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## POSITIONING ANALYSIS OF DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAM BY THE NETIZENS

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### ABSTRACT

One of the challenges of the Department of Health on its herd immunity target during this COVID-19 pandemic is how to get the people vaccinated. The public is torn between getting vaccinated and not. The public's uncertainties are rooted in their confidence in the vaccine itself and the Department of Health, which implements the vaccination program. In this study, the researchers explored how Filipino netizens positioned the DOH in their COVID-19 vaccination programs. The researchers analyzed netizens' 137 comments on selected statements and announcements of DOH posted on their official Facebook page. Using the positioning theory as a method of this study, dominant positions were identified as disappointing, misleading, unreliable, inhumane, forceful, and bias. Likewise, counter positions were classified as protector, responsive, permissive, and optimistic. Also, the researchers explored the rights and duties ascribed to both the public and the DOH per position. By determining how the Filipino netizens positioned the DOH on their vaccination program, the agency could use these positions to improve their herd immunity by providing thorough information about the vaccine and its implementation programs. Positions have shaped and identified DOH to elevate, enhance, and innovate to handle and advocate public health policies and programs.

**KEYWORDS:** DOH, COVID-19 Vaccine, Positioning Theory, Netizens, Herd Immunity, social media

### INTRODUCTION

Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) has globally brought fear since its first outbreak in 2019. Likewise, vaccine apprehension poses a risk to global public health. Since an enormous global effort is

underway to produce a vaccine to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, little is known about community acceptability [1]. The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has resulted in a global health crisis that has profoundly impacted our positions in the world and our daily lives. Not only did the intensity of contagion spread and transmission patterns undermine our sense of security, but the safety precautions put in place to stop the virus from spreading also necessitated societal cooperation [2]. In the Philippines, COVID-19 commenced the pandemic in January 2020, when a Chinese carrier from Wuhan, China, entered the country via Hong Kong [3]. Shortly after, President Duterte ordered to ban Chinese nationals from Wuhan temporarily, China to enter the country [4]. However, after a year-long waiting, Pulse Asia's survey has shown Filipinos' hesitation to get a vaccination [5], [6].

Vaccines: a solution to COVID-19. According to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the development of COVID 19 vaccines has been an extraordinary success. While vaccinating most of the global population is an enormous challenge, one for which gaining and maintaining “public trust in COVID 19 vaccines and vaccination will be as essential as the effectiveness of the vaccines themselves.” Moreover, the experience with COVID 19 will likely shape confidence in other vaccines making it even more important to build trust [7].

Trust in vaccination and the ability of governments to communicate and successfully deliver a vaccination program is critically dependent on (a). the extent to which the government can instill and maintain public confidence in the effectiveness and safety of the vaccines; (b). the competence and reliability of the institutions that deliver them; (c). the principles and processes that guide government decisions and actions in vaccine procurement, distribution, prioritization, and administration; (d). the capacity and effectiveness of regulatory agencies in handling issues and consistently communicating as events arise while retaining public confidence in their review processes; and (e). the effectiveness of the public engagement and communications that accompany these.

The OECD [7] further stated that successful vaccination campaigns also require governments to partner with and support community organizations to conduct “extensive and well-managed community engagement’.” Different populations’ specific concerns need a thorough understanding, prior experiences with vaccination and the health system in general, religious and political affiliations, and socio-economic status. It is also essential to ensure that government actions are open to public scrutiny and that public institutions engage with the population by (a). Proactively releasing timely information on vaccination strategies, modalities, and accomplishments in disaggregated, user-friendly, and open-source formats; (b). Enhancing transparent and coherent public communication to address misinformation and the “infodemic”; and (c). Engaging the public when developing vaccination strategies and in the form and content of key communications.

Finally, “fairness is a hallmark of human behavior that underpins social cohesion and trust.” Therefore, governments must manage public expectations and explain why it is fair that particular population groups within a country are prioritized for vaccination.

Fundamentally, effective health communication entails trust between the public and the scientific community. Building confidence in vaccines 'implies trust in the vaccine (the product), trust in the vaccinator or other health professional (the provider), and trust in those who make the decisions about vaccine provision (the policy-maker)'. In other words, trust springs from credibility. Trust and credibility are transparency, which entails a consistent effort to disclose necessary information from all parties in any health-related endeavor. This means being upfront about factual information—the science of newly manufactured vaccines, their risks, and limitations—and the circumstances with which they will be given to an anxious public [8].

