

A Communicative Constitution Perspective on Advocacy: A Case of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Advocates in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Media and information literacy (MIL) initiatives in the Philippines come from various stakeholders, with each organization designing and implementing programs aligned with varying perspectives. This study investigates these different Philippine-based MIL advocacy groups, their initiatives and programs, and the complexities they experience in conducting their operations. Guided by UNESCO's Global Framework for Media and Information Literacy Cities (MIL Cities) and McPhee and Zaug's Communicative Constitution of Organizations to understand existing advocacies and examine perceived complexities, this research utilized interviews to describe and explore the topic at hand. A total of 15 informants from different MIL advocacy organizations and backgrounds participated in this study. Most of these organizations were formed based on a shared set of expertise and understanding of MIL, with a common belief that MIL is necessary for empowerment and critical thinking. However, differences emerged in the nature of the initiatives and their target audience. Furthermore, the nature of these MIL initiatives offered was seen to be primarily based on the strengths of the group: gamified instructional programs and learning resources from the members of the academe, to name a few. Due to the differences of these programs, it was stressed that collaboration is key, but that challenges may also inadvertently arise from said collaborative attempts. These challenges include technological barriers and financial constraints. Challenges aligned with attempts to connect with beneficiaries were also identified. Despite of these challenges, it remains clear that MIL advocacies are important, especially considering the current media and information landscape. For these initiatives to be successful, a multidisciplinary approach is necessary.

Keywords: *media and information literacy in the Philippines, MIL advocacy organizations, UNESCO, communicative constitution of organizations, MIL, MIL collaboration*

Introduction and Rationale

Growing attention to stakeholders and organizations has been one of the notable Media and Information Literacy (MIL) trends in the early 21st Century (Fedorov & Mikhaleva, 2020). In the Philippines, individuals and groups have initiated various MIL-related efforts. Civil society organizations, like the Out of The Box Media Literacy Initiative (OOTB), develop MIL materials (Out of The Box Media Literacy Initiative, 2021). Government agencies, like the National Council for Children’s Television (NCCT) (Children’s Television Act of 1997, 1997), also have programs that focus on children’s development through media education. Further, there are media industry-affiliated organizations, such as VERA Files (n.d.) and Tsek.ph (n.d.), that fight disinformation.

Still, there remains a gap in documenting current, new, and emerging MIL advocates, especially considering how advocates have shifted their processes to media technologies during the pandemic. At the same time, we believe that it is not enough to merely account for advocates based on their published activities. As O’Neill (2008) noted, understanding of actors may change along with advances in media literacy. Hence, aside from identifying these actors, there is a need to understand the processes they undergo. Since many initiatives rely on individuals and groups, understanding their experiences provides insight into the development and complexities of MIL in the country. Being an exploratory study that also aims to describe what is “MIL” advocacy in the country, this paper covers MIL-aligned advocacies, frameworks, and studies (e.g., digital literacy, information literacy, media literacy) under the umbrella term of MIL.

Furthermore, we argue for the incorporation of a communication perspective into these processes, following organizational communication scholars who place communication at the center of organizations (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). To achieve this, we adapt the four flow concepts of McPhee and Zaugg’s (2009) Communicative Constitution of Organization (CCO): (1) membership negotiation; (2) organizational self-structuring; (3) activity coordination; and (4) institutional positioning.

A nuance in this study is that those involved in MIL initiatives—whether as individuals or as part of a group-called “advocates”— will be analyzed from the communicative perspective of an organization. McPhee and Zaugg’s CCO model was intended for complex and formal organizations. However, we argue that the nature of advocates and advocacy groups today, in our case, MIL advocates, would require a reconsideration of what constitutes an organization. We propose that McPhee and Zaugg’s four flows in CCO may still apply to this case, especially with the complex collaborations involved in advocating for MIL.

MIL Advocates and their Roles

Reviewing MIL and MIL-related studies (e.g., media education, media literacy) provides a glimpse of who may be considered MIL advocates and what their roles entail. This includes those groups from the education sector, such as schools, which contribute through roles like providing training, logistical support, and infrastructure (Dadzie, 2009; Hobbs, 2004; Uršič & Jurak, 2023). There are also teachers who apply pedagogical strategies in teaching (Hobbs, 2004; Nagle, 2018; Nettlefold & Williams, 2018; Pascarella, 2008). Another subset of advocates within schools is the librarians (Dadzie, 2009) who often focus on information literacy such as providing copyright support and teaching ethical information use (Morrison & Secker, 2022). In addition, researchers in the educational sector who may initiate related efforts (Lee, 2020), propose ways to teach (Metila et al., 2023), and evaluate interventions (Hobbs, 2004; Ali & Qazi, 2023). Meanwhile, professionals in fields such as media also play a role by providing content for initiatives (Uršič & Jurak, 2023). Further, corporate companies have also developed MIL-related programs as part of their social responsibility (Lim & Tan, 2020).

Other groups actively promoting MIL-related initiatives include civil society groups and international organizations. Organizations like UNESCO and the European Union (EU) have been strong supporters of programs for media education (Martinsson, 2009; Altun, 2011). International organizations may also be instrumental in encouraging countries to uphold fundamental rights related to MIL (Uršič & Jurak, 2023), while civic groups have been actively partnering with other interest groups in efforts (Lee, 2020). Likewise, both civil society groups and international organizations play significant roles in providing materials (Altun, 2011; Lee, 2020).

Finally, we see how governments play an important role in MIL. For example, the efforts of other advocates may influence policy levels (Lee, 2020), underscoring that governments will always have a regulatory and enforcement role (O'Neill, 2008). At the same time, governments can facilitate public-private partnerships (Hobbs, 2004). Strong government support is also needed for countries with specific needs and challenges, especially for developing countries (Gurung, 2023; Nfissi, 2013).

Challenges among MIL advocates

In MIL-related advocacy, interest groups have both strengths and limitations to contribute. For example, Kerrigan et al. (2023) talked about how librarians may not have enough time to conduct research. In such cases, academic researchers can complement their information literacy efforts. However, related

literature has touched on the challenges of advocating for and collaborating with advocates, albeit indirectly in some cases.

