbolizes the problem that the Philippines and other countries across the globe are facing. It depicts the roles of citizens in a country. The frontliners are the doctors, nurses, and policemen who directly contact infected individuals and the middlemen who are those private companies and sectors in between who have directed special assistance to people expected to be at home.

In this cartoon, the signifier in the collective people signifying individual citizens' roles in helping the country combat COVID-19. Connotatively, it shows how the country needs everyone's effort - knowing particular roles and doing their part - to stop the pandemic.

Table 7. Respondents' idea of the cartoon

Respondent 1	Bayanihan	Frontliners are doing their best to stop the spread of the virus, while people must remain in their homes to prevent the spread of the virus; other private and government sects are also doing their best to give help to the people.
Respondent 2	Frontliners	Not all heroes wear caps---sometimes, they're in face masks.
Respondent 3	Unity	Unity is the best solution to fighting COVID-19.
Respondent 4	Helping each other	While the frontliners are hand in hand in fighting the virus, various volunteers and associations including the well-off citizens, extend their benevolence to the marginalized sector of the society.
Respondent 5	Heroism	Our frontliners are sacrificing themselves to protect us from the deadly virus.

The respondents use the words *Bayanihan*, *frontliners*, *unity*, *heroism*, and the phrase *helping each other*, which could mean that they are aware of their roles and cognizant of the goal that the frontliners had set before us - to flatten the curve. They seem to recognize that what the country needs is unity to fight with the pandemic, and that is by doing their functions and roles.

Figure 8. P500 a day



The elements present in this cartoon are symbolism and distortion. The coin symbolizes the salary of the medical practitioners for volunteering in helping COVID-19 patients, and the bills in the bowl are the Department of Health's (DOH) budget during the pandemic. The image of three medical practitioners on the right and the man on the left was distorted - they are not on par with one another. This depicts that the medical practitioners were belittled and were insulted by this act of DOH - giving P500 as compensation for risking themselves in treating COVID-19 patients. This only shows the insignificant role of the medical practitioners even in times of pandemic where they are needed the most.

In other words, the handing of a coin to the medical practitioners signifies that the DOH is giving insufficient monetary support to the medical frontliners. On the other hand, the keeping of bills in a bowl by a man signifies the corruption of officials that might be present within the DOH securing for themselves. Connotatively, the salary of the P500 is not enough to pay for the lives of the frontliners. The amount only shows how the government

values the medical profession and its neglect of their welfare in dedicating themselves to treating COVID-19 patients.

Table 8. Respondents' idea of the cartoon

Respondent 1	Money	Health workers are receiving less or small amounts of money in spite of the fact that they are risking their lives.
Respondent 2	Underpaid	Our health care workers who risk their lives every single day are underpaid and with fewer incentives from the DOH.
Respondent 3	Insufficient hazard compensation	Medical Frontliners are not getting enough hazard pays despite multi-billion funding from DOH.
Respondent 4	Budget	Our frontliners are lacking support from the government.
Respondent 5	Salary	There should be an increase in salary for frontliners who work hard to end this pandemic.

The respondents' use of the words *money*, *underpaid*, *budget*, and *salary*, and the phrase *insufficient hazard compensation* to describe the image manifest their empathy for the medical practitioners. They seem to know how insufficient the government is paying them in exchange for their lives. Respondent 4 recognizes the lack of medical support by the government to the frontliners. Consequently, respondent five has called to increase their salary after the pandemic. Thus, these responses show that if these medical practitioners are anticipated to risk their lives, then it is just equitable and unerring to increase their salaries and have a sense of nobility to their profession, knowing that the country and its government hearten and succor them.

Figure 9. Ham-handed hit jobs



The element of symbolism and irony of words and images are used in the cartoon. The mud symbolizes the words and actions of the central government against other politicians in the local government, the arm which has the phrase *public opinion* symbolizes the statements which proliferated in social media platforms - Twitter and Facebook - to protect those politicians in the local government whose roles are to assist its constituents. The irony in this cartoon is that the central government seems to criticize those in the local

governments, which in reality, both should be working and coordinating together to give assistance and help preserve people's trust towards the government.

