



Critical Discourse Analysis of Manila Bulletin Coverage and Jeepney Drivers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study examines how the Manila Bulletin frames the Jeepney Modernization Program and how jeepney drivers interpret the policy. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Huckin's discourse tools, the study analyzes selected news articles, opinion pieces, and interview transcripts to identify linguistic and discursive strategies such as modality, connotation, topicalization, framing, agency, foregrounding, backgrounding, presupposition, and omission. The results indicate that the newspaper tends to position modernization as necessary, progressive, and already underway, while the concerns of jeepney drivers and transport groups are often backgrounded. In contrast, the interviews reveal resistance, uncertainty, and a sense of financial and cultural loss among the community directly affected by the program. The research underscores how media discourse can shape public perception of policy issues by normalizing one perspective and marginalizing another. This paper makes the case for more balanced and inclusive reporting of transport reform and the social realities experienced by affected stakeholders.

1. Introduction

The Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP) in the Philippines has been a site of contention over sustainable transport, social justice, and public policy debates as the government and other stakeholders pressure the shift away from traditional to modern jeepneys, creating complex implications for academic and media discourses. As media is a framing factor in public perception and policy acceptance, it has been observed that coverage of the modernization program by prominent online news platforms may have an impact on both public opinion and policy decisions. This analytical perspective is necessary for the discovery of inscribed ideologies and power dynamics in media narratives, as Locke (2004) states that critical discourse analysis enables the examination of how media frames the jeepney modernization debate. Media mechanisms applied in reporting — including the use of expert testimony, appeals to emotion, and selective representation of stakeholders — could influence what the public perceives regarding the Jeepney Modernization Program (JMP). Ong et al. (2023) establish that "passenger satisfaction is closely linked to service quality in jeepney operations," a discourse commonly used in favor of modernization. On the other hand, Frisdeni and Angeles (2020) suggest that "the jeepney is an enduring symbol of Filipino identity, yet modernization is necessary for urban mobility," presenting the dilemma between tradition and modernity.

Media discourse tends to mirror these concerns, at times amplifying the voices of vulnerable stakeholders or, in other instances, privileging economic and ecological explanations at the cost of social justice. Mateo-Babiano et al. (2020) contend that "formalizing the jeepney sector requires regulatory, financial, and social interventions," an assertion found across both academic and media accounts. The visibility of stakeholders, especially marginalized groups such as jeepney drivers, is a common concern across academic and media discourse. Gatarin (2024) stresses that "a just transition for jeepney modernization must address the needs of drivers and operators," underscoring the need for inclusive policy rhetoric. Likewise, Savilla et al. (2024) note that "jeepney drivers perceive modernization as both a threat and an opportunity," reflecting the complexity of stakeholder views. Other proponents emphasize the economic perspective of the program; Agaton et al. (2019) posit that "the real options approach provides a flexible framework to evaluate the investment decision between diesel and electric jeepneys under uncertainty." Furthermore, Andalecio et al. (2020) observe that "implementation challenges include resistance from operators, financial constraints, and lack of infrastructure to support modernized jeepneys." Mendoza (2021) also criticizes the government's approach, saying that "the government's modernization program has neglected the social impacts on jeepney drivers."

Jeepneys have long been integral to the daily lives of ordinary Filipinos, serving as a mode of transport to visit friends, see family, purchase groceries, and get to work. As the government pushes for modernization — with promises to support affected stakeholders — there have been many appeals for extensions and calls for the discontinuation of the program.

With regard to the influence of media in framing policy issues, a critical gap exists in the analysis of how leading online news portals in the Philippines frame the Jeepney Modernization Program. Most studies focus on economic, environmental, or functional aspects (Ayala et al., 2021; Caplis, n.d.; Carlsson & Johansson-Stenman, 2003), neglecting the discursive media framing of the modernization. The program primarily concerns the phasing out of traditional jeepneys — the primary mode of transportation for middle-class Filipinos — yet the government pushes modernization with promises of support while the voices of the most affected communities struggle to influence policy decisions. Portrayals in mainstream media of marginalized stakeholder groups such as jeepney drivers are often absent and, when they do appear, stereotypical and shallow (Mendoza, 2021). Such treatment tends to mask the essential social and ethical consequences of modernization (Mateo-Babiano et al., 2020). This paper aims to illuminate these power imbalances and contribute to a more equitable discourse on public transportation reform.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how prominent Philippine online news portals frame the Jeepney Modernization Program. Following Fairclough's (1995) model as discussed in Locke (2004), by examining how opinion columns and news articles construct the narrative of modernization, this study uncovers the underlying ideologies, power dynamics, and the inclusion or exclusion of marginalized voices. This paper contributes to awareness of how media coverage may be biased and how it shapes public understanding and attitudes towards this modernization. Specifically, the study answers the following questions:

