

Philippines - Media Landscape

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Overview

The recent – and alarming developments – make it imperative to take another look at the Philippine media landscape. The first half of 2020 has seen brazen state maneuvers inimical to media freedom, some of which were even done as the country struggles amid the coronavirus crisis. The head of the state himself, President Rodrigo Duterte, continued to make well-publicized threats and hurl insults against media outfits, which he has been doing since 2016 (Tomacruz, 2020). Several journalists and media companies, known for their critical reportage, are now facing charges filed by high-profile state functionaries and government agencies. In the middle of the longest lockdown in the world, one of the biggest media companies, ABS-CBN, was forced to go off air (The last time the station was shut down was when Philippines was placed under martial law in the 1970s). Furthermore, Duterte signed a new anti-terror law that critics fear will further erode freedom of speech (Buan, 2020; Santos, 2020), despite information and criticism being necessary in this time of the pandemic. For many, the Philippine case is another narrative about a strongman-led regime exploiting the pandemic crisis to consolidate power (see Rachman, 2020).

To make matters worse, overall trust in mainstream news has fallen significantly, as the public trust rating of Duterte, described as a 'populist' leader, remains high (Chua, 2020). In fact, Philippines is among the countries with the lowest trust levels in the sample of 40 countries surveyed in the latest Digital News Report (see Newman, Fletcher, Schulz, Andi, and Nielsen, 2020). Social media is also teeming with posts trying to delegitimize mainstream media and alternative media as sources of information. Especially among the mainstream media, there are cases in which commercial interests take precedence as evidenced by reporting slant, and some state functionaries and pro-state online influencers were quick to use this as a justification for vilifying the media.

The coronavirus crisis has also worsened the already precarious working conditions of Filipino journalists. Many continue to discharge their functions despite fear of contracting the virus and fear of losing their jobs as their companies bleed losses from declining advertising revenues (Tantuco, 2020). On top of all these is the atmosphere of fear created by vaguely worded provisions in new Philippine laws, which define 'terrorism' and 'fake news' in broad terms.

The repertoire of actions of the Duterte government underscores one of the many contradictions in the Philippine media landscape: a strong tradition of watchdog-adversarial journalism (Balod and Hameleers, 2019) that now struggles to function in a supposed democracy despite an increasingly militaristic approach to governance (Gita, 2019; Romero, 2018). In other words, the irony of a strong watchdog orientation within a political system that is being more and more authoritarian (Makalintal, 2018).

The Philippine media landscape is characterized by contradictions, apart from what was mentioned. On one hand, it joins the

global trend of technological disruptions ushering changes in the media economy, profession, and consumption. On the other, persistent socio-economic inequalities and the urban-rural gap limit the potential of these disruptions, thus maintaining the supremacy of legacy media (except the newspaper) as source of information in the countryside.

Print media – newspapers and magazines – is said to be ‘losing its relevance’ as a source of information (Media Ownership Monitor, 2017) as it lags behind television, radio, and even the internet by rate of exposure. The traditional television remains to be the primary source of information, although the news reach of online media is exponentially increasing especially in the urban areas (Chua, 2020). The Media Ownership Monitor (2017) even concluded from the available data that the Philippines is ‘not a nation of newspaper readers’. The most recent data on media consumption affirms this downward trend for print: only 22 percent of the sample get their news from newspapers (see Newman et al., 2020).

The national and major regional newspapers, as well as other forms of legacy media, have already invested in online presence, as more and more Filipinos get their content from digital media. However, community and regional press have seen growth in the past few decades and in many rural areas, the community press banks on their reputation, collective participatory interest of its audience, and its perceived role in social cohesion.

The community press and the radio continue to be preferred modes of communication even for belligerent groups. The radio, in particular, is still seen as the most pervasive, reaching even the most remote of areas.

The country is labeled the ‘social media capital of the world’ given the rate of social media usage (Pablo, 2018; Mateo, 2018; We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020) and belongs to the top 20 countries with highest internet penetration rate (Internet World Stats, 2020a). However, and herein lies another irony, the telecommunications infrastructure of the Philippines remains underdeveloped in most areas, as the number of cell towers is far less than that of its neighboring countries. Internet speed is slower than the other countries in Asia-Pacific and is even below the global average (ABS CBN News, 2019; Akamai Technologies, Inc., 2017) and mobile signal, even the older generation 2G connectivity, is unavailable in many rural areas.

The coronavirus crisis has unraveled the poor state of internet connectivity in many parts of the country, as schools are struggling to switch to online learning and business processing outsourcing companies try to hit productivity targets despite unreliable internet in work-from-home set-ups.

Nevertheless, the past two years have seen a dramatic increase in the reach and speed of internet connectivity, as well as in the number of transactions enabled by it. E-commerce and digital finance are expected to grow as contactless payments are promoted as a safety measure against coronavirus transmission. Digital financial inclusion, however, is still limited by poor internet speed and lack of awareness about e-money security and functions.

Internet access in the Philippines is mostly done through the mobile phone screens, which explains the fact that the country is dubbed as a ‘mobile first market’ (The Nerve, 2019) and also the ‘fastest-growing app market in Southeast Asia’ (Garcia, 2016). However, the mobile phone and telecommunications market reflects some truths in Philippine demographics: the market is dominated by budget smartphones which have a strong presence in the provinces. The ‘emerging affluent’ are the heaviest users of mobile applications for an expanding array of services such as transportation and shopping (Visa, 2016). There is also a generational gap and an income gap in smartphone and internet usage. Far more young people, ages 18 to 29, use the internet and own a smartphone than people aged 50 and above (Schumacher and Kent, 2020). Higher income people are also more likely to use a smartphone than lower income people (Schumacher and Kent, 2020).

The preference for much cheaper smartphones in the countryside could be an effect of poor (if not absent) 3G and 4G connectivity outside the cities – hence, mobile activity is limited to 2G-based activity, which does not require more expensive handsets – and heightened poverty levels. However, this assumed causality has yet to be tested by empirical research.

Duopolies are well-entrenched in the television and telecommunications industry and the country has no strong measures to ensure fair competition (Only recently has a law been enacted, but implementation of course is an entirely different matter). In the case of the broadcast industry, however, market disruptions are likely to arise from the shutdown order on ABS-CBN, the leading network in terms of revenue and audience share and reach.

The media market is private sector-led, and so is research and development, which suffers from poor state funding when compared with other countries in Asia. Although technology-enabled companies are the most active agents in the innovation landscape, the attempts to bridge the digital divide by introducing innovation to the grassroots level are still largely a government affair.

The wave of digitalization definitely offered people, at least in the urban Philippines, new opportunities, but another irony lies in how the internet has become ‘weaponized’ by politically motivated groups and individuals. Some groups have taken advantage of the fact that Filipinos are heavy internet and social media users and the fact that the internet penetration rate is rising rapidly. Studies have documented the rise of systematized misinformation campaigns, with various components including deployment of ‘troll armies’ to sabotage online discourse and proliferation of fake news (see Bradshaw and Howard; Ong and Cabañes, 2016). The architects and operators of these campaigns were found to work for political parties and politicians, one of which is in fact the political party of the incumbent president (Bradshaw and Howard, 2017). In fact, Duterte himself admitted that he spent millions in paying internet trolls to defend him on social media during the 2016 elections (Carmencito, 2017; Ranada, 2017). This has largely contributed to social media networks, particularly Facebook and Twitter, being venues for online harassment and hostile exchange in the Philippines. There is also an ‘overwhelming concern’ about Facebook as a channel for ‘false or misleading information’ in the country (Newman et al., 2020, p.19).

Although the Philippine media system has been described as the ‘freest’ in Asia, and enjoys greater independence when compared to some of neighboring countries (Freedom for Media, Freedom for All Network, 2018; Johnson, 2018), it is indeed far from a rosy picture. The ‘culture of impunity’ that has characterized the media landscape especially after the 2009 Ampatuan Massacre (single deadliest event for journalists in the world) appears to continue under the Duterte regime, as majority of journalist killings remain unresolved and 12 journalists were killed in the first two years of the current administration (International Federation of Journalists, 2019). Over 150 incidents of threats and attacks against journalists have been recorded since Duterte assumed office in 2016, according to Freedom for Media, Freedom for All, a network of journalist organizations (Rappler, 2019).

With the multitude of sources and deluge of data, coupled with delegitimization efforts discussed above, mainstream media in the Philippines found itself struggling for audience engagement. The political and commercial pressures created numerous instances of compromise, as in the case of some journalists reporting that in their respective newsrooms, there is a command to tone down articles critical of the administration (Estella, 2018).

In the face of commercial and political imperatives, many outlets continue to implement business schemes that in some cases include rationalization of labor. For starting journalists (and community journalists), ‘low wages’ tend to be the most important problem, but those in the higher positions tend to see lagging professionalism as the main dilemma (Tandoc and Skoric, 2010). Indeed, professionalism in Philippine journalism is also a function of working conditions and overall media economy, as wages and working conditions can also be predictors of unethical practice or media corruption.

The pathways to a journalism career are diverse. Many journalists graduated with a degree in journalism, communication, liberal arts, or even remotely related fields. There has been a massive growth in the number of institutions offering journalism or mass communication programs since the 1970s. In the basic education level, journalism conferences and competitions are held from the district to the national level and a special program for journalism is now being offered as a specialization strand in senior high school. However, there is no current empirical data evaluating the state of journalism education in the country.

Journalism education in the country operates largely in an industry-centered perspective – the learning emphasis is on reproducing the standards of the industry, i.e. educators train students according to the norms of the industry. This observation goes hand-in-hand with the fact that journalism studies or journalism research is not a robust field of study in the Philippines. Although practitioners see nothing wrong with this learning emphasis, such a perspective can be hostile to innovation and even critical thinking and can prevent the academe from functioning as a critic of the industry.

Media

Print

Mainstream print media in the Philippines, as in other parts of the world, is challenged by declining readership and finds itself hybridising by investing into online and mobile platforms.

Based on the latest available data on media consumption, only 22 percent of Filipino respondents get their news from newspapers, as majority (55 percent) said they 'prefer to watch news online rather than read' (Newman et al., 2020, p.15). This finding suggests that trends as early as 2013 are continuing: As early as seven years ago, barely one in 10 Filipinos read newspapers everyday (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2013). The figure for magazine readership is only slightly higher. Print media lags far behind television, radio, and internet (particularly social media) when it comes to people's 'exposure' level (the respondent is considered 'exposed' to a medium if he or she accessed it everyday or at least once a week or seldom in the last 12 months preceding the survey). Given this data, the Media Ownership Monitor or MOM (2017) concluded that 'newspapers [are losing] their relevance as a source of information'.

According to the 2020 Digital News Report on global news consumption patterns (which covers 40 countries including the Philippines), 'people with lower levels of education are more likely to want to watch online news compared with the better educated' (Newman et al., 2020, p.15). Therefore, in the case of the Philippines, one of the influential factors could be 'educational deprivation' – the strong preference for online news over print news be explained by the fact that majority of Filipino families lack even basic education, according to the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (BusinessMirror, 2018).

Philippines newspapers come in broadsheet and tabloid formats, with the latter significantly outnumbering the former in terms of number and copies sold. There are roughly 40 national dailies (both broadsheets and tabloids), around 60 regional and community newspapers, and 14 newspapers in the foreign language other than English (mostly Chinese). According to a survey conducted by The Nielsen Co. in 2017, the list of top 10 most read newspapers is dominated by the tabloids, which could be because tabloids are smaller, hence more convenient, and cheaper. Only three broadsheets made it in the list. It should be noted that some broadsheets also have tabloid counterparts, such as the broadsheet *The Philippine Star* and the Filipino tabloid daily *Pilipino Star Ngayon*.

The content of Philippine tabloids, most of which in the native language, is marked by an emphasis on crime, sex, and entertainment stories (Tandoc and Skoric, 2010), and the broadsheet content by its focus on politics and governance. The dominance of tabloids in newspaper circulation and readership provides a glimpse on the demographics of Filipino newspaper readers, most of which, based on general tabloid content, seem to prefer sensationalized content, mostly the bizarre and appalling (such as heinous crime and 'show business' or 'showbiz' stories). However, this assumption has yet to be tested by well-developed empirical research. Interestingly, the trend of putting up active websites among broadsheets cannot be observed to be in the same extent for the tabloids (most of the pornographic tabloids do not have a website).

When it comes to ownership, the four biggest newspaper companies have a readership of 21.5 percent of the sample, with each company having a readership of roughly five percent each, as noted by the MOM in 2017. Hence, according to MOM, there is 'not much concentration' in the print market. However, there have been criticisms on the precedence of commercial and political imperatives over public service among Philippine newspapers.

There is not much data on the circulation or readership of regional and community newspapers, which are mostly published in the local language (There are about 170 languages and dialects in the country). Interestingly, however, there is a growth in community newspapering in terms of the number (Opiniano, Arcalas, Mallari, and Tuazon, 2015). Community newspapers and chains continue to thrive as some expand their reach, such as the *Mindanao Gold Star Daily*, which now publishes in 24 provinces. New community newspapers are emerging as Metro Manila-based dailies buy majority shares of existing community newspapers or establish new ones.

According to a study by Opiniano et al. (2015), the primary source of revenue for the community press remains to be community-level advertising, but 'the amount of revenues then depends on the level of economic growth in local communities, the presence of local enterprises and the aggressiveness of community newspapers' advertising and marketing personnel to reach a part of the market' (p.33). Hence, the community press in the richest regions is more 'fortunate' in terms of local advertising as a revenue source (p.33), while those in other communities bank more on 'community-level participatory interest' (p.31), longevity, and standing as source of information. As internet penetration rate continues to lag in countryside and impoverished communities, the community newspapers in these areas have yet to explore the possibilities in using the internet in newswork and content distribution.