First, interest plays a key role in motivating groups to act. For instance, governments may be interested in how digital technologies influence citizen engagement (Lee, 2020) or citizens may act out of passion when reporting fake news (Wu, 2023). Consequently, different perspectives on media literacy come with different practices in advocating for it (Schwarz, 2005). For instance, teachers may base their approaches on their own views of media (Hobbs, 2004). Some advocates may view media literacy as protecting citizens, while others may strive to empower them (Annisa, 2018). At the same time, advocates may be indifferent to some aspects of initiatives. For instance, librarians may remain neutral about specific aspects of advocacy (Kerrigan et al., 2023) or a group may not feel accountable for an effort if they think of it as another group's job (Wu, 2023).

More problems arise when interest not only complicates matters *within* an interest group but also clashes with other groups. For example, stakeholders may have different standards in assessing information depending on their country's contexts (Medina et al., 2023) or may hold conflicting views on issues like copyright, depending on the industry (Morrison & Secker, 2022). These kinds of differing interests can make it difficult to establish a regulatory framework that would cater to the needs of different actors (O'Neill, 2008).

As mentioned, collaborations are important for advocating a goal. However, several challenges may hinder collaboration among advocates. These challenges may include incorporating different agendas of interest groups (Banerjee et al., 2020), or determining which initiatives deserve to be prioritized when it comes to funding (Chu, 2022). There have also been views on whether collaborations across stakeholders may be sustainable, such as the possibility of power imbalances among groups (Marda & Milan, 2018) or doubts about partnerships with groups that may have conflicting intentions (Hobbs, 2004)

Finally, logistical complexities may arise when advocating. These include keeping up with the fast-changing media environment, which may complicate areas such as policymaking (O'Neill, 2008) or managing social media platforms being saturated with actors promoting different discourses (Reveillac & Blanchard, 2022). Thorough administrative processes may also be involved in getting support and funding for programs (Dadzie, 2009), while other countries face more barriers than others, such as low literacy levels, which can make citizens more vulnerable (Gurung, 2023).

Statement of the Problem and Objectives

Considering the previous studies reviewed, we point out the continuous need to account for MIL interest groups in the Philippines. This includes identifying who they are, how they define MIL, their contributions, and the complexities involved in their partnerships. Therefore, this paper asks, *how do interest groups involved in the Philippine MIL perceive the complexities of their efforts and partnerships?*

To answer the research question, the following objectives are set:

1. To identify the advocates involved in the Philippine MIL;
2. To describe their efforts and partnerships with other groups;
3. To account for how these interest groups perceive the complexities involved in their efforts and partnerships.

Study Framework

This study was anchored in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) (2019) Global Framework for Media and Information Literacy Cities (MIL Cities) to identify the interest groups involved in the Philippine MIL (Objective 1) and to describe their efforts and partnerships (Objective 2). Additionally, this study adapted the Communicative Constitution of Organization of McPhee and Zaig (2009) mainly to account for the perceived complexities these groups face in their efforts and partnerships (Objective 3), although the concepts of the theory can also be relevant in the first two objectives.

Several frameworks were initially considered for this study, including general systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1972), an updated version of the Diffusion Innovation Theory by Rogers (2010), and the Stakeholder Theory (Koschmann & Kopczynski, 2017). We also explored the Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 1996), particularly the concept of non-human actors as applied to studying stakeholders (Luoma-aho & Paloviita, 2010; Pouloudi et al., 2004) and project complexities (Sage et al., 2011).

We also decided to explore several frameworks that were proposed for MIL partnerships. O'Neill (2008) elaborated on an existing operational model of media literacy actors to include media education, civil society, media regulators, and media industries. Meanwhile, Comey's (2021) multi-stakeholder approach to media literacy policy has a wider scope of stakeholders, which includes online platforms, audio-visual content providers, press and journalism, public authorities, education and research, civil society, and academia. Perhaps the bigger stakeholder framework would be UNESCO's *Global Framework for Media and Information Literacy Cities* (MIL Cities). The organization visions "MIL Cities" as a place-based approach to "promote creative dissemination of MIL knowledge

in all forms of city activities” (UNESCO, 2019, p. 3). It is important to note that MIL Cities recognize emerging stakeholders beyond “core” MIL interest groups, which we concur for this study.

MIL Cities highlights the importance of participation and collaboration among cities. However, The MIL Cities framework does not specifically aim to further theorize stakeholders but to guide them in understanding their MIL roles. Based on previous literature, we believe that the challenges among interest groups should be seen in light of *communication complexities*, especially when interest groups have conflicting interests or work in isolation. This led us to consider the *Communicative Constitution of Organization* (CCO). As posed by Weick (as cited in Putnam & Nicotera, 2009), the “organization” may be conceptualized as a verb. In line with this, scholars may explore “kinds of processes and interrelationships among them that occur in the ongoing streams of organizing” (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009, p. 9). One of the CCO approaches that aligns with this process-oriented approach is McPhee and Zaug’s (2009) model for understanding organizations. The authors have posed several terms for this model, focusing on theorizing complex organizations that may impact society rather than casual conversations. Further, McPhee and Zaug (2009) contributed a deductive way of identifying the types of processes involved in organizations.

A framework leaning toward an interpretive side (Griffin et al., 2019), McPhee and Zaug (2009) positioned that communication *constitutes* the nature of organizations. As mentioned earlier, the authors proposed *four flows* of messages as a theoretical framework that would help understand the complexity of an organization: (1) membership negotiation, (2) organizational self-structuring, (3) activity coordination, and (4) institutional positioning. Notably, within this framework, a single message can address several flows simultaneously. In explaining how the four flows connect the organization and its members, the authors explained that:

The four flows link the organization to its members (membership negotiation), to itself reflexively (self-structuring), to the environment (institutional positioning); the fourth is used to adapt interdependent activity to specific work situations and problems (activity coordination) (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 33).