1. What linguistic strategies are used in Manila Bulletin articles to support or oppose the PUV Modernization Program?
2. What discursive strategies are used to support or oppose the program?
3. How is the Jeepney Modernization Program framed in the Manila Bulletin, the Philippines' largest online newspaper?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis. Fairclough (1995) as cited in Locke (2004) has described CDA as aiming to "systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power" (p. 1). For example, the pronounced government focus and the limited attention to the concerns of jeepney drivers in the Manila Bulletin during the coverage of the modernization program reflects and shapes public understanding of entrenched systemic power relations (Fairclough, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Locke (2004) emphasizes that CDA is not merely about the use of language, but an effort to uncover "opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practices, events and texts and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes" (p. 1). This makes CDA especially suitable for studies that not only examine media narratives but also seek to interrogate dominant narratives and their construction.

As this paper analyzes news articles and online columns, it considers how the PUVMP is represented by media and whether these representations have contributed to the delays and extensions of the program. Through Fairclough's CDA, this research critically analyzes the linguistic and discursive frameworks employed by the Manila Bulletin as it relates to supporting or contesting the Jeepney Modernization Program.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover power struggles in online news articles and columns published by mainstream Philippine media. CDA is particularly suited for analyzing relationships between language, power, and ideology in texts (Fairclough, 1995). In this qualitative method, texts are not considered neutral repositories of information but as agents playing a role in the negotiation of social reality. They are examined to ascertain how some narratives are given priority and others are excluded, and how agency is attributed or denied among stakeholders (Locke, 2004). The approach is complemented by the analytical tools of Huckin (in Miller, 1997), which provide practical strategies for examining linguistic and discursive features in written discourse.

2.2 Data Sampling

The materials examined consist of two online news articles and two online opinion columns from the Manila Bulletin, all published in 2024. The Manila Bulletin was selected as the primary source because it is recognized as the largest mainstream and highly influential platform in shaping public discourse on national issues in the Philippines. In addition, five in-depth interviews were conducted with jeepney drivers who are directly affected by the program. The study employed purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research questions and to capture contrasting perspectives.

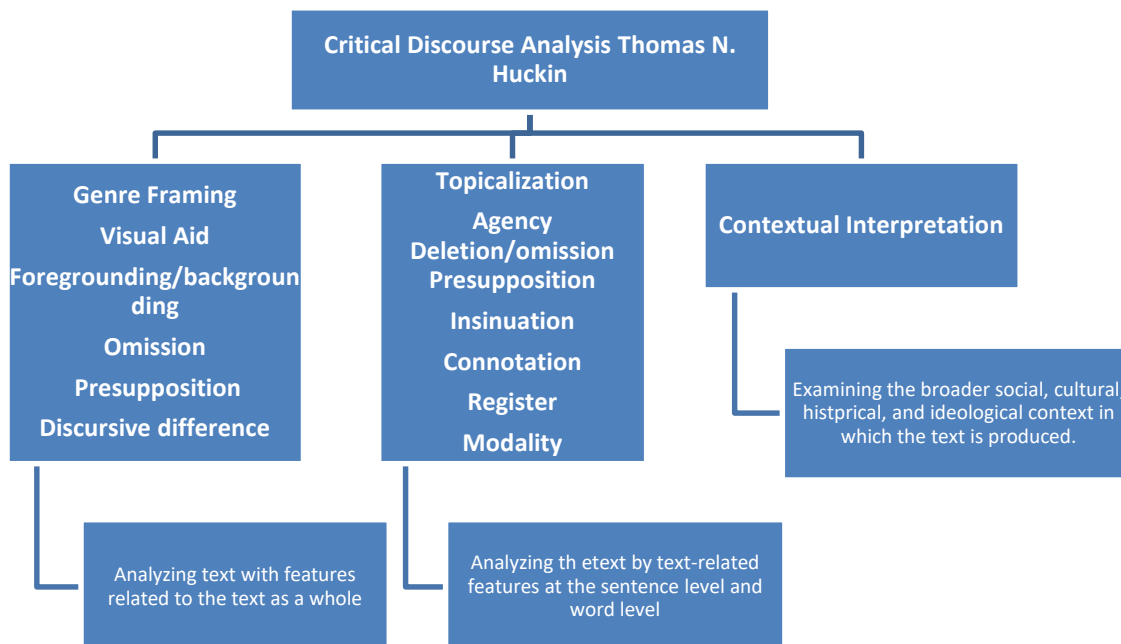
2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through a systematic process focused on selecting relevant textual materials from the Manila Bulletin's online archive using keywords such as "PUV modernization," "jeepney phaseout," and "transport groups." Each article was reviewed for relevance, with those most directly addressing the framing, support, or opposition to the PUVMP included in the analysis. After selection, the texts were analyzed by transcribing relevant excerpts verbatim, while examining linguistic and discursive strategies such as framing, agency, foregrounding, and backgrounding — patterns that align the narrative with government and policy perspectives.

