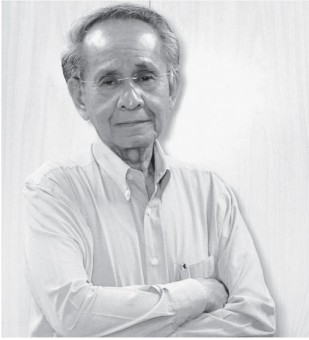


## FOREWORD



INFORMATION IS crucial to the universal imperative of making sense of the natural and social environments that define and shape human lives. Like science, religion and the arts, the media are among the means that have been devised to provide it so as to enable humanity to understand, and gain control of those environments. As purveyors of knowledge and information, the media can be instruments of change and the attainment of human freedom. But through

the dissemination of false, incomplete and misleading information, the media can also be used to manipulate vast sections of humanity into acquiescence to the worst conditions of existence. Because trillions of bytes of information deluge billions across the planet daily, and the capacity to spread falsehood and misinformation through the new information and communication technologies is now within everyone's reach, never has the power of the media to detract from rather than add to the sum of human knowledge and to deter change been as evident and as dangerous as in today's digital age.

The Philippine experience is demonstrating how both the new as well as the older communication and information technologies can be used to undermine rational discourse in behalf of anti-human ends. In 2016 Rodrigo Duterte won the Philippine presidency through, among other means, the use of both social and old media to convey to the electorate an image of himself as a decisive man of action and of a few words who would finally satisfy the demands for change that have echoed across generations. Even his involvement in the operations of the Davao Death Squad, which on a number of occasions he admitted, and his pledge to kill a hundred thousand drug users and pushers in the "war on drugs" he promised to wage once in power, fed into the making of the perception that he would put an end to the country's drug and other problems and to criminality.

PCS Review contributor Orville Tatcho found that during the 2016 campaign for the Presidency of the Republic, there was no attempt in the Duterte political advertisements aired over the old medium of television to reconstruct his tough-talking, tough-guy image. Instead, his most outrageous declarations, which both print and new media also duly

reported, served only to validate and even contribute to it in the apparent calculation of his partisans that it was what would most resonate among the electorate.

With Duterte already in power, the keyboard and old-media army of his partisans have shifted their focus to the defense of the regime and the demonization and harassment of its critics. The Toni Ann Paula Antiporda, Beejay A. Castillo, Lorenzo Elias C. Lopez, and Jose Norberto V. Reyes study for this issue of the PCS Review found that the discourse of that campaign is profoundly anti-intellectual, and, one might add, fact-resistant. It is characterized by the free use of profanities, name calling, threats, incitement to violence, and other forms of hate speech. The expected result of this orchestrated enterprise is to keep the regime in power, and to justify its use of authoritarian means against its critics in the opposition, the independent press, civil society and the churches.

The same campaign is ongoing in the old media of print. Although with over a hundred years of history behind it, one Manila-based broadsheet, which over the decades has made it a policy to support any administration in power, religiously reports events and issues from the perspective of the current regime. Another not only echoes regime claims; in violation of the most fundamental ethical and professional standards of journalism, it also uses its news as much as its opinion pages to openly defend them and disparage regime critics.

But because of their economic and political interests, only with rare exceptions are the rest of the corporate media refusing to compromise their independence before the threat of tax audits, the withholding of broadcast franchises, and the demonstration effect of the political persecution of the online news site *Rappler*. Because of their resistance to the country's descent into another tyranny, alternative media websites as well as that of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines have also been relentlessly subjected to Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks.

Corporate media acquiescence with the regime narrative on the “drug war” and the May 2019 elections has been attributed to the conventions of news reporting, which among others, supposedly include adherence to “objectivity.” In practice, that problematic concept is hardly ever neutral; it usually consists of quoting the powerful without discernment and analysis, and ignoring and marginalizing what the powerless and the poor have

to say. The result is a failure to provide the meaning of events and issues, lack of context, and the dominance in the news of the regime narrative through the “he said, she said” reporting that the film maker and journalist John Pilger has aptly described as stenography rather than journalism. “Objectivity” has long been established as contrary to the journalist’s responsibility of providing not only the facts of an event or issue, but also their meaning. But it is a mantra that has been drummed into the heads of journalism students and practitioners for decades and has not lacked adherents in Philippine practice.

But this is only part of the story of how the media are buying into the “alternative facts” the Duterte regime has made it its business to propagate. The assumption that practitioners and their media organizations are mere victims of journalism’s conventions in making the regime narrative dominant in the public sphere ignores the fact that some of them are also complicit in the process, through, among other avenues, the well-documented corruption in the ranks, the editorial policies that govern the practice, and the political and economic interests that drive the owners of the commercial, profit-oriented media.

The papers in the present issue of the *Philippines Communications Society Review* are as timely as they are relevant to the need for teachers of journalism and communication, researchers, and media practitioners to deepen their understanding of the present state of both old and new media and how they are being used to manipulate and shape mass awareness of the most critical issues and events of public interest.

Hopefully these will encourage further research into how structural factors such as media ownership and advertising often decide not only how issues of war and peace, human rights, environmental decay and climate change, development, politics and governance, and foreign relations are reported, but even what news reports make it to the front pages, the evening news, and the online news sites.

Research on the over a century old history, the role and current expressions of the alternative media, and how organized and individual forms of resistance are accessing and utilizing both old and new media in combating the disinformation at the heart of the communication policies of the regime of unreason is equally crucial. Armed with the research and analytical capabilities of communication and media scholars from the country’s best

universities, the Review is among those journals and publications that can provide this vital service to media practitioners and the public during the present crisis of information in, paradoxically, this Information Age.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luis V. Teodoro', written in a cursive style.

**Luis V. Teodoro**

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