Department of Health: Response programs, and criticisms. In March 2020, the Department of Health announced the first local transmission of COVID-19 in the Philippines. Since then, the national government has been implementing interventions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 at least. These interventions were anchored on the National Plan Against COVID-19, which later was termed the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccines, to provide operational guidance in implementing the COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination program [3].

The National government recognizes the considerable challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically affecting our lives and economy. It was responsible for ensuring effective governance in implementing programs as the country set out to win the battle against COVID-19. The plan resulted from concerted efforts of experts from various government agencies and private sectors. The Department of Health played a crucial role in exercising command and control of the services [9].

Corpuz [10] proposed Multisectoral Approach (MSA) as a solution. There will be collaboration among stakeholder groups from government, civil society, private and religious sectors, and sectors of health and economy. With MSA, the government can maximize knowledge, expertise, reach, and resources by including several sectors, such as interfaith alliances, and benefit from their combined and diversified strengths as they work toward a common objective of increasing public trust in vaccinations [10].

While it is true that the success of COVID-19 vaccination in the country is a shared responsibility where all members of the society are strongly encouraged, the more considerable burden is shared by the government, specifically the Department of Health. DOH is at the frontline of the country's vaccination program.

According to Our World in Data [11], only 2.4% of the country's total population is fully vaccinated, and only 4.7% is partly vaccinated. That is a long way before reaching herd immunity against COVID-19. According to the World Health Organization [12], a substantial population would need to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. Assessing the present data, the DOH would need to reassess its vaccination portfolio. Where could the lapses be?

Filipinos' positions on COVID-19 vaccination. In February 2021, the first batch of COVID-19 vaccines arrived in the Philippines and was distributed by March 2021 [13]. However, Pulse Asia [14] further reported that even though the majority of Filipino adults are concerned about contracting COVID-19, only 16% are willing and decided to get vaccines, while most of them said they are not getting vaccinated (61%) and are undecided (23%). Among the reasons concerned the respondents were safety (84%), effectiveness (7%), unnecessary (6%), accessibility (1%), and cost (1%).

Additionally, in an online article posted by Dancel [15], he elaborated that the hesitation of the Filipinos to be vaccinated is due to brand preferences of available vaccines in the Philippines. Thus, the reluctance was rooted in the government officials' "brand-agnostic" vaccine policy. However, President Duterte threatened to arrest those who refuse COVID-19 vaccines as the nation ramps up inoculations to prevent the spread of the highly contagious delta variant [16].

Many Filipinos are reluctant to participate in the government's vaccination campaign due to the rushed production of COVID-19 vaccines and other difficulties. As a result, gaining public faith in the COVID-19 vaccines is critical. But since many individuals have more confidence in the leaders of their churches, the CBCP is working with the Philippine government to vaccinate 70 million Filipinos against COVID-19 by 2021 to attain herd immunity [17].

COVID-19 vaccine, and social media. Nowadays, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp are significant sources for disseminating information and news to the general public. Still, it, unfortunately, causes more panic in developing countries and spreads misinformation or fake news [2]. However, when used correctly, social media can be a valuable tool for disseminating and receiving pertinent information for patients, clinicians, and scientists [18].

Social media can also be effectively used to communicate health information to the general public during a pandemic. Emerging infectious diseases, such as COVID-19, almost always result in increased usage and consumption of media of all forms by the general public for information. Therefore, social media has a crucial role in peoples' position of disease exposure, resultant decision-making, and risk behaviors. As users generate the news on social media, such information can be subjective or inaccurate and frequently includes misinformation and conspiracy theories. Hence, accurate and timely information must be disseminated to the general public about emerging threats, such as SARS-CoV-2 [19].

In a survey, the majority (83%) of tweets in the Philippines were positive and enthusiastic about the idea of vaccination. Also, the said survey on Twitter shows that 9% had a neutral reaction toward vaccination, and 8% had negative sentiments. Sentiment analysis toward COVID-19 vaccines can help the Philippine government make wise decisions regarding allocating funds and vaccination rollout plans. The journey of winning the battle against COVID-19 still has a long way to go.

However, having effective vaccines and citizens willing to be vaccinated is a great move toward achieving this goal [20].

In addition, the public uses social media to air its grievances against the vaccine. They find social media a medium for them to express their opinions and explain why they refuse to take the vaccines despite the strong vaccination drive by the government.

