

Voices in Cyberspace: A Move-Step Analysis of Politics-centered Online News Editorials

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the discourse organization of politics-centered news editorials published from 2021 to 2022 by Rappler. Specifically, the paper examined the rhetorical moves and steps that characterize the discourse structures of thirty (30) online news editorials that tackle political issues relevant to the 2022 Philippine elections. Findings revealed that these online news editorials generally followed the two-move pattern in constructing the orientation, exposition, and summation blocks. Regarding the steps employed in the move structures, news editorials demonstrated organizational tendencies reflective of Ho's (2004) Model of General Paper Essay with minor variations in terms of sequencing the steps. Based on these findings, the order of the rhetorical moves and steps varied from one editorial to another as these structural segments were employed. The observation of these rhetorical moves scrutinized how the writers presented their arguments logically to make their claims sound, credible, and agreeable to the target readers.

Keywords: discourse organization, genre analysis, moves and steps, online news editorials

1 Introduction

As an everyday source of information for current events and news, newspaper discourse, specifically editorials, has received particular attention from linguists and any other language study enthusiasts (Tarrayo & Duque, 2011). In light of the 2022 Philippine elections, it is

necessary to examine how politics-centered news editorials are structured and organized in orienting and shaping the readers' mindset and stance on this current and significant affair.

According to Anker (2005 as cited in Tarrayo & Duque, 2011), an editorial writer takes position on a controversial issue and gives reasons and supporting evidence to convince readers to accept the position. The role of journalism as a political actor is undeniably evident and the extent to which journalists arrange and organize content to put forward political agenda in news editorials has increasingly piqued the interest of scholars in terms of genre analysis. Recently, the very nature of news consumption has change drastically, especially during the height of pandemic. With the evident shift, the discourse organization of news editorials in the digital space poses an interesting subject for genre-based study.

While there have been existing studies on the analysis of news editorials in various contexts (e.g. Belmonte, 2007; Tarrayo & Duques, 2011; Firmstone, 2019; Syed et al., 2020), to the best of the researchers' knowledge and as evidenced by the relevant literature reviewed, none has been specifically devoted yet in conducting a genre-based analysis on online news editorials that cover political issues in the local context. The present study is intended to fill this research gap. This paper, thus, attempted to make contribution to existing knowledge by analyzing specifically the move and step structures of online news editorials that tackle issues on the 2022 Philippine elections.

The corpus of the present study involves online news editorials published from 2021 to 2022 in Rappler, a Philippine digital news media based in Metro Manila and founded by Filipino

journalists. The decision to focus on this online news source is the fact that it is the first all-digital news organization in the country (Ranada, 2018 as cited in Laterno, Magallanes, & Placio, 2019), which has become one of the leading and frequently-read primary sources of people for news consumption. According to Top Websites Ranking for News and Media Publishers in the Philippines updated in 2022, Rappler ranks third in the leading online news brand and first among the all-digital news in the list.

In this regard, the study first attempts to examine the rhetorical move structures that characterize the three blocks of news editorials classified by Ho (2004). Move analysis, as elaborated by Swales (1981, 1990 in Maswana et al., 2015), is a common example in a specific genre-level analysis that examines the communicative purposes of structural segments in a textual discourse. Upton & Cohen (2009) asserts that analysis on moves starts with identifying the sequence of move types and describing the communicative function that each serves in the target genre. With these, the researchers adopt the model of Ho (2004) to describe the overall discourse structure of the political news editorials in relation to the sequence of their move types.

Furthermore, the present study aims to explore the different steps employed in the blocks of online news editorials. Steps for a move refer to the set of rhetorical choices that writers use to realize a specific functional purpose (Yang & Allison, 2003 as cited in Soler-Monreal, 2016). The sub-moves making up the move patterns can be described in terms of interactional roles that correspond to speech acts (Ho, 2004). In relevance, the taxonomy of steps in every move purported by Ho (2004) serves as the framework of this study to determine the sequences of embedded steps in the political news editorials of Rappler.

The findings of this study will contribute to the contemporary understanding on the communicating intentions of online news editorials in tackling political issues, specifically electoral events, as revealed through its structural organization, making it as one of the frequently read primary sources of people for news consumption.

