

The influences of political posters on Gen Z voting preferences

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Abstract: This study investigates the influences of political posters on the voting preferences of Gen Z, who are believed to have the highest percentage of the voting population in the Philippines. The current study seeks to know if political posters still appeal to this group of the population. This study employs a quantitative research design using the survey method. Survey questionnaires were distributed via Google Form to 58 Gen Z registered voters in Dipolog City. Data were analyzed using summary statistics and frequency. Findings of the study revealed that the Gen Z population prefers political posters that have witty and humorous content. This group of voters also revealed that they have extremely understood the importance of good visual design and wit of content in political posters. Thus, the visual design and wit of the content of political posters have a very influential effect on the voting preferences of Gen Z. The recent study proves that political posters are indeed still powerful campaign tools to promote political candidates with the goal of increasing awareness leading to an increase in votes; hence, political strategists should seriously consider how to enhance political posters during political campaigns.

Keywords: political posters, Gen Z voters, political campaign, election

Introduction

Posters are print media that are composed of catchy slogans with striking visual images designed to convey a message to its readers or audience. These are powerful media to communicate the intended message to the intended audience. Posters are intended to be short, catchy and to appeal to emotions in order to attract the audience.

In politics, posters are an important part in all political campaigns across all nations in the world. These are even useful in the various public and social movements in most societies. Political posters convey meanings to convince the audience to favor a political

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candidate. Political campaign posters will aid in bringing campaigns to the streets to gain more views, stay relevant, and generate interest in the campaign (Patel 2022). These posters are aimed at persuading people to vote for their candidates. Political posters are a distinct type of communication that includes both language signals and signs from other semiotic systems. They are integrated in a social and cultural environment, allowing for certain cultural characteristics to be represented both vocally and aesthetically (Nikolskaya and Pavlina 2021).

The 2022 Philippine National Elections became exciting because of the creativity of political supporters in producing posters that are shared on social media. Social media has played an important role in political campaigns during the campaign period. Gone are the days when we see lots of political posters being hung or stuck on our walls. In the recent elections, posters were used and handheld by supporters during political rallies, which were shared on social media allowing these to reach millions of Filipino voters across the world. The advent of technology and social media ushered in new models of campaigning during the 2022 Elections.

Political posters created by supporters to be brought during campaign rallies became viral on social media. Every group of political supporters creatively designed slogans showing support to their Presidential bets, with the intention of recruiting more people to go with them. The social media platforms in the Philippines were bombarded with shared posts of photos of creative posters. These creative political posters were being shared and re-shared across various platforms. To many, these became social media fun and entertainment. It seems like supporters show off to the public who among them create the wittiest political poster. However, there is a need to understand if these were indeed effective and served its purpose - that is, to increase the number of votes for the political candidate.

It is the interest of this study to find out how these creative political posters influence the voting preferences particularly among Gen Z who are mostly first-time voters during the 2022 Philippine National Elections. Specifically, this study answers the type of poster presentations which appealed to the Gen Z population, their understanding of political posters in terms of its visual design and wit of content, and the influence of these posters to their voting preferences in terms of visual design, and wit of content.

The study provides basic data to help political strategists in developing future political campaign designs in the preparation of creative materials that have the greatest appeal to the masses. This will offer deeper understanding on the role of creative approaches in campaign materials. As we slowly move political campaigns in the digital world, the findings will also provide data to political parties on how to approach Gen Z, which is considered the largest voting population in the country. Their high visibility on social media can greatly influence other voters, thus, the necessity to understand their preferences.

This research study is supported by the Meaning Theory of Media Portrayal. The theory discusses how media shape messages and what this signifies for social behavior. According to this theory, communication is a method for processing meanings. Individuals construct, interpret, and keep meaning using media information. Meaning exists inside humans, and we link it with media information. Messages are used to generate media contents, which are then interpreted within the context of those messages. Whatever material is presented through media should be accurately perceived by the audience (Communication Theory 2014). In communication terminology, meaning refers to the connection between readers/viewers/listeners and the message. Human behavior, according to this notion, is the result of inner understanding. That understanding is established based on how a person develops meanings for the symbols, pictures, or events they see in media, which occurs only when their society provides shared interpretations of that media material. Our meanings are molded, altered, and maintained as we participate in various communication processes. The media's content may influence meaning and develop comparable meanings across huge audiences.

