These examples of leaders with a populist political approach showed similarities between each other and had stamped their mark as the two of the most popular presidents in the Philippines. However, the two also shared a distinct difference – technology and social media.

While the former had reached their target audience through word of mouth and their status as a former actor, the latter had reached their audience almost directly through the internet medium. One case study stressed a similarity between Rodrigo Duterte and Pauline Hanson – an Australian politician – in their shared utilization of social media, which characterized both as populist leaders through the influence of the internet. Whether the political success of Duterte and Hanson had been good or bad, it does not change the fact that social media had a huge role to play in that and would, thereby, be incomplete without its reach and influence. (Sengul, 2023).

The characteristics of a populist actor have been the driving force for the people to prefer these political leaders over others. The similarity among these political actors is their use of a distinct political style as a channel of political communication known as "populism."

Populism can be construed as good versus evil, people versus the elite, or a representation of the elite as corrupt. It may also be the vested interest of the powerful elites or bourgeoisie against workers (Noris, P., 2020). These are populist concepts that are often used by politicians or candidates in an election to gain the constituents' trust.
During the election, candidates resort to various modes of campaign methods, and research proves that social media have been utilized to catch the attention of the voters. According to Groshek & Koc-Michalska (2016), the utilization of social media for politics is likely to increase the chances of winning the election as compared to traditional ways such as commercial campaigns. In other words, social media help populist leaders win or lose the election.

Digital media functions as a modern platform to disseminate all kinds of extremist propaganda nationally and internationally. Social media contributes to the construction or destruction of populist voices. It has played a significant role in the rise of populism as it facilitates the circulation of different platforms. The study of El-Ibiary and Calfano (2022) concluded that social media is a tool for planning and strategically putting populist politics into effect, making social media a threat to conventional democracy.

Moreover, several studies favored modified frameworks that reflect the hybrid nature of social media platform content producers. Zhuravskaya et al., (2020) explained that the internet and social media had been significantly affecting public organizations ranging from the election, making of laws, financial accounting, and execution of policies.

According to Gerbaudo, P (2018), there was a significant relationship between social media and political populism called 'elective affinity. The vast social media network became the perfect venue for politicians to get the people's attention or express what will unite or polarize them, as this could be used as a tool for candidates to favor or oppose each other. He stressed that the core role of social media in populist movements was to provide how people's voices and actions could be heard and seen. It served as an area for netizens to form supporters online or an avenue for discounted parties. Therefore, the populists' exploitation of social media exposure is not surprising.

Hopster (2021) offered four affordances to populism:
1. Social media allows citizens and politicians to circumvent editorial filters.
2. Social media algorithms allow sensational claims to spread comparatively easily.
3. The low-level affordances of social media invite a 'populist style' of communication.
4. Social media allows for the real-time expression and measurement of people's 'general will.'

With the concept of 'Elective affinity' and these affordances, politicians and the people will continuously take advantage of the pursuit of populism. These may become the free ride of politicians to success even decades from now.

In the Philippines, the victory of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. (BBM) in the last 2022 Presidential Election shocked the world despite the surveys predicting that BBM would win the elections by majority vote. A study by Dulay et al. (2023) showed that the more prominent reasons for his success were: Filipinos' preference for authoritarian over liberal leaders, the Filipino voters' ethical/regional voting, and the misinformation in social media that Martial Law was considered the "golden age" of the Philippines.

As suggested by the authors, the case of BBM winning the presidential election amidst controversy from his family's past needs more scholarly research for a deeper understanding. However, one of the factors to consider in comprehending what happened in the last 2022 elections will be the idea of populism through social media. Thus, knowing the impact of populism on Filipino political awareness could provide some answers through this research.

Considering all those mentioned above, the researchers aim to provide concrete answers to the following questions:
1. How can social media platforms influence populism?
2. How can social media further enable polarization between political factions?
3. How do social media platforms influence political views?
4. How can political awareness be linked to political involvement and civic engagement in pursuing nation-building?

Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

This paper is anchored on the study of Terry Flew (2020), which asserts the correlation between social media platforms and the rise of populism and nationalism. Through this concept, he presented the idea that technology creates an avenue for populist leaders to make sense of personal and direct connections with their supporters in the social media sphere. Using populist leaders who present themselves as allies to people or as a leading 'movement' on social media platforms creates an impact or what he calls the 'filter bubble' effect.
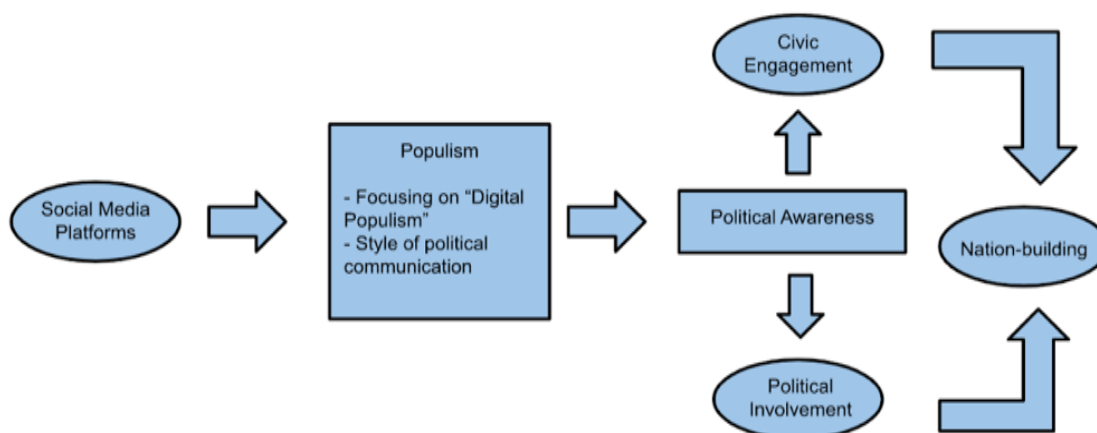
Consequently, the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 focuses on analyzing the impact and/or effects of populism, specifically digital populism, on the development of Filipinos' political awareness. Populism, as influenced by different social media platforms, can have an impact on the political awareness of the Filipino people, which entails the latter's political involvement and civic engagement. The meaningful actions and decisions of the people will be the foundation of nation-building toward sustainable progress.

Figure 1. Correlation between Populism and Political Awareness and Other Determining Factors

Materials and Methods

The type of research design used in the research study is a mixed-method or both qualitative and quantitative research, specifically, a descriptive analysis. It is a type of analysis that provides a description, summarizes the data gathered and looks for patterns to analyze based on the problem statement.

The target population the researchers selected were registered and unregistered voters from all cities in Metro Manila, Philippines using purposive random sampling. The researchers used the following data-gathering instruments: an online questionnaire and an interview. The self-constructed research instruments underwent pilot testing and passed the reliability test satisfactorily.

The data was analyzed using content analysis. The transcript of the interviews was used as the principal source of data in carrying out the content analysis, wherein the researchers formulated data-driven descriptions and explanations as to how populism impacts the political awareness of the respondents and what those effects imply in different facets.

Results and Discussions

As shown in Table 1, more than most of the respondents spent more than four hours of their day surfing the internet, and many of them favored receiving political information (daily news or political promotions) through social media. Hence, it appears that social media, regardless of platforms, somehow influence the spread of populism proved by the overall weighted mean of 2.98. However, more than one-half do not empathize with statements made by political figures, real or not. Although, they confirmed that these are effective means of convincing people.

Table 1. Influence of Social Media Platforms on Populism

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
A. Influence of Social Media Platforms on Populism		
1. I usually surf the internet for more than four (4) hours per day.	3.50	Strongly Agree
2. I am in favor of the dissemination of multiple political information by different offices and organizations on social media platforms.	3.22	Agree
3. I treat social media platforms as primary sources of daily news, particularly ones that involve the current political atmosphere.	2.92	Agree
4. I empathize with testimonials posted online by different political figures.	2.41	Disagree
5. I am in favor of the promotion of political candidates on social media platforms during elections.	2.94	Agree
6. I am in favor of the utilization of social media platforms to advance political ideologies.	2.87	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.98**	**Agree**

In an interview, some respondents stated that they find the publicized statements and interviews of several candidates effective, while others are firm in their stand that such statements and interviews are of no authenticity and credibility. One of the interviewees believes that the dissemination of statements and interviews coming from politicians has a huge effect, especially on ordinary citizens who have little to no education. In contrast, educated citizens can be more critical in assessing the kind of political communication being used by candidates and/or political figures.