Several authors, meanwhile, noted the persistence of media corruption and poor reportage as an outcome of economic conditions among the community press (Chua, 2013; Opiniano, 2015; Tuazon, 2013). The culture of impunity also threatens the community press, as the Philippines sits as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists (Reuters, 2014) and in the bottom third of the World Press Freedom Index (2018). There are documented cases of journalist harassment and even killings among print newsmakers, particularly those functioning in regional or community outlets. This is ironic given the fact that the Philippines is considered as a partly free media system (with journalism having a largely watchdog orientation) as opposed to its neighbors in Southeast Asia.

The print medium has also been used by insurgent and belligerent forces as a way to communicate with various audiences. The Communist Party of the Philippines, for example, publishes *Ang Bayan* in limited copies to disseminate content in different parts of the country.

Radio

Radio continues to be a significant source of information for Filipinos, as it reaches even the 'remotest' areas, as noted by the Media Ownership Monitor or MoM (2017). There is no recent data on audiences' attitudes toward radio as source of content; the most recent publicly available data indicates that as of 2013, it is the second most used medium (see Philippine Statistics Authority, 2013). About two out of five – 41.4 percent – listen to the radio at least once a week. Radio reaches 85 percent of Philippine households, based on 2012 data (National Commission on Culture and Arts, cited by Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network, 2012, p.13). There is indeed a need for up-to-date empirical studies exploring the role of radio in urban areas where online media news reach is rapidly increasing, as well as in rural areas where internet infrastructure remains wanting.

The CIA World Factbook (2015) pegs the number of radio stations in the country at about 1,200 as of 2015. However, citing 2016 data from the National Telecommunications Commission, the MoM puts the number at about 1,500 (416 AM stations and 1,042 FM stations). More Filipinos listen to the FM stations; the MoM noted that Filipinos listen to FM primarily for music 90 percent of the time. The AM stations, on the other hand, put emphasis on news and public affairs and public services.

Audience share is heavily concentrated: four stations (DZMM Radyo Patrol, DZBB 594 Super Radyo, 'Radyo ng Bayan', and DZRH) have a combined audience share of about 84 percent, according to data from a Nielsen Co. survey in 2016 (cited by MoM, 2017). More than 90 percent of the stations are privately owned and commercial (Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network, 2012, p.24), although the government-owned station, DZRB 738, ranks second in terms of audience share.

In terms of ownership, seven broadcasting groups dominate the market (Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network, 2012, p.24), and most of these, such as ABS-CBN and GMA, have television networks as well. Some radio programmes have television 'spin-offs' or also aired in television programmes simultaneous with the broadcast. A coordination in content production or appropriation of content in these two platforms can be observed quite often.

Because the radio is described as the most 'pervasive' medium (MoM, 2017), it is not surprising that hundreds of regional and community radio stations operate in the country. Not much empirical data is publicly available when it comes to professional practices and consumption habits for community radio, but advertisers see radio, particularly local outlets, as the most effective means of reaching consumers (Rosales, 2006, p.149).

Community radio is also seen as a venue for educational programmes especially those under government agencies, such as those discussing nutrition and other grassroots issues. At the same time, some ethnic minority groups, as well as belligerent and insurgent forces, use the radio to supplement their face-to-face organizing. The Cordillera Peoples Alliance, for instance, occasionally runs radio programmes as a medium for cultural activism (Soriano, 2016, p.355).

Radio journalists, more than print journalists, 'bear the brunt of violence against media workers' in the Philippines (Rosales, 2006, p. 148). Rosales (2006) attributed this to interweaving factors such as a 'a post-Marcos legacy of all-powerful and well-entrenched military and politicians', 'weak judicial system', 'lack of professionalism among newsmakers' (see also Shafer, 1990; Tiglao, 1991), and a 'lack of aid and protection for journalists from the station owners, who comprise a small, powerful oligarchy in the Philippines' (p.148).

Television

Overview of the television industry. Media consumption habits, including information about the most popular and trusted sources of news and information in different regions (300-500 words):

The traditional television still 'dominates the media landscape', according to The Digital News Report, which includes a survey with over 2,000 respondents in the Philippines (Chua, 2020; see also Newman et al., 2020). It should be noted that the survey has a predominantly urban sample, which could explain the strong preference for online news (at 85 percent) and the finding that online news is catching up with television as primary source of information.

In a Nielsen survey in 2016 (cited by Media Ownership Monitor or MoM, 2017), television is the most trusted source of political information (58 percent of the sample). Cable/satellite technologies offer subscriptions to Filipinos based in other parts of the globe, although cable/satellite subscriptions are limited to only 12 percent of urban Philippines (MoM, 2017). Subscription video-on-demand (SVoD) services, which allows viewers to access video content through the internet, is also on the rise in the country and surprisingly has found a way to co-exist with cable television (Chua, 2018). This situation is in stark contrast with the U.S. experience, where cable companies are feeling the brunt of the competition with the growing SVoD industry. The Philippine situation could be explained by the fact that not all Filipinos have constant or reliable internet access, so SVoD and cable TV serve different markets, said Sheila Paul, Philippines country manager for HOOQ, an SVoD service (Chua, 2018).

There are more than 400 television stations nationwide as of 2016, 23 of which are in Metro Manila. The television market is highly concentrated and is in essence a duopoly – the two biggest conglomerates, ABS CBN and GMA, have an audience share of about 81 percent (MoM, 2017). Constantly 'engaged in a vicious ratings war', the biggest networks such as ABS CBN and GMA are among the most influential opinion shapers (Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network, 2012, p.142). These conglomerates also operate regional stations or relay their programmes to independent regional stations.

These conglomerates, being unchallenged for the most part, have been reporting massive net profits for many years now, with their revenues reaching millions of dollars every six months these past few years (Amojelar, 2020; Rivas, 2019b). These two networks also rake in profits during election season, when political advertising greatly increases their revenues, such as the 2019 case in which their earnings ballooned by 69 to 120 percent (Rivas, 2019a).

However, the forced closure of ABS CBN, the oldest television company in Southeast Asia (Regencia, 2020), in May this year might change this longstanding status quo. The leading network in terms of market share, ABS CBN has 42 television stations, 23 radio stations, and 10 digital broadcast channels, all of which stopped airing a day after its 25-year-franchise to operate expired (Chua, 2020). Under Philippine laws, the legislators have to create an enabling law that will grant a media network its franchise to operate, hence the term 'legislative franchise'. Although bills have been filed for the renewal of the ABS CBN franchise as early as 2014, none of these saw significant progress.

The National Telecommunications Commission (NTC), the government agency overseeing related affairs, refused to grant

the network a provisional authority to operate, which was previously granted to other stations that found themselves in the same predicament before, said Theodore Te, a human rights lawyer, in an interview with *Al Jazeera* (Regencia, 2020). The NTC issued a shutdown order when the Solicitor General, the chief legal counsel of the government, threatened to sue NTC commissioners (Regencia, 2020).

Many critics linked this discriminatory action with the 'political vendetta' of President Duterte himself (Gutierrez, 2020), who made several verbal attacks against ABS CBN in different speeches. He accused them of 'playing favorites' (Regencia, 2020) and 'swindling' him when the network reportedly refused to air his political advertisements (Corrales, 2017; Rappler, 2020a) during the campaign period of 2016 (which the network denied). He also threatened to block the renewal of the franchise (Corrales, 2017; Placido, 2018) and lambasted the network over its allegedly unfair reporting (Rappler, 2020a).

When the network was forced to go off air, some 11,000 employees were left with an 'uncertain future' and 'deprived' about 38 percent (as of January) of the television-viewing population of their source of information and entertainment (Tantuco, 2020). Its rival network, GMA, has gained viewers at the absence of ABS CBN (Esmael, 2020) – its audience share jumped from 40 to 60 percent overnight (Chua, 2020). Its shares also 'soared' by 24 percent (Rivas, 2020a).

Critics believed that the closure of ABS-CBN leaves an information void, which is the last thing the nation needs as people seek crucial information about the pandemic. Furthermore, according to the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, the shutdown order sends a 'chilling effect' on freedom of speech (Gavilan, 2020b), given that the network has earned the ire of the chief executive and Duterte has made his disdain known in several occasions prior to the closure.

The government-owned *People's Television Network Inc.*, on the other hand, has a significantly lower audience share than that of its private competitors. All television franchises, however, must be approved by the government, particularly the House of Representatives (lawmakers), and then regulated by the National Telecommunications Commission (also a government agency).

Some churches or religious organisations also purchased television stations or launched their own.

Regular programming on weekdays is largely the same across the stations. The day begins with early morning news programmes, followed by a variety of lifestyle or home-making shows or cartoons for a younger audience. The lunchtime entertainment shows command significant audience attention and are consistently at the top of survey ratings. Most of the late afternoon slots are given to soap operas, followed by the evening newscast. After the evening news programmes, the 'primetime', described as a window of time with a spike in the number of viewers, is usually a screening of soap operas or reality television shows.

The critique on mainstream television lies mainly on the tendencies stemming from its commercial nature, an example of which is the massive amount of air time allotted to advertising, or the news emphasis on 'what sells'.

Digital Media

Evolution of the online media marketing in the last years

If we talk about 'digital media' in the Philippines, we talk largely about the rapidly expanding communication spaces networked by the internet. As of 2019, 79 million out of about 110 million Filipinos (72 percent) use the internet, an increase of more than 3,300 percent from 2000 figures, based on the data from Internet World Stats (2020b), which combined the figures published by Facebook, International Telecommunications Union, and other sources. Internet penetration rate is rapidly increasing in the country, as evidenced by an increase of nine percentage points in just one year (from 2018 to 2019).

The figures published by We are Social, an advertising agency, and Hootsuite, a social media management platform (2020, cited by Kemp, 2020), are more recent but slightly lower: 73 million internet users as of January 2020, which means that the internet penetration rate is at 67 percent.

The Philippines is ranked 12th worldwide in terms of the number of internet users as of the first quarter of 2020 (Internet World Stats, 2020a), this despite having one of the slowest average internet speeds in the world (ABS CBN News, 2019; Akamai Technologies, Inc., 2017). According to the Speedtest Global Index, which ranks over 130 countries according to average internet speed, Philippines ranks 103rd out of 139 countries with its average speed falling below the global average (ABS CBN News, 2019).

Filipinos are also at the top spot worldwide when it comes to the amount of time spent on internet: an average of nine hours and 45 minutes everyday (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020, cited by Kemp, 2020). This is probably linked to the slow average internet speed, but the factors have yet to be determined through empirical studies.

Despite the convergence of technologies and the internet coming of age especially in the urban Philippines, internet penetration, literacy, and speed particularly in the countryside remains hindered by poor infrastructure (Pablo, 2018). The pandemic crisis has drawn attention to how poor internet can sabotage essential activities or functions. For one, the poor internet speed makes it extremely difficult for many schools, especially in the rural areas, to switch to online learning as the crisis forced schools to close down (Gascon, 2020). The business processing outsourcing industry, once described as the 'sunshine industry' because of the huge number of jobs it generated in the past decade, may also suffer because the work-from-home set-up – the new normal – can be adversely affected by poor internet connection (Ibañez, 2020). Unless these conditions change, corporate clients 'may look to have alternative destinations serving particularly premium customers where they just can't afford to have long wait times and outages,' said Sharon Melamed, managing director of Matchboard, an Australian-based outsourcing matching service, in an interview with BusinessWorld (Ibañez, 2020).

The younger population uses the internet most often, although this does not come as a surprise. The highest amount of internet usage was observed among Filipinos in the 18 to 24 age bracket (81 percent), followed by the 25 to 34 bracket (65 percent), based on a 2018 survey by the Social Weather Stations (Flores, 2018). More recent data points at a large generation gap in internet use: 94 percent of people aged 18 to 29 use the internet at least occasionally and own a smartphone, as opposed to 36 percent for those aged 50 years and above (Schumacher and Kent, 2020). There is also another gap in internet usage according to income: people with higher income are more likely to use the internet than those with lower income (Schumacher and Kent, 2020).

Filipinos access the internet primarily through the smartphone, according to a survey done by advertising agency We are Social and social media management platform Hootsuite (2020). An overwhelming 94 percent of the sample (Filipinos aged 16 to 64) are mobile phone users, 93 percent of which are smartphone users. More than 70 million are mobile internet users (majority of the population), accounting for 97 percent of the total number of internet users, and there are even more mobile phone connections than there are people in the Philippines. Smartphone access also accounts for much of the web browser traffic (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

The number of smartphone users in the Philippines are expected to more than double from about 40 million in 2016 to 90 million by 2021, according to the 2016 Ericsson Mobility Report (Jiao, 2016). To put these figures into perspective, one has to consider that the Philippine population has reached 109 million as of 2020.

The mobile internet penetration rate was said to be increasing by 30 million users every year (Garcia, 2016), despite the poor mobile internet speeds. In the 'State of the LTE report' published by mobile network research firm OpenSignal (Boyland, 2019), the speed and availability of the long-term evolution or LTE mobile connection in the country fared so poorly that it

ranked 71st out of 87 countries.

Nevertheless, despite the long history of sluggish internet, internet speeds in the country appear to be increasing at a fast pace. The same report states that there is an 11 percent increase in the mobile internet speed connection from 2018 to 2019 and a huge leap of 34 percent in the case of fixed internet connection.

The same survey also covered how Filipinos use the internet every month. Respondents reported spending most of their time online on social media (98 percent) and messenger (97 percent), followed by entertainment and video apps (92 percent). Other priorities include navigation (75 percent), gaming (68 percent), music (65 percent), and shopping (59 percent). In terms of 'online content activities', most Filipinos use the internet to watch online videos (98 percent of the survey sample), watch vlogs (80 percent), and listen to music streaming services (84 percent) (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

Philippines is also 'the fastest growing app market' in Southeast Asia, as more and more Filipinos are availing of services (e-commerce, for instance) through their smartphones (Garcia, 2016). According to report, 91 percent of the sample said that they searched online for products to buy in the month preceding the survey. The same percentage also visited an online retail store and 76 percent purchased a product online. Moreover, more than 48 million people (roughly 45 percent of the population) reported purchasing consumer goods online in 2019. Kemp (2020), however, said that despite these figures, the Philippine online economy is 'still relatively small'. In fact, the country posted the lowest average revenue per ecommerce user among the sample of countries included in the Digital Market Outlook survey of Statista, an online portal for statistics from various sources worldwide (2020, cited by Kemp, 2020).