2.4 Data Analysis

The paper draws upon Huckin's (in Miller, 1997) CDA framework, conducting a comprehensive analysis of chosen texts at multiple levels. The texts were first contextualized by determining authors, audiences, and purposes behind communication, as well as relations with other relevant discourses. To ensure the credibility of the study, triangulation was employed by integrating news articles about the program, in-depth interviews with five jeepney drivers, and peer debriefing with other researchers. Macro-level analysis addressed genre, organizational structure, and cohesion, followed by sentence-level exploration of syntax, lexical choices, and modality — including connotative meanings and indicators of certainty, register, subjectivity, or bias. Text segments were coded according to Huckin's (in Miller, 1997) strategies: modality (degree of certainty), connotation (emotional or cultural associations), topicalization (choice of subject), framing (overall presentation), agency (who is given power), foregrounding and backgrounding (what is emphasized or downplayed), presupposition (taken-for-granted ideas), and omission (what is left unsaid). Findings were interpreted in light of broader socio-cultural and political context, as recommended in CDA literature (Fairclough, 1995; Huckin in Miller, 1997)

Figure 1. Huckin's Critical Discourse Analysis Model (Source: Huckin, 2004)



2.5 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness of the research is established through four general criteria identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility is defined as the "honesty" and "faithfulness" of the data or findings, and was achieved through triangulation, participant checking, and peer debriefing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Transferability was ensured by providing sufficient depth of information regarding the setting, fieldwork, findings, and conclusions so that other researchers may consider transference (Moustakas, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1998; Creswell, 2012). Dependability, defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as "whether the study process is consistent, reasonably constant across time, researchers, and procedures" (p. 278), was addressed by aligning research topics, describing the researcher's role, using varied data gathering techniques, and supporting peer review. Confirmability concerns whether findings capture the essence of meaning from respondents' rather than the researcher's viewpoint, with the researcher maintaining self-awareness regarding biases and preconceptions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Since the study examined publicly available media texts, confidentiality and consent issues are minimal; however, the research adhered to ethical standards by faithfully representing the texts, not misinterpreting them, and citing original sources (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). For the interview participants, informed consent was obtained and strict confidentiality was maintained. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and guaranteed their anonymity. They were assured that no personal information — including names, location, or data gathered — would be included in the study report, and that data would be used solely for this study. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with participants retaining the right to withdraw. All sensitive or personal information was secured and deleted following the research.