McPhee and Zaug (2009) conceptualized *membership negotiation* as the process of recruiting members into a group. Referring to Giddens’ idea, the authors proposed that this flow is crucial, as “organizations, like all social forms, exist only as a human agency” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 35). Therefore, an organization

can be formed when it recruits members and “leads them to take part in and understand the interactional world unique to the organization” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 35). Beyond gathering members, *organizational self-structuring* refers to the way an organization structures itself and practices reflexivity. According to the proponents, these are the ways that the “organization as a system takes control of and influences itself, not merely to handle immediate problems but to set a persistent routine procedure for response” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 37).

McPhee and Zaug (2009) argued that the organization’s self-structuring is the springboard to their *activity coordination*. The authors described this flow as the communication “process of adjusting the work process and solving immediate practical problems” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 38). Consistent with the view of communication as constitutive of organizations, the authors also noted that members operate as a “common social unit”, perhaps due to the self-structuring discourse. Finally, the *institutional positioning* communication flow represents the macro-level aspect and systemic view of the framework, wherein organizations negotiate with other groups. This flow characterizes communicators as “individuals on boundary-spanning roles who negotiate terms of recognition of the organization’s existence and place at the same time as they negotiate their relationships” (McPhee & Zaug, 2009, p. 39).

We conceptualize that the complexities of MIL advocates’ efforts and partnerships can be captured through the four flows. While this CCO framework may lean toward formal organizations, this study included advocates, who may be part of larger groups but are individually advocating for MIL through collaboration with other groups. With such complexity, some flows may or may not be evident for some groups in this study. Nevertheless, Putnam and Nicotera (2009) noted that organization as a social form is “culturally and temporally defined” (p. 13), which may open new paths for applying the four flows. McPhee and Zaug (2009) seemed to acknowledge how the theorizing of four flows may be *adapted* due to the changing nature of organizations:

...these flows are arenas in which organizations do vary and can be changed in their fundamental nature. Many authors have claimed, over the decades, that new forms of organizations have emerged, as a result of various social and technological developments. A theory such as this one gives us a template by which to detect, diagnose, and assess novel organizational phenomena. (p. 32)

Overall, this paper adapts UNESCO's MIL Cities model, modified with a communication perspective through McPhee and Zaugg's (2009) CCO, along with the previous studies reviewed in this paper.

Research Design

The review of previous studies and frameworks led us to propose for a framework where communication constitutes the experiences of MIL advocates in the Philippines. Accordingly, we also employ a qualitative inquiry that honors "communication as a constitutive process of intersubjective, relational meaning-making" (Farias & Chuang, 2014, p. 74). This approach contrasts with systems thinking, as the qualitative research design of this study focuses on "both the process of communication as well as the subjects and context of a communication event" (Farias & Chuang, 2014, p. 76).

Meanwhile, this study remains descriptive and exploratory, addressing the gap in understanding what is "MIL" advocacy, particularly within the Philippine context. Furthermore, it is cross-sectional, as some interest groups and their MIL efforts may have emerged only recently.

Research Methods and Instruments

This study employed key informant interviews with individuals who have direct experience of the phenomenon (Baxter & Babbie, 2003) — in this case, those involved in MIL advocacies. While we have some knowledge of advocacy groups in the country based on personal experience and literature review, we cannot identify all new and emerging interest groups.

For the method, focus group discussions may capture interactions among advocates and literature review showed that these groups may have diverging views. Taking this into consideration, they do not meet a homogenous criterion required for conducting focus group discussions (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Hence, key informant interviews are deemed to be the most suitable approach.

Table 1 outlines the objectives, key discussion points, and probing questions used during these interviews. These discussion points and questions were based on the study framework and literature review. For instance, initial topics of the formation of groups, perceived roles, beneficiaries, and MIL definitions can reveal each group's positioning in a potential MIL City, while also aligning with CCO's membership negotiation flow. Questions on group routines, rules, and practices may provide insights into CCO's organizational self-structuring and activity coordination, while topics around conflict resolution with other groups can highlight aspects of institutional positioning. Further, questions on the lack

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of data, processes, funding, and online conduct of advocacy were derived from previous research on advocacy challenges.

These points and questions are designed to remain open-ended through small questions to “provide openings through which interviewees can contribute their insiders’ perspectives with little to no limitations imposed by more close-ended questions” (Chenail, 2011, p. 255).

Table 1

Objectives, Key Discussion Points, and Questions

Objectives	Questions
To identify the interest groups involved in the Philippine MIL.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion points on how they would describe themselves as an MIL interest group. ● Can you tell us more about how your group started? At what point did you consider yourselves as a “group”? ● What for you is the role of your group in forwarding MIL in the country? ● Who do you consider will benefit the most from the existence of your group? ● Can you share some ideas that your group agrees with when talking about MIL?
To describe their MIL efforts and partnerships with other groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion points on how they would describe their efforts and partnerships in forwarding MIL in the country. ● Can you name some strengths and limitations within your group? ● Can you describe some of your MIL initiatives? What are these about? ● Can you share with us a time when you reached out to another group to work together on a project? ● Discussion points on running their interest group. ● an you cite some routines, rules, and practices that you have observed in your group? How do you think this helps your group maintain your work?
To account for how these interest groups perceive the complexities involved in their efforts and partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussion points on what are the difficulties that they face when making efforts and partnerships in forwarding MIL in the country. ● Have you encountered some conflicts or complexities within your group during your MIL initiatives? How did you address these? ● Have you encountered some conflicts or complexities with other groups in relation to MIL initiatives? How did you address these? ● What are the things that you think hamper your MIL initiatives and partnerships with other groups? For example, have you experienced problems with lack of data, processes, funding, or keeping up with conducting your initiatives online?

