

CONDENSED FORMAT OF THE STUDY

Democracy Resilience and Media Literacy amid the Pandemic:

Perspectives of Civic Journalists

By

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INTRODUCTION

Democratic stability and resilience has been a challenge during the pandemic. Many countries worldwide, including leading democracies in the recent months have witnessed the imposition of unprecedented restrictions on individual liberties and the democratic sphere (Baruch & Mordechay, 2020). These include 1) freedom of movement (travel restrictions); 2) right to privacy (contact tracing); 3) military intervention (checkpoints & inspections) and; 4) access and right to information. (Dressel 2011)

Still, being in a democratic country in the middle of a crisis, proves to be an advantage. In a democratic regime, there is a stronger foundation and provision for demands that the government function with transparency, and the understanding that it can be criticized for concealing information. The ability to criticize the government and to expose its misconduct, which exists in democratic regimes, creates an additional layer of protection for the public and ensures that publicly elected officials are to promote the public good and not only their personal interest, as is prevalent among authoritarian rulers.

A democracy's steadfastness is reflected in part through its "democratic resilience." Societal resilience expresses "the capacity of a system to respond flexibly to a severe disruption or disaster – in accordance with its magnitude and severity of its consequences – in order to contain the damage and the inevitable decline of the system's functionality, and to bounce back rapidly to its normal entity, structure, and conduct." "Democratic resilience" evolves from the concept of societal resilience, and seeks to examine the conditions under which democracy can properly deal with disruption or disaster. (Baruch & Mordechay, 2020)

A democracy qualifies as resilient if its attributes of recovery, flexibility, adaptation, and innovation are "capable of addressing complex challenges, and weathering and responding to

the crises that affect its survival or durability, and its overall quality and performance.” (Baruch & Mordechay, 2020)

Under the present circumstances, it is important to ask, “How resilient is the Philippine democracy in the present crisis?” The trajectory of the present administration’s populism took a definitive turn in 2018. An article in toxic democracy in the Philippines stressed that populism in the Philippines is not a pharmakon but democracy’s autoimmune disease.” Toxic rhetorics resulted in attacks against power-scrutinizing institutions necessary for democracy’s survival, from the judiciary to the media, the International Criminal Court to activist organizations. (Curato, 2019)

Democracy resilience requires active civic engagement among its citizens. Civic engagement means making a difference in our communities and developing a combination of knowledge, (MIL)skills, values, and motivation needed to enact change. It includes formal and informal activities such as volunteering, voting, lobbying for a politician, community gardening, completing the census, coaching a community sports team, writing to an elected official, researching ballot initiatives, and more. (UNLV, 2021)

Meanwhile, active civic engagement requires Media and Information Literacy (MIL). This is because media literacy serves as an empowering means to address threats in a free country. It is considered as a core competency for engaged citizenship in participatory democracy. (Mihailidis & Thevenin 2013)

If citizens are to make enlightened collective decisions, they need to rely on true factual beliefs, but misinformation impairs their ability to do so. Developing an empowered population that can identify and avoid misinformation and fact-check on its own terms is not only the most effective solution available. It is also the most democratic and practical way to restore trust in media, fellow citizens, and other institutions. It empowers citizens to make informed choices about what information is worthy of their trust, instead of leaving such decisions to other entities, which can cross a fuzzy line between serving the people and outright censorship - something counter to democratic ideals (Brown 2018).

Media literacy is an important factor in promoting democracy Kibore, Lumona (2017). Media literate people know and understand that in a democracy, their freedom of expression is

guaranteed by their constitution -- and that the fourth estate - the media should deliver messages to the people without being oppressed or intimidated by the authorities of the respective country or any entities that have the authority to prevent information from the people.

Media Literacy enhances democracy in a strategic way to involve passive to active, from recipient to participant, from consumer to citizen (Belin & De Maio, 2020).

It is in this premise that the researchers conducted a study on democracy resilience and media literacy amid the pandemic from the perspectives of civic journalists in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. The proponents believe that civic journalists are in the best position to speak their views on the research topics.

The study asks the following questions:

1. What are the thoughts and insights of community journalists on media literacy and democracy resilience?
2. What is the possible link between media literacy and democracy resilience?
3. What kind of relationship is operational in a crisis among government, media and society?