3. Results and Discussion

In any Critical Discourse Analysis, it remains vital that the larger socio-cultural context is explored to ensure a deeper analysis of the material (Huckin in Miller, 1997). The Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP) is a national government initiative geared towards transitioning the Philippine public transport system into a globally competitive, environment-friendly, and reliable system that prioritizes commuter safety (Recuenco, 2024). While the program gained support from some transport groups with a 70% compliance rate, two major transport groups — Manibela and Piston — vocally opposed the program through strikes and protests, arguing that its implementation is anti-poor and would leave jeepney drivers in debt, as each replacement vehicle costs approximately two million pesos. Additionally, the program's cultural impact — specifically the phasing out of the iconic jeepney — drew significant concern. In August 2024, twenty-two of twenty-three senators signed a resolution proposing suspension of the PUVMP due to financial constraints and compliance issues; however, the President indicated that no suspension would take place (Cabalza, 2024).

3.1 Linguistic Strategies Used to Support or Oppose the PUV Modernization Program

After conducting a critical analysis on the news articles and interview transcripts, the linguistic strategies that emerged are presented in Table 1 below, addressing the first research question on linguistic strategy through the categories of modality, connotation, and topicalization.

Table 1.

Linguistic Strategies Used to Support or Oppose the PUV Modernization Program

Linguistic Strategy	Excerpts	Interpretation
Modality	"will be retired" / "cannot afford to stop" / "the option is to move forward" / "if it's not allowed, just fix it" / "not all of us here can buy that [modern jeepney]" / "We can't do anything" / "Maybe not... that's also difficult"	High modality signals certainty that the program cannot be stopped.
Connotation	"King of the road" / "empowerment" / "progress" / "building common ground" / "the government is your adversary there" / "Jeepneys are good, they're traditional... they've been around a long time" / "Drivers like us will suffer... we can't afford the monthly amortization"	Positive or negative connotations frame the modernization as appealing or unacceptable.
Topicalization	"The DOTr announced..." / "President Marcos stated..." / "The government plans..."	Government entities are foregrounded as the main actors, while transport groups remain passive.

The linguistic strategies used by the Manila Bulletin primarily function to support the PUV Modernization Program through modality, topicalization, formal register, and connotation, all of which reflect the modernization's framing as an unstoppable and necessary implementation despite hints of doubt from some stakeholders. Support for the modernization program is linguistically evident through high modality in both news articles and columns, reflected in phrases such as "will be retired" and "cannot afford to stop," implying the PUVMP is already in progress and the only option is to move forward.

Conversely, lower modality appears in the one article that calls for "building common ground" (Article 3), where the appeal to work together is framed as encouragement and a soft appeal rather than a demand for reconsideration. In terms of topicalization, most sentences place government entities such as the "DOTr," "the government," or "President Marcos" as subjects, while transport groups remain passive. The reference to jeepneys as the "King of the Road" and the framing of their replacement as "retirement" lightens modernization as a respectful tribute. Connotation also played a major role: words such as "empowerment," "building common ground," and "progress" are used in articles supporting the program. In summary, the linguistic strategies used by the Manila Bulletin strongly reinforce this government-driven initiative by making the PUVMP appear progressive while backgrounding and softening opposition views.

3.1.1 Modality

Modality, as defined by Huckin (in Miller, 1997), "refers to the tone of statements as regards to their degree of certitude and authority" (p. 93). Modality is often demonstrated through modal verbs and phrases such as may, might, could, will, and must. In Article 1 ("PUV modernization 'legitimate' but should not burden public"), the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) uses low modality: "The program must not cause undue burden to the commuting public and the drivers and operators of PUVs." The CHR softly intervenes, calling for the program to be justified rather than rejected.

In Article 2, the modality is high and final. The DOTr states: "We cannot afford to stop this program" and "Suspending the implementation will not benefit anyone." These statements leave no room for negotiation through the use of the modal verbs "cannot" and "will not." In Article 3, modal verbs are softened through context: "We should focus on building common ground" and "The DOTr must allow time for adjustments." Although the modals remain strong, they are mitigated by appeals to adjustment and dialogue. In Article 4, the statements are final: "The government continues the PUV modernization program" and "The iconic jeepney, known as the 'King of the Road,' will be retired." Notably, the government appears as the active subject in the first statement while the second is in passive voice, with the government still the implied agent.

