

# Political Gaslighting of Trolls under the Duterte Regime

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## Abstract

When communication in social media platforms is used as a means for political control, it allows for a culture of truth manipulation and historical distortion to exist. The creation of troll armies as part of the government operations in countering critics and dissidents alike was to engage them in futile discourses. Composed of digital influencers, fake accounts, and algorithmic bots, their goal is to seemingly inflate Duterte's supporters, while also practicing a messianic culture in public opinion. Examining the psyche of online political trolls during the Duterte regime, this study explores how disinformation campaigns thrived through the social phenomenon of political gaslighting. Danah Boyd's concept of "attention hacking" elaborated how trolling is used as a psychological warfare against information in digital media spaces. Through a psychological approach, this study discusses the culture of influence, how trolls have the power to manipulate narratives to a convincing degree, which eventually translates to additional voter support. Rather than showing the large comprehensive network of trolling, this study contributes to the moral particularities and justifications that understands the developments of their interpersonal relationships as online political trolls. As the strategies of political deception in populism continues to advance, the troll presence and impact welcomed a wide support base of Duterte that carried over after his regime, which argues trolling as a propaganda used as a response to arguments and grievances, as well as to form beliefs, sentiments, and opinions.

**Keywords:** Online Trolling, Disinformation, Political Gaslighting