

Determining the Public Opinion on Rappler as A News Media Critic of the Administration

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Abstract

With the rise of social media and online platforms wherein information is only just a click away, there is still a grey area as to whether online users trust news sites and pages on the digital space. This study aims to assess and analyze the public perception of Rappler as a news media outlet wherein it highlights its role as a news media critic of the Duterte administration. The researchers collected the needed data to identify the public opinion of Filipino adults who are aged 18 and above regarding Rappler's critical way of reporting. This study is supported by data, articles, and related literature that are mainly focused on media trust, media credibility, and related factors towards the reported trust in media. Moreover, this study expounds the surrounding issues related to Rappler's investigative journalism. The study has been operationalized through online surveys and by setting certain eligibility requirements, which served as the qualifier for the respondents before answering the questionnaire. Additionally, this study shows a glimpse of the Media Effects Theory and its correlation to the study's nature. Upon analyzing the gathered data, results show that most respondents trust Rappler as a news media outlet critical of the Philippine government.

Keywords: media, Rappler, public opinion, journalism, government critic

Introduction

In 2012, Maria Ressa, Glenda Gloria, Chay Hofileña, and Beth Frondoso founded Rappler Inc. Rappler is said to be the first in the Philippines, emerging as an online news platform with an ethos similar to a tech startup. They started to operate with just 12 journalists and developers, attracting young readers' attention with their "millennial style" of journalism. Slowly it eventually dominated the internet and social media, now banging as the fourth-biggest news online website in the Philippines with over 100 journalists working for it (Petersen & Ratcliffe, 2020). Later in 2015, the parent company of Rappler Inc., Rappler Holding Corp., was reported to have been invested by two foreign companies—North Base Media

and Omidyar Network. Through the form of Philippine depositary receipts or PDRs in which The Securities and Exchange Commission approved both deals (Salaverria, 2018).

Rappler is an online news organization that gradually emerged throughout the years. It was well-recognized for its investigative journalism, which unravels the corrupt activities made by the government—a definitive move as watchdogs of the government. Nevertheless, despite building the organization's reliability and credibility as a digital news source, many online users continue to ridicule the online news platform blatantly. These are the things that readers perceive about the content produced by Rappler. Some people applauded the courageous journalism brought about by the Rappler reporters. Some online users contrast their reports and repeatedly state that Rappler only writes harmful content about the government.

Subsequently, in 2016, the feud against Rappler started as pro-Duterte columnist Rigoberto Tiglao criticized Rappler in a blog post stating that Rappler failed to disclose the number of investments brought in by the two foreign companies. He also slammed them for using PDR as he said that it "defies the Constitution's limits on foreign investments in certain industries." (Salaverria, 2018). Since then, the cold war between Rappler and the Duterte administration started.

For years, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has attacked Rappler and threatened its staff members. It was in the year 2018 when Rappler faced charges. Cyber libel, tax evasion, and securities fraud were the charges that Rappler had to confront. The court already dropped two libel cases in June and August 2021. As of December 3, 2021, there were at least seven (7) active cases pending in court against Rappler, its CEO Maria Ressa and its directors and former researcher (Buan, 2021). Some of these complicated cases were appeals process at the Court of Appeals for the Securities and Exchange Commission's closure order against Rappler, four (4) consolidated tax cases against Ressa and Rappler Holdings Corporation at the Court of Tax Appeals, and another tax case against Ressa and RHC at the Pasig Regional Trial Court Branch 157.

They became the center of the hot topic in journalism/news reporting because they have been a critic of the current administration, which had led them to be the target of attacks, hate messages, and death threats from the growing number of online trolls. They have received an average of 90 hate messages per hour. Rappler has been accused of spreading fake news and being owned by Americans, and these non-verbatim accusations came from none other than this current administrations' president, Duterte (International Center for Journalists, 2021).

The site's journalists face tremendous pressure from online trolls, who have been strengthened by Duterte's suggestion that reporters should be treated as "spies" who are "not exempted from assassination." According to the outlet (Subingsubing, 2021), the distributed denial of service attack has reached "over 6 billion in accumulated requests," seemingly intended to prevent internet users from logging onto the site and bringing down Rappler's website several times over the next few hours. It is said that the attacks started when Rappler posted its story regarding the passage of a Senate bill allowing full foreign ownership of public services. The

attack came only days after the ABS-CBN news site also experienced a similar attack that brought down its news portal for six hours. Bayan Secretary-General Renato Reyes stated that these cyberattacks "target press freedom and are intended to disable online media that are critical of the Duterte regime."

