

EXPANDED ABSTRACT

Democracy Resilience and Media Literacy amid the Pandemic:

Perspectives of Civic Journalists

By

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SUMMARY

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).

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 topic.

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?

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.

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.

The following are the conclusions of the study.

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 reliance 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.

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