This study examines the types of political posters that appeal to Gen Z voters, evaluating them in terms of understanding of the posters and the influences on voting preferences, particularly regarding visual design and the wit of content. The posters are further analyzed through the lens of Media Theory of Media Portrayal to explore how political posters shape Gen Z voting preferences.

Review of related literature

Political posters are multimodal writings that contain both verbal and nonverbal features. Every text has references to previous texts.

Campaign posters are no exception as multimodal narratives. Each method may be symbolic, allowing certain relationships to be established with various codes relating to social and cultural settings (Nikolskaya and Pavlina 2021).

The functions of posters are either to acclaim a political candidate or to attack them. These posters are a significant tool for creating a good picture of leaders, defining their character and views, as well as criticizing political opponents (Ibidem). Posters display a good synergy between verbal, iconic, graphics and color. It is said that posters have information impacts on candidate/party leader identity and reputation, agenda-setting effects, and an influence on candidate/party effectiveness and stability. Furthermore, posters have the potential to excite the people and create positive media attention (Holtz-Bacha and Johansson 2017). Empirical evidence suggests that posters, in addition to their attention-seeking and mobilization impacts, assist politicians and parties in gaining attention, improving name recognition and issue opinions, and shaping political images. They also inform voters about candidates or political stances.

In Europe, political posters are studied based on iconographic and visual dimension, and verbal/discursive dimension (Novelli 2017). Iconographic and visual dimensions refer to the visuals that provide an illustrative purpose by depicting the candidates, the poster's message, or the intended audience. As we have seen, the primary motifs of photographic posters, which comprise the majority, are the candidate or the political leader, generally portrayed alone or, less often, with voters or members of the public. Thus, rather than exhibiting the parties' ideas, initiatives, or policy programs, photographic posters limit themselves to showcasing the officials' faces and images. On other hand, verbal/discursive dimension deals with content. The posters refer to Europe primarily as a geographical/political entity but not as a social community; as a result, the European people, i.e., citizens, voters, or residents, are completely missing from the election campaign.

A study of the campaign posters during the 2019 Mayoralty Election in Bogota, Colombia found out that visual features associated with candidates' physical features had a little impact on voters' choice making in Colombia (Nadal et al. 2021). The findings revealed that superficial attributes in political campaign materials had less effect on Colombian participants' voting selections. A slight tendency to associate smiling expressions with more pleasant feelings and

seriousness as a negative attribute could be proven. Moreover, the German election survey data showed that most voters choose candidates based on their party affiliation rather than their appearance, as seen by the high impacts of the party in each of our studies (Herrmann and Shikano 2020).

Political posters are designed to represent a party's campaign strength. The research conducted in France and Belgium reveals the strategic usage of posters by party status: whereas large parties use them to show their authority, lesser parties use them to give extra information with the shared goal of increasing their voting base (Dumitrescu 2010). In a similar study, political advertising almost surely has a role in influencing the electorate. This impact, however, is mild and might be a conscious or subconscious effect. This implies that political marketing campaigns have minimal influence on voting behavior. Furthermore, political ad campaigns continue to be prevalent, which implies they are still important in the election campaign process; radio and television continue to be the most effective mediums of advertising (Ojekwe 2016).

Methodology

This study employs quantitative research design using survey. A Survey is designed to collect data from a diverse audience. The Survey Design contributes to the objective of evaluating frequencies and discovering trends in survey answers. The purpose of this data is to determine the degree to which distinct scenarios may be established among these respondents (Form plus 2020).

The research was conducted in Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte. Respondents of the study were the 58 students who were selected based on specified criteria. The main inclusion criteria in the selection of respondents were the following: born between 1997 and 2004, and officially registered as a voter by Commission on Election. The respondents belong to the Gen Z generation; however, this does not attempt to generalize the voting preferences of the whole Gen Z population. The results of this study can only shed some light of understanding to this group of voters.