Later in the year 2020, the CEO of Rappler, Maria Ressa, was then found guilty by the court. This verdict has caused her to receive an indeterminate sentence ranging within a minimum of six months and one day, a maximum of six years, and fines for moral damages and exemplary damages. It has also obstructed their website reporting. In addition, credibility or reputation-based attacks were thrown at the CEO, eventually affecting Rappler itself as a media outlet. Terms such as "*bayaran*," "fake news," "ISIS supporter," and the likes are being connected to Rappler. The orchestrated online attacks further erode public trust in independent journalism.

Rappler, since it has begun, proudly refer to themselves as credible, honest, and factual amongst all things. They highly promote their fact-checking methods in uncovering the truth behind the fake news on social media. This leads to the importance of the study. As Rappler rose to fame, their reputation dimmed as soon as they dug stories against the Duterte administration. DDS or Diehard Duterte Supporters backlashes against the entire organization. Their credibility was suddenly questioned. There was even a point when Maria Ressa—the founder of Rappler, was arrested. This caused havoc all over the journalism world. It is essential to conduct this research as it is timely and necessary.

This research question, what is the public opinion on Rappler as a news media outlet critical of the Philippine government? The demographic variables of the respondents include eligibility requirements based on their geographical location (island groups: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao), age (18 years old and above), as well as gender, educational attainment, primary news sources, and the average time spent consuming news (Bolalek, 2013). The primary dependent variable is the level of trust in Rappler.

The researchers aimed to assess and analyze the public perception of Rappler as a news media outlet, particularly focusing on its portrayal as a critic of the Duterte administration, with a focus of understanding the extent to which public opinion aligns with or diverges from the perceived role of Rappler in the political landscape. Further, the objectives of the study are: to determine the demographic characteristics of respondents in terms of age, sex, geographical location, educational attainment, news source, and average time spent on news consumption; to understand public perception of critical reporting; and to assess whether the public trusts Rappler as a vocal critic of the government.

Investigative Journalism

Journalism is the pursuit of gathering, verifying, and presenting news and information to the masses. It's the country's safeguard to democracy, and history declares that the more democratic a society, the more info and information it tends to have (American Press Institute, n.d.).

In a time where social media content emerges to a vast audience range and accessibility, there has yet to be a distinction between truthful information and disinformation, colloquially known as "fake news." This is where investigative journalism enters the scene and strives to save the day—to prevent us from falling victim to disinformation and stay informed with factual data.

Investigative journalism reports significant occurrences such as illicit transactions committed by the people in seats of power. Indeed, it is backed up with multitudes of facts and analysis as they present it to the public (UNESCO, n.d.).

In the Philippines, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) is a leading nonprofit media organization specializing in investigative journalism. Media networks also air investigative programs such as GMA Network's "Reporter's Notebook" and "I-Witness." Moreover, gliding with digital reporting, Rappler has been one of the prevailing online news organizations in trend.

Controversies of Rappler

The Philippines' news organizations are likewise afflicted by the fake news epidemic, particularly Rappler, the country's first digital news organization (Ranada, 2018). "Fake news," is the information that has been purposefully fabricated and disseminated as news with the intent to mislead the readers" (McGonagle, 2017). At the same time, it was noted that the term gained global relevance during the 2016 US Presidential Election and is now a topic of public concern (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2019).

It is no longer guaranteed to be reliable due to the internet and social media proliferation. It allows it to be abundant, fast-flowing, and easily accessible and shared to a broader audience online, as opposed to traditional media such as print, radio, and television, where news information is subjected to stringent verification before being broadcasted or printed (Lanterno Michelle, 2019). Filipinos are particularly vulnerable to fake news since it is so prevalent online, given that they are among the world's most active internet users. Sixty-seven million people spend an average of nine (9) hours and twenty-nine (29) minutes per day online (Camus, 2018).

Rappler has continuously been tagged as a "fake news outlet" on almost all social media sites. It started when President Rodrigo Roa Duterte slammed Rappler in 2018 and called them fake news peddlers. The accusation came after several articles written by Rappler in which Duterte said is rife with innuendos and falsity. Political leaders worldwide have used the term "fake news" to accuse reporters of spreading lies and discrediting their journalism over the last years (Lees, 2018). These accusations are used to justify the closure of news outlets, imprison journalists, and censor the content to block public access to the internet and social media sites.

