

Issue Editor's Note



The last two years have witnessed many formal and informal gatherings of print and broadcast journalists engaging in talks with the public having the general sentiment that Philippine media are experiencing threat that is reminiscent of Ferdinand Marcos Martial Law years – censorship, intimidation, and bullying. What is unique about the present media landscape though is that these variations of coercion do not only come from the government, but also from ordinary citizens and paid trolls alike participating in (mis or dis)information and opinion exchanges. The consequence of this is unprecedented polarization of what supposedly are political opinions but are, upon close scrutiny, are heightened personal sentiments that may only give hints of political insights.

From the highly sexualized Sen. Leila De Lima's senatorial and congressional hearings to the arrest of Rappler, Inc. CEO, Maria Ressa, the public has taken the brunt of conflicting and conflated information. At the surface, the heightened level of opinion expression can be deemed as a good sign of a robust democracy. However, communication and media scholars and practitioners would be the first to place a caveat to this. If opinions only reflect fundamentalist notions of egalitarianism and the justification of misogyny as means to a good end, both sources of information and information processing, should be scrutinized.

In this issue of the PCS Review, the scholar's challenge to scrutinize media misinformation and manipulation has been a daunting task. This is not only because the depth and range of misinformation and manipulation have been found to be difficult to capture, but also because for communication and media scholars and practitioners alike, media manipulation and misinformation have both subtle and pronounced attributes that challenge typical ways of inquiry. How should a scholarly examination of this ambivalent phenomenon be done? What is in media misinformation and manipulation that we particularly puzzle about? What are their many dimensions, expressions, and unsolicited counter

reactions they have triggered? What realignments have been made by the public as a protective response to being the target of intense criticism? These are just some of the queries that this issue of the PCS Review has explored in the following featured articles.

The article, “Anti-Intellectualism in the Facebook Comments Surrounding President Duterte’s Criticism of U.P. Student Protests,” by Toni Anne Paula A. Antiporda, Beejay A. Castillo, Lorenzo Elias C. Lopez, and Jose Norberto V. Reyes is an interesting take on how media manipulation and misinformation are manifested in online expressions of anti-intellectualism in the form of Facebook comments about student protests. This study surfaces the equivalent local lexicon of anti-intellectualisms first tagged in Western contexts. The authors successfully argue for the uniqueness of the Filipinos’ ambiguity in communication as reasons for these new, yet familiar, kinds of anti-intellectualism surfacing in online interactions. More interestingly, the article illustrates how anti-intellectualism has spawned a similar but more grievous threat to democratic meaning-making -- anti-discourse.

The article by Ma. Miriam R. Diaz, Archieval L. Mariano, Mikaela Ayeera N. Quisido, and Kurt Dale O. Tordesillas titled, “United We Stand: Exploring the Online Reconstruction of Anakbayan UP Diliman’s Online Collective Identity among Its Members,” further sophisticates the scholarly task of figuring out media manipulation and misinformation in what they term as the era of “post-truth”. They offer a rather unlikely slant at the topic – the study of the intersection between collective and individual online identities. The focus of the study is UP Diliman Anakbayan’s Facebook community’s thread of comments intentionally labelled as “the voice of resistance” against Pres. Rodrigo Duterte’s criticism of UP students’ participation in walk-outs. The article’s premise is to highlight the complex group identity formation by what is deemed to be a left-leaning student group at a time when it was being attacked by a dominant sector such as the government. The study offers significant findings on how a media battle in opinion formation regarding the propriety of students’ roles and actions vis-à-vis political response does contribute to a strengthened collective identity formation as reflected in the group’s online activity.

Oliver B. Tatcho's article, "Political Campaign Discourse in Television Advertising: The Case of Rodrigo Duterte," meanwhile tackles the 2016 presidential campaign of then presidential candidate Rodrigo Duterte's populist imaging of plans for the country. Examining nineteen (19) television campaign advertisements, the author is able to sift through the multimodalities of Duterte's advertisement campaign, which was mostly composed of motherhood statements that were not verifiable in their purported application. Tatcho strongly offers the need for televised live debates that would subject candidates to close issue-based scrutiny from the public, and thus exposing candidates' capacity to give coherent articulations of solutions to societal issues without the aid of glitz and glamour provided by advertisements.