In the interview transcripts (Participants 1–5), the participants reflect on degrees of uncertainty and helplessness. Participant 1 states: "Kung hindi na pwede, edi ipaayos lang" ("If it's not allowed, just fix it"). Participant 2 reflects: "hindi naman lahat tayo dito kayang bilhin yun" ("not all of us here can buy that [modern jeepney]"). Participant 3 expresses resignation: "Wala tayong magagawa" ("We can't do anything"). Participant 4 reflects uncertainty: "Hindi siguro... Mahirap din" ("Maybe not... that's also difficult"). These statements reflect the participants' sense of constrained options and limited agency.

3.1.2 Connotation

Huckin (in Miller, 1997) examines connotation as the use of words whose meanings extend beyond their literal definition. In Article 1, the phrases "legitimate endeavor" and "undue burden" carry loaded connotations: the former justifies the PUVMP while the latter implies that burdens, if they exist, must remain within acceptable moral and legal limits. In Article 2, the government's justification is accompanied by implied threat and loss: "We've already invested a lot — napasubo na tayo"; "It will be a waste of money and time"; and "The whole program might collapse." Article 3 employs empathetic but ultimately ineffectual language:

"We must empower transport cooperatives"; "Understand the drivers' plight"; "Build common ground." Article 4 uses emotionally charged language such as "The iconic jeepney... will be retired" and "King of the road," evoking national pride while softening the reality of displacement.

In the interview transcripts, participants expressed their opposition using language that connotes cultural loss and institutional inequality. Participant 1 stated: "Government ang kalaban mo dyan!" ("The government is your adversary there!"). Participant 1 also said: "Maganda talaga ang jeep kasi traditional jeep ito... noon pa yan" ("Jeepneys are really good, they're traditional... they've been around a long time"). Participant 4 expressed financial hardship: "Phaseout? Wala, mahihirapan lang kaming mga driver... hindi naming kaya yung kwan yung monthly amortization" ("Phaseout? Drivers like us will suffer... we can't afford the monthly amortization"). These statements position the government as threatening and inequitable while defending the jeepney as culturally essential.

3.1.3 Topicalization

Topicalization operates at the sentence level and answers the question: What is the sentence about? (Huckin in Miller, 1997). By choosing the topic or subject of a sentence, the writer imposes a particular angle or slant. Article 1 places the CHR as the main subject — "CHR said it supports..." and "CHR reminded the government..." — yet actual stakeholders are never quoted. Article 2 foregrounds the DOTr: "The DOTr warned..." and "He explained that suspending the program will result in wasted subsidies." Article 3 distributes agency more broadly, with the government, transport groups, and civil society all appearing as subjects: "We must..."; "DOTr should..."; "Transport groups must..." Article 4 returns to government-centered subjects: "President Marcos said..." and "DOTr continues..." In the interview transcripts, agency shifts to a collective "we the jeepney drivers," yet it is framed in resignation: "whatever the government decides will proceed" and "it's their decision, we can't do anything."

3.2 Discursive Strategies Used to Support or Oppose the PUV Modernization Program

The second research question addresses discursive strategies. With the help of linguistic strategies, the Manila Bulletin articles further employed discursive strategies to frame the PUVMP as an unproblematic and systematically organized program. These strategies include framing, agency, foregrounding and backgrounding, presupposition, and omission, and are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2.

Discursive Strategies Used to Support or Oppose the PUV Modernization Program

Discursive Strategy	Excerpts	Interpretation
1. Framing	"unstoppable and necessary implementation" / "already in progress and the option is to move forward"	The program is presented as something that must happen, making opposition seem pointless.
2. Agency	"the DOTr," "the government," "President Marcos" as subjects; transport groups are passive agents; "Maybe we'll just fix up our jeeps ourselves"; "We hope it doesn't push through. We don't want it."; "Whatever the government decides will proceed."	Government entities are shown as the decision-makers; drivers and transport groups are marginalized.
3. Foregrounding/Backgrounding	"Government entities such as the 'DOTr,' 'the government,' or 'President Marcos' as subjects"	Government decisions are foregrounded while drivers and affected groups are rendered powerless.

4. Presupposition	"will be retired" / "cannot afford to stop" / "Not everyone here is rich" / "Whether we agree or not"	The articles assume that modernization is certain and cannot be halted.
5. Omission	"transport groups are passive agents" / "replacement and displacement as 'retirement'"	The struggles of affected groups are left out and suppressed.