Media Credibility and Public Trust Ratings

Credibility is essential in the field of mass communication, specifically on the ground of news, where authenticity is based on its credibility because there is a responsibility to give truthful records of news events to the audience.

Fake news is one of the significant threats to society as identified by the World Economic Forums because news plays an essential role in the country as a primary source of reliable information (McGonagle, 2017). Credibility is defined as the "believability of information and sources that are inclined with trustworthiness and expertise of the information source as interpreted by the information receiver" (p.1), where trustworthiness is defined as the "combination of believability, honesty, and lack of bias" (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Expertise is defined as "knowledge of the subject" (Bolalek, 2013).

The associate director of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, Luis Teodoro, said in a forum that the best protection for media is the people's trust (Tordesillas, 2020).

In 2018, Rappler reported that Special Assistant to President Bong Go allegedly intervened in the Philippine Navy's selection of the weapon systems supplier for the P15.7-billion frigate program (Macas, 2018). Consequently, President Duterte defended his secretary and accused Rappler of being a fake news outlet. He [Duterte] railed against the said digital news site and said, "For your information, you can stop your suspicious mind from roaming somewhere else. But since you are a fake news outlet, then I am not surprised that your articles are also fake." Rappler fought back and, in a statement, told Duterte that fake news peddlers are not far from Malacañang.

The media holds democratically elected officials responsible for exposing corruption and policy failures. Although many leaders recognize media criticism as a necessary part of modern democracy, others restrict press freedom or coerce media outlets to silence their critics. In presidential democracies, we uncover the variables that inspire and enable presidents to limit media freedom. The study is limited to how Presidents react to the media against them. The study aims to that (a) in the absence of an effective electoral opposition, presidents who hold ideological positions contrary to those of the mainstream media adopt the media as viable opponents, and (b) the media are vulnerable to presidential infringements on their freedom where legislatures and judiciaries have limited powers in comparison to presidents and are thus unable to restrain presidents' actions against media freedom. From 1993 to 2013, we used quantitative assessments of press freedom ratings in presidential and semi-presidential countries to support our position.

SWS Survey on Publishing Critical Things of the Administration

A national survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations for the third quarter of 2021 found out that 45% of Filipino adults believe with the statement, "It is dangerous to print and broadcast anything critical of the administration, even if it is the truth." Only 19% of the population disagreed with this. This climbs the net danger of publishing things analytical of the administration in all areas [Balance Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao] except Metro Manila and all educational levels other than those college graduates. Moreover, the statement, "I can say anything I

want, openly and without fear, even if it is against President Duterte," made the net personal freedom rise in Metro Manila and Balance Luzon. The same goes for junior high school graduates but fell among college graduates.

Reported Trust in Media vs. Related Factors

One-third of young adults in Slovenia perceived the role of media in society as positive while the rest express a worrying level of trust in media. The data was gathered in two ways — interview and survey questionnaire. For the interview, 21 participants were asked about their relationship with media regarding their use in a day. On the other hand, for the survey part, 220 respondents were administered and asked about (a) how young people perceive media's role in society? (b) How much do young adults trust daily news broadcasts, newspapers, and online media in Slovenia with respect to public or commercial and traditional or new media? (c) How does the young students' perception of the role of media in society affect their confidence in traditional and new media? The interview and survey questionnaire was administered to young adults aged 18-29 years old. Further results of their study showed that (50.9%) of the respondents were critical (45.7%) are skeptical of the media in general, and (29.1%) of the respondents recognized the role of media as positive.

In a report that took a look at how people use the news and present a bespoke analysis of how women consume and perceive news, based on data on audience behavior from 11 countries featured in the 2020 Reuters Institute Digital News Report: Kenya, South Africa, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, Brazil, Finland, Germany, United Kingdom, and the United States (Andi & Selva, 2020a). The study intended to bring audience data and other evidence to a broader debate whether the media industry is fair to women. It also included country profiles that look more closely into issues of media and gender in those countries and; provide specifics on women's news consumption. The researchers found that men are more likely interested in political news than women. At the same time, women are more likely than men to express high levels of interest in information about health and education.