The Philippine youth expect that the networked technologies that will have the greatest impact in their lives in the future include the 'Internet of Things (IoT), virtual/mixed/augmented reality (VR/MR/AR), and next-generation computing experiences' (Microsoft Philippines, 2017). This is based on a survey with a sample of the younger population in Asia-Pacific. The IoT, ranked as the top technology projected to have the biggest impact on people's lives, now exist in the form of 'confluence of power devices, cloud and data' (Microsoft Philippines, 2017). However, six out of 10 Filipino respondents in the sample felt that the country is 'not ready to adapt to digital disruptions'. For instance, only a small number of Filipinos relative to the total population owns or uses a smart home device, as suggested by the results of the survey published by We are Social and Hootsuite (2020). Only 4.2 percent of the respondents reported owning or using a smart home device.

Traditional media (print and broadcast) have long invested in online presence to expand reach given the pervasiveness of the internet in the Philippines. Newspapers like *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* and broadcast networks like GMA put up their respective news websites, which either reprint stories or videos published in print or shown in television programmes (or appropriate content into the online format) or publish entirely new stories 'as soon as they happen'. One firm, *Rappler.com*, is a purely online news outlet.

Like the traditional media, news websites source their revenues largely from advertisements, and advertising revenue is a function of reach and audience engagement. Hence, news firms re-post content in social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), which as the abovementioned data suggests, is where many Filipinos discuss or communicate with their networks.

The internet coming of age also provided cause-oriented groups and individuals with a cheaper if not entirely free platform in which they can disseminate information to an increasing number of netizens. Even belligerent forces are using social media networks and websites to reach more audiences, as in the case of the Communist Party of the Philippines' and Moro International Liberation Front's websites and accounts in Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter.

Alternative or non-mainstream media found the internet as a cheap platform for their content, which compensates for their

meagre resources when compared with those of mainstream media. *Pinoy Weekly* and *Bulatlat.com*, for example, publish most of their stories online, and these stories were mostly guided by news values different from those that guide mainstream news. However, alternative media outlets, which have a long history of reporting on government transgressions, recently reported cyberattacks especially in January this year. *Bulatlat.com*, for example, was inaccessible for a period of time because of a 'Distributed Denial of Service' or DDos attack, with the 'attackers using 1,100 compromised computers to flood the website with requests' (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, 2019).

Social Networks

For four consecutive years since 2015, Philippines has been at the top spot worldwide in terms of the amount of time people spend on social media, based on the report published by advertising agency We are Social and social media management platform company Hootsuite in January this year. According to the same report, Filipinos spend an average of three hours and 53 minutes on social media on any device everyday, hence the label 'social media capital of the world' (Pablo, 2018; Mateo, 2018). The report also shows that the average number of social media accounts per internet user is 9.9. Surprisingly, despite these figures, Philippines lags behind its neighbors in Southeast Asia when it comes to internet speed and cost (Pablo, 2018), although recent figures show that average internet speed in the country is fast increasing (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

The report showed that Philippines has 73 million active social media users. This figure bears more significance if contextualized – the total population as of 2020 is roughly 109 million. An overwhelming 98 percent of these users access social media networks through their smartphones. These figures are higher than the numbers in some highly developed countries like Japan and South Korea (House of IT, 2018).

Facebook is the most widely used platform – 96 percent of internet users use the network, much higher than the U.S. figure (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020). This is followed by YouTube (95 percent), Facebook Messenger (89 percent), Instagram (64 percent), and Twitter (56 percent).

Social media is also used somewhat extensively in e-commerce as 29 percent of the internet-using population search and purchase products through social media (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2018). Commercial firms maintain at least one social media account as a way of promoting products or services and getting in touch with the market. Furthermore, as of January 2020, Facebook reported that its adverts reach 70 million Filipinos at a given time (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

Many government agencies and public figures, as well as private enterprises, have social media accounts to disseminate information and discuss with their 'followers'. Advocacy groups and even belligerent forces are managing social media accounts to communicate their cause and establish a wider audience base. The Moro International Liberation Front and the Communist Party of the Philippines, for example, are publishing some campaign materials and other related content in their Facebook accounts.

Most of the news consumption is now done through television and social media (David, San Pascual, and Torres, 2019, p.4; Newman et al., 2020). Much of the traffic to the news websites was generated by social media, particularly Facebook (David et al., 2019, p.4), and media outlets now employ social media managers or community managers to manage audience engagement and expand reach. A lot of political engagement among Filipinos also happen in the Facebook social space. Based on an online survey with 978 Filipinos, David et al. (2019) found that following political figures and institutions on Facebook is 'associated with higher levels of political interest and engagement' and that using Facebook as source of political information is positively correlated with discussing politics frequently with others (p.1).

However, social media has become 'weaponized' in this setting (Ong and Cabañes, 2016, p.1), as groups and individuals

were found to be implementing massive disinformation and discourse-hijacking campaigns for political agenda (p.5). Ong and Cabañes' (2016) conducted in-depth interviews and online observation with operators of fake Facebook and Twitter accounts and the strategists who manage them. The researchers found that click farms, fake news, and troll armies were used systematically by players across the political spectrum to sow disinformation in social media. In another report, the political party of the incumbent president Rodrigo Duterte, Partido Demokratiko Pilipino Lakas ng Bayan or PDP Laban, was found to be hiring fake account operators especially during the campaign period (Bradshaw and Howard, 2017, p. 17). Duterte himself admitted that during the presidential campaign period in 2016, people were paid about USD 200,000 to 'defend him on social media' (Ranada, 2017).

The researchers noted that 'disinformation production is a professionalized enterprise: hierarchical in its organisation, strategic in its outlook and expertise, and exploitative in its morality and ethics' (Ong and Cabanes, 2018). They added that there is a system 'has not only normalized political deception, but made it financially rewarding – especially for people at the top'.

This systematic campaign to sow disinformation and delegitimize non-state sources of information – 'cyber attack (and) online harassment/trolling' – is perceived by Filipino journalists as the 'second worst threat' in the current practice, according to a 2018 survey done by the International Federation of Journalists and Southeast Asia Journalists Unions (International Federation of Journalists, 2019).

Critics fear that Facebook and other social media networks can become venues for cyberattacks against perceived enemies of the government. For example, in June this year, hundreds of Filipinos reported dummy accounts on Facebook – accounts with their name (sometimes misspelled) but with no profile photo and few or no friends. One fake account reportedly sent a message to the real account, calling the person a 'terrorist' (Cabato, 2020). The hashtag #HandsOffOurStudents went viral as many netizens believe that these fake accounts could be used to implicate people in what could be considered as 'terrorist' acts online, especially because the fake accounts emerged at the time of the strong backlash against the then proposed anti-terror law (see CNN Philippines Staff, 2020b; see also Rappler, 2020b).

The social media scene in the Philippines has also become spaces for gender-based violence (offensive language, online harassment, among others). In fact, 'cybercrimes against women' is among the top three complaints received by the Anti-Cybercrime Group of the Philippine National Police (Occeñola, 2018). An empirical study also proved the link between depression and use of Facebook among Filipino college students (see Maglunog and Dy, 2019): Based on a survey with about 350 college students, there is a 'moderate positive association' between depression levels and time spent on Facebook.

Although social media has become a hostile space according to the experiences of many people, it played an important role during natural disasters (see Tandoc and Takahashi, 2016; Tandoc, Takahashi, and Carmichael, 2015). When super typhoon Haiyan barreled across the Visayas region of the Philippines, the victims used Twitter 'mostly for dissemination of second-hand information,

in coordinating relief efforts, and in memorializing those affected' (Tandoc et al., 2015, p.392). Others used Facebook for 'collective coping strategies' (Tandoc and Takahashi, 2016, p. 1).

As the pandemic crisis continued, more Filipinos turned to online selling particularly through Facebook (Rivas, 2020b) as face-to-face interaction and gatherings were restrained and millions lost their jobs during the lockdown (Lopez, 2020).

Opinion Makers

Individuals or groups with influence on public opinion, who are not in the category of professional news media outlets: blogs, websites, any other channel

The idea of 'opinion makers' in the Philippines can be broken into three: first, the 'influencers' in social media, second, the oft-discussed or oft-cited public figures in mainstream media, and third, media personalities who provide insights in established broadcast programmes (such as news anchors). The second and third also manage their respective accounts or pages in social media.

The social media accounts with the most number of followers in the Philippines are those of celebrities. For instance, actors like Anne Curtis, Vice Ganda, and Angel Locsin each have more than 10 million followers in Twitter. In Facebook, actors like Marian Rivera and Angel Locsin have about 15 million 'likers' on the pages. The number of followers on these celebrity pages easily dwarf those on the pages of public officials.

Media conglomerates and service providers like ABS-CBN and GMA also rank high in the list of accounts with followers numbering to at least 13 million (but these fall under the category of 'professional news media outlets').

There are also 'bloggers' who publish political content and who have a significant number of followers. For example, the controversial Facebook account of Margaux 'Mocha' Uson, former assistant secretary in the Presidential Communications Group (appointed by Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte), has more than five million 'likers'. If all these likes on her Facebook page are authentic, then she has a greater reach than the pages of many professional news media outlets. However, Uson was repeatedly accused of peddling fake news through her Facebook page (Hapal and Magsambol, 2017) and was even summoned in a Senate hearing on proliferation of fake news.

Filipino internet users also follow influencers according to their respective interests. For instance, a certain Anne Clutz, a Filipino 'vlogger' with about a million subscribers on YouTube, posts make-up tutorial videos and product reviews. James Deakin, now a television host at CNN Philippines, is also a YouTube vlogger with a following among car enthusiasts and vehicle users.

There is no up-to-date empirical data on the visibility and framing of public personalities (e.g. President Rodrigo Duterte) in mainstream media. However, in a survey with a sample of journalists in 2018, a significant number of respondents reported that there is an effort to tone down articles critical of the Duterte regime or to 'avoid antagonizing' the administration (Estella, 2018).

Sources

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- [Business World](#)
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- [Philippine Daily Inquirer](#)
- [SunStar](#)
- [The Manila Times](#)

- [The Philippine Star](#)

Tabloids

- [Abante Tonite](#)
- [Agila ng Bayan](#)
- [Bandera](#)
- [Bulgar](#)
- [Hataw](#)
- [People's Journal](#)
- [People's Tonight](#)
- [Pilipino Mirror](#)
- [Pilipino Star Ngayon](#)
- [PM Pang-Masa](#)
- [Remate](#)
- [Saksi Ngayon](#)
- [Tempo](#)

Radio

- [DWBM-FM 105.1](#)
- [DWIZ 882](#)
- [DWKC-FM 93.9](#)
- [DWKY 91.5](#)
- [DWQZ 97.9](#)
- [DWRK 96.3](#)
- [DWRR-FM 101.9](#)
- [DWRT-FM 99.5](#)
- [DWSM 102.7](#)
- [DWTM 89.9](#)
- [DWYS 101.1](#)
- [DZAR 1026](#)
- [DZAS 702](#)
- [DZMB 90.7](#)
- [DZMM-AM 630](#)
- [DZRB-AM 738](#)
- [DZRH 666](#)
- [DZRJ-AM 810](#)
- [DZRM 1278](#)
- [DZRV 846](#)
- [DZSR 918](#)
- [DZXL 558](#)

Television

- [ABS-CBN](#)

- [CNN Philippines](#)
- [GMA News TV](#)
- [GMA-7](#)
- [IBC 13](#)
- [INC TV](#)
- [Net25](#)
- [People's Television Network](#)
- [TV5](#)
- [UNTV News and Rescue](#)

Digital media

- [Adobo Magazine](#)
- [Bulatlat](#)
- [Entrepreneur Philippines](#)
- [Kami](#)
- [MindaNews](#)
- [PEP](#)
- [Philippine News Agency](#)
- [PhilOnline](#)
- [Rappler](#)
- [Spin.ph](#)
- [YugaTech](#)

Opinion Makers

- Celebrities (such as [Angel Locsin](#), [Vice Ganda](#), [Marian Rivera](#))
- Interest-based bloggers/vloggers (such as [James Deakin](#) for car enthusiasts, [Anne Clutz](#) for makeup enthusiasts)
- Media networks (such as [GMA](#), [ABS-CBN](#))
- Political bloggers (such as [Mocha Uson](#), [Pinoy Ako Blog](#), [Thinking Pinoy](#))

Organisations

Trade Unions

With a constitutionally guaranteed right to assemble and 'petition the government to redress grievances', the Philippines has some 600 registered national trade unions, industrial federations, and plant-level unions (International Labour Organisation, 2016). Examples of these are Kilusang Mayo Uno, Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa and the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines. These registered unions, however, represent less than 10 percent of the total 38.8 million workers (International Labour Organisation, 2016).

For Camilon (2018), trade unions 'perform a critical role in the democratisation of wealth' in a society by 'securing good collective bargaining agreements with company owners and by shaping pro-labor government policies'. However, he noted

that 'union density' has drastically declined. Based on the data from the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment, the number of wage and salary workers organized into unions dropped from 20.2 percent in 2003 to about eight percent in 2014 (Camilon, 2018).