2 Review of Related Literature

2.1 News Editorials on Political Agenda

News editorials are regarded as a complex activity of argumentative writing that takes position on controversial issues and convince readers to accept the position through laying out supporting evidences (Anker, 2005 as cited in Tarrayo & Duque, 2011). Particularly, editorials are written to influence public opinion, encourage critical thinking, and motivate readers to act on an issue. The distinctive role of editorials is that they serve as the collective identity of the editorial board and intend to represent the public voice and opinion of the governing body of a newspaper (Firmstone, 2019).

It is an undisputed fact that media, specifically in electronic forms, have provided people a forum for political expression. El Baff et al. (2020) states that news editorials “argue about political issues in order to challenge or reinforce the stance of readers with different ideologies” (p. 3154). At present, demand for more transparency in politics is increasingly growing. The active engagement of citizens to political topics shows how they form their opinions about relevant issues through paying opinion to the information supplied by the media.

2.2 Moves and Steps in News Editorials

Previous studies have begun to examine how information presented in news editorials are structured and organized by analyzing the moves and steps. Tongsibsong (2012) conducted a genre analysis of English editorials regarding hard news in broadsheet and tabloid newspapers focusing on move analysis using the frameworks of move analysis introduced by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). Findings revealed that there is one common move structure in the broadsheet newspaper’s editorials and two common move structures in tabloid newspaper editorials. Six similar features of the editorials in broadsheet and tabloid newspapers were also found. With the same intent, the present study intended to analyze the moves and steps employed in the discourse organization of online news editorials.

Another study was done by Orosa, Garcia, and Santorum (2013) who conducted an in- depth content analysis on the features and degrees of adaptation of the editorials of five newspapers from different European countries to the communicative online environment. The

traditional and online editorials were compared and contrasted according to roles, main objectives, structures, text types, use of hypertext and multimedia, reader's participation, and updating. The findings revealed that the online editorials maintain the traditional content and format features of printed editorials, and shows little adaptation to the digital platform. Unlike Orosa et al.'s (2013) study, this paper focused only on examining online news editorials taken from Rappler, which mainly publishes digital news in the Philippines.

Tarrayo and Duque (2011) described the discourse structure and textual metadiscourse in Philippine newspaper editorials. The research utilized Ho's (2004) model of a possible discourse structure of a General Paper essay in analyzing a total of 24 editorials published in 2010 by two leading Philippine broadsheets. Results of the study indicated that the articles followed the two-move pattern in each block. Like any other argumentative essays, the editorials are structured in a way that the orientation block introduces the writer's claim on an issue; the exposition block expands the discussion of this claim; and the summation block provides a summary of the writer's primary point and a recommendation or solution.

In another study conducted by Gapas (2016), Ho's (2004) model of General Paper (GP) essay was also adopted as a framework to formally investigate the discourse organization of opinion articles found in university-level newspapers. Findings of the study revealed that the articles observed the two-move pattern in the orientation, exposition, and summation blocks and employed two frequently used specific steps in each block.

Similarly, the present study also adopts Ho's (2004) framework to investigate the discourse organization of political news editorials from online news sources. Specifically, the model is utilized to examine the specific moves and steps that were employed in presenting political issues through the editorials. Although the present study used Ho's (2004) model, this paper mainly focused on thirty (30) news editorials published in Rappler.

By and large, these empirical studies serve their purpose as substantial references to the present study. As observed, most of the reviewed studies were only focused on the discourse structure of printed news editorials and there was no study that analyzed online editorial articles in the local context. Hence, there is a need to fill the research gap through analyzing the discourse

organization of online news editorials that tackle political agenda in light of the 2022 Philippine elections.

3 Theoretical Background

Ho's (2004) Model of a Possible Discourse Structure for a General Paper (GP) Essay serves as the framework for the current study.