Moreover, the data also showed that women and men are almost equally likely to trust or distrust news in most of the countries that have been analyzed. There are positive correlations between interpersonal trust, trust in the media, and trust in other institutions (Andi & Selva, 2020b; Jakob, 2012). Moreover, in a study on trust in media in the Americas it was argued that a person's level of education is the strongest sociodemographic predictor of trust in media, with men and women with lower levels of schooling trusting news more than those with higher levels of education. But there are also some studies reporting that women are on average more trusting than men, yet this research in the countries surveyed, showed no consistent difference in levels of trust between men and women (Selva & Andi, 2020).

On the other hand, in a study it was aimed to identify how educational attainment could affect media trust and accuracy based on the premise of the Dunning-Kruger Effect. The Dunning-Kruger Effect pertains to a type of cognitive bias wherein people believe that they are more intelligent and capable than they are.

Nonetheless, upon gathering the needed data for Stimers' study, the results showed that Dunning-Kruger Effect is not entirely present in the data, for the respondents in the lower levels of education did not state outsized belief in the accuracy of the media when compared to the respondents who hold a master's degree or higher (Stimers, 2020). The trust in the press was aligned with the beliefs in media accuracy. Moreover, it indicated that higher levels of education set out higher levels of trust in the media. Of the smaller group of 48 respondents, 33 and 32 made definitive statements that would first require one to be informed on politics and follow and trust the media or news sources. Nevertheless, groups 33 and 32 were from the H category. Only one respondent of the 48 was from the M category, noting that the higher the degree of educational attainment, the less probability to give an illogical answer.

Over the past year, many Filipino journalists were labelled as the enemy of the state or were pertinaciously red-tagged mainly because of their criticism of the government (Chua. Y, 2021). They were subjected to political attacks and threats. A report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2021) cited from (Rappler, 2023) showed that Rappler scored 45% in trust rating, which is considerably low compared to other news media outlets like GMA Network, Manila Bulletin, Philippine Star, etc. that scored more than 60%. In addition, it has a mistrust score of 29%, which is the highest among all the rest of the news media outlets.

Furthermore, a macro-level study about the factors related to trust in news showed that the type of news sources like the mainstream and alternative media corresponds with the reported level of trust in the news media. The study showed that news consumption through alternative media is correlated to their lower level of trust in news. In contrast, mainstream media as a source of news is linked to a higher level of trust (Eisenegger et al., 2019).

Another study about the factors influencing trust in media has shown that age nor gender were not significant predictors of media trust in any form (Fernández-Planells, 2015). The same study showed that trust and mistrust in media are associated with exposure to it.

Media Effects Theory as the Theoretical Framework

The principal objective of this study is to identify the public opinion of Filipino adults aged 18 and above on Rappler as a news organization that is critical of the administration.

Media reporting, particularly investigative journalism, is among the most significant sources in terms of public awareness of corruption. Rappler has been one of the prevalent news organizations known for their undaunted reporting (OECD, 2018). Hence, the study is supported by the Media Effects Theory as its theoretical framework. Media effects pertain to the intended or unintended outcomes of what the mass media does. In addition to that, media effects theory expounds on how the mass media influence the attitudes and perceptions of its audience members (Borah, 2016a).

Moreover, the survey conducted in 1940 by a team of researchers from Columbia University, headed by Paul Lazarsfeld, determined how the media affected people's perception. Contrary to direct media influence, the researchers attributed the lack of media effect to selective exposure. The press seemed merely to reinforce the decisions of those who had already made up their minds (Griffin et al., 2018). This study seeks to determine how Rappler's media messages influence the perception, public opinion, and trust of its audiences towards the type of their journalism.

Methods

This chapter presents the population, sample size, sampling technique, and statistical treatment utilized by the researchers and the procedures conducted in the data gathering. The study is classified as descriptive research, whereas the researchers utilized the quantitative research design to emphasize identifying the public opinion of Filipino adults towards Rappler as a news media outlet that is critical of the administration. Moreover, the study adheres to the Media Effects Theory to further elaborate the relevance of the theoretical framework.

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

The respondents of this study are Filipino adults who are 18 years old and above and are currently residing in the Philippine Island groups, namely: National Capital Region (NCR), Balance Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

The researchers applied the 99% confidence interval and 5% margin of error in selecting the sample size. This resulted in a total of 664 respondents. The respondents will be selected through the use of convenience-quota sampling.