Given the reported labor flexibilization and contractualization schemes in Philippine media firms (National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, 2018, cited by Cabico, 2018), the rise of clamorous media worker unions is something that can be expected. However, union organizing among media workers appears to be not as robust as it is in other industries or sectors, despite the recent layoffs in some firms like CNN Philippines and TV5 (euphemised under the label 'right-sizing'). Since 2010, very few media union campaigns have managed to command significant attention (that is, have made it to the headlines, which is not surprising given that such reportage would be against the networks' interests). Notable examples include 1) the 2010 struggle of ABS CBN Internal Job Market Union for security of tenure, and 2) the recent victory of Talent Association of GMA Network in its campaign for regularization (TAG, however, is not a registered labor union). In both of these, the Philippine Court of Appeals decided in favor of the workers' case.

Union organising in media and telecommunications appears to follow the general trend of union organising across industries: a 'steep decline' due to the 'continuous assault on the fundamental rights of workers, particularly to security of tenure, and the existing barriers that keep workers from fully exercising their rights to self-organisation and collective bargaining' (Camilon, 2018). In many companies, for instance, workers who are not yet 'regularised' (labeled as 'under probation' or 'contractual') cannot join unions for fear of losing their already 'uncertain' jobs. In general, only regular employees can be bona fide union members, and this observation is true for media worker unions.

Journalist Associations

The Philippines has a handful of journalists' or media workers' organisations and trade unions, but few with a strong national presence. Some associations have individual journalists as members, as in the case of National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), National Press Club, and Economic Journalists Association of the Philippines. Some have outlets or firms as members, such as the Philippine Press Institute (PPI), an association of newspapers and also one of the oldest professional media organizations, 'Kapisanan ng Brodkaster ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas' or KBP (Association of Philippine Broadcasters), and College Editors Guild of the Philippines (CEGP) for college publications.

Some of these associations campaign actively for media freedom and decent working conditions for journalists. They also release statements and conduct activities condemning what they described as 'culture of impunity' in the country, a condition that enables journalist harassment (online and offline) and even killings. The NUJP, for instance, recently published several press releases on the recent arrest of a prominent journalist, Maria Ressa, head of news outlet Rappler, which published stories critical of the current administration. The NUJP slammed the arrest as 'a move of a bully government' (2019). Ressa had just been convicted of cyberlibel, a verdict described by NUJP as an assault to freedom of speech and the press (Gonzales, 2020).

The CEGP, meanwhile, participates in campaigns aside from those that primarily concern the media. These include human rights campaigns particularly in light of the at least 6,000 deaths in police anti-drug operations (Tupas, 2019) since President Rodrigo Duterte assumed office in 2016. This number could be a conservative estimate, given that the source is the Philippine National Police, and also does not include the vigilante killings that occurred in the same period. The CEGP, the oldest alliance of student publications in the country with hundreds of member publications, also publish press releases and other materials containing its stand in issues such as poor labor conditions and what it deems as flawed government policies.

Other associations adopt a monitorial and regulatory rather than an advocate role, as in the case of KBP. The KBP, with 121

member broadcast stations and corporations, established its 'own system of self-regulation and standards for radio and television stations in the country' (2016).

News Agencies

The official newswire service of the Philippine government is the Philippine News Agency (PNA), which is under the supervision of the Presidential Communications Office. The PNA was established in 1973 under the regime of dictator Ferdinand Marcos as a means to 'control all sources of information' (Inquirer Research, 2018). It has been tapped mostly for coverage of presidential activities and world events in the Philippines, such as the conferences of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation. It also has a 'long-standing working relationship' with the news agencies of ASEAN member states and the Asianet, an Australia-based consortium of newswire agencies. (Philippine News Agency, 2017). In its website, the PNA declared that it is now trying to modernize its operations through additional funding to purchase equipment that it used to lack, such as new laptops, desktops and fiber connection.

News firms in the country also source some of their stories from global newswire agencies, largely from Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse. These stories are mostly about foreign affairs, which is not surprising given that news organisations are rationalizing resources and cannot (or opt not to) send correspondents abroad.

Audience measurement organisations

Perhaps the most prominent audience measurement organisations in the Philippines are the marketing research firms that the television networks often cite when reporting their ratings. For television networks, the most oft-cited audience measurement firms are Kantar Media and AGB Nielsen Media Research Philippines. Kantar Media, a multinational research group present in more than 80 countries, also provides custom audience research for radio and digital media.

As of 2013, AGB Nielsen uses a panel size of 1,980 households based in urban areas, which represent about 60 percent of the total television-viewing population (Dumlao, 2013). Kantar Media, on the other hand, uses a nationwide panel size of 3,500 urban and rural homes, reportedly representing 100 percent of the total viewing population (Makabenta, 2017).

The two broadcast giants, ABS-CBN and GMA, each claim ratings lead whenever these audience measurement firms release their findings. However, in 2007, ABS-CBN filed a civil case against AGB Nielsen over alleged tampering of ratings in one area. Through its AM station DZMM, ABS-CBN reported that according to AGB Nielsen, GMA was behind the fixing of data, to which GMA responded with a PPh 15-million (more or less US\$780 million) libel case (Makabenta, 2017). In 2008, the court junked ABS-CBN's case.

Audience measurement for digital media is largely conducted by international companies or organisations. Nielsen, the parent company of AGB Nielsen, launched its Digital Ad Ratings service in the Philippines in 2015. Another example would be Comscore, Inc. or NASDAQ-SCOR, which introduced Mobile Metrix® in the country in 2016 'for the reporting of mobile web and app audiences on smartphones and tablets' (Comscore, Inc., 2016). In 2017, the Philippine Digital Measurement Board, comprised of representatives from advertising, research, and global platforms like Google, launched the Digital Measurement Standard (DMS), a unified, 'industry-wide measurement standard that puts clarity and direction on how to evaluate digital marketing and advertising performance' (Llamas, 2017). The DMS, which is the first of its kind in the country, aims to cover a broad range of digital experiences and platforms.

In the case of print media, there are still no institutions or research firms that authenticate the circulation rates of newspapers and magazines.

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- [Geological Society of the Philippines](#)
- [Institute of Electronics Engineers of the Philippines](#)
- [Institute of Integrated Electrical Engineers](#)
- [Integrated Bar of the Philippines](#)
- [Integrated Midwives Association of the Philippines](#)
- [Occupational Therapy Association of the Philippines](#)
- [Pharmaceutical Association of the Philippines](#)
- [Philippine Association of Medical Technologists](#)
- [Philippine Association of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers](#)
- [Philippine Institute of Certified Public Accountants](#)
- [Philippine Institute of Chemical Engineers](#)
- [Philippine Institute of Civil Engineers](#)
- [Philippine Institute of Environmental Planners](#)
- [Philippine Librarians Association](#)
- [Philippine Medical Association](#)
- [Philippine Nurses Association](#)
- [Philippine Seafarers Union](#)
- [Philippine Society of Agricultural Engineers](#)
- [Philippine Society of Mechanical Engineers](#)
- [Philippine Society of Mining Engineers](#)
- [Philippine Society of Sanitary Engineers](#)
- [Philippine Veterinary Medical Association](#)
- [Society of Aerospace Engineers of the Philippines](#)
- [Society of Metallurgical Engineers of the Philippines](#)
- [Solidarity of Filipino Workers](#)
- [Trade Union Congress of the Philippines](#)
- [United Architects of the Philippines](#)

Journalist Associations

- [Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines](#)
- [Economic Journalist Association of the Philippines](#)
- [National Union of Journalists of the Philippines](#)
- [Philippine Science Journalists Association](#)
- [Philippines Press Institute](#)

News Agencies (usual newswire sources of local media outlets)

- [Agence France-Presse](#)
- [Associated Press](#)
- [Philippines News Agency](#)
- [Reuters](#)

Audience measurement organisations

- [AGB Nielsen](#)
- [Kantar](#)

Policies

Media legislation

Philippines has been described as a 'flawed democracy' with a 'partly free' media system (The Economist, 2018, cited by ABS CBN News, 2018). This observation is congruent with the reality that while Philippine journalism generally adopted a watchdog orientation (Balod and Hameleers, 2019), this strong tradition is restrained by a string of systemic conditions. These include the culture of impunity that allows journalist killings and harassment as well as stifling legislation, if not legislation that lacks teeth. Under the pretext of addressing the pandemic crisis, the Duterte regime has also enacted new laws that critics have described as assaults to free speech and media freedom.

Freedom of speech and access to information are guaranteed by the Philippine Constitution, the highest law of the land. Article III Section 4 states that 'No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.' Section 7, meanwhile, states that 'access to official records, and to documents and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions, as well as to government research data used as basis for policy development, shall be afforded the citizen.' However, despite these constitutional guarantees, the practice of journalism remains stunted by threats to freedom such as harassment and even killings. In fact, the Philippines has been labeled as the 'deadliest peacetime country for journalists in Southeast Asia', with 185 journalists killed since 1986, and only 17 of which were partly resolved (International Federation of Journalists, 2018).

Apart from the constitutional guarantee that mandates access to information, Philippines has the Freedom of Information (FOI) Executive Order, signed by the president in 2016, which provides policy guidelines for the release of information from public offices. The Executive Order, however, is not a law, as the Philippine Congress failed to pass the actual bill. It has been more than 30 years since the first FOI bill was filed in Congress. Although some groups laud the signing of the FOI order, several groups criticize it for having a long list of exceptions and conditions (166 exceptions, to be specific), which defeats the purpose.

Moreover, although the free speech clause is in place, other laws have been used to restrain free speech or as a form of

political vendetta, such as the criminal libel law and the Cybercrime Law. The first penalizes libel under the Philippine Revised Penal Code (RPC), which states that the act is punishable by imprisonment from six months to six years. Journalist groups have long called for the 'decriminalization' of libel in the Philippines (Patag, 2018). A criminal libel law, as opposed to civil libel laws in other countries, is 'disproportionate' as it mobilizes the resources of the state in arresting and prosecuting the journalist (Noorlander, 2013). The journalist might be imprisoned and the criminal record can affect his work and travel in the future. The law penalizes the 'defamatory imputation' that is 'presumed to be malicious, even if it be true'. In other words, whether or not the statement is true does not matter; what is being punished is the intent to 'discredit' or 'to cause dishonor'.

For the state functionaries such as incumbent Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo, libel laws are in place as a check on possible abuse of freedom of speech (Patag, 2019). However, for the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, a journalist trade union, the 'antediluvian libel law and its threat of jail time is one of the weapons of choice of corrupt officialdom against those who dare scrutinize and call out their venality and abuse' (Patag, 2019). In 2007, for example, then presidential spouse Mike Arroyo, filed 10 libel cases against 46 media workers who wrote on corruption allegations hurled against him (The libel cases were eventually dropped). Perhaps a more recent example that begs to be discussed is that of Rappler executive Maria Ressa, who was recently convicted for cyberlibel as defined under the Philippine Cybercrime Law.

In essence, the definition of libel in the RPC is carried over to the Cybercrime Law, albeit appropriated to the online platform (This therefore considers the 'sharing' and 're-posting' of content deemed libelous). Enacted in 2012, the law was opposed by various human rights and journalist groups because it may enable the state to clamp down on groups and individuals sharing progressive content. Moreover, the Cybercrime Law triples the penalty time for libel from 50 months to a maximum of 12 years in jail.

In the case of Ressa and Rappler, a certain Wilfredo Keng filed a libel complaint in 2017 over a Rappler story published in 2012, months before the Cybercrime Law was enacted. According to Rappler, the Philippine National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) initially dismissed the complaint because the story was published five years before the complaint was filed, way beyond the one-year prescriptive period for libel (Patag, 2019). However, the NBI revived the complaint in 2018 and recommended the indictment of libel charges versus Rappler, which has long been publishing articles critical of the current administration. According to Manuel Eduarte, NBI Cybercrime Division head agent, the article is covered by the Cybercrime Law because it can still be seen or read at the time of the effectivity of the law (Patag, 2018).

According to its 37-page decision, the court found the Rappler story 'defamatory' primarily because Keng's side was not published nor was it verified (Mendoza, 2020). Although the one-year prescription for libel has clearly lapsed, the Department of Justice, the principal law agency of the government, cited a 'lesser known' law that states a 12-year prescription period for libel (Mendoza, 2020). The use of this law to justify the verdict, however, remains contested even in the legal sphere because the law cited was enacted when the Philippines was still a colony of U.S. and should have been superseded by more recent laws, one of which states the one-year prescription period for libel (Robles, 2019b).

Many believe that the filing of charges is 'politically motivated' and discriminatory against Rappler (Robles, 2019a). Rappler, currently facing seven other charges, has long been publishing stories critical of the Duterte administration. Robles (2019a) wrote that Keng's lawyer himself said that Rappler did get in touch with Keng to confirm the license plate number and ownership of the car mentioned in the article in question. Moreover, the lawyer reportedly said that he did not know why Keng did not file a case against Philstar.com, which also published some of the allegations in 2002 (Robles, 2019a) but took down the article only last year (CNN Philippines Staff, 2019).

As the number of CoViD cases continue to climb and the economic losses pile up, the Duterte administration has enacted a law supposedly to address the crisis: the Bayanihan Heal as One Act of 2020 (BAHO law), which also granted the president

temporary emergency powers, such as the power to re-align the government budget. The BAHO law punishes individuals spreading 'fake news', which, according to lawyer Josalee Deinla, is vaguely worded and very broad and can therefore be used to target critics (Clarín, 2020). The law defines those spreading fake news as 'individuals or groups creating, perpetrating, or spreading false information regarding COVID-19 crisis on social media and other platforms, such information having no valid or beneficial effect on the population, and are clearly geared to promote chaos, panic, anarchy, fear, or confusion.' However, Deinla asked, 'Who is to say the information is not valid? Who is to say that the information has no beneficial value?' (Clarín, 2020). The National Bureau of Investigation in the Philippines has already issued 17 subpoenas to individuals that it found to be spreading 'fake news' (Clarín, 2020). Although the BAHO law is only effective until June 5, senators already filed a bill that seeks to enhance the BAHO law by granting the president 'additional special powers' (Rey, 2020).