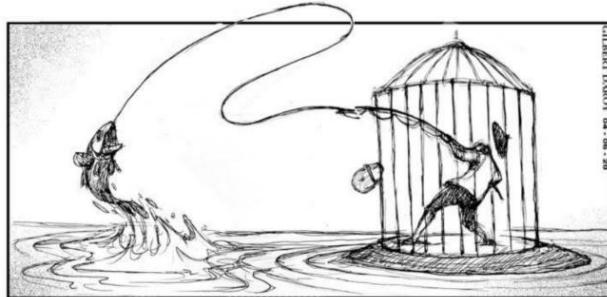
The cartoon's humor is manifested by the disparity of powers depicted by the central government lying on the mud and the individuals in the local government standing handing boxes of supplies. It revealed how insecure and incompetent the central government is - putting them on the backstage and the local government who has their way of giving assistance and solution - putting them in the spotlight amidst the pandemic.

The government is not just limited to the central government; local governments are also doing their part to provide solutions they think are necessary and beneficial. Thus, this pandemic is not the time to throw mud against one another. This is also why netizens have raged on social media posting their opinions - frustration towards the central government and local governments' support. The public plays a role in making sure that those making efforts from the local governments are protected from the central government's incompetence by using their opinions posted on social media.

Table 9. Respondents' idea of the cartoon

Respondent 1	Positivity	People who wanted to help will continue to help and share positivity even when some are very negative.
Respondent 2	Freedom of expression	In this time of pandemic wherein the physical community is absent, social community is most used. Public opinion serves as an agent of information dissemination to check the government's movement towards the virus' development and atrocities.
Respondent 3	Mudslinging against politicians by politicians	We are independent and LGU are delegated powers run their scope and do what is the best.
Respondent 4	Backstage	Throwing stones is the least most politicians can do when the public praise frontliners who have something to contribute.
Respondent 5	Justification	Empathy influences public opinion.

The words *positivity*, *backstage*, and *justification*, and the phrases *freedom of speech* and *mudslinging against politicians by politicians* are what the respondents think of the cartoon, which can hardly be associated with one another. It only means that they have inferred the cartoon differently. After that, it can be inferred that public opinion - respondents' idea of the cartoon, as represented by the arm in the cartoon, also varies, just like in society. Respondents stick to the idea that mudslinging is present in the country, and those who are helping at their best must be protected through their opinions.

Figure 10. Modified Quarantine

The elements used in the cartoon is symbolism to picture the verisimilitude of how challenging the COVID-19 situation is for the marginalized sector. The man represents all individuals below the economic bar - market vendors, PUV drivers, carpenters, fishermen, etc. The cage is representing their house where they are locked.

The cartoon has no binary opposition that could be considered a factor for creating humor. However, the man's act of fishing alone, even when inside the cage, signifies the hardship of a Filipino striving to provide something for himself and his family during ECQ, when no one is allowed to go out of their houses. It may also imply, on the other hand, those individuals that break the rules of ECQ to eat and survive, even if it means detaining them.

Table 10. Respondents' idea of the cartoon

Respondent 1	Throttled	It shows the situation of the poor, the general mass. In this pandemic, people were trapped in their houses, making them unable to work making them unable to provide necessities for their family necessities.
Respondent 2	Work	You can not go to work to earn money to buy food for the family during the pandemic because authorities will detain you or punish you.
Respondent 3	Struggle	With the implementation of ECQ it affects our livelihood, we struggle to live within just our cages(house) because of the lockdown.
Respondent 4	Restrictions	You were locked up with potential resources and equipment, what is needed is your initiative.
Respondent 5	Hunger	People are suffering because of lockdown, no food to eat.

The respondents use the words throttled, work, struggle, restrictions, and hunger to empathize with the present condition of the marginalized sector, though they seem to have acknowledged the need for ECQ in the event of COVID-19. These respondents believe that Filipinos are much challenged during this lockdown, especially in finding something to eat.

6. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The study determined that political cartoons have elements that make them an inevitable tool of attracting readers' attention, yet not all political cartoons pose humor. Some of them are a verisimilitude of the social structures, power relations, and differences. The study showed that, despite the limited information about the government's measures and citizens' responses concerning COVID-19, they could communicate their views and speak their inner sincerity and thoughts through existing semiotic indexes and symbols.

Political cartoons have their styles that make them an inevitable tool for attracting readers' attention. Thus, newspapers need to adopt and deliberately harness cartoons' potentials in their editorializing. These cartoons that are shown in this survey are very relevant to the issues that Filipinos are facing now. The researcher realized that political cartoons could have been better explained in phrases regarding the analysis and integration of respondents' ideas. The researcher does not see the possibility of some or majority of the illustrations expressed in a single word. Nonetheless, the research had been a great avenue to assess people's awareness about the pandemic that is happening right now in the world. Therefore, it creates political awareness, thus providing a form of civic education to editorial cartoon viewers.

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