These discursive strategies have collectively positioned the PUVMP as inevitable and beyond contestation. Framing was used to construct the program as progressive and long overdue. In the article "PUV modernization continues: 'King of the road' will be 'retired'," the program is framed as an honorary and modern transition rather than a forced displacement of traditional jeepneys, aligning with Fairclough's notion of "recontextualization," where ideological interventions are presented as neutral processes (1992).

3.2.1 Framing

Framing, according to Huckin (in Miller, 1997, p. 91), refers to "how the content of a text is presented" with respect to how the writer wishes to position an argument. In Article 1, the CHR frames the modernization as legitimate but subject to welfare conditions: "The CHR said it supports the program but emphasized that it must not result in undue burden"; "Modernization must be implemented in a way that protects the rights and welfare of all stakeholders." These are framed as reminders rather than conditions or demands. In Article 2, the DOTr frames modernization as something that must proceed: "We've already invested so much — napasubo na tayo"; "The suspension would derail years of planning and cause waste"; "This is a national project that should not be derailed." The coupling of "national project" with the modal "should" implies that questioning the program is itself inappropriate. In Article 3, the framing is comparatively inclusive: "We must work together to find solutions that both modernize and support our jeepney drivers"; "This is not a matter of whether to modernize, but how to do it inclusively." This is the only article that explicitly centers driver welfare within the modernization frame. Article 4 romanticizes the jeepney era: "The jeepney's retirement is part of moving toward a better transport future"; "The phaseout signifies the end of an era and the beginning of a safer, cleaner system." This framing positions the program as the face of national progress.

3.2.2 Agency

In this context, agency refers to the agent-patient relationship, where agents performing actions depict power while those receiving the actions are patients (Huckin in Miller, 1997). Across all articles, speaking power is predominantly given to government agencies: "CHR reminded the government to ensure that the shift to modernized PUVs respects labor rights"; "DOTr Secretary Jaime Bautista said suspending the program would cause more harm"; "President Marcos said modernization will continue despite challenges"; "The LTFRB has instructed operators to comply with the new deadline."

While stakeholders occasionally appear as subjects in Article 3, they are positioned as needing to initiate actions to secure their own consideration: "Transport groups must take the initiative to engage in honest dialogue"; "The DOTr, LGUs, and operators must align their efforts." In the interview transcripts, participants expressed their helplessness. Participant 3 stated: "Kung ano lang desisyon ng gobyerno" ("Whatever the government decides will proceed.") Participant 4 said: "Siguro yung... pagandahin na lang naming yung mga jeep naming" ("Maybe we'll just fix up our jeeps ourselves.") Participant 5 expressed direct opposition: "Yun lang talaga masasabi ko hindi sana matuloy yan. Ayaw naming" ("We hope it doesn't push through. We don't want it.") These statements reflect constrained and defensive agency, with self-repair as the only available option.

3.2.3 Foregrounding and Backgrounding

Foregrounding and backgrounding refer to a writer's emphasis or de-emphasis on certain concepts by giving them "textual prominence" (Huckin in Miller, 1997, p. 91). In Articles 1 and 2, the legitimacy of the PUVMP and the government's investment are foregrounded, while the protests and concerns of affected drivers are backgrounded. Article 1 states: "CHR underscored that modernization must not come at the expense of livelihood"; "Transport reforms should not ignore the economic vulnerabilities of drivers." However, despite these statements, the actual voice of marginalized stakeholders — namely, jeepney drivers — is not quoted. Articles 2 and 4 foreground government investments and justifications: "Bautista explained that financial assistance had already been released to operators"; "The government highlighted improvements in safety and emissions compliance." What is backgrounded are drivers' resistance and financial concerns.

Article 3 attempts to foreground driver sentiments — "Let us not forget the plight of thousands of drivers who rely on daily boundaries"; "We must include their stories in the modernization narrative" — but these attempts remain shallow without actual driver quotations. In the interview transcripts, participants consistently highlighted local impacts and losses: Participant 3 asked "San na mapupunta yung mga jeep na ito?" ("Where will all these jeeps go?"); Participant 4 noted that traditional jeepneys could carry steel and goods while modern ones cannot; Participant 5 emphasized the community impact: "Kasi ang problema natin dito eh yung mga commuters satin" ("Because our problem here is really for our commuters.").