Perhaps worse than the 'fake news' provision of the BAHO law is the recently enacted Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, signed by the president early July. The Anti-Terror Law lengthens the period for warrantless arrest, expands surveillance on suspected terrorists, and removes the penalty for wrongful detention or baseless accusation. It also provides a sweeping definition of terrorism: the incitement of terrorism 'by means of speeches, proclamations, writings, emblems, banners or other representations' even without taking any direct part in the commission of terrorism. Therefore, the law leaves a thin line between legitimate expression of dissent or critique and acts of terrorism. An Anti-Terrorism Council, appointed by the president, has the power to interpret this broad definition and determine who is a terrorist. Not surprisingly, there is widespread opposition against the law, which human rights groups described as a form of legalized suppression and as a 'stealth martial law declaration' (Gavilan, 2020a). As Sobel (2020) said, the law is just 'the latest in a series of power grabs passed under the guise of national security amid the coronavirus pandemic, presenting a serious threat to Filipino democracy.'

Others see the enactment as a way to preserve the political status quo as more and more Filipinos feel that their quality of life has gotten worse during the pandemic crisis. According to a mobile survey conducted in May (in the middle of the longest lockdown in the world), the net optimism of Filipinos plummeted to record-breaking negative levels (Tuquero, 2020). For Prof. Aries Uruguay, a political analyst, the record-high level of pessimism means that political favor for the Duterte administration may 'run out' as the majority buckle under the weight of the recession (Tuquero, 2020).

A proposed amendment to the Constitution, meanwhile, includes the addition of the modifier 'responsible' to the free speech clause: 'No law shall be passed abridging the responsible exercise of the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press...'. However, the crucial question, again, is who or what will define 'incitement' or 'responsible'.

3.2 Accountability systems

With the presence of well-entrenched laws described as restraints in the exercise of free speech, accountability systems for Philippine media are not as robust as campaigns for media freedom. 'Accountability systems' in this setting, for the most part, take the form of legal measures or prohibitions (e.g. libel laws and other laws within the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines). For this reason, the media has been wary of political imperatives masking under the guise of 'checking media responsibility', as they believe that such initiatives can, as proven by a history of martial rule, be used to silence the press.

Some media networks and newspapers, such as ABS-CBN, have their internal ombudsman who deals with journalism ethics complaints, especially those which gained traction from the audience (e.g. viral in social media).

Definitely more active and visible than the in-house ombudsmen are the organisations that lean more to a monitorial role, such as the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) and 'Kapisanan ng Mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas' or KBP (Association of Philippine Broadcasters). The CMFR evaluates media coverage and even calls out cases of media corruption

or unethical practice. In many instances, a CMFR representative was invited in television news programmes to speak on issues of media freedom and responsibility.

The KBP, meanwhile, 'established its own system of self-regulation and standards for radio and television stations in the country', which binds – but only to some extent – its 121 member networks or corporations. However, the CMFR has expressed doubts on the future of self-regulation in Philippine media, citing the feeble penalties imposed by the KBP on its erring members (CMFR, 2011).

The Philippine Press Institute (PPI), as well as the KBP, developed a code of ethics: the 'Philippine Journalist's Code of Ethics' that has been used and studied in journalism schools. However, in actual practice, the interpretation of these codes leaves gray areas as the media landscape – and the working conditions of journalists – is far from ideal.

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Regulatory authorities

Although associations of broadcast corporations and newspapers exist with a set of regulatory standards, it appears that these self-regulatory systems lack teeth, and more so for outlets that are not members. According to the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility or CMFR (2011), 'the media are not only failing to regulate themselves; more importantly, some media organisations are actually depending on the government to intervene, in effect eroding the very principle of self-regulation itself.' A case that should illustrate this is that of a hostage-taking incident in 2010, in which the 'Kapisanan ng Mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas' or KBP (Association of Philippine Broadcasters) investigated the accusations of reckless reporting that partly compromised police operations at that time.

The government then asked the KBP to intervene and impose appropriate sanctions, given that there is no government body mandated to regulate Philippine media. Almost a year after the hostage-taking incident, the KBP decision, which found its member networks guilty of ethical lapses, 'has come down to feeble fines of P30,000, and a virtual slap on the wrist (Lingao, 2011). The CMFR likened to situation to a 'mountain laboring to produce a mouse' (2011). Worse, the GMA network, one of the media giants that constitute what is essentially a television duopoly, was not penalized because it withdrew its KBP membership in 2003 (It had a tiff with the association over commercial loading limits). Hence, the KBP asked the government to act on the ethical lapses under GMA, which was ironic given that 'media self-regulation means that media institutions themselves enforce ethical and professional standards among their members without intervention from the government or any other external agency' (CMFR, 2011).

The KBP members that were penalized – ABS-CBN, RMN, and then ABC-5 – even filed appeals to reverse the KBP decision. Instances such as this led monitorial organisations such as the CMFR to 'doubt the future of self-regulation' among Philippine media.

In terms of ownership regulation, the legal framework allows government bodies to interpret legal guidelines and process applications for setting-up media outlets. Protectionist laws require mass media to be owned and managed wholly by citizens or corporations wholly owned and managed by them. However, as the Media Ownership Monitor (2017) noted, the implementation of these protectionist laws are severely lacking, as in the case of tycoon Manuel V. Pangilinan's media and telecommunication empire, the ownership of which can be traced to Indonesia.

The telecommunications industry, unlike mass media, is classified under the 'public utility regulatory regime', which mandates only a 60-40 ownership scheme (at least 60 percent owned by Filipinos and 40 percent by foreign equity). However, proposed amendments to the Philippine Constitution include a removal of such protectionist measures.

For a broadcast outlet to operate, it needs to follow the 'twin franchising principle'. It has to register with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to acquire a franchise approved by the Congress. It also has to secure a second authorization – 'a second franchise' – from the National Telecommunications Commission, which is called the Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity.

In terms of monitoring ownership concentration, the Philippine Competition Commission, a newly established body under the Fair Competition Act of 2015, is mandated to spot anti-competition agreements and break up media monopolies if the case requires.

Recent events, however, shed light on the possibilities in which the government can exercise control over media outlets through the existing legal framework. For example, in 2018, the SEC revoked the operating license of Rappler, an online media outlet that published articles critical of the administration. The SEC ruled that Rappler is 'liable for violating the constitutional and statutory Foreign Equity Restriction in Mass Media' (Tomacruz, 2018) because one of its investors is a foreign philanthropic investment firm, Omidyar Network. Omidyar invested in Rappler in 2015 through Philippine Depositary Receipts, which allows foreigners to invest in a Filipino company without owning part of it or without being involved in its management. Rappler executives such as Maria Ressa believed that there was no due process and that the firm is being singled out in what was described as a politically motivated move (Rappler, 2018a).

Another prominent example is the case of ABS CBN, the oldest television station in Southeast Asia, and the leading network in the country in terms of audience share. Through a 'cease and desist' order, the network was forced to go off air when the Philippine Congress failed to renew its legislative franchise. A broadcast network needs a franchise to operate, which legislators have to approve or renew, as the case may be. However, the legislators rejected the bill for the renewal of the

franchise, leaving the 11,000 media workers of ABS CBN in limbo. For some, the refusal of the Congress to renew the franchise only shows the loyalty of the legislators to the interests of the executive. In a statement, several faculty of the University of Sto. Tomas called the decision an 'unabashed display of servility to the Duterte regime and its enablers and a brazen exercise of political power.'

Although several concerned agencies of the government, such as the SEC and the Bureau of Internal Revenue, have made it clear that the network did not violate any laws and paid its taxes regularly (CNN Philippines Staff, 2020a), majority of the lawmakers still voted against the franchise renewal, which led many to believe that the network is being singled out as an outcome of President Rodrigo Duterte's 'political vendetta' (Lema and Morales, 2020). Duterte himself threatened to block the renewal of the franchise and also threatened to sue ABS CBN for not airing his political advertisements during the 2016 campaign period (Rappler, 2020a).

Sources

Pertinent laws

- [Cybercrime Law](#)
- [Freedom of Information Executive Order](#)
- [Human Security Act](#)
- [Libel under the Revised Penal Code of the Philippines](#)
- [Philippine Competition Act](#)
- [The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines](#)

Some concerned government agencies

- [National Bureau of Investigation](#)
- [National Telecommunications Commission](#)
- [Philippine Senate](#)
- [Securities and Exchange Commission](#)
- [The House of Representatives](#)

Media associations with a self-regulation mechanism

- [Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines](#)

Education

Universities and schools

Philippines has seen a staggering increase in the number of journalism schools and institutions offering either a journalism or mass media course in the past few decades. In 1970, only 13 institutions offer degree programmes either in communication or journalism. In 2006, this figure ballooned to 291 institutions offering journalism as either a degree programme or a subject (Chua, 2006). These journalism schools started as a department or program subsumed under the broader fields of communication or liberal arts and became separate and independent institutions over time.

Most of the institutions offering journalism courses are in Metro Manila, albeit there is a growth in the number of schools offering mass communication and journalism courses outside the capital region. The Metro-based schools include the Journalism Department of the University of the Philippines, awarded with the 'Center of Excellence' recognition by the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and University of Sto. Tomas (UST), which has the longest running journalism programme in the country. The largest state university in the country, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP), also has a journalism programme based in Metro Manila. Both UST and PUP were awarded with the 'Center of Development' recognition. Outside Metro Manila, one of the most notable journalism schools is the Silliman University, the first journalism school to be established outside the capital region.

Although the number of communication and journalism schools increased drastically since the 1970s, there are only 18 institutions offering degree programmes specific to journalism as of 2006 (Commission on Higher Education, 2005). Many courses deal with communication in general, with journalism as a specialization.

There is no publicly available data on the recent number of journalism and mass communication programmes nationwide. What is available is the data on the enrollment rate and number of graduates in the 'Mass communication and documentation' area – the number of graduates in 2018 is a little over 29,000, an increase of about 2,000 from 2008 figures (Commission on Higher Education, 2018). However, this data does not include institutions that subsumed journalism under humanities programmes.

The Bachelor of Arts programme in Journalism (BA Journalism), as prescribed by the CHED, should have a total of 140 units (usually a four-year programme). More than a quarter of the total number of credits is allotted to general education courses (36 units) and about half (60 units) are allotted to core and required courses (journalism and communication theory courses and internship). Institutions that were granted the status of 'autonomy', or autonomous from CHED, are free to modify the prescribed credit load. Recently, the CHED endorsed a new programme, the Bachelor in Journalism programme, which is a 'professional non-thesis degree' with the lesser number of units allotted to core and required courses (a three-year programme as opposed to the four-year BA Journalism course).

There is no systematic empirical research evaluating the state of journalism education in the country, but there is a 2006 descriptive study that aims to provide an overview (see Gapasin, Mirandilla, San Pascual, and Sanqui, 2006). In this study, the authors observed that journalism education in the country, by and large, struggles with 'theory versus practice' debates in setting educational standards (an offshoot of the longstanding industry versus academe divide in journalism), poorly qualified teaching personnel, and lack of necessary facilities, equipment, and materials. However, the general objective of the journalism education system is still to cater to the demands of the industry, or to perpetuate the norms and standards of the industry rather than be its corrective or critic.

Although the CHEd specifies that journalism faculty should have at least a master's degree and at least five years of journalism experience, this is not always the case in many institutions. Tuazon (2006, cited by Chua, 2006) said that only a fifth of journalism educators have work experience, while some have an educational background that is not only tangential to journalism. Teodoro (2006, cited by Gapasin et al., 2006) noted that 'a closer look at the qualifications of the teachers reveal that some come from disciplines that are not even remotely connected to journalism or communication' (p.106).

Another dilemma lies on the contradiction in the role of the journalism educator: should they cater to the demands of the industry or should they focus on the standards of academic work? This contradiction, which is often resolved in favor of the industry-centered perspective, is the reason there are many journalism departments or institutions with a few number of PhD holders as faculty or without a strong academic research tradition. While many practitioners see nothing wrong with this situation, several scholars have recently called for a journalism education tradition that aims to prepare students for ushering or coping with disruptions in the field (technological, economic, and epistemological disruptions) instead of simply reproducing current industry standards (Folkerts, Lemann, and Hamilton, 2013; Hirst, 2010; Mensing, 2010).

Despite so much scholarly and professional interest in technological disruptions as drivers of change in the field, trends like big data journalism and algorithmisation of newswork (as journalism as a practice becomes increasingly influenced by computer algorithms based on user behavior or preferences) appear to be remotely considered in journalism curricula of most institutions. This is probably because such trends have yet to manifest in significant levels in Philippine newswork. Moreover, especially in schools outside Metro Manila, the quality, inadequacy or lack of facilities and equipment for digital reporting hinders educators and institutions from keeping pace with emerging standards. This begs for empirical research on how the pervasiveness of social media and other digital trends are accommodated into journalism curricula, and what meso and macro factors influence this.

In the basic education level, meanwhile, the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) has long been conducting journalism conferences and competitions from the district to the national levels. In some elementary and high schools, journalism is offered as an extra-curricular subject to selected students. However, according to many public school teachers, journalism is 'not a priority' because it is not part of the 'Basic Education Curriculum' (Estella, 2018). Fortunately, in 2017, DepEd started to offer a 'Special Program for Journalism' in the senior high school level, which acts as a bridge between basic education and college. In the tertiary level, CHEd also conducts journalism conferences and competitions nationwide.

Professional development

The pathways to a journalism career are diverse. Not all journalists have a degree in journalism or related fields. Some journalists have a degree in the liberal arts, political science, and even in the hard sciences. Many practice journalism as a passion, but not all of these practitioners have adequate training. Unfortunately, although the number of journalists in the Philippines is pegged to be somewhere around 3,500 (Arao, 2018), there is no recent data on the general profile of the Filipino journalist in terms of age, gender, and educational attainment.

Internship or on-the-job training appears to be highly valued among employers, so much so that for many graduates, the internship is their point of entry into a news organisation. News outlets also provide scholarships and trainings to a targeted institution or group. The scholars of these news firms are bound by a contract to work for at least a year under their sponsors.