METHOD

The three main problems were answered using a mixed method. In particular, it used an exploratory sequential design in which it started with the conduct of an FGD; the results of which were validated in a survey. The study is grounded on the Media System Dependency Theory of Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur.

Focus Group Discussion of 15 key informants representing Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao was conducted in January, exploring and examining perspectives and insights of civic journalists on the following: (a) Philippine democracy, (b) democracy resilience, (c) media literacy, and (d) 2022 Presidential Election. Primary items included in the FGD are the following:

1. How they gauge and describe the present condition of the Philippine democracy in the middle of the Covid-19 Crisis in terms of media freedom and restrictions.

-Their foresights on the resilience of democracy during the present regime based on their experience.

-Their foresights and suggestions for the upcoming 2022 presidential elections in case Covid-19 measures and restrictions persist.

-Their insights on the importance of media literacy among the Filipino people in relation to promoting democracy resilience in the country.

2. How they can contribute in promoting media literacy for the masses in terms of:

a. Sharing knowledge-rich media literacy programs to strengthen active participation and raise voices of the people to protect and promote democracy.

b. Carrying on continuous and proactive assessment to influence on shaping perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards enhancing the democracy.

c. Introducing advance visual communication channels to gather needed information equally to minimize the marginal from rich to poor scenarios.

d. Discerning misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. Fact-check and teach others to do the same.

e. Teaching the importance of media literacy to enhance democracy and as a tool for lifelong learning.

Survey was conducted after the FGD to validate perspectives and insights that came out during the first phase of the study. The survey part measured the two variables of democracy resilience and media literacy as reflected in the study's problems. Respondents of the survey were 60 civic journalists representing equally Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Civic journalists' opinion, practice and perceived impact of democracy resilience were measured i.e., importance of democracy resilience, behaviors that show democracy resilience, etc. Media literacy was measured in terms of opinion, practice and impact i.e., what kind of works, advocacies do civic journalists practice in order to promote and increase media literacy among themselves and more importantly among the public. To summarize, the two main variables are measured in particular on the following:

a. Democracy Resilience- level of opinion, practice and impact

b. Media Literacy- level of opinion, practice and impact

Correlation within variables under democracy resilience was conducted i.e., does the level of understanding affect the level of willingness and practice, or would willingness lead to actual behavior and practice (or not)? The same variable correlation was done for media literacy

in terms of opinion, practice and impact i.e., are the actions, practices enough to make a difference in the level of media literacy impact.

For the data analysis, an FGD was conducted with 15 key informants. The FGD was recorded and transcribed. Open and axial coding and thematic analysis were applied. Results of the FGD were included in the survey instrument along with indicator statements measuring the two main variables of democracy resilience and media literacy.

The survey results were encoded in excel and the Pearson correlation was run using SPSS. The study made use of a 5-point Likert Scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first part presents the findings generated from the FGD (Focus Group Discussion).

The following is the summary of Democracy Resilience Axial Codes generated from the focus group discussion:

- 1.The pandemic is being used by people in power to control the public and the 2022 election.
2. Democracy's biggest issue is manipulation of public information.
3. Media are restricted and threatened; most have expressed fear and frustration.
4. Media's role as watchdog is crucial with propaganda and fake news spreading in social media.
5. Public trust in media and government is affected with various, dichotomous contents in social media.
6. The public needs to be more critical with the media restricted, and the government's manipulation of information.
7. Media and public should be vigilant of human rights violation.
8. Democracy resilience is continuing to speak against abuses in power, human rights violation, and curtailing propaganda and fake news.

The following is the summary of Media Literacy Axial Codes:

- 1.Media literacy has to be an institutional advocacy, not just a personal advocacy.
- 2.Media literacy is crucial in fighting propaganda and false information.
- 3.The popularity of social media i.e., FaceBook has contributed in the problem of propaganda and false information.

4. The importance of context, research, facts and sensemaking in Journalism should be observed by other content producers in social media.
5. There is a need to collaborate with various sectors i.e., media, academe, NGOs in the fight against false information.
6. Media's job has become more difficult in dealing with propaganda and false information.
7. Opposing views are needed in discernment and decision-making.
8. Owners of social media sites should be responsible and accountable to proliferation of false information.