In this paper, the researchers aim to reveal the position and sentiments of Filipinos toward the COVID-19 vaccine posted on the Department of Health Facebook page. Moreover, to delve into the positions of the Filipinos as they voice it out on different online platforms. The researchers would like to gather this information from Facebook comments posted on various DOH threads.

Further, the researchers will focus on how people assume different “positions”, “social positions”, “roles”, “statuses” or “masks”. These terms describe the different identities that people assume during interactions, emphasizing the necessity of understanding this process to understand why people act as they do. This paper will further explore the significant challenges and opportunities associated with the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, with implications on acceptance, trust, and safety in protection against the virus disease.

### **Positioning Theory Triangle as Framework**

Positioning Theory is one theoretical and methodological tool to analyze how social phenomena are produced through discourse [21]. In this study, positioning refers to assigned roles with the corresponding rights and duties [22], [23].

Furthermore, the positioning triangle (or triad), an analytical framework under positioning theory, posits three mutually significant factors in unfolding social episodes. The factors used to fulfill the research goal are positions, storylines, and social forces of discursive acts or speech acts [24]. These factors determine the distribution of rights and responsibilities ascribed to the entity in a given context. Also, the positioning triangle covers the moral orders or the standards that serve as a pattern of interactions ranging from small groups of individuals up to more prominent sects or even nations. Moral orders encompass not just ideas about what is good and what is evil, as well as explicit and implicit beliefs about the distribution of rights and duties to think, talk, act, and even feel in specific ways [25].

This study focuses on the conversation where social phenomena are produced [26], [27]. It involves comments posted by the netizens on social media such as Facebook. These comments pertain to the Filipinos' positions toward the DOH vaccination program. Their positions are analyzed regarding how netizens position themselves and the DOH. Subsequently, this also entails ascribing the rights and duties of both DOH and the netizens. Positioning theory will help shed light on how the public views the DOH's vaccination program.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In this study, using Positioning Theory as a frame, the researchers attempt to answer the questions, “What is the position of the Filipino netizens towards the DOH vaccination program? How is DOH positioned?”. As we identify how DOH is positioned, the rights and duties are attributed to the people, and DOH will also be determined.

### **METHOD**

The research design used in this study is qualitative research, specifically Positioning Theory. This study aims to gain insight and explore the depth, richness, and complexity inherent in the phenomenon happening on social media about the Department of Health’s (DOH) distribution of Covid 19 vaccines using positioning analysis.

In positioning theory, “position” and “positioning” are general metaphors to grasp how persons are located within conversations. The subjects are observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines [28], [22]. The researchers checked the comments of the Filipino online communities using the Facebook page of the Department of Health regarding the context of Covid 19 vaccines.

On the other hand, the Facebook page of the Department of Health was utilized as the online platform by researchers. This online platform gathered enough information to easily access the public opinion of Filipino online communities using the public opinion that Liu et al. [29] used. As to the aggregate of feelings, wishes, attitudes, and thoughts held by the general public about public affairs with media as the carrier.

### **DATA PROCEDURES**

The researchers utilized only one social media platform to obtain direct and lesser bias of positions of the netizens. Specifically, the researchers used the Department of Health’s Facebook page to gather the netizens’ comments. Researchers identified seven data sources from the said Facebook page according to the relevance of the topic, the COVID-19 vaccination program of the Department of Health.

Moreover, the pool from which final extracts for analysis were obtained was the first 50 comments of each source's total number of comments to achieve the data cleaning. However, the extracts were further screened corresponding to their presented positions. These extracts led to a total of 137 comments from all the sources. Other comments that showed no positions about the topic, or identified as trolls, were not included in the pooled extracts for analysis.

To keep the information confidential, the researchers collected data without obtaining any personal, identifying information from the participants. In both cases, the researchers gathered data from the participants' online comments, and this information became the data to be analyzed. The researchers



are interested in peoples' behaviors and experiences rather than an exposé about individuals. Researchers are expected to respect their participants but are not interested in reporting a named action [30].

The researchers reviewed all the translations and paraphrased the participants' comments to ensure that manipulation did not exist in the study. The researchers did not correct the spelling of the participants' comments and used direct quotations. The comments that have similar themes were clustered and labeled as one position.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The primary goal is to explore the positions of the Department of Health and the ascribed rights and duties by the netizens. Consequently, we gather the netizens' comments from DOH's Facebook page to identify their position. As stated by Harré & Van Langenhove [21] on social interaction, "the moral positions of the participants and the rights and duties they have to say certain things" [25]. To achieve this, the researchers followed the procedures for analyzing the data:

First, determining the storylines presented in the netizen's comments. The researchers used the Department of Health's Facebook posts on the COVID-19 vaccination program as the object of discourse made by online communities. Following the second step is surfacing the reflexive positions taken up. These positions sum up what is to be expected in the episode that is being studied. The researchers collected and organized the comments, focused on the study topic, and highlighted the constructs.