In terms of social media and polarization between political factions (Table 2), most of the respondents agree shown in the results of the study. Still, for more than most of the respondents, it becomes their obligation to contradict issues found online, considering that there are clashing perspectives on different platforms of social media. Respondents agree that there are still credible news sites that can influence their political points of view on certain issues. Several interviewees answered that they are interested in watching online debates and interviews, stating that the interviews on different social media platforms capture their interest because they want to know how – what are the platforms of the candidates in certain issues and their respective responses.

Table 2. Social Media and Polarizations between Political Factions

B. Social Media and Polarization between Political Factions		
7. I follow influencers that are active in supporting and/or campaigning for a political figure that I also support.	2.66	Agree

8. I can disregard misconceptions about political matters said by an influencer.	2.78	Agree
9. I can disseminate to other people about lies being spread by influencers.	3.03	Agree
10. I consider other influencers' thoughts and opinions regarding a certain political issue.	2.7	Agree
11. I acknowledge the clashing ideologies and perspectives that influencers have when discussing political figures.	3.27	Strongly Agree
12. I am a member of a Facebook group that supports a political figure and/or political party I also support.	2.35	Disagree
13. My opinion of an influencer is affected by their political stance and how vocal they are on it online.	2.95	Agree
14. I feel that the credibility of some news sites has deteriorated on social media compared to their newspaper counterparts some years back.	3.17	Agree
15. I do fact-check every time I come across a controversial political issue online.	3.70	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.96**	**Agree**

Although most of the respondents believe that they did join any political group on social media, one of the interviewees mentioned that during the last national election, he learned different information related to the political candidates' last elections as a member of the group that he is involved with, posts the platforms of their respective political candidates that they support. According to him, he joined several groups related to the political candidates and politics-related, most especially during the last election, to learn several things, such as the platforms of the candidates that they support and their respective political and personal history.

Table 3. Influence of Social Media on Political Views

C. Influence of Social Media on Political Views

16. I rely on social media to receive news and political information.	2.82	Agree
17. I engage in political discussions on social media platforms.	2.56	Agree
18. I am interested in replying and/or posting politics-related posts on social media.	2.56	Agree
19. At some point, I changed my political stances/views regarding a national issue because of social media.	2.85	Agree
20. At some point, I changed my political stances/views regarding a political candidate because of social media.	2.82	Agree
21. Social media encouraged me to register to vote.	2.66	Agree
22. I am open to changing my political views regarding a political issue once exposed to new and concrete information in online discussions.	3.40	Strongly Agree
23. I often see posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram feed like my political views.	3.41	Strongly Agree
24. I unfollow and/or block people on social media platforms that are not like my political views.	2.46	Disagree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.84**	**Agree**

In Tables 4 and 5, most respondents utilized social media to receive news and political information and engage in political discussion, which led to changes in political views and beliefs. These social media have also been used to develop new friendships or unfriend friends because of their political stands. Hence, social media greatly affects political views and thinking. On one hand, some people have an open mind when evaluating diverse political topics as they are willing to change their political opinions provided supported with facts and verifiable materials.