Table 1. The Total Population Of Each Island Group and The Needed Percentage of Respondents in Each Island Group

	Total Population of Each Island Group	Needed Percentage in Each Geographical Location	
National Capital Region	13484462	0.12	80
Balance Luzon (outside NCR)	48712480	0.45	299
Visayas	20583861	0.19	126
Mindanao	26252442	0.24	159
		100%	664

Research Instrument

The researchers formulated survey questionnaires to gather data deemed significant to the study. The researchers will utilize Google Forms for the online/e-survey. Links will be posted on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook) and their corresponding poster (Call for Respondents). The research instrument comprises four divisions: the first contains the title and consent form or the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Meanwhile, the second division includes the eligibility questions to verify

if the respondent is indeed qualified to participate in the study. It is followed by the third division, which elaborates the respondent's sociodemographic profile, which comprises the respondent's name (optional), sex, highest educational attainment, and average time spent on news consumption. The last division covers the relevant questions for the study.

The online survey form entails questions in line with the study's objectives and hypotheses. Nonetheless, the questions are provided with two choices, agree or disagree. Respondents will have to tick or check the appropriate box depending on which they prefer based on the questions provided. These are designed to determine the respondents' standpoint on Rappler as a Philippine government media critic.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers will conduct the study among online readers of Rappler. Since the study is quantitative research, the data collection will rely on convenience-quota sampling and structured data instruments to fit the respondents' diverse experiences, particularly from questionnaires. To obtain information, researchers will utilize Google forms to be sent to chosen respondents' email addresses.

After collecting all the data, the researchers will tabulate the gathered responses to the survey and finally interpret the public opinion towards Rappler's way of reporting.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Given the nature of Public Opinion Research, the needed statistical treatment of data in this research is the frequency, weighted mean, crosstabulation, and method agreement analysis.

Ethical Consideration

The ethical issues in the research topic concentrate upon informed consent, which is meant to offer participants safety and assurance. This can assist in guaranteeing that the participant's rights are not injured or infringed in any manner, and they can choose whether or not to participate in the study. The other is confidentiality, which should ensure the privacy of the study's participants because anonymity can help participants answer better to the survey and offer more accurate information when answering about how they validate fake news that circulates in social media.

Results And Discussion

This chapter discusses the data gathering results through opinion polling that we, the researchers, have collected. It aims to determine the following:

1. If the public agrees that news media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administrations; and
2. The public opinion by knowing if they trust Rappler despite being critical of the administration.

With the help of univariate analysis and method agreement analysis, we will be able to determine the public opinion on Rappler as a news media critic of the administration. The homogeneity is identified by subtracting the percentage of disagreement from the percentage of agreement (% agree minus % disagree).

The net agreement terminology to know the homogeneity or consensus is translated as

- +50 and above, "very strong";
- +30 to +49, "strong";
- +10 to +29, "moderate",
- +9 to -9, "neutral";
- -10 to -29, "poor";
- -30 to -49, "weak";
- -50 and below, "very weak"

Filipinos Agree that News Organizations can Freely Publish Critical Reports About the Government

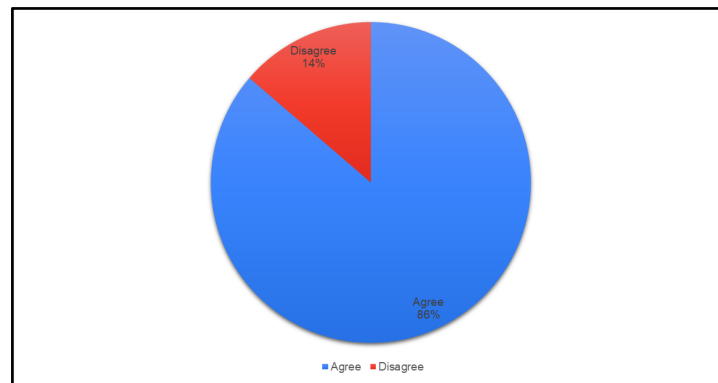


Chart 1: Net agreement with the statement, "News media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administration"

Agree or Disagree with the statement: "News media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administrations." (Sumasang-ayon o Hindi Sumasang-ayon sa pahayag. "Ang mga kumpanya ng midya sa Pilipinas ay may kalayaan maghayag ng mga kritikal na balita tungkol sa administrasyon.")