A researcher-made questionnaire was used in conducting this study. The questionnaire was validated by an expert, and was pilot tested for reliability and validity. After validation and pilot testing, the questionnaire was administered to the selected respondents using Google Form. A letter of consent to participate in the study was sent to

the respondents prior to administering the online survey. The letter included the purpose of the study and its potential significance. The research respondents were free to opt out of the study at any time. The personal identities of the respondents were kept confidential.

After the respondents completed answering the questionnaire, the data were analyzed using summary statistics (mean) and frequency. The study ensures that it is free of plagiarism and the results are accurately presented in this study.

Results and discussion

This section presents, analyzes, and interprets the data. This includes the type of political posters that appealed to Gen Z, the level of understanding of political posters in terms of visual design and wit of content, and the level of influence of political posters to voting preferences in terms of visual design and wit of content.

Type of political posters that appealed to Gen Z

Political posters are classified into several types: (a) those that contain witty or humorous content, (b) those that are visually attractive and/or highly colorful, (c) those that rely more on visuals with minimal text, (d) those that emphasize text with fewer visual elements, (e) those produced in large formats, and (f) those designed in smaller sizes.

Study shows that Gen Z population prefers political posters that contain witty or humorous content (rank 1 with 43.1 percent). This is closely followed by political posters that are visually attractive and/or highly colorful (rank 2 with 36.21 percent). Political posters that rely more on visuals with minimal text ranked next (rank 3 with 17.25 percent). From the top three choices, this finding reveals that political posters that have witty or humorous content appealed most to the Gen Z population.

The findings revealed that young generation reads the content of political posters rather than just be enticed with colorful posters. This can be attributed to the fact that Gen Z are 'mobile-phone-users' group. Information for them shall be handy and right on their fingertips. Since most of them have mobile gadgets, they can easily browse and read witty posts, and cross post these when they like the contents. The affirmation of 'likes' on their social media accounts encourages them to read and choose witty posts, which they share to their friends on social media, which relatively somehow become a source of online social interaction. This online exchange, particularly

on political posters, becomes channels in persuading other people to like and vote for the political candidate.

Wells (2016) stated that the objective of campaign posters is to persuade individuals who are indecisive to vote for whoever seems to be the most popular candidate. With wittier and visually attractive posters, the more that candidate appears to be promoted. Political posters and their distinct forms of art remain an important means of expression. Hence, posters must resonate with the crowd through the wit of its content. The nice thing about political posters is that they can be made by anybody. In a discussion-interview between Jakab and Wert posted on *Gagosian Quarterly*, they agreed that posters needed context to be relevant. Its impact can change people's apathy into fun and excitement (Jakab & Wert 2020). Similarly, campaign experts claim that clever and witty phrases on political posters have the tendencies to work best, especially for political candidates who are not well-known (Nelson 2017). This implies that witty contents can attract more attention from people, hence, enhancing the popularity of the political candidate. In today's generation of high social media usage, popularizing political candidates is no longer a problem. It will only take a witty message for the campaign poster to be widely promoted and disseminated, especially in this age of social media.

Understanding of political posters

The understanding of political posters among the Gen Z population is classified in terms of visual design and wit of content. Visual design refers to the effective use of striking colors, clear and readable font styles and sizes, proper mounting for mobility, and an appropriate poster size that ensures visibility and attracts attention from the crowd, especially in political campaigns. In terms of wit of content, political poster captions should be short, sweet, and easy to remember, with catchy and trendy text that highlights the candidates' positive characteristics, avoids attacking rival opponents, and presents messages that are both fun and verifiably true.

Findings of the study revealed that Gen Z population have extremely understood the importance of good visual design, and wit of content in political posters. With an average mean of 4.49, the data showed that visual design and wit of content have great impact to people. In terms of visual design, the study showed that political posters must have good visual, use of striking colors, use of clear font sizes and styles, enough size to stand out in the crowd, and properly

mounted for easy mobility. In terms of wit of content, the texts and captions on political posters must be easy to remember, catchy and trendy, should not be attacking rival candidates, but rather highlight the characteristics of the candidates. The posters must be fun but can be easily verified and fact-checked.