Table 4. Interrelation Between Political Awareness and Political Involvement and Civic Engagement

E. Interrelation Between Political Awareness and Political Involvement and Civic Engagement

25. I describe myself as politically aware.	3.30	Strongly Agree
26. I want to be or am a volunteer/campaign staff to a certain political candidate.	2.74	Agree
27. I am in constant dialogue with friends and family about relevant political matters.	2.94	Agree
28. I make an active effort to encourage and aid others in strengthening their political awareness and engagement.	3.01	Agree
29. I keep myself politically always updated.	3.18	Agree
30. I share the desire to be actively engaged in national/local politics with like-minded peers.	2.96	Agree
31. I actively participate in political activism, such as rallies and assemblies.	2.04	Disagree
32. I do my best to exercise my rights to freedom of speech and the right to protest in order to be politically involved.	3.25	Strongly Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	**2.93**	**Agree**

Many interviewees - respondents described how social media enabled them to rethink their assumptions about political figures. According to one of these respondents, he is not interested and has no knowledge about politics but upon reading articles online and watching YouTube, his point of view changes. Thus, the influence of social media on our respondents, specifically on their political awareness, involvement, and civic engagement. Some even volunteer to campaign for a political candidate and participate in rallies and assemblies as induced or encouraged by things they see and hear on social media.

Based on the researchers' study, most of the interviewees have defined being politically aware as someone conscious of the different and current or contemporary issues that are happening in the country, particularly in politics. Moreover, having an awareness of politics is having a stand and not being neutral, knowing the struggle of the common folk, and working to know more about the hardships that other citizens go through in their lives. On the other hand, when asked if being politically aware is of utmost importance for the betterment of the nation, the respondents unanimously agreed that it is important because it gives us the opportunity to exercise our rights, share information, educate people and give voice to them.

According to Kim, J. & Kim, Y. (2021), political participation increases only when individuals engage in specific information behaviors – political information seeking. Comparably, the study conducted by Kim Anderson et al. (2020) shows that the more often citizens are exposed to political news via social media, the more they are active in political participation targeting the political system. The findings indicate that people's political engagement is influenced by political and social media exposure. As for political involvement, there is evidence that exposure to political information on platforms like Facebook and YouTube affects citizens' political behavior across generations.

In summary, most respondents and interviewees believe being politically aware and active helps educate people and exercise their rights. Furthermore, being politically active and having awareness about the issues in the country significantly affects their views and opinions about politics and issues in the country.

Conclusion

Populism signifies its influence in the formation of Filipinos' political awareness through social media platforms. Considering the findings, the following conclusions were drawn. Politicians use social media platforms to study how people interact with one another generally to develop more effective populist strategies and keep up with technological advancements. In addition, findings show that individuals consider people's opinions in social media, especially those that are well-known. Hence, most intellectuals think the media is the ideal tool for enhancing political awareness. It shows the division of people in which some are using social media to gain new insights and perspectives and those who stand firm on their beliefs and choose to explore the topic without being easily swayed. Moreover, individuals are open-minded when analyzing various political topics and have a willingness to incorporate political views if described with credible information in online discussions. Additionally, social media during the campaign period is

essential to the public since this is where they base their choice for their country's future leaders. Lastly, the findings showed that exposure to political information on social media influences people's political behavior, although it does not always successfully convert ideas into lucrative actions that bring up grievances, call for reform, and confront the status quo.

The researchers, through this study, were able to gather sufficient data proving that social media platforms, in consideration of their accessibility, reach, and applicability, play significant roles in the exchange of political information between citizens with distinct political views. These social media platforms serve as the instrument of political leaders to convince people that they are better than others. The result of the study reveals that social media is the main channel of political communications from campaigns, elections, program dissemination, and even executions of projects. It is through social media especially that people and political leaders somehow understand each other and serve as a venue for the former to take advantage of the situation. It appears that populist leaders do not rely fully on traditional ways of influencing people, and they just utilize social media to sway voters to believe them. Since people spend so much time engaging in these platforms, the probability that they will see, read, and hear the political leaders is high.

Political processes such as elections, voting preferences, policymaking, law implementation, and formulation of general plans of action are put in place and embedded in the overall system of the nation due to the demands and needs of the population. Hence, how people perceive political figures and their works could define the turnout of the elections, the prioritization of certain legislations, and the formulation of responses to societal problems vary from one leader to another.

The researchers would also like to recommend to future studies the idea of analyzing the extent of one's political awareness and political involvement, focusing on different sectoral groups and cause-oriented groups that manifest political awareness and involvement much more often and the apolitical and indifferent groups of citizens.

Acknowledgment

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