3.2.4 Presupposition

Presupposition is language use that provides no alternative, strategically taking ideas for granted (Huckin in Miller, 1997). The PUVMP is constructed as inevitable and as a great marker of progress; stopping the modernization is treated as simply not an option. Article 1 presupposes legitimacy: "While the modernization program is a legitimate endeavor... the process must be improved." Article 2 presupposes irreversibility: "Suspending implementation now will only cause more confusion"; "It is too late to stop a program of this scale." Article 3 presupposes forward movement: "The reform is already underway; what's left is ensuring its fairness." Article 4 is unequivocal: "The phaseout is now irreversible"; "Jeepney modernization marks the country's forward stride in public transport."

In the interview transcripts, participants also reveal presuppositions. Participant 3 expressed: "Kahit agree tayo o hindi" ("Whether we agree or not"). Participant 2 noted: "Mahal pero nasisira agad" ("expensive but breaks easily"). Participant 5 observed: "hindi naman lahat ng tao ay mayaman" ("Not all people are rich"). These presuppositions in the official discourse expose the hidden intent about quality and access to the program, potentially influencing readers regardless of their approval or objection.

3.2.5 Omission

While two opposing parties appear across articles — government agencies (the President, DOTr, CHR) and stakeholders (jeepney drivers) — there are no direct references to major strike actions or opposition statements in the news coverage. This omission effectively silences drivers' valid appeals and masks the transport strikes caused by the modernization, framing it as unchallenged. As Huckin (in Miller, 1997, p. 91) notes, omission is the "greatest form of backgrounding"; if strikes, driver hardships, or implementation challenges are not mentioned, they will less likely enter the reader's mind. The vague framing of conflict as "this issue has caused tensions" conceals the omission of loan burdens, consolidation failures, and inhumane enforcement. Progressive words such as "transition," "retirement," and "celebration" completely disregard the cries of jeepney drivers and their families.

Moreover, in the interview transcripts, most participants do not acknowledge the government's claims about safety, environmental progress, or national modernization. Their answers rarely reflect any anticipated positive improvement. Lines such as "Jeepneys are really good because they're traditional... they've been here for a long time," "There's nothing we can

do," and "We hope that it doesn't push through" reveal neither negotiation attempts nor acknowledgment of government aid. The line "Because our problem here is really for our commuters" reveals the socioeconomic impact of the program on the wider community. The omission of local hardships in the news articles — where most quotations come from officials rather than drivers themselves — illustrates a fundamental disconnect between institutional discourse and community reality.

3.3 The Jeepney Modernization Program as Framed in the Manila Bulletin

The third research question concerns the framing strategies apparent in the news articles and interview transcripts with respect to the program, government portrayal, resistance and opposition, and representation of drivers, as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3.

The Jeepney Modernization Program as Framed in the Manila Bulletin and Jeepney Drivers

Framing Strategy	Excerpts	Interpretation
1. Framing of Modernization	"will be retired," "continues," "forced," "inevitable transition," "end of an era," "retirement used to soften resistance" / "It would be good... if only the modern jeep weren't so expensive..."	Modernization is shown as necessary, unstoppable, and positive.
2. Government Portrayal	Government "confidently advancing the program," "irresponsible to delay" / "The government is your adversary there" / "Whatever the government decides will proceed"	Government appears strong and determined; delays or opposition are cast negatively.
3. Resistance and Opposition	Omission or softening of "transport strikes," "loan defaults," "organizational opposition" / "Disagree, I don't agree..." / "Maybe we'll just fix up our jeeps ourselves"	Opposition is downplayed or ignored, making resistance seem less significant.
4. Representation of Drivers	Hardships romanticized as "drivers' plight," generalized and not directly voiced / "Not everyone here is rich" / "The economy is really affected. That's all I have to say."	Drivers' struggles are acknowledged but softened, marginalized, and deprived of power.