Third, understanding the meanings of utterances and the accompanying social force. From the point of view of the storyline, tentative meaning for each action, including speech acts of the netizens. Fourth is the action orientation stage. The researchers explored what is gained from constructing the Department of Health in this particular way within the context.

Having identified the various constructions of the discursive through netizens' comments on the Department of Health within the context of the COVID-19 vaccination program, the researchers now take a closer look at the subject positions they offer. Sixth is the practice stage, which is concerned with the relationship between discourse and practice. It required systematic exploration of how discursive constructions and the subject positions open up or close down opportunities for action. By constructing particular versions of the world and positioning subjects within them in specific ways, discourses limit what can be said and done.

The final stage explored the relationship between discourse about the DOH's COVID-19 vaccination program and subjectivity. Therefore, the researchers utilized multiple coding to verify the positions initially created to prevent bias. The researchers examined individual coding as a group to clarify positions concerning raw data and eventually reach a consensus on the themes.

**RESULTS**

The analysis was conducted on the Department of Health (DOH) online posts regarding the COVID-19 vaccination program. The researchers also examined netizens' comments on the posts that mirrored how netizens positioned the government agency. A table was developed to indicate the netizens' dominant and counter-positions on the DOH, the related attributed rights lost by the public, and the government agency's stated duties. Furthermore, Table 1 depicts how the internet community justified the DOH's incompetence and neglect.

**Table 1. Summary of positions given to the Department of Health used as disapproval or frustrations on the COVID-19 vaccination program**

<b>Positions</b>	<b>Storylines</b>	<b>Rights of the Public</b>	<b>Duties of DOH</b>
Disappointing	DOH has a disorganized implementation of vaccination programs resulting in the disappointment of the public.	Rights to acquire proper vaccination	Duty to provide the public a proper vaccination
Misleading	DOH is providing insufficient information and misconceptions on the COVID-19 vaccine and the implementation of the vaccination program.	Rights of information and knowledge on COVID-19 vaccine and the implementation of the vaccination program	Duty to provide complete and outright information about the vaccine and the vaccination program
Unreliable	There have been inconsistencies in reports about vaccines and their side effects	Rights and be confident with the DOH's vaccination program due to vaccine brands and their side effects	Duty to disclose complete information of the vaccines, especially their side effects
Inhumane	The current vaccines are still under experimentation procedure	Natural rights on life's meanings	Duty to respect one's beliefs and life meanings
Forceful	DOH is forceful and is removing a person's free will to be vaccinated.	Natural rights to decide whether to be vaccinated or not on their own's will	Duty to respect the natural rights of the public to accept or decline to be vaccinated



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Bias	There is an unfair implementation of vaccination	Rights for impartial vaccination implementation	Duty to provide the public unbiased vaccination program
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**Dominant Positions**

**Disappointing.** Among all of the dominant positions, the researchers' findings mostly point to DOH being disappointing. Aside from that, some Filipinos have already expressed their willingness to be immunized. They did not get vaccinated, however, because there was no vaccine or the vaccines were delayed. Many negative comments about DOH's vaccination program implementation have been made. Even though that it was announced on February 28, 2021 that the Philippines received vaccines and disseminate them the next day, some lament that they still have not received any vaccines from their areas, while some complain about the slow process of their LGU's vaccination program. On the other hand, some netizens' issue is with the travel protocols for those who are fully vaccinated. It was announced that travel restrictions for fully vaccinated individuals would be laxer than for those who have not [6]. However, there is still a need for the antigen test before traveling, thus their disappointment.

**Misleading.** The comments concluded that the Department of Health's information about the COVID-19 vaccine and its program was confusing. Correspondingly, there have been reports that even the government agencies themselves are guilty of spreading wrong information by hiring "online trolls" [31]. In response to the public's concerns and apprehensions, vital information must be made public. Unfortunately, the DOH is not exempted from the issue of spreading misleading information. Likewise, discrediting without further explanation to some opposing ideas regarding vaccines increases skepticism of the people. Consequently, the amplification of false information also affects the government's vaccination program [32].