Ethicality of the Instrument

The researchers see minimal risk in conducting this study, as the intended informants actively lobby for their causes. Even so, informants may experience discomfort, particularly for the third objective, where questions focus on the perceived challenges they face in their efforts and partnerships. Therefore, the researchers ensured that both the informants and their organizations would remain anonymous. The statements were also translated into English and paraphrased to remove identifying information and organize ideas. For the discussion, while the nature of the work may be implied, there was a conscious effort to avoid narrowing it down to a particular advocacy group or individual. Following Haggerty's (2004) recommendations on ethics in social scientific research, general labels such as "participant", "respondent", "interviewee", and "advocate" were used to maintain anonymity. Informants were provided with informed consent and a guide to the questions beforehand, and all data privacy rules were followed. During the interview, the researchers discussed informed consent, after which each informant was asked if they agreed to participate in the study and to be recorded.

Selection of Key Informants

There are three criteria for selecting informants: (1) the informant may be part of a group, whether formally or informally, or may form a "group" during MIL collaborations; (2) the individual or group the informant belongs to must have at least one MIL-aligned effort directed toward a beneficiary; and (3) the individual or group the informant belongs to must have experienced collaborating or partnering with another interest group to elevate their MIL effort/s. There are no specific individual demographic requirements such as age or sex. To maintain an exploratory approach on emerging interest groups, the scope of these efforts will not also be limited to a geographic scope (national or regional).

The research employed purposive sampling based on the interest groups identified in the previous literature. Being MIL advocates ourselves, we had already reached out to individual advocates and some representatives from advocacy groups. A snowball sampling strategy was employed, starting with core networks of MIL-labeled stakeholders and expanding to discover other advocates and advocacy groups involved in MIL, especially those with unique and niche characteristics.

Regarding the number of participants, the study employed maximum variation sampling to get a diverse set of informants (Bunquin & Solis, 2021). Data saturation was achieved after 15 interviews. Since advocates may be located across various locations due to their advocacies, the interviews were held online. After finalizing the proposal, we prepared the informed consent document,

sent out invitations, and scheduled the interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded, and detailed notes were taken where excerpts were drawn for the discussion of results.

Carter and Little (2007) discussed determining the quality of qualitative research through epistemology, methodology, and method. In practicing reflexivity, we acknowledge how our epistemic position on gathering knowledge (i.e., experience-based) influences methodologies that “justify methods” and, in turn, “produce knowledge” (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1320). The authors also noted how axiology is an important aspect of epistemology. Therefore, we needed to practice reflexivity as we interpret how informants, say, address conflicts of values with other interest groups.

We followed a thematic analysis for data analysis. As proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022), thematic analysis involves data and context familiarization, coding, and theme development and refinement. More specifically, we employed axial and cluster coding (Baldo-Cubelo et al., 2021). In developing themes, we followed Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) discussion of themes emerging “both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach)” (p. 88). Therefore, the thematic analysis presents a discussion of findings in comparison with previous literature and frameworks used.

We acknowledge the scope and limitations inherent in the design of this study. First, we do not intend to take a critical stance and would not take on an advocacy lens through a critical paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Second, as we employed a qualitative research design, this study does not aim to generalize the experiences and perspectives of interest groups. Further, time and resource constraints limited the study’s data-gathering scope and timeframe. As such, this study may not fully capture the diversity of MIL interest groups in the Philippines and their experiences, although we have at least found data saturation among our sample.

Results and Discussion

Objective I: The Advocates Involved in the Philippine MIL

The 15 individuals who participated in the interviews come from a wide range of backgrounds, including civil society groups, professional groups, and government affiliations. Participants included four licensed librarians, a media practitioner, a member of an international network, a researcher, and a member of a youth group. All have advocacies, activities, or experiences related to MIL, offering insights on how they can contribute to an MIL City (UNESCO, 2019).

Membership Negotiation: Coming together, Repurposing, and Convening

It was interesting to note some commonalities in how these groups have formed, which illustrates their flow of membership negotiation. First, there was an evident banking on expertise. For example, one civil society group's MIL advocacy started when its members were still students wanting to share what they had learned in class with college students from other schools. This was also true for individuals who network with other experts, including academics and international colleagues. Like in other nations (Altun, 2011), international organizations have taken an interest in MIL efforts in the Philippines. One participant shared how she "wrote the proposal" for a series of online webinars tackling disinformation. This project received funding and support from neighboring countries, inspiring them to continue in other countries as well.

Second, it was noted that groups have repurposed their roles to focus on MIL. Professional groups have become involved in Philippine MIL efforts, similar to how professionals across the globe engage themselves with MIL-related advocacy (Lee, 2020; Uršič & Jurak, 2023). For instance, a group of professionals initially pursued objectives not related to MIL. Another participant noted how their definition of media education had changed to accommodate contemporary of media and MIL concept, showing related conceptualizations on MIL despite differences in terminologies. Meanwhile, a different participant talked about how they started with client-centered services, like marketing and events, but later agreed with funders that "there's so much potential in the young" to promote nation-building and civic engagement as related to MIL. Nevertheless, some groups have been involved in MIL-related activities since the beginning. For instance, a participant mentioned that their professional group has always been engaged with digital literacy, information security, and information workshops.

McPhee and Zaug's (2009) membership negotiation flow is evident in how Philippine MIL advocacy groups bring together volunteers. For participants affiliated with groups whose members are spread across the Philippines, convening spaces were crucial in bringing them together. One media practitioner participant noted that their "alliance" of practitioners existed informally for decades, but was finally convened as a formal organization through a conference held in Manila. The same happened with another group that initially came together from regional events until they eventually gathered in the capital to form a network.

MIL Beneficiaries and MIL Definitions

When asked about how they articulate their roles in the MIL advocacy, the participants have enthusiastically talked about their different and specific roles, banking on their strengths. One participant noted their role in convening

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projects, another on resource development, one was focused on advocating against surveillance capitalism, another for being the “accountability layer” against disinformation, there are those on fact-checking, and some for critical thinking, among others.

Interviewees stress the critical role that MIL activities play in developing critical thinking abilities, empowering individuals to detect credible information sources, and navigating an increasingly confusing digital landscape. They emphasize the impact of early exposure, advocating for the inclusion of MIL concepts into school curricula starting at a young age. One respondent, a former senior high school MIL teacher, highlighted the importance of MIL education initiatives, especially given the widespread internet access that facilitates the spread of fake news and disinformation.