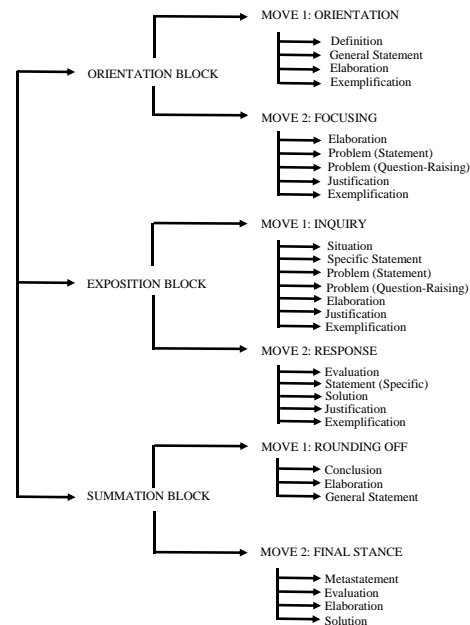


Figure 1. The model of a general paper essay by Ho (2004)

The characterization of the online editorial texts as a discourse unit is done by adopting Ho's (2004) Model of a General Paper Essay. Ho (2004) described the possible text structure and organization patterns that characterize the General Paper (GP) essay, in which she proposed three blocks in this model, namely the Orientation, Exposition, and Summation block. Each block is comprised of a two-move pattern that consists accordingly of specific steps.

Based on the literature reviewed, local printed opinion articles and newspaper editorials have been examined through the framework of Ho (2004), which marks the model's observance to the journalistic principles of editorial writing. Examining the corpus of the present study using this model reveals how the general components of the editorial's macrostructure – orientation, exposition, and summation blocks – are structured and organized in tackling politics-centered issues.

4 Research Objective and Questions

This study aimed to conduct a genre-based analysis on the discourse organization of politics-centered news editorials published from 2021 to 2022 by Rappler, a Philippine-based digital news media, through examining the rhetorical moves and steps employed in online editorials that tackle political issues in light of the 2022 Philippine elections.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What rhetorical moves as proposed by Ho (2004) characterize the discourse structures of Rappler's news editorials?; and
2. What specific steps are employed in the move structures of the orientation, exposition, and summation blocks of the online news editorials?

5 Methodology

This study aimed to conduct a genre-based analysis on the discourse organization of politics-centered news editorials published from 2021 to 2022 by Rappler, a Philippine-based digital news media, through examining the rhetorical moves and steps employed in online editorials that tackle political issues in light of the 2022 Philippine elections. Structural interpretation of the rhetorical moves and steps from printed and online news sources are based on the model of Ho (2004).

The research study employed a qualitative-quantitative design in analyzing thirty (30) editorial news articles published from 2021 to 2022 by Rappler. The quantitative design of the study utilized frequency counts of the moves and steps identified by Ho (2004) that were evident in the news editorials. As for the qualitative design, the research employed rhetorical analysis to describe the discourse organization of news editorials published in online news sites based on the move structures and steps employed.

A total of thirty (30) genre samples of news editorials were carefully analyzed to examine the discourse organization of the editorials. Selection of the genre samples for analysis was based on the relevance of the issues to the 2022 Philippine elections. After the initial steps, the news editorials collected were encoded and reformatted using word-processing software such as Microsoft Word. Each article was first

analyzed, divided, and classified according to the three blocks presented in the model of Ho (2004). Afterwards, macro data analyses were conducted, where the rhetorical moves and the specifics steps used in the political news editorials were examined based on the General Paper Essay Model of Ho (2004).

After the discourse blocks, moves, and steps were classified based on Ho's (2004) model, the occurrences of the rhetorical moves and steps in every block were counted, tallied, and tabulated on a frequency table. Whereas the organizational moves were counted and tallied based on whether they occurred in each block for every online news editorial, the steps were counted based on their occurrence in every rhetorical move.

To answer the first subproblem, the researchers counted the rhetorical moves that characterize the discourse structure of online news editorials. Results were tallied manually and were tabulated for the frequencies and percentage of the moves. A rhetorical analysis was utilized for further genre-based analysis.

As for the second subproblem, the news editorials were examined by determining the steps that were utilized in every move as identified by Ho (2004). The researcher tallied and tabulated the results to show the frequency and percentage of the steps evident in the editorial articles.