The following is the summary of the Democracy Resilience and Media Literacy Axial Codes generated from the FGD's group chat as transcribed and coded:

1. The public need to be able to filter information; media should help the public in carrying this out.
2. Media even with restricted information and limited mobility cannot be silenced.
3. Red-tagging, freedom of the press, and of free speech and expression, propaganda and false information are strong issues in democracy resilience.

From these axial codes, the following themes are generated from the focus group discussion.

1. In a pandemic where media is restricted with mobility and information, and when the government is perceived as manipulating information, the public relies on social media for information.
2. False information and propaganda may translate to a more critical public out of desperation. But this may only happen with a media literate public.
3. With a hostile relationship between media and government, public trust in both media and government is affected.
4. Media remains to be resilient in facing and responding to issues on human rights violation, on abuses to power, and on the curtailment freedom of speech and expression.
5. A critical responsible media is needed for a discerning public.
6. For so long as media and society remain critical and active in the affairs of the nation, democracy prevails.

7. Interdependencies between media and government, media and society, and government and society in terms of public information, public order, social integration, and mobilization are limited, which should be strongly operational in a crisis.

The second part presents the findings of the survey.

A. Democracy Resilience

Highly manifested under opinion are statements on “*The public watch and read news to be informed of events*”, and “*The public not only consume media content, but also provide content for others.*”

The study revealed uncertainty on “*The public understand propaganda and do not get easily swayed*”, and not manifested on “*The public act, individually and collectively, when there are injustices.*”

The rest of the statements are manifested. These are on the public using the social media to raise important issues in society; understanding the importance of election amid the pandemic; believing that rights should not be violated even in a crisis; following policies and directives of the government only if these do not violate their rights; and that even with perceived red-tagging, remaining steadfast in protecting democracy.

The results indicate that the public remains democracy resilient amid the pandemic with a weighted mean of 3.95 or manifested. The public based on the perspective of community journalists are aware of their democratic rights, utilize traditional media and social media for information, but do not necessarily translate to a discerning, critical public that respond to injustices.

Highly manifested under practice are statements on “*As a journalist, the more the government restricts press freedom, the more I resist control and assert people’s right to information*”; “*Media remain to be a credible source of information to the public*”; “*Media verify information provided by the government*”; “*Journalists are at the forefront in protecting democracy*”; “*Media and journalists risk their lives to stand for the truth*”; and “*The media fulfills its watchdog role especially in a crisis.*”

The rest of the statements are manifested. These are on media informing the public of fake news generated by the government; that in cases of media and government conflict, the public usually siding with media; and that the media having a collective stand on issues that threaten democracy.

The results indicate that the media remains strongly democracy resilient in times of crises with a weighted mean of 4.23 or highly manifested. The study shows a higher level of democracy resilience in self- assessment i.e., among journalists as compared to their assessment of the public's level of democracy resilience.

Highly manifested under impact is the statement on "*Media play an important role in voting literacy.*" Results showed uncertainty on "*The public do not see any positive change in the next two years.*"

The rest of the statements are manifested. These are statements on *with media and government's seemingly opposing views, people are confused as to the state of democracy; public's trust in government is weakened in handling of the health crisis; public's trust in media is low with the perceived biases of some media practitioners and journalists; public's optimism is low when threats to democracy are evident; public's love for country is affected when crises are not handled well by government; people come together when there are threats and attacks to democracy; there is high mistrust among the people on the capacity of government to handle the health crisis; there will be public uprising in case of the 2022 election be suspended; with rampant fake news, it becomes all the more difficult to trust media and government, and media play an important role in voting literacy.*

The results indicate that public's patriotism, trust and optimism depend on the public's trust in media and government with a weighted mean of 3.92 or manifested. The survey validates the earlier generated finding in the FGD which states that with a hostile relationship between media and government, public trust in both media and government is affected. The impact of this mistrust may translate into a more independent, critical public relying more on personal and technological means of accessing information other than media and government.

The data revealed the capacity of the public to remain resilient in threats to democracy, the media's efforts in protecting democracy, and the public's and the media's separate

relationship with the government--not on a tripartite relationship but on a parallel two- way relationship i.e., public and government, and media and government.