**Unreliable.** One of the dominant positions of the netizens to the DOH in their vaccination program is that they are unreliable. DOH is positioned because the possible effect of their supposed herd immunization is still unpredictable. This position came from the notion that even if the vaccine intends to promote herd immunity to the COVID-19 virus, some citizens who have undergone vaccination have experienced adverse effects. Moreover, the primary concern of the netizen is the vaccine brand that the government acquired for the citizens. The netizens' complaints could be coming from the published effectivity rate of Sinovac compared with other vaccines [33]. The netizens expressed their fear that once mandated, even if they are healthy, they might suffer from the adverse effect of the vaccines.

**Inhumane.** The Department of Health is positioned as inhumane because netizens believe that the vaccination program is a mere trial-and-error where people are considered subjects in experimentation. The netizen's concern circulates to the fact that its development is still in its initial stage. It can be pondered that the vaccination program is still too premature for their immunity. Some adverse effects

are not yet known. Aside from that, they think there is another way to overcome this COVID-19 virus that is more natural and humane. The discourses have shown that the DOH is inhumane because the vaccination program is part of an experiment; there are more natural ways to survive this COVID-19 pandemic. There are natural means to boost the immune system that has been proven helpful and effective. With this kind of thinking, netizens believe that it is safer to practice these than rely on the government agency's vaccines.

**Forceful.** The comments concluded that the Department of Health and the government as forceful among the people to be vaccinated. This notion began after President Duterte threatened to arrest those who were unwilling to be vaccinated as “potential carriers”. In connection to this, mandatory vaccination is met by reasons that citizens hold the right to their own lives. Also, as a Christian nation, few even stand firm in their beliefs that only God has the right to their lives, not the government. According to Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo in an interview, President Duterte can wield the "constitutional command". It refers to the Filipino's ability to order mandatory inoculation against the Coronavirus Disease 2019 [34]. Ultimately, people's reluctance to be vaccinated and the government is forceful stems from both fear that their rights may be denied and distrust over the government's quality of vaccines.

**Bias.** The comments concluded an imbalance implementation of vaccination, especially regarding the efficacy of vaccine brands purchased and used. Added to the concern of the netizen is that some places use unacceptable ways to get people to be vaccinated, like withholding the pension of the senior citizens. Further, the netizens see it unfair that the ones getting the vaccines first were the poor ones. Duterte defended why the government purchased more of Sinovac than other brands because it is now being used in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, and Brazil. There have been no deaths reported so far [35]. Many Filipinos still doubt the efficacy of the vaccines being offered and fell off comparing brands of vaccines. Because of these, a policy has been implemented stating that the Philippines will stop announcing the brands of vaccines used by centers to "overcome vaccine preference". After this, people rushed their way to crowded centers where their preferred vaccines were offered [36]. Aside from this, they see it as a bias to use vaccines made from China that is not acceptable elsewhere in the world. Further, the netizens see it unfair that the ones getting the vaccines first were the poor ones. In response to this concern, the public seeks a more balanced and fairer implementation of the vaccination programs, giving justice to the vaccines being used and offered an unbiased approach to convincing citizens to take the vaccination.

### **Counter positions**

The Filipino netizens' counter positions that were ascribed to the Department of Health (DOH) are namely, protector, responsive, permissive, and optimistic.

**Table 2. Summary of positions given to the Department of Health used as approval or support on the COVID-19 vaccination program**

Positions	Storylines	Rights of DOH	Duties of the Public
Protector	Vaccines are protective measures against COVID19.	Rights to protect the public by implementing protective measures such as vaccination.	Duty to obey, support the vaccination program.
Responsive	DOH shows its dedication and sense of responsibility in doing its job to fight COVID 19	Rights to be appreciated for its dedication, commitment, hard work to fight COVID19	Duty to appreciate DOH's commitment to public service.
Permissive	Freedom to be vaccinated without force or hesitation of their own volition.	Rights to be respected in implementing the vaccination program.	Duty to have a choice for themselves to be vaccinated.
Optimistic	Has a positive outlook on the effectiveness of the vaccination program.	Rights to earn public trust in their vaccination program	Duty to gain trust that the vaccination program of the government is effective.