After the presentation of each move and step, the researchers extracted specific samples from these online news editorials to illustrate the most prevalent move and step structures in the discourse organization of news editorials that tackle issues regarding the country's upcoming national elections.

6 Results and Discussion

This section presents the key results of the study with reference to its aims. The sequence of the discussion is as follows: (1) the rhetorical moves that characterize the discourse structure of online news editorials; and (2) specific steps employed in the move structures of each block of online news editorials.

6.1 Moves Employed in Rappler's Online News Editorials

The data in the following table present the frequency and percentage distributions of move

patterns employed in the political news editorials from Rappler news.

Move	F	%
Two-move pattern (i.e., Orientation block: Orientation/Focusing; Exposition block: Inquiry/Response; Summation block: Rounding off/Final stance)	27	90
Non-two-move pattern	3	10
Total	30	100

Table 1: Move patterns utilized in online news editorials

The findings in Table 1 suggest that the organization of online news editorials that tackle political issues in the country generally observes the two-move pattern in the orientation, exposition, and summation blocks classified in the study of Ho (2004). This indicates that the presentation of political issues in online news editorials may be structured in a manner similar to typical argumentative essays. Specifically, the news editorials were organized as follows: the orientation block provides an overview or a background of the topic, including the news media’s position on the political issue; the exposition block elaborates the general claim and gives an in-depth discussion of the issue; and the summation block synthesizes the ideas presented and discussed.

Steps	F	%
Orientation		
Orientation	30	17.44
Focusing	27	15.70
Exposition		
Inquiry	30	17.44
Response	28	16.27
Summation		
Rounding off	30	17.44
Final Stance	27	15.70
Total	172	100

Table 2: Move structures utilized in online news editorials

The findings in Table 1 suggest that the organization of online news editorials that tackle political issues in the country generally Table 2 above shows the rhetorical moves utilized in the news editorials from Rappler. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that the online articles frequently employ the first move in every block. Examining each, orientation, inquiry, and rounding off moves are consistently utilized in the orientation, exposition, summation blocks of all thirty (30) online news editorials, respectively.

First, in the orientation block, the use of the “Orientation” move indicates that in presenting the political issues in online news editorials, writers commonly begin by providing the background and context of the topic. This is followed by the “Focusing” move where the writer focuses on the discussion of a specific issue. Second, in the exposition block, the consistent use of “Inquiry” move suggests that online editorials tackle political issues by directly providing specific details that support the main argument. This is, then, followed by the “Response” move that allows the writer to develop a more in-depth discussion of the main ideas in the editorials, including their input on the issue. Lastly, “Rounding Off” move in the summation block is where the writer restates the thesis and provides conclusion based on the main ideas pointed out in the political issues covered in the articles. As for the “Final stance” move, this is used as a means of evaluating and further elaborating the ideas stated in the orientation block.

6.2 Steps Employed in Rappler’s Online News Editorials

The data in the following table present the frequency and percentage distributions of the steps utilized in the orientation, exposition, and summation blocks of political news editorials taken from Rappler news.

Orientation Block

Steps	F	%
General statement	30	37.97
Elaboration	23	29.11
Problem (Statement)	8	10.13
Problem (Question-raising)	7	8.86
Justification	5	6.33
Exemplification	4	5.06
Definition	2	2.53
Total	79	100

Table 3: Steps employed in the orientation block of online news editorials

Findings in Table 3 reveal that online news editorials use the general statement and elaboration steps more frequently than the other steps in presenting political issues. The above results agree with the findings of Gapas (2016) in his study regarding the discourse organization of Philippine university newspaper opinion columns. Introductions in the editorial articles must provide a general background of the presented argument to sustain the readers' attention and interest (Tan, 2003). Moreover, as emphasized by Brizee & Tardiff (2014 as cited in Gapas 2016), general statements consist of thesis statements that may contain the claims, points of views, interpretations, and cause-and-effect statements that the writers aim to convey. The use of the elaboration step is also evident in the orientation block of the news editorials, in which this step provides details, particulars, and any other elaborations of the preceding statement (Ho, 2004).