Inputs from librarian participants align with previous studies focusing on the role of information professionals when it comes to efforts (Dadzie, 2009; Morrison & Secker, 2022). Participants also highlighted the changing information landscape, which calls for the development and implementation of MIL initiatives to benefit everyone. One respondent commented on the change in the mindset of Filipinos, attributed to the weaponization of information. This weaponization of information, the respondents narrated, requires reorientation and the development of MIL skillsets among information consumers.

Most initiatives were observed to target students as beneficiaries. However, one respondent noted that this can lead to issues regarding marketing and engagement:

“Most of these initiatives, they target students, either in senior high school or in college but it is difficult to market MIL to the uninterested. For example, [name of agency] I noticed that their approach always comes from the [a field’s] perspective, when ideally everybody should be a target of these advocacies. But right now, the common approach for this is for students, so maybe others will think: “If I’m not a student, why would I be interested in that?””

Although students are considered the primary beneficiaries of MIL initiatives, the interviewees emphasize the significance of broadening the scope of outreach and collaborating across a wide range of industries. For example, some participants noted that they cater more to the general public, who would benefit from their advocacy. A participant from a professional group said that, regardless of socio-economic class, everyone will benefit from cybersecurity. Still, some participants remarked that even if their advocacies cater to the public, they still have specific beneficiaries like indigenous communities as mentioned by one

participant. Interestingly, some participants noted strategies for reaching other beneficiaries such as engaging teachers to create “ripple effects” and reaching out to Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders as they influence policies and reach the youth sector.

Aside from their roles, interviewees were asked to provide their definitions of MIL. Some used theoretical frameworks, such as those coming from UNESCO, in defining the concept. Meanwhile, others have a more general definition of MIL, usually related to the nature of the group they belong to (e.g., technology-focused, legal knowledge) or the needs of their beneficiaries (e.g., critical thinking for the youth). This shows the potential of related frameworks, areas, and advocacies to converge under the umbrella of MIL in the country.

Objective 2: Efforts and Partnerships of Philippine MIL Advocates

Activity Coordination: Strengths in MIL Initiatives

When working together on projects, MIL advocates, reveal different ways in which McPhee and Zaugg’s (2009) activity coordination flow may take place. The participants noted various strengths in delivering MIL initiatives, especially when it comes to their individual and group expertise and experiences. For example, the librarian respondents, the largest number of participants in the study, are either practicing library and information science (LIS) professionals or educators. All have substantial experience working in school libraries, where they have designed information literacy programs aimed at providing children with the fundamental abilities that are necessary for information literacy. Regarding their MIL engagements, it is interesting to note that some have become involved with MIL as a response to the emergence of the infodemic and the spread of disinformation. For the respondents, this engagement stemmed from their interest-in rethinking traditional MIL notions.

Some informants shared interesting strategies for teaching MIL, aligning with the findings of Nettlefold and Williams (2018). For example, two respondents have spearheaded their own information literacy initiative at the institution where they work. Their initiative is a gamified version of MIL and they view it as both a tool for promoting library services and civic literacy. The development of the program was a response to their observation that students rely on digital resources for news, similar to the observation of Nettlefold and Williams (2018). One of the interviewees, who is also a co-founder of the initiative, shared some insight regarding the initiative:

“We wanted to shy away from the typical webinar-type information literacy program; my co-founder had a background in gamification, so we decided to develop a game. It then became the first gamification initiative

in our institution. The main objective [of the game] was to supplement the various services in our institution. However, in the implementation, we encountered several obstacles, some were about implementation, content development, question development, promotion and marketing, prizes, and [alternative ideas from other] members of the groups.”

Gamified approaches to MIL education have gained traction in recent years. Some initiatives developed actual videogames for MIL (Costa et al., 2018), while some have organized race-type MIL contests (Yap & Penaflor, 2020; Chua & Jinio, 2023). While these initiatives come from different groups, all have the same goal of developing MIL skills using a more novel approach.

Other examples of expertise-based MIL initiatives include debate tournaments, where individuals from a professional group serve as mediators, children’s program productions by tapping filmmakers and production managers, and MIL teaching materials made by young creative content creators.

Evidence-based initiatives were also evident in some groups. This includes the children’s program mentioned earlier, which is based on the researcher participant’s research publication. However, a researcher’s involvement does not stop there. The participant shared additional ways in which being an academic can initiate extension activities arising from their intellectual work. Beyond the academe, a civil society group has also used their research capabilities by regularly conducting surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs), which served as the basis for their projects. These efforts align with previous literature on the vast role of the researchers (Lee, 2020; Metila et al., 2023; Gurung, 2023; Hobbs, 2004; Ali & Qazi, 2023).

Similarly, a participant from a youth group shared how they developed an MIL toolkit for SHS teachers, based on research and FGDs identifying gaps in MIL competencies in the country. This focus on helping teachers corresponds to various calls for their role (Nagle, 2018; Metila et al., 2023) and, consequently, their training and development (Nettlefold & Williams, 2018).

Lastly, there are also initiatives geared towards civic engagement, which would support the relationship between MIL and civic engagement. For example, a participant noted how “democracy was abstract” to the youth, equating civic engagement to charity, giving alms to the poor, and cleaning their surroundings. Therefore, they made it a goal to make civic engagement more understandable to these beneficiaries.

Institutional Positioning through Awareness, Engagement, and Collaboration

The collaborations involved in the informants’ activities strengthen the integration of MIL efforts within the concept of a city (UNESCO, 2019) and also

highlight their institutional positioning through awareness of other advocates, engagement, and, for some, the building connections as the core of MIL advocacy. Following UNESCO's framework, collaboration in this study shows a symbiotic relationship among core MIL groups and emerging stakeholders. There was also evident complementary collaboration to address one weakness with another's strength, as noted in previous studies (Kerrigan et al., 2023; Wu, 2023).