Media's practice of democracy resilience is reflected on its opinion of the public's democracy resilience, but on a higher level. Media's practice and public's opinion (based on media) on democracy resilience are observed in impact i.e., the public's trust decreases in both the media and government with the spread of propaganda and fake news, with media biases, and with government's threats to democracy and inability to handle the pandemic.

B. Media Literacy

Highly manifested on opinion are statements on "There is a need to institutionalize efforts and initiatives to promote media literacy"; "Media literacy should be understood on three levels: source, content, and audience"; "The biggest concern on media literacy is false information"; "A media literate society validates information and decides based on factual, impartial information"; and "The public should be active recipients of media content".

The rest of the statements are manifested. These are on "The media is already media literate; advocacies on media literacy should focus more on the audience/ consumers/ public, not so much among media practitioners and journalists"; "Media messages should be understood within the context of politics"; and "Media content are constructed and are represented realities".

Data revealed that media literacy upholds the truth and creates a critical public with a weighted mean of 4.21 or highly manifested. Results showed how the journalists see media literacy as an important tool for a democracy resilient nation with the public adhering to truth and being critical with content through more community and institutional efforts in advancing media literacy among the public.

Highly manifested on practice are statements on "I try to promote media literacy by calling out people who spread false information on social media" and "I support movements that promote media literacy". The rest of the statements are manifested. These are on "Media institutions are working together to increase media literacy of the public"; "Media institutions are working together to increase media literacy among media practitioners and journalists"; "I am a

member/ officer of advocate groups on media literacy”; “I report false information found”; “I accept invitations to speak on media literacy”; “I write articles on media literacy”; and “Institutions I work with/ for have programs promoting media literacy”.

Data revealed that media and journalists, individually or collectively, promote and support media literacy with a weighted mean of 4.15 or manifested. Results show that community journalists engage in activities that promote and advance media literacy among the public, and that the importance of media literacy for a critical society is actualized in their works in media.

Highly manifested on impact are statements on “Media literacy allows for a critical, discerning public”; “Misinformation, disinformation and malinformation reduce media’s credibility to the public”; “Lack of media literacy adds to the confusion of the public”; “With rampant false information, the public finds it difficult to determine news from propaganda”; “A media literate public protects and defends democracy”; “Media content shapes public’s perception”; “A media literate public make informed political and voting decisions”; “Media literacy allows the public not only to learn from media, but also to be sensitive to manipulation, even if the manipulation comes from the media”; “Media literacy allows for dialogues between and among sectors in seeking ways to understand and resolve issues”; and “Media literacy develops and increases civic participation”.

Manifested statements are on “People’s inability to determine news from propaganda allows the government to mislead and manipulate people”; and “A media literate public engages in political discourses.”

Data revealed that media literacy affects the type and level of political participation of the public with a weighted mean of 4.26 or highly manifested. Results revealed media’s strong belief in the value of media literacy in fighting propaganda and false information, and in increasing the public’s engagement in national affairs especially in democracy issues.

Media literacy opinion is translated to media literacy practice and is strongly reflected in impact (with a very high negative correlation). The last two variables on practice and impact show later in the correlation a very high negative correlation.

C. Summary Table for Democracy Resilience and Media Literacy

Media's practice of democracy resilience is reflected on its opinion of the public's democracy resilience, but on a higher level. Media's practice and public's opinion (based on media) on democracy resilience are observed in impact i.e., the public's trust decreases in both the media and government with the spread of propaganda and false information with media biases, and with government's threats to democracy and inability to handle the pandemic.

Media literacy opinion is translated to media literacy practice and is strongly reflected in impact. ML practice and ML impact later in the correlation have shown very high negative correlation which means that the journalists' actions are not enough to make an impact in media literacy.

Opinion on democracy resilience and media literacy have a weighted mean of 3.95 and 4.21 respectively; manifested and highly manifested in that "*The public remains democracy resilient amid the pandemic*" and "*Media literacy upholds the truth and creates a critical public.*"

Practice on democracy resilience is highly manifested with a weighted mean of 4.23 while practice on media literacy is manifested with a weighted mean of 4.15. It shows a higher level in practice i.e., actions and engagements on democracy resilience than media literacy among community journalists.