Chart 1 depicts the stance of Filipinos on the current state of the country's press freedom. In contrast, they were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, "News media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administrations." The univariate analysis illustrated in a pie chart indicates that 573 respondents or 86.3% agree with the statement while 91 respondents, or 13.7%, disagree. The majority of the respondents agree that the statement justifies that Filipinos believe that press freedom exists and is functioning in the country. The data implies that news organizations can freely publish articles and reports despite being critical to the Philippine government.

Filipinos are Aware that Rappler is a Critic of the Government, and they Continue to Trust the News Organization

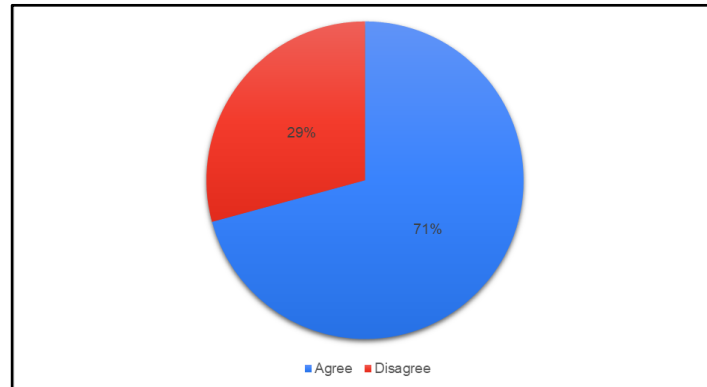


Chart 2: Net agreement with the statement, "Rappler is one of the news media outlets known to be critical of the administration. I trust Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the government"

Agree or Disagree with the statement. "Rappler is one of the news media outlets that is known to be critical of the administration. I trust Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the government." (Sumasang-ayon o Hindi sumasang-ayon sa pahayag. "Kilala ang Rappler bilang isa sa pinakakritikal na midya outlet sa administrasyon. May tiwala ako sa Rappler sa kabila ng pagiging kritikal nito sa administrasyon.")

Chart 2 represents the view of Filipinos on the journalism ethics of Rappler as a news media critic of the government whereas they were asked to whether agree or disagree with the statement, "I trust Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the government"

Results show that out of 664 total respondents, 470 respondents or 71% agree that they still trust Rappler despite being a media critic of the government. On the other hand, 194 respondents, or 29%, disagree that they still trust Rappler.

Irrespective of their Geographical Location, Filipinos Firmly Believe that News Media Outlets in the Philippines can Freely Publish Critiques of the Administration

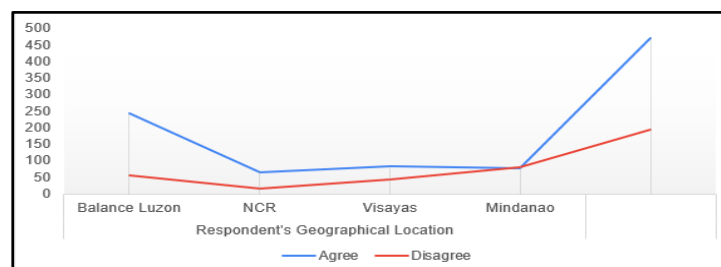


Figure 1: Net agreement by island group on the statement, "News media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administration"

The net perception on critical reporting about the government is high (86% in Balance Luzon, 80% in NCR, 90% in the Visayas, and 88% in Mindanao) in all island groups. This shows a net agreement score (% agree minus % disagree) of +50, implying that the majority of the respondents, irrespective of their geographical location, strongly agree that news media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administration.

News Media Outlets in the Philippines can Freely Publish Critiques of the Administration: Strong Agreement Among High School Graduates to Post-Baccalaureate, Poor and Weak Agreement for the Rest

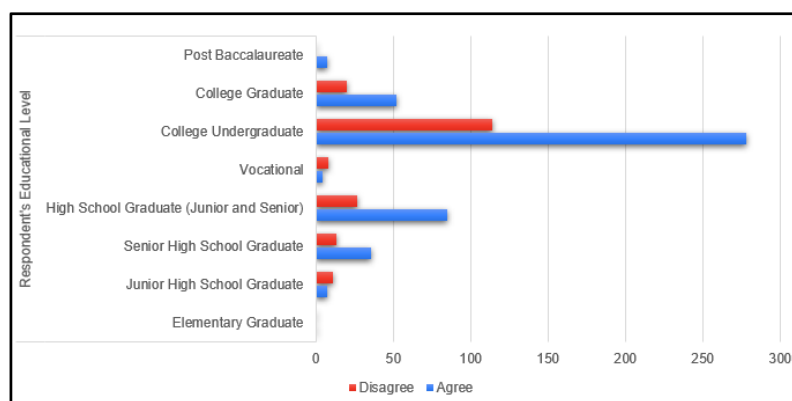


Figure 2: Net agreement by education on the statement, "News media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administration."