Another article by John Evan Orias titled, "Journalists and Bloggers in the Post-Truth Era: The Political Economy of Philippine Online News Production on Facebook," examines how selected online editors and selected news bloggers produce and distribute news content on Facebook. Exposing the intricacy of content production, the author takes a less literal consideration of media misinformation and manipulation. His article is an imperative illustration of the power of content producers in the creation of text that would eventually be consumed by its intended audience. The study implicates the science and the art of finding what would capture interest and maintain online engagement among audiences. Content production is a sensitive balance between what the audience wants and what it needs, including the hit-and-miss goal of creating ripples in online worlds. By highlighting the meticulous process of content selection and processing, Orias gives a lucid demonstration of where content-producers, from the audience and websites and blog developers alike, can stay vigilant on and engaged in constructive online interactions.

Using the approach of new historicism to an examination of power and patronage in a body of text used in everyday familiar and familial talks, Joyce Arriola's article titled, "Power and Communication: A Preliminary Sampling of Linguistic Corpus on Filipino Patronage Culture" offers a Foucauldian poststructuralist analysis of everyday Tagalog expressions. She focuses on how the Filipino kinship sensibility transpires in everyday words that signify hierarchy, loyalty, inclusions and exclusions. Arriola mostly problematizes the Filipinos' inability to transcend kinship in

favor of nationalism as reflected in many of their everyday words. Her conjecture points towards the constitution of a typical post-colonial trauma as both subverted and affirmed in language. If abused, the culture of kinship as manifested in language can arm media manipulation and misinformation. In a hopeful light, however, Arriola posits that it can help bring communitarianism.

A book review by Jim C. Duran on a classic book by Deborah Tannen (1999), *"The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue,"* is also included in this issue. Duran reviews Tannen's premise on how the argument culture limits the expansion of public discourse by only surfacing two opposing views. Duran relates how the argument culture is manifested in several Philippine political issues like the passing of the Freedom of Information Law, the South China Sea dispute, the Bangsamoro Organic Law, Federalism, the war on drugs and extra judicial killings. Duran strongly endorses Tannen's position on the need to surface not just opposing voices in discourse, but also the "third opinion" in political discussions.

This issue also contains an essay by Allison G. Atis titled, *"Of Interactions, Interpretations, and Participations: Perspectives on a Die-Hard Duterte Supporters On-line Group."* This is the author's reflection on her accidental traverse inside a pro-Duterte Facebook community. The author reflects on her stint inside what she termed as an echochamber of Duterte fanatics. Her scholarly mandate challenged her to go beyond her political and personal biases and assess the experience of a different kind of text with an imperative confrontation of both her cynicism and enthusiasm as a media scholar. The essay gives a raw account of her intellectualisms of the Facebook group as well as her personal testament of how misinformation takes form in an online echo chamber.

Likewise, Ariel C. Sebellino's speech, *"Impressions on Media and Information Literacy Education in the Philippines"* delivered during the First Conference of the Philippine Association for Media Information Literacy [PAMIL] on 18 March 2019 Quezon City Sports Club, is an inspiring contribution for this issue. His speech is a timely reiteration for the need to rally for media information and education. He particularly calls on media practitioners and communication scholars alike, the so-called "front-liners" in vigilance, dismay, and criticism of media manipulation

and misinformation – to make media literacy and education accessible to all. Sebellino urges to keep the hope alive among those who claim to care about democracy. For him, the reflex to educate is as vital as the need to correct and call-out those who propagate misinformation. He strongly posits that true responsibility does not only come through preaching but through teaching as well.

Lastly, John Nery’s keynote speech at the annual PCS Conference last 18 March 2019 is an inspiring way to wrap-up this issue. He expands the discourse on media misinformation by sharing to his audience the distinctions among the concepts “disinformation”, “misinformation”, and “malinformation”. Nery situates these iterations of misinformation in how media become complicit in some people’s intention to harm the public, as in the case of the video of the massacre of 50 people in a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand that was uploaded by the terrorist himself. The terrorist wanted an audience and the media callously took on this “wish”. Nery then illustrates how such an irresponsible act of information dissemination is actually also being done by the government, as in the case of President Rodrigo Duterte’s “narco list”. Nery’s keynote ends with his emphasis on the need for both the public and the media to be gate-keepers of information through discernment and continuous looking out for anything that might take on the “shape of harm”.

As this issue’s editor, I do not wish my readers to simply enjoy reading this scholarly piece, but to be prepared for diverse and provocative standpoints on media manipulation and misinformation. These standpoints come from the intellectual’s table as well as the scholar’s inherent reflex to respond to the needs of the time via discernment of discourse and evidentiary warrant. May this issue of the PCS Review both dare and inspire the academics, media practitioners, advocates of democracy, and students to elevate the discourse on media manipulation and misinformation to one that will ultimately push these communication “disorders” to their end.



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