In terms of familiarity, all the individuals who were interviewed showed an understanding of the various MIL activities currently being carried out in the Philippines. For instance, some respondents repeatedly mentioned their awareness of Rappler's programs and their familiarity with the Philippine Association for Media and Information Literacy (PAMIL). Some also mentioned global library initiatives from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). While some admit familiarity but not necessarily engagement, they recognize the existence of these programs and their role in preventing the spread of false information, fostering critical thinking, and enhancing the number of digital literacy abilities among the general public.

Meanwhile, a participant from a civil society group noted how their group has fostered regional and international partnerships along with their advocacy. A member of a professional group shared a similar experience explaining how they were able to connect with digital groups, youth organizations, and even labor organizations. The participant noted the importance of these networks to cover the "actual conditions [in the] Philippines." This concurs with the interviewee from a youth group, who said that there is strength in different minds working together, especially when these minds come from different areas and provinces of the country. Regional and international alliances, therefore, strengthen the global goal of MIL Cities.

Similarly, one respondent, a researcher, highlighted the importance of connecting their findings to the policy-level discussions by reaching out to government agencies like the Department of Education (DepEd). Reaching schools is crucial, as noted in previous literature, where these institutions would foster the implementer role for initiatives (Uršič & Jurak, 2023; Hobbs, 2004; Dadzie, 2009).

It is then evident that working together is necessary for MIL initiatives. But when and how does collaboration happen in MIL initiatives? First, collaboration skills and capabilities seem imminent. A participant noted their network president's "lobbying" skills, which were instrumental for their group, saying that is "how we translate our vision to actions." Another example is a professional group composed of individuals who are knowledgeable in various areas of a specific professional practice. These professionals are skilled in negotiations

and convening stakeholders from different sectors like the academe and policy development. These patterns appear to align with Lee's (2020) observation that, in some countries, initiatives started from individuals and groups before advancing to policy levels.

As highlighted by previous studies, the government plays a big role in media education (Hobbs, 2004; Gurung, 2023; Nfissi, 2013). This interest was reflected by participants who are connected to the government, who noted their commitment to their mandate to help people. The participants shared their capacity to facilitate MIL advocacies across the country in collaboration with other stakeholders, which agrees with Hobbs (2004) pointing out the government's contribution to facilitating public-private partnerships.

Overall, examples of collaborative projects shared by participants included seminar workshops, fact-checking collaborations, campus partnerships, and media production activities. Groups also help each other with logistics when delivering events.

Some participants recalled how collaborations happen among groups and individuals with similar initiatives. One participant, for instance, detailed how they sometimes pitch for funding, while at other times, groups reach out to them to develop a project with available funding. The participant also details how groups may take turns in leading projects.

“When it comes to local partnerships, we maximize those with similar MIL advocacies. We try to tap when we have a friend from another civil society organization. Next time, it will be their turn to lead [a project].”

There are times when collaborations also happen to expand the reach of beneficiaries. For example, one participant shared how they were able to connect with elementary and high school students during an MIL event organized by another group. Another instance is when a participant shared how they partnered with a group that had units in parishes, allowing them to spread their MIL materials more widely. These practices reflect McPhee and Zaug's institutional positioning flow, as advocates negotiate with other groups to establish mutual goals while also working on their own intentions.

Back-and-forth Membership Negotiation and Organizational Self-Structuring: Maintaining the Group and its Collaborations

McPhee and Zaug's (2009) membership negotiation flow is reflected in the way groups recruit other MIL advocates, as discussed earlier. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed more nuanced stories on how to *maintain* these relationships within the context of MIL advocacy. The sharing of experiences provided evidence of how MIL advocates have been organizing in a temporal way, as pointed out by

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Putnam and Nicotera (2009). It also appeared that MIL advocacy organizing has developed into a unique nature of its own, like what McPhee and Zaug (2009) noted about emerging organizations.

To illustrate, informants were asked about how they maintain their group dynamics when working with a group. Different strategies emerged, such as maintaining work online, coming together should the need arise, setting up a system, and banking on a sense of volunteerism. Since most participants noted that their groups are volunteer-based, some have noted mechanisms to accommodate differing schedules of members. This seems to reflect McPhee and Zaug's (2009) self-structuring processes. For instance, one participant detailed how they make use of the online spaces and identify the times when they need to work together.

“As a small organization, we do not have an office space. We physically meet if needed on an ad-hoc basis. We have a group chat online. Sometimes, there is a need for me to make the decisions myself, but when it comes to matters like proposals, budget, and finance, we are both involved and there are clear divisions of labor. When we craft statements, the draft will always go through the eyes of the members.”

When it comes to collaborations with other groups, some participants also shared mechanisms that they put in place. One participant detailed how they ensure the alignment of their projects with partners by conducting stakeholder surveys. This helped sustain the partnership and facilitated monitoring and documentation purposes.

Finally, central to maintaining the group and its collaborations is the importance of a sense of volunteerism. For instance, a participant from a civil society group shared their “like-mindedness” for advocacy. Meanwhile, another participant from a different civil society group recounted how many individuals (e.g., volunteers, and alumni) joined their advocacy against fake news. They even found it very interesting that some individuals “apply” to be part of their group. Meanwhile, a researcher participant shared inspiring examples of personal convictions to advocate for MIL, such as teachers and researchers in science and math areas incorporating MIL into their work.

Objective 3: Advocates' Perceived Complexities in Efforts and Partnerships

Maintaining the Group

Complexities are revealed in all four flows of CCO. In terms of membership negotiation and organizational self-structuring, since many of the participants

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belong to groups that rely on volunteerism, it is understandable that they face commitment challenges despite the strong sense of volunteerism and personal advocacies among individuals mentioned earlier. For instance, one participant noted that during the pandemic, they had to adjust from conducting their initiatives face-to-face to going online. Consequently, another participant shared that when the lockdowns eased in 2021, they had to readjust, as some volunteers had to return to the physical office, and their time was no longer flexible. This became a challenge in sustaining the good practices, as they went back to a “trial and error” stage.