The idea of 'professionalism' or professional development in the Philippine setting cannot be divorced from the political economy of the media. Tandoc (2016), in his survey with 349 Filipino journalists, found that younger journalists with lower wages tend to identify 'low wages' as a problem more than others, while those with higher salaries tend to identify lagging professionalism as the 'most important problem'. In other words, wages and job security are also predictors of appreciation

for journalistic competence in the country.

Journalistic professionalism in the Philippines is largely defined by the norms and standards of the industry, and so future newsmakers are only socialized into existing roles and later reproduce these current orientations and standards. It is not surprising that practitioners and even many journalism educators see nothing wrong with the idea, but for some scholars like Hirst (2010) and Mensing (2010), such a notion of professionalism can be hostile to innovation and creative disruptions, which characterize the global field of journalism today.

Media Development Organisations

Media development organisations in the Philippines can be broadly classified into two: 1) international organisations that usually partner with local ones to promote professionalism and/or in support for a cause (e.g. media freedom and human rights) and 2) local organisations or centres with similar objectives. A notable example for the first category would be the United Nations Economic, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which partnered with several local institutions and groups for activities such as developing journalism curricula and drafting campaign plans. For instance, in 2018, the UNESCO provided technical advice to the coalition of journalist groups tasked with creating a 'national plan of action for the safety of journalists' in the Philippines. This is in line with the task of UNESCO as the 'global facilitator of the implementation' of the UN 'Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity' (UNESCO Office in Jakarta, 2018). Another international organisation involved in the creation of the national plan is the International Media Support (IMS), a Denmark-based organisation aiming to help develop the media sector into 'well-functioning and independent media.'

Like UNESCO, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a 'political foundation' based in Germany, partnered with a local educational institution for the training of newsmakers. The Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism was established in 2000 and was envisioned as an 'educational hub' providing learning opportunities for working journalists in the region.

The International Red Cross, meanwhile, gives awards to journalists who wrote excellent humanitarian reports ('Red Cross Award for Humanitarian Reporting'). The award aims to promote 'for human dignity amid armed violence and to promote international humanitarian law, the rules that seek to limit, for humanitarian reasons, the effect of armed conflict' (Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, 2013).

In the local scene, we have organisations that offer training and other learning opportunities for journalists, promote advocacy for the protection of practitioners, and seek support especially for the families of journalists slain or incapacitated in the line of duty. For example, the Philippine Press Institute, an association of newspapers, organises training sessions especially for print journalists. The Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists (FFFJ), meanwhile, is a coalition of media groups aiming to 'raise funds and receive donations for the protection of journalists under threat; to provide immediate assistance to the families of journalists killed in the line of duty; to act as a support group for journalists in distress by, among other means, forming quick-response teams to investigate and report attacks against journalists; and to follow up the prosecution of cases involving attacks against journalists.'

When it comes to promoting quality of newswork and professionalism, the local organisations that need to be mentioned are the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) and Vera Files. Established in 1989, PCIJ is a non-profit agency aiming to promote investigative reporting and 'to create a culture of it within the Philippine press'. It funds investigative projects, publishes books on current affairs, produces documentaries, and conducts seminar-workshops. Vera Files, established in 2008, has fairly the same objectives. Having published specialized reporting projects supported by grants (e.g. elections in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), Vera Files describes itself as having the expertise 'in the production of research-intensive and in-depth reports in multiple formats, and the training and mentoring of journalists,

students and civil society organizations.'

Sources

Universities/schools of journalism

- [Ateneo de Naga University](#)
- [Batangas State University – Nasugbu](#)
- [Bulacan State University – Main Campus](#)
- [Centro Escolar University](#)
- [Colegio de San Juan de Letran](#)
- [Colegio de San Lorenzo](#)
- [De La Salle University Dasmaringas](#)
- [Kalayaan College](#)
- [La Salle University Ozamiz](#)
- [Laguna State Polytechnic University – Siniloan](#)
- [Lyceum of the Philippines University](#)
- [Mindanao State University – Main Campus](#)
- [Misamis University](#)
- [Palawan State University](#)
- [Pasig Catholic College](#)
- [Polytechnic University of the Philippines](#)
- [St. Paul University Dumaguete](#)
- [St. Paul University Manila](#)
- [St. Scholastica's College](#)
- [The Manila Times College](#)
- [University of Eastern Philippines](#)
- [University of La Salette Santiago](#)
- [University of Luzon](#)
- [University of Perpetual Help System DALTA Molino](#)
- [University of Rizal System – Angono](#)
- [University of San Jose-Recoletos](#)
- [University of Southern Mindanao](#)
- [University of the East](#)
- [University of the East – Caloocan](#)
- [University of the Philippines Diliman](#)
- [University of the Philippines Los Baños](#)
- [Visayas State University](#)
- [West Visayas State University](#)
- [Western Mindanao State University](#)

Media development organisations

- [Freedom Fund for Filipino Journalists](#)
- [International Media Support](#)
- [Konrad Adenauer Foundation](#)

- [Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism](#)
- [United Nations Economic, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation](#)
- [Vera Files](#)

Telecommunications

Mobile network ecosystem

Mobile communication in the Philippines has seen a massive growth in terms of penetration rate (the number of people having mobile phones and mobile phone subscriptions) and range of mobile activity (from 2G-based communication to availing of services through online mobile applications). This is despite the deeply entrenched duopoly in the telecommunications industry – a duopoly that has raked immense profits for decades now (Camus, 2018a) even as reports of poor or spotty service and ‘unfulfilled’ advertising promises found their way in both informal and formal venues (Elchico, 2015).

It is ironic that the country is at the top of the list in social media usage and amount of time spent in the internet, but infrastructure inadequacies prevent a significant number of users from taking advantage of mobile activity in its full potential. Internet speed in the country is still below the global average (ABS CBN News, 2019; Akamai Technologies, 2017). The availability of stable mobile signal – and all the more 4G connectivity (Opensignal, 2018) – remains concentrated in the urban Philippines. In the GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index (2018), which measures the performance of 150 countries based on 39 indicators (e.g. mobile infrastructure), the overall country score of the Philippines is only 61.59 out of 100, a ‘transitioner’ country, as opposed to other countries that are ‘leaders’ and ‘fast transitioners’. Among the indicators, ‘affordability of devices and services’ scored the lowest, followed by ‘mobile network infrastructure’. However, according to latest ‘State of Mobile Network Experience’ report published by mobile analytics company Opensignal (Fitchard, 2019), 4G connectivity in the Philippines has improved ‘dramatically’ as LTE users can now access an LTE connection more than 70 percent of the time.

The industry players continue to blame government bureaucracy for the infrastructure inadequacies such as inadequate cell towers (Philippines has far less than neighboring countries Vietnam and Indonesia), and while the government has drafted the first ever ‘common cell tower’ policy to fast track the construction of more towers, visions of the future are clouded with disagreements among parties involved (industry players and government representatives) (Camus, 2018c).

Nevertheless, mobile phone usage has become so pervasive that there are documented cases of it being used to disseminate information in far-flung indigenous communities (see for example Zapata, 2016). There are also documented cases of mobile phone usage among government workers at the grassroots level (e.g. village health workers communicating through SMS with patients and other stakeholders). Moreover, while sluggish speeds are common in the past decade, the future may not be as bleak, based on the 2020 report of We are Social and Hootsuite. According to the report, average mobile internet speed jumped by 11 percent from 2018 to 2019, while the speed of fixed internet connections jumped by 34 percent.

The digital divide that persists partly because of poor telecommunications infrastructure in the countryside is also a function of socio-economic inequalities in the country. In the urban Philippines, more and more people are availing of services (transportation, purchase of products, mobile banking, among others) through mobile applications (‘apps’). However, particularly in the case of mobile banking and purchase of services, the ‘emerging affluent’ tend to use applications in an

extent more than the lower income strata (based on the results of the Visa Consumer Payment Attitudes study in 2016).

Nevertheless, current trends in digital payments appear promising. In 2019, 48.90 million Filipinos (about 45 percent of the population) made digitally-enabled payments (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020). There was also an increase in the amount spent on consumer e-commerce from 2018 to 2019, as the total value of digitally enabled consumer payments in the country grew by 20 percent in just a year (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

The smartphone market is dominated by ultra low-end phones with a strong presence in the provinces (International Data Corp., 2018, cited by Reyes, 2018). The lesser preference for higher-priced phones (capable of more sophisticated mobile activity) in the countryside could probably be explained by heightened poverty levels as well as lack of 4G, even 3G, connectivity in the area.

When using the internet through smartphone apps, Filipinos tend to spend the most time on social media (98 percent of the sample), followed by mobile messenger (97 percent), entertainment or video apps (92 percent), navigation apps (75 percent), gaming apps (68 percent), music apps (65 percent), and shopping apps (59 percent) (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

It appears that Filipinos in general feel a constant need to connect with their networks local and abroad, especially with the increasing number of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). OFWs total to about 2.2 million as of 2019 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020), a 61-fold increase since 1975, when the first statistics for overseas employment was recorded (International Organization for Migration, 2013, cited by Lozada, 2013).

Company profiles

The telecommunications industry in the Philippines is a duopoly of the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT, Inc.) and Globe Telecom (Globe). Both are private companies, with PLDT being partly owned by Hong Kong's First Pacific Group and Globe being part of Ayala Corp. In terms of mobile subscriber base, Globe is ahead by a narrow margin as of 2019, with about 94.2 million subscribers as opposed to PLDT's 60.49 million (Lamiel, 2020). Both posted an increase of 21 to 27 percent from 2018 figures.

Both companies have posted immense profits: from 2000 to 2016, PLDT paid its shareholders with more than PhP 380 billion (USD 7.3 billion) in cash dividends, while Globe has paid about PhP 135 billion (about USD 2.6 billion) (Camus, 2018a). However, for several years now, consumers have complained about what they described as 'poor' or 'inconsistent' service from these telecommunications giants. According to Trade Undersecretary Vic Dimagiba, the Philippine Department of Trade and Industry has received 55 complaints against Smart (under PLDT) and Globe over 'poor internet service, slow speeds or unfulfilled promise of an advertised service' in 2015 (Elchico, 2015). This is merely an official record and of course does not include reports made on informal channels such as social media. In 2017, a legislator warned that the Congress can revoke the licenses of the companies if reports of poor service continue (Cepeda, 2017).

These claims appear to be bolstered by findings of research firms. Philippines has the slowest internet speed in Asia-Pacific as of 2017 (Akamai Technologies, 2017), with an average speed of 5.5 mbps, lower than the global average of 7.2 mbps. Two years later, the average internet speed still falls below the global average, according to the Speedtest Global Index, which ranks over 130 countries according to average internet speed (ABS CBN News, 2019). Philippines ranks 103rd out of 139 countries in the Index. According to another report by Cable.co.uk in 2017, Filipinos need to wait about four and a half hours to download a high-definition movie, 50 percent longer than in Vietnam and more than 14 times slower than it would take in Singapore (Camus, 2018a). However, internet speeds appear to be picking up pace, as average mobile internet speed increased by 11 percent from 2018 to 2019, while the average speed for fixed connections jumped by 34 percent (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

In November 2018, Filipino authorities selected Dito Community (formerly Mindanao Islamic Telephone Company), a joint venture of China Telecom and a Filipino tycoon, as the new major telecommunications player that will challenge the telecommunications duopoly. Last year, its Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity was issued, bringing it a step closer to commercial launch (Bell, 2019).

A new internet provider company, Converge ICT solutions, is also seen as an emerging challenger to the home internet duopoly of PLDT and Globe. Converge ICT offers home fiber plans that are cheaper by 40 to 50 percent than similar offerings of its competitors (Camus, 2018d). The company was cited as the 'fastest growing internet service provider' in the International Finance Awards of the International Finance magazine, a London-based publication (BMPlus, 2020).

When it comes to 4G connectivity, the coverage in the country remains patchy especially outside the urban areas, despite the fact that 4G networks arrived in the country around six years ago. However, 4G connectivity has seen a massive improvement in less than two years. Based on a report published by mobile analytics company Opensignal (Fitchard, 2019), LTE users can now access an LTE connection more than 70 percent of the time, a dramatic improvement from the 2018 performance. According to the 2018 report of Opensignal, 4G signals remain 'hard to find' in the country and 'neither of the two Philippines operators provided...users with the 70% availability we have seen in more mature 4G markets.'

5G connectivity is still in its infancy – even though Globe launched its 5G service in 2019, a comprehensive deployment of the technology 'will take time', probably three to four years (International Finance Business Desk, 2020).

Main trends

The Philippines emerged as the 'fastest growing app market' in Southeast Asia as of 2017, as reported by global trade body Mobile Ecosystem Forum (Galvez, 2018). With the number of mobile phone connections exceeding the total population as of 2020 (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020), an increasing number of activities and transactions are done through mobile applications or 'apps'. Moreover, the Philippine market 'can be a gold mine for app developers' because of 'high install growth (driven by low cost devices and cheap data plans)' and the fact that 'app localization is almost unnecessary' as a significant part of the population speaks English and 40 percent of mobile internet users prefer it over the national language Filipino, according to global mobile advertising company Applift (2015).

However, although it was predicted that the app market will grow 2019 onwards, 'expansion in value will be limited by the very slow connection speeds the current 4G network can achieve' (p.7), according to an industry profile released by MarketLine (2017), an international publisher of business and industry information.