Kuttig (2020) cited that posters are very necessary to fully understand how local politicians communicate with their communities, as well as how intra-party connections are constructed and power is shared. This importance is crucial to building the image of politicians through good visual and wit in their political posters which can be largely seen in public. In the case of Bangladesh for example, she maintained that posters are important aspect of hypervisibility of politics that can define political culture of the country. The collection of political posters creates the spectacle of a political performance during election campaigns. *ACE Encyclopedia* (n.d.) cited that the intended meaning is lost when the appearance of posters overpowers function. In this case, these political posters become a waste of paper, and public nuisance. Thus, there is a need for good balance between aesthetic and content of posters to serve its purpose of promoting the political candidate. BU School of Theology (2019) contended that posters do have an influence. Election posters influence voting behavior by promoting name familiarity, emphasizing competitiveness, and encouraging engagement.

Influence of political posters to voting preferences

The political posters are very influential to the voting preferences of Gen Z in terms of visual design and wit of content. In terms of visual design, color combinations and patterns in political posters increase my interest in supporting the candidate, shapes and sizes influence my liking toward them, integrated images and photos encourage my support, font styles and text types strengthen my desire to support the candidate, and overall visual balance enhances my willingness to follow the candidate. In terms of wit of content, the content of the message reflects the political ideology of the candidate, the captions are fun and highly entertaining, the poster content is trendy and “hashtagable,” the messages are socially relatable, and the statements written on the posters carry deep meanings.

Findings of this study revealed that visual design and wit of content of political posters have very influential effect to the voting preferences of Gen Z (with an average mean of 4.14).

Data showed that visual design of political posters in terms of color combinations and patterns, shapes and sizes, integration of images and photos of candidates, readable font styles and text-types, and incorporation of good visual balance are very influential to the voting preferences among Gen Z. These are the qualities of good political posters that can have appeal to the audience especially the Gen Z population. In the same way, wit of content of political posters in terms of the reflection on posters about the candidate's political ideology, fun and highly entertaining poster captions, trendy and "hashtagable" contents, socially-relatable messages, and impactful with deeper meaning are extremely influential to the voting preferences of Gen Z. Witty captions are the trend these days because people can easily relate with especially when these go viral when posted and shared on social media.

This supports the findings of Nadal et al. (2021) on the case of campaign posters during the Mayoralty race in Bogota, Colombia in 2019. Their study revealed that slogan on posters was an important deciding factor on voting choices. This is in consonance to the findings of this study where posters that have socially-relatable messages with deeper meanings have great influence on voting preferences.

In a similar study, Martinez (2016) found out that political posters interact with the audience by the interplay of various visual and linguistic choices. Messages that can be read in the posters are explicit because these are short, catchy and consciously chosen with the intention of influencing audience to vote for the political candidate. She found out that written messages on posters reveal the characteristics and the discourses of the political candidate. The slogans or captions and the visual representation of politicians suggest what type of politicians they are.

Steven Heller, as cited by Smith (2017), stated that political posters give the opportunity to look at things ironically. He further stated though that the importance of political posters is situational, because these are direct response to the event which is portable and easily displayable. Hence, during this period of shareability and online visibility, political posters' contribution to the candidate's success cannot be ignored.

Conclusion and recommendation

In conclusion, political posters are indeed powerful campaign tools to promote political candidates with the goal of increasing votes. Since

these can highly influence voting choices, it is important to pay attention to the preparation and presentation of visual (visual design) and linguistic (content) characteristics of posters. Political strategies shall not underestimate what posters can do to the political parties. Hence, they have to be creative in presenting their candidates through these political posters by paying attention to what type of posters that appeal most to the Gen Z voting population.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended to political parties, candidates and their strategists to study what the people want and wish for their leaders to be. The media shape the content of the message and how should people receive such information. Through political posters, the political party will be able to share to the voters what type of government they will expect once they vote and elect the leaders.

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