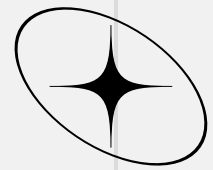


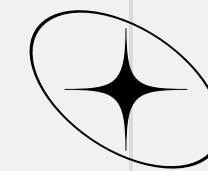
SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE PHILIPPINE ELECTIONS

Mara Cepeda

Philippines Correspondent, The Straits Times



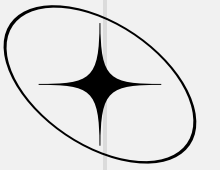
social media capital of the world



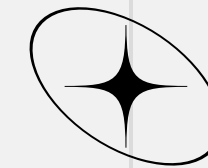
**social
media
capital
of the
world**



**most
vulnerable
to election
disinformation**

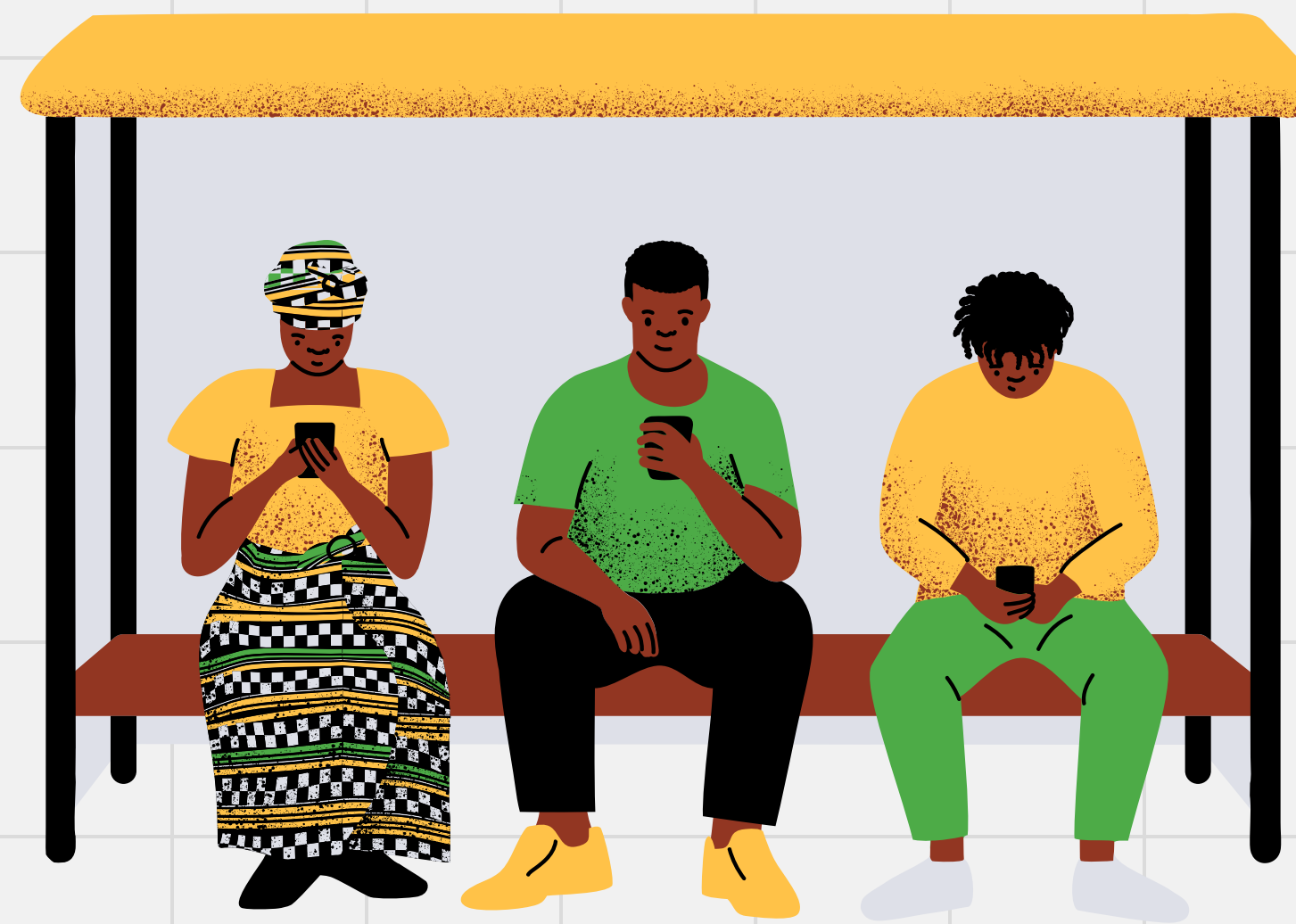


97.5 million



Filipino internet users at the start of 2025

Digital 2025 study
by Meltwater and We Are Social

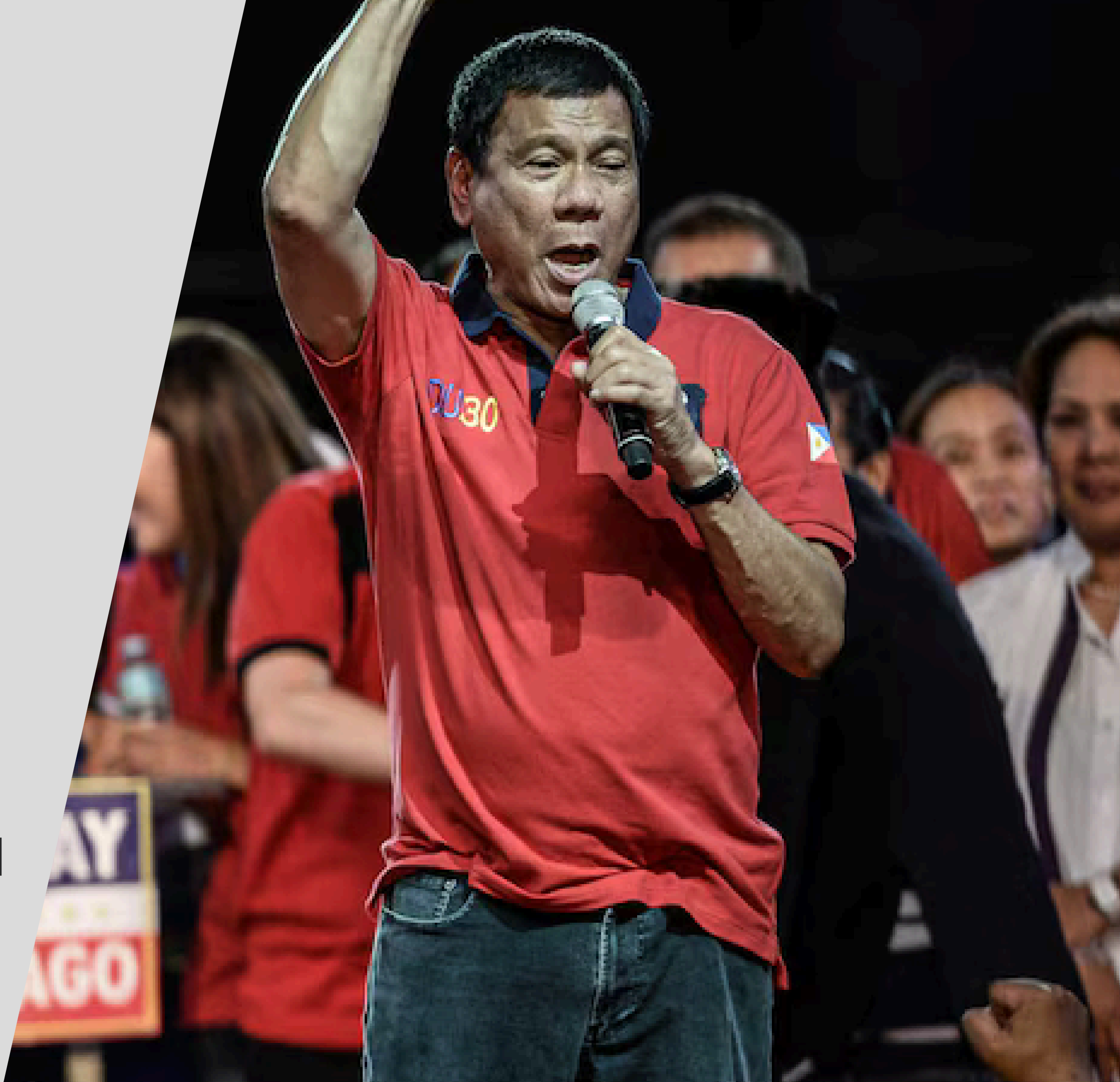






Rodrigo Duterte in 2016

- Weaponized social media to rule the 2016 presidential polls
- Strategy: Emotion over facts
- Raw, unfiltered messages straight to voters
- Sold his strongman image with the help of influencers, microinfluencers who branded him as the “authentic” choice
- Rise of troll farms



**The Duterte
government