Aside from the aforementioned steps, the table also reveals the use of problem- statements and problem-questioning steps in online news editorials. Ho (2004) posits that these steps present aspects of a situation that require a response from the readers. It is through the use of either statement or explicit question form that the steps can be actualized. As writers provide general statements, they resort to the use of justification step to present reasons in support of the stated idea, and exemplification step to provide specific examples and concrete data and statistics. In addition, the definition step, which garnered the least frequency counts, is used in online news editorials to give context to an issue by explaining the meaning of a concept,

particularly the unfamiliar terms.

Exposition Block

Steps	F	%
Elaboration	85	20.83
Specific Statement	81	19.85
Problem (Question-raising)	70	17.16
Justification	58	14.22
Situation	31	7.60
Exemplification	26	6.37
Problem (Statement)	22	5.39
Evaluation	21	5.15
Solution	14	3.43
Total	408	100

Table 4: Steps employed in the exposition block of online news editorials

Upon examining the data presented, it can be inferred that the total frequency of steps in the exposition block of online news editorials has the highest number of occurrences compared to the other blocks. This can be attributed to the fact that sentence lengths in the exposition block vary, which involve the multiple uses of moves and steps to establish the particular details of the political issues and arguments tackled. This observation gives a nod to the assertion of Ho (2004) that among all the three blocks, exposition is the least predictable in terms of its move-step structure.

From these findings, it can be observed that elaboration and specific statement are two of the most frequently used steps in the online news editorials. In tackling political issues, these news editorials present specific statements to state a particular claim or proposition (Ho, 2004) and construct specific arguments in support of the main argument (Tan, 2003). These arguments, then, are developed and strengthened through the use of the elaboration step to provide detailed explanations of the preceding statements.

Moreover, other frequent steps that occurred in this block are problem (question-raising) and justification. After presenting a particular argument, the writers pose an explicit question to raise a problem and acquire a response from the readers. Given that the "response" move in this block primarily contains the input of the writers on the topic, writers justify the arguments presented through

providing reasons in support of the given statement. They also employ the situation step to provide background information by presenting facts and circumstances, particularly on the discussion of political issues. With the use of exemplification step, editorial writers are able to illustrate aspects of these propositions and assertions through giving concrete data and specific examples to compel readers to accept the claims.

Summation Block

Steps	F	%
Conclusion	24	25
Elaboration	24	25
General statement	19	19.79
Evaluation	15	15.63
Solution	14	14.58
Metastatement	0	0
Total	96	100

Table 5: Steps employed in the summation block of online news editorials

Table 5 presents frequency and percentage distributions of the steps used in the summation block. The summation block utilizes the “rounding off” and “final stance” moves. Data show that among the summation steps, the most frequently used are elaboration and conclusion. Contrary to the findings of Gapas (2016) where not many writers opted to provide a direct conclusion, the genre samples of editorials in the present study frequently use conclusion to reiterate the ideas in the preceding statements, and summarize the main points of the issue.

Moreover, the general statement in online news editorials is utilized to state in broad terms the proposition presented in the summation block. The use of evaluation and solution steps is also evident, where news editorials evaluate the circumstances and put forward recommendations and proposals as to how the problem could be solved. As stated by Tan (2003), closing paragraphs must leave a strong impression to the readers. This can be achieved by integrating evaluations, possible solutions, and judgements. With reference to the present findings, this assertion is observed in the online news editorials that tackle politics-related issues.

Based on the sequences of steps in the online new editorials that tackle political issues

in the country, it can be noted that some editorial articles do not exactly follow the structural order of Ho’s model as these steps are employed depending on the purposes and intentions that the writers hope to convey in the editorials. In a similar sense, the order of the rhetorical moves also varies from one editorial article to another, in which some online news editorials are characterized with two-move patterns, while others follow a non-two-move pattern.