**Protector.** Filipino netizens have stated that the vaccination program of DOH is to protect people from COVID 19 and use these vaccines to neutralize the cases of COVID and get life back to normal again. Several comments appeal to those against the vaccines not to discourage others with their fabricated stories but rather to consider that DOH is an expert in public health services. Furthermore, this discourse seems to counter all other discourses saying that DOH is mandated to be the overall technical authority on health (DOH). Thus, DOH is positioned as a protector. As such, it assures the protection of individuals, families & communities exposed to health hazards & risks (DOH).

**Permissive.** The public is left to decide whether they want to participate in the DOH vaccination program. In this position, DOH is seen as a permissive entity that respects people's right to choose. Freedom to choose is a fundamental right, and in the Human and People's Rights Declaration of the Philippines, it is stated that fundamental rights should be guaranteed, protected, and upheld.

**Responsive.** Several online commenters expressed their gratitude for the efforts of DOH in fighting this global crisis. Thus, it positioned DOH as an entity responsive to the public's immediate needs in times of crisis. In facing this present pandemic, cooperation between government and citizens is indispensable. Every person can be critical of the government's policies, but criticisms will not help the country achieve its goal - to save the people from this COVID 19. When the COVID 19 pandemic ends, there is a need for the country to reflect on the government. Furthermore, what are we if there is no government [37]

**Optimistic.** In positioning, the DOH is positioned as an optimistic entity about the success of the vaccination program. Moreover, DOH is identified as one who has high confidence in ensuring success over this pandemic. Hence, DOH is positioned as optimistic so far as its objective is to immunize the whole country. The government made policies that would foster trust and social connection, and such is the vaccination program that will help alleviate this collective problem of COVID 19.

## DISCUSSION

In this research, six dominant positions emerged to DOH regarding the vaccination program: Disappointing, Misleading, Unreliable, Inhumane, Forceful, and Bias. The researchers also identified four counter-positions: Protector, Permissive, Responsive, and Optimistic. These constructs and positions reflect DOH's leadership, transparency, sense of responsibility, and dedication to society in implementing the COVID-19 vaccination program. By integrating and evaluating constructs/positions, the researchers will reveal DOH's role, obligations, and criticisms of vaccination programs in safeguarding the public.

Among all the dominant positions, the comments gathered by the researchers mostly leaning DOH towards Disappointing. Some Filipinos already expressed their willingness to be vaccinated, but they failed to get vaccinated because vaccines were delayed or no vaccine available. The slow procurement of vaccines, limited capacity for distribution and implementation of programs, and the government's incompetence in COVID-19 response have led to the current delay in managing COVID-19 [38]. Some individuals convey that their local government officials have mandated that they get vaccinated to acquire their pension plans. Also, an announcement was made to the public that travel restrictions would be lenient to vaccinated individuals [6]. However, later on, it was declared that travelers should undergo swab testing before they can travel. On the contrary, this overarching problem came upon just as the government has opened up the vaccination of over 35 million Filipinos to curb the virus transmission and uplift the country's economy [39].

DOH is characterized as Misleading because of misconceptions and holding complete information about the vaccination program. The government is not exempted from spreading misleading information for using public funds for online trolls [40]. Such as the claim of Vernon Coleman that COVID-19 vaccines are weapons of mass destruction and could end the human race [41]. The lack of essential information has caused disorientation that makes people think that vaccination is unsafe and

harmful. As Philippine Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III said, “This non-disclosure agreement is not our doing, this is the requirement of the suppliers, and we cannot disclose trade secrets, and included in the trade secrets are the pricing. We can't disclose that publicly without violating the non-disclosure agreement” [6].

In this regard, social media platforms play a vital role. It provides a breeding place for the uncertainty that fuels skepticism that gave birth to fear, anxiety, violence, and dismissal of public health measures. Harmless, they might seem, but these can cause life either due to too much vaccine hesitancy or heightened emotional distress [12]. The misinformation about the vaccines that spread in social media is much like a disease that people must have to guard themselves as well [42]. The agency's inconsistencies also bring it to a misleading position in handling the vaccination program, despite the news that the government will pay compensation to those who suffer from possible adverse effects of COVID-19 [43]. Unfortunately, for the netizens, this is yet another misleading declaration.