weaponized
social media
to boost lies and
propaganda.**

**The Duterte
government
weaponized
social media
to boost lies and
propaganda.**

**Being critical
suddenly means
you are
"fake news" or
unpatriotic.**

**And who
benefitted from
Duterte's
weaponization
of social media?**

**And who
benefitted from
Duterte's
weaponization
of social media?**

**MARCOS,
who ran a well-
oiled campaign
that sought to
bury the past,
rally for unity,
and evade
scrutiny.**

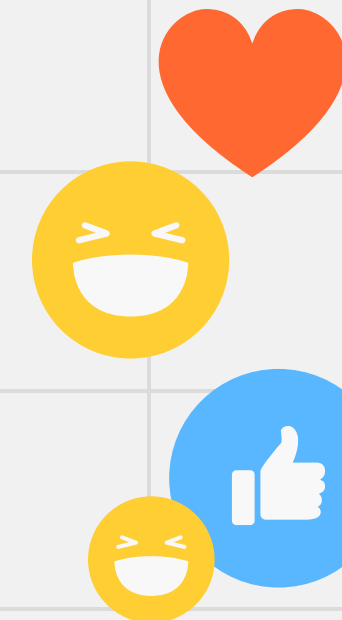
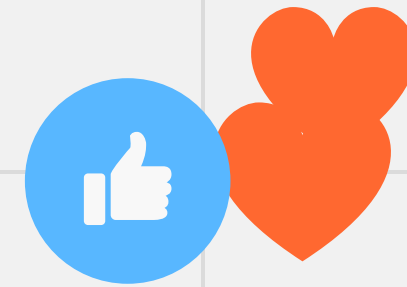
Ferdinand Marcos Jr in 2022

- Rewrote history about his dictator father's rule – Martial Law as “golden age” in PH
- Key battlegrounds were on TikTok and YouTube
- Algorithm manipulation ensured young voters saw propaganda before they saw facts.
- He avoided debates, dodged scrutiny, and let the internet shape his image for him.



Algorithm-driven echo chambers

- Social media platforms prioritize engagement, often promoting sensationalist and divisive content because they go viral.
- Traps Filipinos in their own echo chambers
- Voters only see content that reinforces their beliefs, reducing critical thinking.



Troll farms & AI-driven disinformation

- Paid operators spreading fake news and political propaganda
- Often with huge social media followers, dwarfing reach of journalists
- AI tools now being used to create deepfake videos, fake endorsements, and AI-generated political ads



Social media regulation, data privacy issues

- Social media platforms face little accountability in the Philippines.
- Some platforms have removed pro-Duterte and pro-Marcos disinformatin networks, but many still remain.
- Weak enforcement of Data Privacy Act allows misuse of voter data.



DISINFORMATION
REMAINS
A BIG THREAT,
ESPECIALLY WITH
THE DAWN OF AI.





**BUT ALL HOPE
IS NOT LOST.**

**WE NEED TO
KEEP FIGHTING.**



Journalists must work harder to regain the public's trust.