After the critical discourse analysis of the four Manila Bulletin articles and interviews from jeepney drivers regarding the PUVMP, it is revealed that the modernization is framed as a valid, progressive, and necessary national project. In both news and opinion articles, the modernization is foregrounded as a progressive and inevitable transition, effectively softening and backgrounding public resistance and driver testimonies. This narrative reveals a power imbalance where government policies are privileged over community realities.

The government is portrayed as confidently advancing the program. Phrases like "will be retired" and "continues" suggest that the modernization is not just happening but must happen. The term "napasubo" used in one article adds a resigned justification for continuing. Even in the article where the CHR intervenes to spotlight stakeholders, the frame still presupposes that modernization is legitimate. There is a consistent omission or softening of opposing voices — transport strikes, loan defaults, organizational opposition. Even when hardships are acknowledged, they are romanticized as "drivers' plight" and generalized rather than articulated directly by those affected.

The interview participants consistently frame the program as burdensome, costly, and impractical: "too expensive," "breaks down easily," and incapable of meeting local needs such as uphill travel, goods transport, and long-term use. They frame the government as unconcerned and detached: "the government is your adversary there," "whatever the

government decides will proceed," and "the economy is really affected" — all highlighting the power imbalance and the absence of participatory dialogue.

In summary, the Manila Bulletin frames the PUVMP as an inevitable transition that will transform public transport — a program that, despite implementation challenges and the minority's opposition, will continue. Resistance is either backgrounded, softened through honorary terminology such as "retirement" and "end of an era," or omitted altogether. This framing aligns with a state-centric developmental discourse wherein institutional actors such as the DOTr and the President hold exclusive narrative authority.

4. Conclusions

Public transportation is the heart of any progressive society. How the media frames national government programs such as the PUVMP significantly affects how the community perceives the urgency and legitimacy of the program and its implementation. This study did not merely aim to describe how the PUVMP is presented in media, but to uncover biases in media representations.

By uncovering the linguistic and discursive strategies used by Manila Bulletin and the words of jeepney drivers, this paper contributes to public awareness of how media articles can either reflect balanced reporting or biased narratives. The results show that the Manila Bulletin's media representations are not neutral; they carry an embedded ideology that positions the government as logical, progressive, and unchallenged, while marginalizing protests and strikes through omission and presupposition. The jeepney drivers, who honestly expressed their lack of power in the face of this policy, were largely omitted from the news articles; mainstream reporting highlighted official stakeholders while failing to gather and represent the responses of those most directly affected.

Critical Discourse Analysis of such content remains crucial to enable readers to examine seemingly neutral news articles. When readers understand that writers use strategies to foreground and background ideas, they become more critical readers with a better understanding of what may be missing or intentionally foregrounded. This awareness will hopefully encourage the public to push for more inclusive, transparent, and empathetic policy implementation and communication, especially in projects that directly impact low-income workers such as jeepney drivers and small operators. The jeepney drivers themselves portrayed the government as the sole main decision-maker and greatly expressed their powerlessness in a program that would significantly affect their livelihoods.

Policymakers can take note that the successful implementation of a national program requires not only looking at the majority and framing the government in power, but communicating plans, providing assistance, and genuinely listening to stakeholders. The modernization of public transport should not come at the expense of those who have nurtured it through the years.

Finally, by exposing the power struggles reflected in the Manila Bulletin articles, this paper hopes to contribute to a reasonable and just full implementation of the PUVMP — a modernization that focuses not only on progress but also on the livelihoods of those who are the key to its success.

5. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should address several important gaps. First, longitudinal studies covering 2024 to 2027 using surveys with drivers would help determine whether media framing shapes their views on the program over time. Second, multimodal analyses that incorporate photographs and video footage — not just text — would yield a richer understanding of how the PUVMP is represented across different media formats. Third, comparative studies examining similar transport modernization programs in other countries — such as bus reforms in India or taxi modernization in Southeast Asian cities — could identify shared patterns and

unique challenges. Finally, expanding the data corpus to include other major Philippine newspapers and digital platforms beyond the Manila Bulletin would allow for a more comprehensive and representative analysis of media framing of this national policy.

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Critical Discourse Analysis of Manila Bulletin Coverage and Jeepney Drivers' Perspectives

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Author's Bio

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