By educational attainment, net perception with the statement, "News media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administration," was high for college undergraduates (71%), high school graduates (76%), college graduates (52%), senior high school undergraduates (73%), post-baccalaureate (100%), junior high school undergraduate (39%), vocational (33%), and elementary graduate (50%). This shows a net agreement score (% agree minus % disagree).

Net agreement with the statement, "News media outlets in the Philippines have the freedom to publish critical things of the administration," was very strong in educational levels namely: high school graduates (both junior and senior high school) and post-baccalaureate with a net agreement of +50. On the other hand, it was strong for college undergraduates, college graduates, and senior high school undergraduates with a net agreement of +30 to +49. Meanwhile, it was poor for junior high school undergraduates with a net agreement of -10 to -29. It fell weak for vocational graduates with a net agreement of -30 and was very weak for elementary graduates with a net agreement of -50 and below.

Trust in Rappler by Island Group: Strong Agreement in Luzon and Visayas, Strong Disagreement in Mindanao

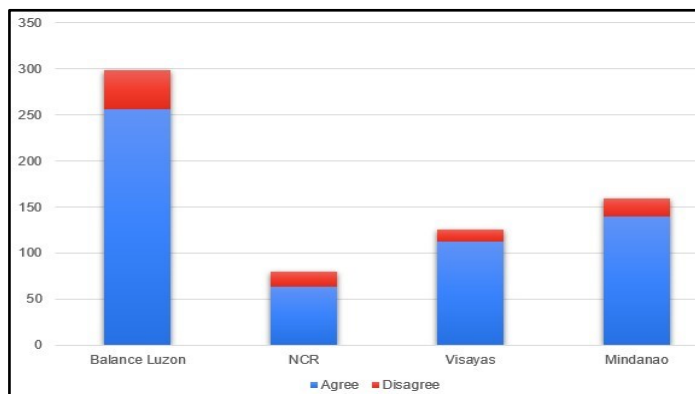


Figure 3: Net agreement by island group on the statement, "Rappler is one of the news media outlets known to be critical of the administration. I trust Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the government."

By geographical location, net perception with the statement, "Rappler is one of the news media outlets that is known to be critical of the administration. I trust Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the government.," was high for Balance Luzon (81%), NCR (83%), and Visayas (66%) but low in Mindanao (49%). This shows a net agreement score (% agree minus % disagree) for Balance Luzon and NCR of +50, which implies that the respondents from this region strongly agree that they still trust Rappler despite being one of the critics of the government. For Visayas, a net agreement of +30 implies that the respondents from this region strongly agree that they still trust Rappler despite being one of the critics of the government. Lastly, for Mindanao, a net agreement of -50 implies that the respondents from this region strongly disagree that they still trust Rappler after being one of the critics of the government.

Trust in Rappler Across Educational Levels: Moderate Agreement Among College Undergraduates, Neutral Among Others

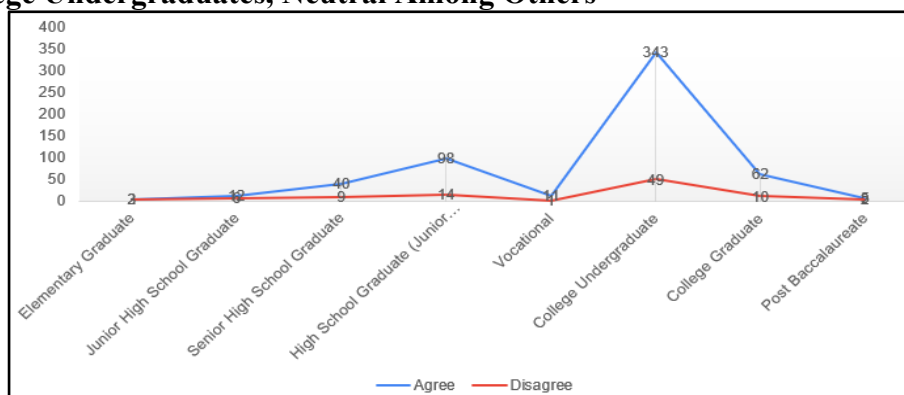


Figure 4: Net agreement by education on the statement, "Rappler is one of the news media outlets known to be critical of the administration. I trust Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the government."