Impact on democracy resilience is manifested with a weighted mean of 3.92 while highly manifested on media literacy with a weighted mean of 4.26. It shows the strong call for the advancement of media literacy in maintaining a democracy resilient nation.

D. Correlations

Democracy Resilience (DR) Opinion has very high positive correlation with DR Practice (.94), Media Literacy (ML) Impact (.96), and DR Impact (.96). Democracy Resilience Opinion is translated to DR Practice, ML Impact and DR Impact which state that "*The public remains democracy resilient amid the pandemic*"; "*The media remains democracy resilient in times of*

crises"; *"Media literacy affects the type and level of political participation of the public"*; and *"Public's patriotism, trust and optimism depend on the public's trust in media and government."*

ML Opinion has high positive correlation with ML Practice (.65) which state that *"Media literacy upholds the truth and creates a critical public"* with *"Media and journalists, individually or collectively, promote and support media literacy."* ML opinion is translated to ML action. However, ML Practice has very high negative correlation with ML Impact (-.81) which means that ML practice does not translate to ML impact i.e., the journalists' actions are not enough to make a difference in media literacy. While ML Practice has high negative correlation with DR Opinion (-.62) i.e., ML practice has no relation with DR opinion.

DR Practice has very high positive correlation with DR Opinion (.94), DR Impact (.99), and ML Impact (.82). It shows that DR practice reflects DR opinion, DR and ML Impact. The statement on *"The media remains democracy resilient in times of crises"* is connected with statements on *"The public remains democracy resilient amid the pandemic"*, *"Public's patriotism, trust and optimism depend on the public's trust in media and government"*, and *"Media literacy affects the type and level of political participation of the public"*.

However, what appears to be of only significant value is DR Practice and DR Impact at 0.02 p- value.

In summary, the Democracy Resilience (DR) variables have very high positive correlations—opinion is shown in action, and perceived impact is evident. Media Literacy (ML) variables, on the other hand, show only high positive correlation between opinion and practice, but is not demonstrated in impact. ML Impact shows high negative correlation with ML Practice, while ML Practice shows high negative correlation with DR Opinion. ML Impact is shown to be more positively correlated with DR Practice and DR Impact. The relationship is on positive and negative relationship, not on causal relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The public's dependency on media and government in times of crises is not evident in the study. Factors such as false information and propaganda seem to affect the supposed dependency of the public to media and government during times of crises.

What appears to be evident is the public's relying on social media for information. As observed in the qualitative part of the study, in a pandemic where media is restricted with mobility and information, and when the government is perceived as manipulating information, the public relies on social media for information.

2. Interdependencies between media and government, media and society, and government and society in terms of public information, public order, social integration, and mobilization are limited, which should be strongly operational in a crisis.
3. A fully operational strong media literacy sustains democracy resilience. This is observed in the qualitative data, and appeared as positively connected in the survey.
4. False information and propaganda may translate to a more critical public out of desperation. But this may only happen with a media literate public. This dichotomy of fake information and propaganda either creating a blinded manipulated public or a critical discerning public, in this case the latter being evident.
5. The significant correlation of the study was on the public's democracy resilient being connected to the public's patriotism, trust and optimism which is based largely on their trust in media and government. This validates the general principle of the MSD theory on the public's dependency and need for government and society in times of crises. However, the dependency is grounded on perceived trust i.e., lost of trust in government and media reduces the need and dependency of the public in these two institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) It is suggested that various projects on the promotion of democracy resilience and media literacy be conducted by civic journalists through the Philippine Press Institute (PPI), along with stakeholders and partner organizations.
- 2) Other institutions and organizations that promote media and information literacy and democracy resilience should conduct projects geared towards educating the people to make informed decisions on prevailing democratic issues such as: a) vaccination program; 2) claiming pandemic provisions guaranteed by the government; c) democratic

issues in the upcoming elections; d) Discerning propaganda and disinformation in the current political landscape; and the like.

- 3) An evaluation on the effectiveness of the recently conducted PPI Voter's Education Webinar-Forum for various universities in the country is highly recommended.
- 4) A similar study may be conducted for the mainstream media practitioners.
- 5) A study on the readiness of the Philippines for the upcoming elections is highly recommended.

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