One of the dominant positions of netizens to DOH in their vaccination program is that they are Unreliable. Although the purpose of the vaccination is to protect the person from spreading the virus, others were experiencing adverse effects. The side effects of vaccination caused hesitations, fear, and uncertainty in some people. Vaccine acceptance in low and middle-income countries is primarily explained by an interest in personal protection against COVID-19, while concern about side effects is the most common reason for hesitancy [44]. In other words, a lack of consistency will affect the credibility and confidence of vaccines. According to the WHO, vaccine hesitancy is a delay in accepting or refusing safe vaccines despite the availability of vaccination services [45]. The behaviors responsible for such a phenomenon are confidence, convenience, and complacency. Some research suggests that it might be best to address this at a population level by providing clear policies, reports and updates, and regular surveillance [46]. However, it can be inferred that the government is doing the opposite despite its promise of increased effort. From the netizens' reaction, the government's actions should improve to fight against the lethal disease. Some Filipinos are willing to be vaccinated but reject vaccines from China [47] because they find them unreliable. Thus, some have expressed frustration with the government on their procurement of the Sinovac vaccine.

DOH is positioned as Inhumane because people to be vaccinated are considered subjects for experimentation that is mere trial-and-error. There are natural means to enhance one's immune system, which people believe to be safer and more effective than relying on the government's vaccines. The British Institute of Human Rights [48] stated that “the right to be free from inhumane or degrading treatment protects us all against serious physical or mental harm from a public body or their staff, and their failures to protect us, whether that harm is intentional or not. The right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment is an absolute right which means any such treatment is not lawfully.” The United Nations has said that in response to serious public health threats to the life of a nation, human rights law allows for restrictions on some rights. This strictly necessary standard must: be based on scientific evidence that is not arbitrary nor discriminatory, be set for a determinant amount of time,

maintain respect for human dignity, be subject to review, and be proportionate to the objective sought to achieve [49].

One position attributed to DOH is being Forceful, which detached the person's liberty to be vaccinated. The government, through DOH, has the authority to vigorously implement the program by requiring the public to submit themselves for vaccination. However, non-compliance with rules or opposition to being inoculated will lead to consequences of penalty and arrest. As perceived by netizens, forceful is a threat to their rights, creating fear, reluctance, and mistrust [39]. The individual has choices to be respected and not be disregarded. This government's view was even more heightened through misinformation because the Philippine government has not announced that the vaccines be mandatory [3]. The government held mandatory wearing of face masks and face shields after President Duterte was briefed on the spread of the new variants [50]. However, the threat by the President to send to jail anyone who refuses to be vaccinated is met with fierce criticism by the citizens permitting fake news to spread fast and increasing public hesitancy [50].

Bias is a position ascribed to DOH by the online public because there is an imbalance in the implementation of vaccination, especially regarding the efficacy of brands of vaccine purchased and used. Unfair treatment on the purchase and distribution of vaccines to people of different states has existed. It becomes questionable why the government preferred vaccines with minimum efficacy instead of vaccines with high efficacy at affordable costs.

“Vaccine equity is the challenge of our time,” said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). The Director-General also said that rapidly spreading variants, the inconsistent application and premature easing of public health measures, fatigue with social restrictions, and the dramatic inequity in vaccine coverage have led to an alarming spike in new cases and deaths [51].

Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations' Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), underscored that the council's support is necessary for getting countries to ensure that all people are included in national vaccination plans. She further highlighted the need for a global ceasefire, in line with the UN Secretary-General's appeal last March, while immunization campaigns against measles, polio, and other diseases, paused during the pandemic, must also resume. “We cannot allow the fight against one deadly disease to cause us to lose ground in the fight against others”, she said [52].

On the other hand, DOH is positioned positively by some netizens. It is mandated to promote public health awareness and ensures the safety of the people. According to World Health Organization [12], all COVID-19 vaccines approved by WHO for emergency use listings have been randomized clinical trials to test their quality, safety, and efficacy. To be approved, vaccines are required to have a high efficacy rate of 50% or above. After approval, they continue to be monitored for ongoing safety and effectiveness. Vaccines are likely staying effective against variants because of the overall immune



response they cause. In connection to this, President Duterte's threat to those who will not get themselves vaccinated is an expression of his heightened concern for the increasing number of cases. The Philippines was even considered a COVID-19 Hotspot in Asia, with more than 1.3 million cases and 23,749 deaths with more than 1.3 million cases and at least 23,749 deaths [50].

DOH was also positioned as Permissive, wherein the public is given discretion and allowed its own decisions to participate in the vaccination program. However, the effect of restricting vaccine choice on vaccination intention may differ across countries. According to Sprengholz et al. [53] hopefully, the situation may change over time, depending on pandemic conditions and local perceptions of vaccines. Schmelz and Bowles's [54] findings have broad policy applicability beyond COVID-19 to cases in which voluntary citizen compliance is essential because state capacities are limited and because effectiveness may depend on how the policies themselves alter citizens' beliefs and preferences.