When it comes to using networked services through mobile phones, Filipinos spend most of their time on social media, followed by mobile messenger, entertainment and video apps, games, and shopping apps, according to a 2020 report by

advertising Agency We Are Social and social media management platform company Hootsuite. There is no recent empirical data on the demographics of mobile app users and which particular apps are used by which group. The available data shows that the younger population use the internet most heavily, although it does not specify whether the access is through mobile apps, desktop apps, or browser (see We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020). However, data shows that majority of the Filipinos access the internet through their smartphones (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

According to a 2018 survey, the highest amount of internet usage was observed among Filipinos in the 18 to 24 age bracket (81 percent), followed by the 25 to 34 bracket (65 percent) (Flores, 2018). More recent data shows that Filipinos aged 18 to 29 are far likely to own a smartphone and use the internet at least occasionally compared to those in the 50 plus crowd (Schumacher and Kent, 2020). From these figures, one can assume that mobile app users are mostly the younger Filipinos – or the digital natives, so to speak.

By economic strata, the 'emerging affluent' tend to use apps for a variety of services, such as booking transportation, more than the other socio-economic categories, based on the data from the Visa Consumer payment Attitudes survey in 2016. About 70 percent of the 'emerging affluent' in the sample use apps to avail of services, higher than the average 6 out of 10 for all strata.

The app ecosystem in the Philippines is diverse: Filipinos use apps for social networking, banking, movie and series streaming, deliveries, music download and streaming, transportation, mobile money, and even healthcare. Although the Philippines has been 'slow in adopting e-wallets' (The Nerve, 2019), more and more Filipinos are now using mobile money services offered by the telecommunication giants PLDT, Inc. (Paymaya and Smart Money) and Globe Telecom, Inc (GCash), as well as financial services platform Coins.ph. From 2018 to 2019, the value of e-money transactions increased by 36 percent and is expected to climb further as contactless transactions are promoted amid the coronavirus crisis (Agcaolli, 2020). GCash reported a customer base of 20 million users as of 2019, while Paymaya has eight million based on the most recent available data published 2017 (Zoleta, 2019). Coins.ph, meanwhile, has five million users as of 2018 (The Nerve, 2019). With these figures, the number of people with e-wallet accounts accounts for 31 percent of the total population (The Nerve, 2019).

However, while the adoption of e-wallets is increasing, several barriers stand in the way of digital financial inclusion. For one, cash is still the most preferred payment method and in 2018, only two years ago, 99 percent of the local transactions were still paid by cash (The Nerve, 2019). Furthermore, while 31 percent sounds like a good number, this number is still lower than the number of e-wallet accounts in neighboring countries such as Indonesia (66 percent of the population have e-wallet accounts) and Thailand (58 percent) (The Nerve, 2019). Lack of awareness about e-money and cybersecurity remains an obstacle as well. A significant number of Filipinos do not use e-wallet because they think it is not secure, others simply do not see the need for it, while others do not know how they work, according to a 2019 survey conducted by The Nerve, a data insights company, in partnership with news firm Rappler. More than 1,700 respondents participated in the survey. Last, the adoption of e-wallets is also hindered by poor internet speeds outside especially outside the urban areas.

Barriers notwithstanding, and even without the coronavirus crisis, e-wallet transactions are still expected to grow because the character of the Philippine mobile-digital landscape is predisposed toward it: Philippines is a 'mobile first' market with high internet and social media penetration (The Nerve, 2019).

Especially in the urban Philippines, most Filipinos now tend to use mobile banking instead of visiting branches. According to the Visa Consumer Payment Attitudes study in 2016, nearly three in four Filipinos have a banking app on their mobile phones and 80 percent of Filipinos prefer to transact through the app instead of going to the branch. Furthermore, 65 percent have used their smartphones to make purchases and 41 percent make mobile payments at least one a week. Moreover, the

number of digital payment transactions per month increased by 20 from 2013 to 2018 (Massally, Ricart, Bambawale, Totapally, and Bhandari, 2019).

Surprisingly, many Filipinos seem to be aware of cryptocurrency, but investments remain low because of perceived risk, based on a survey by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) last year (de Vera, 2019). The OECD found that 74 percent of the respondents are aware of cryptocurrency but to varying extent: 27 percent said their level of awareness could be described as 'not very well', 20 percent 'some extent', and 17 percent 'very well' (de Vera, 2019).

The use of mobile apps for the healthcare sector is also emerging, as health maintenance companies started using apps to streamline services. PhilhealthCare, Inc., for example, introduced apps to 'allow members to consult with doctors using smartphones, skip the long lines in waiting for medical care, produce electronic vouchers, find the nearest clinics, generate letters of authority or obtain an electronic medical prescription' (dela Cruz, 2018).

Mobile coverage

The mobile network coverage in the country, currently offered by a telecommunications duopoly, has expanded widely through the years to reach even remote areas. However, due to limitations in infrastructure (such as insufficient number of cell towers), mobile signal remains unavailable in some areas especially in the Mindanao (one of the major island groups) countryside. The existing telecommunications companies blamed this infrastructure problem for the inconsistent quality of the mobile signal and internet.

Late last year, the government organised a public consultation for the draft of the first ever 'common cell tower' policy of the country, which includes the measure 'to remove all future cell tower building activities from incumbents PLDT, Inc. and Globe Telecom, Inc.' as a way to fast-track the roll-out of cell towers, as well as requiring the telecommunications companies to share their cell tower assets (Camus, 2018c). The number of cell sites operated by PLDT and Globe total to about 16,000, a mile less than those of neighboring countries like Vietnam with 70,000 towers and Indonesia with 90,000 (Camus, 2018c). However, the consultation became a protracted, thorny debate among stakeholders and possibilities of a legal row came to the fore.

Based on real-time data from nPerf, an online application company that churns out geo-localized statistics on internet connection, many areas in Visayas and Mindanao, particularly the coastal areas, do not have consistent mobile signal. 4G connectivity is still heavily concentrated in urban Luzon, while most areas with mobile signal coverage only have 3G. This data is congruent with the 2018 report of mobile research firm Opensignal, which found that 4G connectivity in the country is 'hard to find' and is offered in a much lesser extent than it is in other countries. However, according to the latest report of Opensignal (Fitchard, 2019), 4G connectivity in the country has improved 'dramatically' as LTE users can now access LTE connection more than 70 percent of the time. Opensignal (Fitchard, 2019) wrote that the improvements are more likely driven by the 'competitive pressure' brought by the launching of Dito Telecommunity, the third telecommunications player.

Interestingly, there are studies that documented the pervasiveness of mobile phone usage even among indigenous communities in rural areas such as the Aplai and Bontok Igorot communities in the Cordillera mountain range (Zapata, 2016). The use of mobile phones in such areas are largely influenced by the 'indigenous social code' (p.1) and is limited to 2G-based information dissemination (e.g. sharing news or announcements to the community). Most of the respondents in the study received their phones from more affluent relatives living in the city and many households share a unit because of the cost.

Mobile ownership

The number of smartphone users in the country is expected to reach 90 million by 2021, according to the 2016 Ericsson Mobility Report (Jiao, 2016). This figure should excite any smartphone manufacturer, given that the total population is currently pegged at around 109 million, as per census data. According to the latest available data, about 87 percent of Filipino adults are mobile phone users as of 2018 (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2018), and the number of mobile phone connections is more than the total population (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020). The mobile internet penetration rate is fast increasing by 30 million users every year (Garcia, 2016).

The use of mobile phones has penetrated everyday life to the extent that even the poorest consider mobile phone services as a 'necessity' despite it being a greater cost burden for those at the 'bottom of the pyramid' (Aguero, de Silva, and Kang, 2011, p. 19).

The ultra-sensitive smartphone market reflects the massive income disparity in the Philippines, as the budget smartphones priced at 150 USD and below capture two-thirds of the market (Jain, 2019). Chinese brands have gained a strong consumer base (57 percent of the total sales in the last quarter of 2019), largely due to their aggressive marketing and expansion of distribution channels (Jain, 2019). The local manufacturer Cherry Mobile is still among the top five brands but has seen a decline in sales due to intense market competition with the Chinese handsets (Jain, 2019). The market strategy of Cherry Mobile is worth mentioning in this section: It continues to have a significant market share primarily due to its 'pervasive presence in the provinces' coupled by its low-end prices (International Data Corp., 2018, cited by Reyes, 2018). These figures are congruent with the fact that 4G, even 3G, internet connectivity is absent in many rural areas especially in the coastal areas of major island groups Visayas and Mindanao, which could explain the lesser need for mobile internet activity (e.g. availing of services online), and hence the lesser preference for more capable but higher-priced smartphones.

The use of mobile phones for grassroots activity has been documented in several academic and professional works. SMS has been used for grassroots health communication in remote villages in the Philippines, as in the case of how government 'barangay' (village) health workers communicate with stakeholders in a rural area at southern Philippines (see Sumaylo, 2013). Among health professionals and students, the 'basic' mobile phone remains to be the most used medium at home and at work (Gavino, Ho, Wee, Marcelo, and Fontelo, 2013, p.303).

Mobile phone usage has also found its way into indigenous communities in highly remote areas. For example, according to an ethnographic study (Zapata, 2016), the Applai and Bontok Igorot communities in the Cordillera mountain range use mobile phones as a way of disseminating information to the community (as opposed to visiting all homes to share news). The usage of mobile phones is heavily governed by the 'indigenous social code' (p.1) and is still hindered somewhat by infrastructure inadequacies.

Sources

Telecommunications companies

- [Globe Telecom](#)
- [Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company](#)

Leading mobile phone companies by market share

- [Apple](#)
- [Cherry Mobile](#)
- [Huawei](#)

- [MyPhone](#)
- [Oppo](#)
- [Samsung](#)
- [Torque](#)
- [Vivo](#)

Concerned government agencies

- [Department of Information and Communications Technology](#)
- [National Telecommunications Commission \(NTC\)](#)

Innovation

Landscape analysis

Perhaps the most visible agents in the innovation landscape are the private companies that currently use and are actively looking for transformative technologies. These companies, for example, hold conventions for ‘business leaders’ and executives, usually as a method to market products and services or to keep abreast of emerging trends. This reflects the reality that research and development (R&D) is ‘largely private sector-led’, as 64-73 percent of the R&D investments came from the private sector in 2002 – 2011 (Aquino, Correa, Manalo, Faylon, 2014).

Furthermore, the government investment in science, technology, and innovation ‘pale in comparison’ with those of its ASEAN neighbors and China (Aquino et al., 2014). The country allots only 0.1 percent of its GDP to R&D, far smaller than the allocation of countries like Japan and Korea. The number of researchers per million people is also lower in the Philippines compared with those in some of the neighboring countries like Singapore (Aquino et al., 2014). One contributing factor (and also an outcome) of the poor investment in R&D is the ‘exodus’ of researchers and scientists either to the private sector or to find greener pastures abroad.

However, the government, particularly the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), are still the most decisive forces in setting the policy regulatory environment and overcoming the digital divide. Although the Philippines has seen a massive increase in internet penetration rate (72 percent as of 2020, according to Internet World Stats, which compiled data from Facebook, International Communications Union, and other sources), there is still a huge chunk of the population that was never exposed to the internet. Furthermore, this internet penetration data does not take into consideration internet literacy levels. The number of mobile phone users in the country is expected to reach 90 million (majority of the population) by 2021 (Ericsson Mobility Report, 2016, cited by Jiao, 2016) but the lack of mobile signal and 4G connectivity hinders users in many rural areas from taking advantage of the full potential of mobile connectivity (of course, another decisive factor is poverty levels in the countryside).

In the global scale, Philippines is ranked only 101st out of 176 economies (near the lowest third) in the ICT Development Index (IDI) as of 2017. Through the IDI tool, the International Telecommunication Union, an agency under the United Nations, ranked ‘the performance of 176 economies with regard to ICT infrastructure, use and skills, allowing for comparisons to be made between countries and over time’ (Talavera, 2017). Meanwhile, in the Global Innovation Index (GII) of 2019, which evaluates countries’ capacity for innovation through a set of indicators, the Philippines ranked 54th out of 126

economies – a huge leap of 19 notches from the 2018 rankings. The GII is published by Cornell University, INSEAD, and World Intellectual Property Organization. In another index, the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) of 2019, Philippines ranks 72nd out of 141 economies in the ‘Innovation capability’ indicator and 64th across all indicators (Schwab, 2019, p.462). The GCI, published by the World Economic Forum, measures ‘Innovation capability’ through variables like research and development expenditures.

For Marasigan (2017), the digital divide in the country ‘is a problem that persisted due to a confluence of reasons: one is the government’s refusal to invest in digital infrastructure, another is the bureaucracy in seeking permits by private companies from local governments.’ For Vea (2017, cited by Marasigan, 2017), the digital divide is a ‘symptom of the more persistent socioeconomic inequalities’, an observation that appears to be at the root of the digital divide, given that the income inequality in the country remains ‘stubbornly high (above world average)’, according to a 2017 report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Asian Development Bank, and the UN Development Programme (Caraballo, 2017).

For its part, the government has drafted ‘roadmaps’, or programs and policy directions, in the effort of addressing the digital divide. An example of this would be the ‘ICT roadmap for the next six years’ (starting 2017), which includes the implementation of the ‘Digital Terrestrial Television Broadcasting Migration Plan’, the first ever Telecommunications Summit, and the development of the eGovernment Master Plan 2.0 (Department of Informations and Communications Technology, 2017). Government agencies like DICT are also aiming to build ‘smart cities’, which ‘entails the integration of efficient communications technologies to be introduced...into the everyday lives of citizens’ (Department of Informations and Communications Technology).

Apart from the developing policy frameworks, government agencies like the DOST also invest in programs aiming to improve the productivity and profitability of small and medium enterprises through technology interventions.

Profiles of main tech parks, accelerators, hackathons

The diffusion of innovation in the Philippines can be described in two ways: 1) cutting-edge developments in technology are usually introduced in private sector-led venues, which is also often flocked by the early adopters of the technology, and 2) the diffusion of technology to the grassroots and the remote areas is usually a government-led affair. Government agencies, such as the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) and the Department of Agriculture, also allots funds for research and development programs and scientist grants.

Technology-enabled companies organise conferences and conventions both as a marketing initiative and as a way to connect with developers. For example, the Philippine Digital Convention (PDC), organised by PLDT, is held supposedly to ‘[connect] local industry leaders with tech visionaries and pioneers’ (Rappler, 2018b). The PDC is attended by business executives and developers.