Net perception with the statement, "Rappler is one of the news media outlets that is known to be critical of the administration. I trust Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the government," was high based on educational attainment giving a net agreement score (% agree minus % disagree) of +42 signifying that most of the surveyed respondents comprising 70% of the population strongly agrees that they trust Rappler despite being vocal and critical of the government. Specifically, it was neutral in all educational levels except among college undergraduates: +9 among high school graduates, +5 among college graduates, +3 among senior high school undergraduates, +1 among post-baccalaureate, -1 among vocational and junior high school undergraduates, and +0 among elementary graduates. On the other hand, it was moderate among college undergraduates having a net agreement score of +25.

Conclusion

Given the current pandemic situation we are in, the researchers were only able to collect data through online crowdsourcing. The recruitment of respondents could be further improved especially when the pandemic ends and the recruitment of respondents are possible face-to-face. Face-to-face data gathering will enable future researchers to reach the older age group as well.

The measurements could be refined and enhanced as well. The variables and measurements in the instrument were limited which led to the limitation of possible inferential analysis that can be utilized for the data gathered.

Furthermore, the current sampling technique used is non-probability. Probability sampling technique can be utilized which is a highly probable technique apt for quantitative data analysis and would be able to provide a higher level of research findings from the data

For the stakeholders, a communication campaign would be helpful, specifically for the Filipino news media consumers. Although in a big-picture perspective, the results show that the public trust Rappler as a news media outlet, we should also take into consideration of the disagreement percentage. Media information literacy through a communication campaign would help educate the media consumers in properly assessing news from a news media outlet and identifying whether it's credible and trustworthy.

Based on the public opinion survey results, data show that Filipinos believe in press freedom. In addition to that, despite Rappler's critical reporting, most of the public still trusts the online news organization. These results imply that the controversies have minimal influence on the public's trust in the media organization.

Guided by the Media Effect theory as the foundation of this study, results show that even after being the government's most prominent media critic, the public still trusts Rappler. According to (Borah, 2016b), media effects pertain to the intended or unintended outcomes of what the mass media does; hence the company's controversies seem to have little influence on how the public views their journalism. In today's society, where misinformation has the power to influence the

majority, news plays an essential role in being the primary source of reliable information (Lees, 2018).

The study does not cover the concepts and principles relating to the other types of news criticism. It is only limited to the news media, Rappler as a critique and watchdog of the Philippine government disregarding other news concerns unrelated to government issues. In the methodology, the researchers used a descriptive study design. In contrast, the researchers used a quantitative research approach to determine Filipino adults' public opinion towards Rappler as a news site critical of the administration. Furthermore, the study adheres to the Media Effects Theory to further elaborate the theoretical framework's applicability. In this design, survey questionnaires were used and produced substantial questionnaires to gather more sensible results. Also, they managed to adhere to the 664 number of respondents to collect more information to achieve the accuracy of the results.

This public opinion research serves as an effective tool in weighing and quantifying the public trust [in carefully described geographic areas such as Balance Luzon, NCR, Visayas, and Mindanao] on Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the Philippine government. Furthermore, it addresses issues, particularly the current state of press freedom in the country and the pulse of the public on it. The survey provided information and a much-needed check of the actual state of journalism in the Philippines. Contrary to the result of the national study conducted by the Social Weather Stations for the third quarter of 2021 (Social Weather Stations., 2021), wherein it found out that 45% of Filipino adults believe that it is dangerous to print and broadcast anything critical of the administration, even if it is the truth, this research implies that majority of the respondents comprising 86.3% believe that news organizations such as Rappler can freely publish articles and reports despite being vocal and critical to the Philippine government. While 71% of the respondents agree with the statement, "I trust Rappler despite being one of the media critics of the government." Finally, this will add fuel to Rappler and the rest of the news media outlets to fulfil their responsibility to publish truthful records of news events to the public, even if it means critical reporting to the government.

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