It positioned DOH as Responsive to the immediate needs of the public in times of crisis. The Philippine National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19 Vaccines [55] were formulated to provide operational guidance in implementing the COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination program. The designing of the plan involved the participation of various government agencies to ensure the alignment of policies and procedures among agencies and the integration of the said plans into national governance mechanisms. In addition, the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines and implementation of COVID-19 vaccine programs necessitates the participation of all members of society.

DOH is also identified as Optimistic about its objective to immunize the whole country is concerned. As a psychological phenomenon, optimism can also be protective, preserving self-esteem and building resilience in the face of adversity [56]. However, even with the limited supply, optimism behind the vaccination program may have led to lower compliance with health protocols resulting in more infections. As Dr. Rabindra Abeyasinghe, WHO Representative to the Philippines, calls it "vaccine optimism" [57].

Dr. Takeshi Kasai [58] said, "As we move into our second year of living with COVID-19, additional tools for fighting the virus bring hope. We are now optimistic about the development of new, safe, and effective COVID-19 vaccines."

### **Implications**

Positioning of the Department of Health by the online public community recommends a standpoint on how to construct them in providing a program that will help people not be at risk with the COVID-19 virus, which is the vaccination program. The dominant positions such as disappointing, misleading, unreliable, inhumane, forceful, and bias, only show that the public does not trust nor listen to the Department of Health COVID-19 vaccination program.

On the other hand, the counter position is under the pro side, such as protector, permissive, responsive, and optimistic. Because of the Department of Health's dedication and commitment to pushing the COVID-19 vaccination, the public is pleased and grateful that their job is well done. Additionally, even with the varieties of vaccines available, the online public is not forced to be vaccinated. Instead, the people are the ones who insist on being vaccinated. This only implies that the COVID-19 vaccination program of the Department of Health is on the right road to herd immunity. The Department of Health COVID-19 vaccination program is a silver lining.

This study empowered us to investigate the different positions of the Department of Health as constructed by the netizens. The Facebook page of the Department of Health is a noteworthy medium for giving insight into what the online community feels either they are about the anti or pro-side issues of the COVID-19 vaccination program.

Moreover, positioning DOH by netizens has created challenges and opportunities for herd immunity and established perception of “social identity” as an institution of public health. Despite negative attitudes and numerous criticisms given by netizens, DOH has shaped into a constructive approach to elevate, enhance, and innovate to handle further and advocate public health programs and policies.

The analyzed data is transparent upon how the online public community constructs and positions phenomena such as the COVID-19 vaccination program of the Department of Health. With other matters alleged as Dengvaxia, many children died because of the vaccine; Filipinos do not see that the Philippines' government and the health system are confident enough to protect the public from such diseases. This only confirms that Filipinos are not yet open to the idea of vaccination.

We hope that the Filipino nation and the Department of Health will unite and fight against the spread of any pandemic. The government, especially the Department of Health, appeals to the public that trusting their program and the official statement about the vaccine will succeed. Simply following safety protocol, wearing a mask and face shield, being vaccinated, and not believing in fake news will help slow the spreading rate.

Therefore, we ask Filipinos to be optimistic and open-minded. Further, we would like to request the Department of Health to provide complete information to the online public on the negative and positive sides of their COVID-19 vaccination program, successful or not. It will contribute a lot, if not all - to the government and the Filipinos as they share a battle against COVID-19.

## CONCLUSION

The dominant constructions given to the Department of Health positioned them to be disappointing. Also, they are positioned as misleading due to the public's loss of the right to information on the COVID-19 vaccine and the government's vaccination program. The DOH is positioned as unreliable because of the public's claim of losing the right to choose reliable vaccines and know complete

vaccines' details, especially their side effects. This information only implies that the COVID-19 vaccination program of the Department of Health needs sufficient time and effort to disseminate and implement.

Counter positions such as protector, responsive, permissive and optimistic, positioned the Department of Health as a pleasant and proactive agency. This position states that the Department of Health is protective, amenable, tolerant, and confident in its service to the public. These further states that the best solution is to give the correct information on how the people will not be at risk of the virus and the COVID-19 vaccination program. However, the public claimed to be obedient, appreciative, and confident in the vaccination program of the Department of Health. Likewise, the people claimed that it is their privilege to be vaccinated.

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