In the part of the government, agencies like the DOST implement projects that aim to bring innovation closer to small and medium enterprises, rural communities, and grassroots government workers. For example, DOST has the ‘Small Enterprise Technology Upgrading Program’, which, according to DOST Secretary Fortunato De la Peña, provide technological assistance to about 45,000 medium and small enterprises, thus generating 227,000 jobs (Lopez, 2018).

The DOST also aims to narrow the digital divide partly through its ‘Digital Empowerment Program’, one component of which is the ‘Juan Konek Free Wi-Fi Internet Access in Public Places Project’. The project seeks to provide an additional 7,118 free wifi hotspots in 43 major cities and 967 municipalities across the archipelago (Department of Science and Technology, 2016).

Sources

Government agencies primarily concerned with innovation and research

- [Department of Agriculture](#)
- [Department of Information and Communications Technology](#)
- [Department of Science and Technology](#)
- [National Telecommunications Commission](#)

Traditional forms of communication

Summary

Although digital modes of communication are increasingly becoming ubiquitous, some information channels and discussion spaces within the community remain highly important especially in the grassroots level. In the 'barangay' or village, local leaders hold face-to-face activities to disseminate information, as in the case of public consultations, health seminars, among others. As the 'basic unit of governance', the barangay 'serves as the primary planning and implementing unit of government policies, plans, programs, projects, and activities in the community', as per the 1991 Local Government Code of the Philippines. Although insufficient funding hinders 'any significant infrastructure development or institution building in the barangay' level, it is still found to be effective in 'resolving people disputes' and attending to 'civic and civil matters' (Punongbayan, 2018). For this reason, barangay leaders are tapped by higher officials in introducing programs to constituents and soliciting support during electoral campaigns.

Barangay officials are also starting to use digital tools in increasing community participation especially for its assemblies. For instance, in some villages, barangay councils use Facebook and even Twitter for information dissemination and event documentation. The 'Events' feature of Facebook is even used by a number of barangay councils as far as the northern Mindanao region (in the southern Philippines) (Gepuela, 2017). The Philippine Communications Operations Office, tasked with disseminating information about the executive branch of the government, declared in 2018 that it will provide satellite receivers with internet access to the over 42,000 barangays in the country (Musico, 2018).

For barangay workers and volunteers, the SMS was also described as a 'convenient' way to instruct or to inform stakeholders (Sumaylo, 2013, p. 106). For example, in Sumaylo's (2013) study, barangay health workers (BHWs) in a village in Mindanao reported that text messaging is the most commonly used medium in their work. Interestingly, SMS is still perceived as an 'informal' channel in the community, so BHWs feel the need to 'reinforce' this with 'face-to-face interaction' (p.106). In most rural areas where 3G and 4G signal are either absent or inconsistent, it is not surprising that text messaging appears to be the most commonly used medium by those working in the grassroots level, reinforced by face-to-face interaction and vice versa.

Religious leaders in the community are also a force to be reckoned with, as church activities and gatherings become venues for networking, information dissemination, or simply connecting with groups of the same interest. An overwhelming 86 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, thus the label 'only Christian nation in Asia' (Miller, 2019), an outcome of over 300 years of Spanish colonisation. About six percent belong to other nationalized Catholic denominations, while some two percent belong to over 100 Protestant denominations.

The country also has a four percent Muslim minority, most of which are in the southern part of the archipelago (according to the Philippine Statistics Authority in 2017, 93 percent of Muslims in the country reside in Mindanao), and a two percent minority following 'non-Western', indigenous beliefs (Miller, 2019). In Mindanao, several areas have suffered under decades of conflict between the Philippine military and Muslim armed groups, such as the Moro National Liberation Front or MNLF and its splinter group Moro Islamic Liberation Front of MILF (it should be noted, however, that these groups also have Lumad members, or members from indigenous groups). However, as Özerdem and Podder (2012) noted, recruitments into such groups 'is not simply about religion or ideology', such is a 'simplification of its underlying support base' (p.521). Deeply entrenched poverty, geographical location, and 'disparity in governance delivery' are also decisive factors (Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities, 2012; p.8; Özerdem and Podder, 2012, p.521). The insurgency is rooted on the struggle for self-determination – the autonomy of the Moro people in a reclaimed ancestral domain. The 40-year conflict has left at least 120,000 dead in affected areas (Ishii, 2013).

Filipinos in general have 'conservative' views on issues, owing largely to their adherence to Catholic teachings (Lipka, 2015). For instance, 67 percent of Filipinos find divorce 'morally unacceptable', which is three times number of Americans who share the same view. In fact, apart from Vatican, Philippines is the only country in the world that does not allow divorce (except for Muslims). Ninety-three percent also view abortion as immoral, which makes the country the most 'universally opposed to abortion on moral grounds' among the 40 nations surveyed (Lipka, 2015).

Like other countries, the cultural diversity in the archipelago generated a diversity in art forms and forms of expression. However, although there is an attempt to include traditional and folk art as topics of learning in Philippine schools, 'the efforts have not been sustained long enough to create substantial impact' and are also 'largely undocumented and isolated' (Loza, de Guzman, and Jose, 2008, p 125). Worse, there is little educational emphasis on rediscovering the 'use of indigenous art materials which should be well considered for their cultural, environmental and economic values' (p 125), a reality that continues despite the declared intention of the Philippine Commission on Higher Education to 'advance learning, research and the enrichment of the country's historical and cultural heritage.'

In some of the conflict-torn areas in the country, traditional forms of communication, such as theatre, can provide people with the means to cope with or to heal from trauma, as well as regain their sense of community and promote the advocacy of peace. For example, in Bau's (2017) study on the UNICEF 'Art for Development' programme in a displaced people's camp in Zamboanga, she observed that by collaborating in art forms, in this case puppetry and photography, adolescents 'begin to build a broader sense of peace and understanding' and 'helped them to recognise the importance of their role in identifying problems and solutions together with others (p.10). In a study published 11 years ago, Schank and Schirch (2008) already noted that a group of theatre artists was travelling in various parts of Mindanao to promote 'peaceful co-existence' among Muslim, Christian, and indigenous communities. 'Arts-based interactions' were also found to be helpful in healing and coping with stress following natural disasters, noted Zerrudo (2016), who discussed examples from the Philippines and Nepal. In these examples, people revisited community folklore on which their performances (story-telling, creative play, music, among others) are anchored. Zerrudo wrote that 'as community rituals sprung from creative engagement with catastrophe become central to our 'everyday,' we have the potential to protect land and sea through nuanced environmental conservation while recording and perpetuating our rich cultural narratives' (p.169).

In much of the countryside where mobile technologies and internet access are largely unreliable, face-to-face interaction and traditional forms of communication should play an important role in the campaigns waged by belligerent groups operating in these areas. In the case of the New People's Army, for example, members sometimes hold 'cultural nights' in which the community is invited to performances promoting the ideology and praxis of the Communist Party of the Philippines, as reported by a source who refuses to be named due to security concerns.

When it comes to music, there appears to be a strong preference for music produced by foreign artists among the younger population. Although many of these artists are US-based or Western, Korean artists are also becoming wildly popular. Filipino artists, particularly the independent or 'indie' artists, took advantage of the disruptive digital technologies in the form of streaming services like Youtube and Spotify (Beltran, 2018). However, making a living out of music in the country is full of practical struggles. According to Schoop (2018, cited by Beltran, 2018), the number of artists who can make a living out of music in the country is 'so small that, in all her time spent doing fieldwork in the Philippines, [she] mostly encountered musicians who...had to have day jobs to make ends meet.' Schoop is a post-doctoral researcher in musicology who spent most of the decade doing fieldwork in the Philippines.

Nevertheless, the country still has artists producing music in local languages or dialects, mostly aired in the local or regional radio stations. However, there is no empirical data on the reach and following of (or appreciation for) these 'hyperlocal' songs, as well as the life narratives of these artists.

Sources

Authorities for pertinent religions

- [Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines](#) (Roman Catholicism)
- [Iglesia Ni Cristo](#) (Church of Christ)
- [National Commission on Muslim Filipinos](#) (Islam)
- [National Council of Churches in the Philippines](#) (Protestantism)
- [Philippine Orthodox Church](#) (Eastern Orthodoxy)

About the *barangay* as a grassroots unit of governance

- [Barangay](#)

Some sources for Philippine traditional and folk art

- [Cultural Center of the Philippines](#)
- [National Commission for Culture and the Arts](#)

Conclusions

Conclusion

The Philippine media landscape is rife with contradictions. On one hand, digital communication is steadily becoming ubiquitous, as shown in the surge in internet use and mobile activity figures. However, the widening socio-economic inequalities and the gap between urban and rural infrastructure maintain the digital divide. Hence, while the urban Philippines, particularly the youth, is expecting a future reality enabled by the 'Internet of Things' and artificial intelligence, legacy media – with the exception of the newspaper – remain as prime sources of information outside the cities and for the entire nation in general.

Nevertheless, internet and mobile activity pervade everyday life in a pace unprecedented, so much so that groups and individuals, many of which working under political parties (a notable example is the political party of the incumbent president), exploited the technology for political agenda. Hence, the documented systematic misinformation campaigns (proliferation of fake news) and deployment of 'troll armies' aiming to sabotage online discourse, which lead to the 'weaponization' of the internet to serve political interests.

Internet as a source of information also sped past print media, which is losing its relevance for much of the general public as the current figures suggest, albeit the community and regional newspapers have seen tremendous growth over the years. Print media, as well as radio and television, invested in online presence to expand reach obviously for relevance and profit, to an extent that we see news outlets that are purely online or more active online. If these trends continue, it is likely that national newspapers and magazines may either merge with others, diversify into other platforms (especially online), cease publishing and maintain an online platform, or worse, cease operating. The forecast may be different for community and regional press, most of which operate in areas where the internet is not yet an indispensable part of everyday transactions, or where the internet and mobile connectivity infrastructure is sorely underdeveloped. It is in these areas where legacy media, particularly radio and community newspapers and magazines, remain as tools for social cohesion.

Although telecommunications infrastructure of the Philippines – and its innovation capability in general – remains far behind that of other countries and even some of its ASEAN neighbors, mobile internet use is pervading every aspect of urban Filipino life. The volume of digital payments, e-wallet accounts, and e-commerce transactions is on the rise, so is the usage of apps for a wide range of activities. New players are challenging the duopolies in the telecommunication and home internet industries, pushing established companies to invest more on the accessibility and deployment of technologies. The 'mobile-first' (The Nerve, 2019) market of what is touted as the 'social media capital' (Pablo, 2018) of the world makes the country predisposed to higher levels of digital financial inclusion.

However, apart from low media literacy levels (see for example Rubinas, 2019), poor internet connectivity remains as a stumbling block, especially in the time of the coronavirus crisis, in which the new normal is contactless payments and work-

from-home set-ups. The crisis has unraveled the sorry state of Philippine internet infrastructure. For one, online learning is not feasible for many schools especially in impoverished areas. Business processing outsourcing companies, which generated thousands of jobs for Filipinos, are struggling to maintain productivity despite internet problems in work-from-home set-ups.

Digitalization in the Philippine mediascape, like in other parts of the world, clearly ushered new business models and transformed the media economy. Unfortunately, these changes include unjust rationalization schemes, such as depression of wages for entry-level journalists. If the internet penetration rate continues to rise and if the private sector-led telecommunications industry continues to invest more in infrastructure development, the greater access to the internet may generate more and more rigid competition for a highly distracted audience. This competition – as well as the delegitimization efforts that discredit mainstream media as source of information – may urge firms to create more aggressive profit-maintaining schemes, which may lead to journalists being overworked and underpaid. These conditions are at the root of unethical practices, media corruption, and lagging professionalism.

The current administration, particularly President Rodrigo Duterte, has maintained an antagonistic stance toward the media, which he and other pro-administration online influencers described as 'biased'. Duterte has issued threats against some media outlets, including the threat of not renewing the operating license of ABS CBN, biggest broadcast network. Less than two years after issuing this threat, ABS CBN was forced to go off air when Congress refused to renew its franchise. Many see this as a form of political vendetta (Lema and Morales, 2020) because Duterte accused the network of refusing to air his political advertisements during the campaign period of 2016, which the network denied. Duterte himself said, 'I will see to it that you are out' (Esguerra, 2019).

These statements can contribute to a climate of distrust in which people view reports critical to the administration as merely false or 'biased', especially because Duterte continues to enjoy a high trust rating. The mainstream media is not exactly a clean slate – there are documented cases in which commercial interests take precedence over public service, which the pro-administration forces were quick to use as an excuse for legitimizing measures and statements detrimental to media freedom. If the efforts delegitimizing the media will succeed in the time of intense competition in the industry, there is a possibility that outlets will have to deviate from the watchdog orientation that has long characterized Philippine journalism.

For critics, the recent actions of the Duterte government show how it is using the coronavirus crisis as leverage for its 'forceful exercise of power' (Deinla, 2020). As the optimism levels of Filipinos plunge to record-low levels in the coronavirus recession, the government has also enacted laws that have the potential to punish criticism, no matter how valid. In the newly signed anti-terror law, for instance, a handful of presidential appointees have the power to define terrorism and decide who is a terrorist, giving them ample room to target critics and send a chilling effect to the population.

The coronavirus crisis has further exposed the systemic dilemmas that account for the many ironies in the Philippine media landscape. Although government agencies are making efforts to close the digital divide and increase information literacy, the current contradictions in the Philippine mediascape will persist if these structural dilemmas are not addressed. These ironies are rooted on the massive socio-economic inequalities, heavy concentration in the media and telecommunications industry, and inadequate investment in science and technology research and development. The income disparity that continues to rise is in fact the mother of poor information literacy, a tool that one can gain from access to education and a must in the time of fake news and troll armies.

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