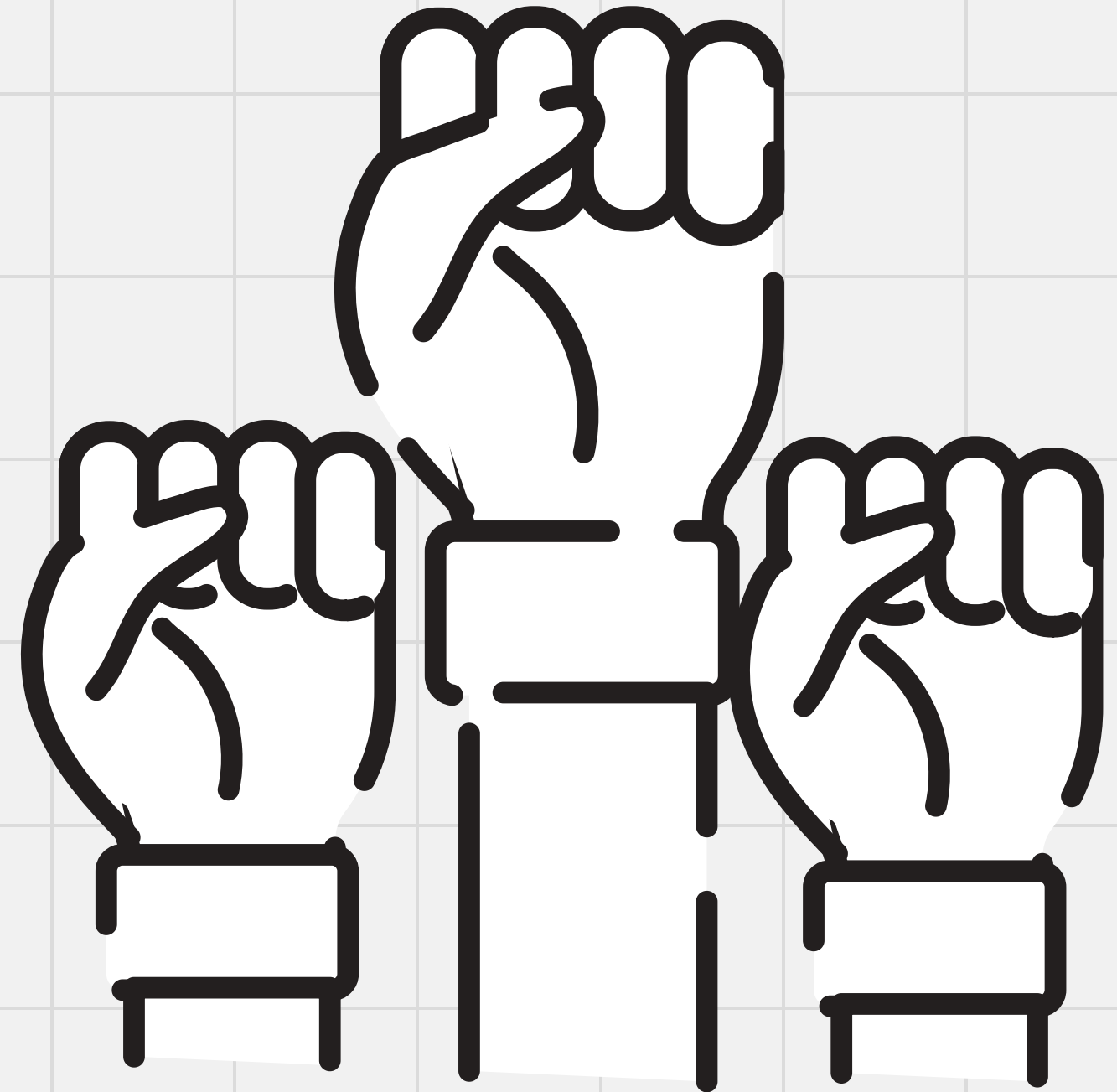
- Innovate on storytelling, including harnessing AI tools.
- Follow the audience, most of whom are now on Tiktok, IG Reels, and Youtube.
- Continue fact checking efforts.

Tsek✓.ph



What else can be done?

- Improve media literacy and vote awareness among Filipinos
- Stronger regulation vs online disinformation, enforce stricter social media campaign laws
- Demand accountability from social media platforms



Journalists cannot do it alone.



**Upholding
truth, justice & democracy
is every Filipino's
responsibility.**