Still, some participants shared how their groups mitigate these challenges, such as through proper delegation of roles and the use of online collaborative tools. These strategies somehow resonate with McPhee and Zaug’s (2009) organizational self-structuring flow, especially in practicing reflexivity. For example, one participant also highlighted how they set times when they reflect on the status of their group.

“[We have] periodic assessments to talk about the problems of the organization. Why are there no new members? Why are we not active? What can we do? There is consciousness.”

However, there are still additional challenges as participants try to maintain their groups and activities. Non-human actors, as discussed by Latour (1996) and applied to stakeholders (Luoma-aho & Paloviita, 2010), are evident in these experiences. One pattern that emerged would be the technological barriers, similar to how O’Neill (2008) noted the challenge of a fast-changing media environment. Some participants, for instance, shared how members may have faced difficulties in using online collaborative tools, which affects their activity coordination.

Another example shared by a participant is how advocacy groups may have difficulty in “competing” with influencers who are more adept at developing online content and capturing audiences in contrast with the nature of advocacy and poses a difficulty with institutional positioning. This point concurs with the arguments of Reveilhac and Blanchard (2022) on social media platforms filled with actors, as well as that of Chu (2022) who noted that time and space may be scarce for media literacy efforts.

“It’s technology. At the end of the day, most of the advocacies are online and it is difficult to compete with influencers. We recognize our very limited reach when online. We prefer face-to-face despite the efforts needed for it. We acknowledge the algorithm, the human factor. There is also the environment of advocacy which considers the scale or the impact.”

Funding and Evaluation

It is evident across interviews with participants that funding is one, if not the most pressing challenge in advocacy work, especially when it comes to activity coordination. This is consistent with previous literature on advocacies (Chu, 2022; Dadzie, 2009). Still, it is interesting to note how specifically funding has impacted the interviewees' initiatives and the different ways that they try to address these challenges.

Despite having volunteers, maintaining operations requires a consistent source of funding. As one participant shared, a budget is needed to mobilize volunteers to go to areas for advocacy work, covering transportation and food allowances. Another example is the amount of money needed to maintain production, although one participant mentioned plans to scale down so that they can continue. From an MIL research interest perspective, an interviewee shared how prioritized funding understandably works in an academic setting since faculty members have their own research interests.

Many of the participants shared that funding works on a project basis. This means that they apply for grants, or at times, funding groups reach out to them. As Chu (2022) noted, prioritization happens when there are diverse goals. To illustrate, prioritization challenge can be a challenge as MIL may not be considered “sexy” by some stakeholders. Still, it is interesting to note how some participants strategize ways to make MIL relevant to funders.

“Sometimes, it depends on what is currently relevant to the funders during a specific period of time. For example, there is time for climate initiatives, and then later on this will shift, such as the shift of funding to the Palestine war. Sometimes, we find ways to fit MIL in the initiatives so we adjust.”

Despite funding challenges to support day-to-day operations, there was evident cooperation among groups. For example, a participant affiliated with the government shared how they extend assistance to civil society organizations by providing venue, food, and other funding assistance when they go to communities. Meanwhile, several participants noted out-of-pocket spending to push through with their activities or “*para sa bayan* (for the country)”, as one advocate said. This shows a strong sense of self-structuring discourse, which paved for activity coordination in solving challenges.

Lastly, it is worth noting how evaluation may be connected with funding. For instance, one interviewee explained how support may be tied to having an “immediate” outcome—something difficult to measure when talking about MIL. Without a quick evident outcome, the participant rightly noted from experience how it may be a challenge to gain appreciation from stakeholders. As an example,

the participant said that it may be helpful to give an MIL award to a municipality, but measuring MIL itself can be difficult. Such measures for evaluation could be helpful for further developing regulations, where the state could mostly contribute (Lee, 2020; O'Neill, 2008; Hobbs, 2004).

Still, some participants shared how they apply evaluation in their projects. For instance, an advocate shared an evaluation questionnaire for school-based projects. They also elicit input from students to make their work participatory, such as in the case of module development.

Unifying Priorities

Differing interests among advocates are evident in this study, similar to the findings of previous literature (Lee, 2020; Wu, 2023; Kerrigan et al., 2023). Several informants shared contextualized experiences of *how* these diverging interests were revealed in their efforts. Despite the lofty goals that have been established for the MIL initiatives, obstacles, such as differing views members and some logistical difficulties have emerged. For example, a group of professionals who come from different areas of their practice may understandably have disagreements on stances and, therefore, the identity of the group. Another challenge advocates face is avoiding “competition” with other groups or individuals, adding to the inevitably different motivations of advocates.

The respondents agree that obstacles could potentially hinder the most efficient collaboration and dissemination of MIL projects. There are tasks that are prioritized differently along with logistical constraints that are included in this category. This was explained by one respondent,

“Some MIL groups tend to be exclusive, with this, I mean that there might be some forces that can affect their goals so some may tend to gatekeep. This kind of exclusivity might make engagement difficult, sometimes they have activities that leave the impression of “this is what we do”, or “this is us.”

Another respondent reminded MIL advocacy groups to avoid implementing programs that have a ‘one-size fits all’ approach because target beneficiaries are not always on the same level in terms of access. This concern about access extends to potential partners as well.

Finally, regarding the importance of collaboration between MIL advocacy groups and unifying initiatives, one respondent emphasized the importance of representation, believing that MIL is interconnected and that not all ‘bright ideas’ come from one group alone. This underscores the need for inclusive and participatory approaches in program development and implementation. These approaches are essential to ensuring that concerns are addressed.

Meanwhile, a participant interestingly reflected on whether a multisectoral approach may really be feasible for MIL, despite stakeholders sharing hopes. The bigger question of whether a multisectoral/multistakeholder approach is feasible in the first place has been raised in previous literature (Marda & Milan, 2018), such as difficulty in aligning goals and perspectives (Medina et al., 2023; Morrison & Secker, 2022; Banerjee et al., 2020) and differences in expectations between stakeholders (Wu, 2023; Hobbs, 2004).

“The [nature of a group], the [nature of a group], the [nature of a group] may have a different ways of doing [MIL initiatives]. Do we really have a multisectoral approach? As of now, [the initiatives] are still in the pilot stages. We still lack a pushing factor. MIL is still foreign.”