By and large, observation of the moves and steps give readers a logical framework of the editorial writers’ ideas that will allow them to weigh carefully the information received. This allows news consumers to carefully examine how the writers present concrete pieces of evidence logically to prove their claim and make their arguments sound, credible, and agreeable to the target readers. All of these can potentially influence people’s future decisions and actions, especially that the 2022 election is approaching and the readers, who are citizens of this country, must be wise in choosing the deserving leaders.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, these are the conclusions of the study:

1. The discourse structures of politics-centered news editorials from the online news site, Rappler, generally follow the two-move patterns in constructing the orientation, exposition, and summation blocks. These patterns are only apparent to some extent as there are few news editorials that do not observe the two-move pattern. Regardless, all news editorials consistently employ the first moves, namely the orientation, inquiry, and rounding off, in every block. These suggest that online news editorials tackle political issues in a manner that begins with establishing the background and context of the topic, presenting, then, specific details to support the main arguments, and synthesizing the ideas and main points raised to ensure effective communication of the topics and stances to the readers.
2. With regard to the steps employed in the move structures of Rappler’s news editorials, the orientation block frequently used the general statement and elaboration steps; the exposition block revealed the frequent occurrences of elaboration and specific statement steps, and the summation block

frequently utilized the conclusion and elaboration steps in synthesizing the main ideas presented. These steps demonstrated organizational tendencies reflective of Ho's (2004) model with minor variations in terms of the sequencing of steps. In other words, it can be noted that not all online news editorials adhere exactly to the structural order of Ho's model as evident in the varied sequences of the steps employed. This implies that the organization of rhetorical steps in online news editorials depends on the objectives and purposes of the writers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following are recommended:

1. Given the limited number of samples on this genre-based analysis, future studies with larger samples or corpus of online news editorials can be undertaken to arrive at more conclusive results.
2. Online news editorials can serve as authentic examples of argumentative texts that can be used in pedagogy to aid learners in analyzing discourse structures, in evaluating facts and viewpoints, and in presenting their own arguments concerning current news and affairs.
3. Ho's (2004) Model of General Paper (GP) Essay should be introduced not only to students, but also to writers in general. The moves and steps in the model can be a helpful guide to them in constructing and organizing written discourses, and maintaining the coherence of the ideas presented.
4. The prevalent rhetorical move and step patterns in online news editorials can be employed or enhanced by writers in the process of writing essays to provide sound claims and logical arguments to the target readers.

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Appendices

Appendix A. News Editorial Articles

- Rappler News Editorials from <https://www.rappler.com/>
- “2021 is when we act and build, or bust” (January 4, 2021)
- “Why is the government afraid of community pantry” (April 6, 2021)
- “China and Duterte’s roaring defense” (May 10, 2021)
- “The boxing in the Senate and the circus 2022” (May 31, 2021)
- “Politics first before brownout, before town” (June 7, 2021)
- “Duque, Lao, and Duterte’s crackdown” (August 23, 2021)
- “Get rid of false heroes” (August 30, 2021)
- “The promoters of money heist in the pandemic” (September 13, 2021)
- “Pharmally hits the pavement” (September 27, 2021)
- “Justice is coming” (September 20, 2021) “Mr. Duterte, that’s fine!” (October 4, 2021)
- “When the Ombudsman weaponizes SALNs against the public” (October 25, 2021)
- “The deluge of lies” (November 1, 2021)
- “Criminal or immoral: Accepting money during election period” (November 3, 2021)
- “Why the 2022 presidential candidates must have a global outlook” (November 4, 2021)
- “Substitution in aid of gangster politics” (November 15, 2021)
- “This is the era of fake hero” (November 29, 2021)
- “We have one, big democracy project. What to do?” (December 13, 2021)
- “Outshining the tyrant” (December 27, 2021)
- “2022, the year to be political” (December 28, 2021)
- “P203-billion debt of the Marcos family, charge!” (March 25, 2022)
- “New Year call to Comelec: Follow in the footsteps of 35 tabulators” (January 3, 2022)
- “Do not be infected with Marcos Jr.’s Zoomicron” (January 19, 2022)
- “Evicting justice” (January 24, 2022)
- “Where are you headed?” (February 7, 2022)
- “Is this the last EDSA?” (February 21, 2022)
- “Be smart in voting, oil fuel crisis is here” (March 14, 2022)
- “Our democracy is not a family business” (March 28, 2022)
- “Lorraine Badoy, desecrated truth” (April 4, 2022)
- “Let us reclaim public space” (May 7, 2022)