As Banerjee et al. (2020) pointed out, establishing a multisectoral approach to advocacy is where communication becomes crucial. With diverging views that arose, McPhee and Zaugg’s (2009) institutional positioning flow seems to be the most challenging communication process in MIL advocacy.

Connecting with Beneficiaries

Lastly, complexities and challenges may extend beyond the group and in collaboration with other advocates. There are also challenges in reaching the beneficiaries themselves. As revealed in previous literature, developing countries may have more barriers in terms of MIL-related development (Gurung, 2023). The same is observed in the Philippine context, as experienced by the advocates. For instance, a participant noted the difficulty of “operationalizing” their efforts to the different contexts of Filipinos.

“With the lack of solid comprehension skills [in some beneficiary groups], it is a question of how [they] can appreciate complex ideas. There is a domino effect. If we want to produce content about inflation...we need extra effort to translate.”

Similar to other challenges, interviewees shared ways they use to better reach their audiences. As highlighted in previous literature, advocates from different groups and positions may have different approaches, which influence their actions (Altun, 2011; Hobbs, 2004) or how they view audiences or beneficiaries (Annisa, 2018). To illustrate, some participants focus on contextualizing materials and strengthening their relationships with regional partners. Another example is a participant who shared how they gamified civic engagement activities using the Gen Z language to be more relatable and accessible to the youth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The first two objectives are to identify advocates involved in Philippine MIL and describe their efforts and partnerships. We found that there is a growing number of MIL advocacy organizations focusing on various aspects of the practice. Stories of how these groups convened, grounded on varied experiences, were uncovered in the respondents' accounts. Advocates play different roles in the formation and continued existence of these MIL advocacies, but all roles are aligned with the experiences each advocate brings. These areas of expertise also influence the kind of initiatives that advocacy groups promote: some teach, some develop programs, while some have more niche approaches, such as implementing civic activities. Depending on the focus of the advocacy group, some organizations offer media-based activities, while others focus on information-related initiatives. We then see the potential of MIL being a convergence point such advocacies.

Through the lens of UNESCO's Global Framework for MIL Cities, we conclude that advocates contribute to the country becoming an MIL City. Upon checking the criteria set by UNESCO (2019), we found efforts in organizing public activities, focusing on various marginalized and underrepresented groups (which was an advantage of fragmented efforts), and fostering collaboration among civil society actors as well as international MIL networks. This can be considered as incremental movements. From participants connected with the government, we found efforts in supporting non-governmental organizations, such as by helping them logistically in executing non-formal MIL education and initiatives in local communities. Nevertheless, future researchers can gather insights from local government authorities and other non-traditional stakeholders to see whether other criteria of MIL cities are being further actualized in terms of integrating MIL into various aspects of a city. At this point, we deem that MIL advocacy can foundationally contribute to the country's goal of becoming an MIL City, although the scope may not yet be as expansive as in the vision of the framework (UNESCO, 2019).

The third objective is to examine how MIL interest groups perceive the complexities involved in their efforts and partnerships. Considering the unification of both the media and information sides in MIL, we found a need for these various groups' efforts to be united. Calls for collaboration between these groups have long been discussed (Kymes, 2011), and through the narratives shared by this research's informants, we observed both opportunities and challenges associated with the creation of these groups. Opportunities and challenges arise at all stages of collaboration, from program development to implementation, and even in the process of recruiting different groups for a single activity. Commitment is a key challenge that advocacy programs face since most members

are volunteers, and this is exacerbated by competition from influencers who are more skilled at crafting online content and attracting audiences. Aside from these challenges, sustainability concerns also emerge, due to the limited funding advocacy groups have. All these contribute to the difficulty that advocacy groups have in unifying their varying priorities and successfully connecting with their intended beneficiaries.

The four flows of McPhee & Zaug (2009) proved to be useful in exploring the process behind the “organizing” of MIL advocates in this study. Membership negotiation was seen in how advocates come together, repurpose, and convene through a shared sense of volunteerism and like-mindedness. As McPhee & Zaug (2009) noted, organizational self-structuring indeed paved the way for activity coordination, where advocates hold on to the discourse of advocacy as they navigate the complexities of MIL-related work. Finally, we found many showcases of institutional positioning among advocates, as they become aware of other groups, engage with them, and even have institutional positioning (i.e., building networks) as the very core of their MIL advocacy. Further, we found several instances where advocates negotiate with other groups, such as through give-and-take in leading projects.

In theorizing the communicative constitution perspective in MIL advocacy, we conclude that the road toward becoming an aspiring MIL City indeed relies on processes and interrelationships in the act of organizing (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). We concur with the premises of CCO that the four flows can simultaneously emerge in one activity, and a flow can pave the way for another. We saw this in how advocates practice reflexivity (self-structuring) as they adjust their routines, member recruitment, and consequently, their activity coordination and institutional positioning, in response to the challenges. While MIL advocates in this study, whether individuals or parts of a group, are not large organizations that the CCO’s four flows were intended for, we found instances of four flows happening simultaneously or in various sequences, especially when advocates navigate challenges related to technology (e.g., maintaining memberships and operations online, staging online MIL activities, and positioning themselves in competition with online influencers). We therefore conclude that the four flows, as McPhee and Zaug (2009) proposed, may be adapted due to changing nature of organizations.

Finally, through our investigation of MIL advocates and their efforts, we identified both strengths and limitations in convening, coordination, conception, and implementation. We also found that the existence of these MIL advocacy groups reflects the heightened importance of MIL education in the country, as unified MIL advocacies are crucial to the development of a media- and information-

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literate society. Our key findings may be useful both for those who intend to establish their own MIL advocacy and for organizations with existing initiatives, should they decide to connect with other MIL stakeholders in the conduct of their programs. Since this research brought together informants coming from different sectors, it may also be instrumental in identifying strengths that potential partner-advocates may offer outside a group's own area of expertise, supporting the belief that MIL is an interconnected and multi-sectoral affair.

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