



From Disinformation to Influence Operations

The Evolution of Disinformation in Three Electoral Cycles

Rossine Fallorina | Jose Mari Hall Lanuza | Juan Gabriel Felix
Ferdinand Sanchez II | Jonathan Corpus Ong | Nicole Curato

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1. INTRODUCTION

How has the Philippine disinformation landscape evolved since 2016? How different was the 2022 presidential election from previous electoral cycles? And what lessons can we learn from electoral triumphs and defeats often associated with disinformation?

This report goes to the heart of these questions. Our aim is to understand the evolving character of disinformation—the tactics used, actors involved, the wider context in which disinformation unfolds, and the responses of the government, tech platforms, and civil society to these trends. In doing so, we hope to generate actionable insights on impactful responses to disinformation, with a view of preparing for the 2025 midterm election.

Our main findings are as follows:

- **Quality:** If in previous years, we perceived disinformation as misleading claims and wild rumors gone viral, today they are better understood as misleading narratives that affirm political fans' hardened political identities and weaponize their core feelings of resentment and anxiety.
- **Tactics:** In 2023, disinformation in the Philippines is supplied by a savvy information-media-fantasy complex that offers both mainstream and micro-targeted political commentary, entertainment productions, and lifestyle events and programming.
- **Actors:** Disinformation influencers continue to play cat-and-mouse games with platforms and fact-checkers, and their fame and notoriety follow the life cycles of finicky celebrity culture. Influencers produce content for fan communities across digital platforms while disinformation architects—the political and commercial elites who strategize behind the scenes—continue to reap the greatest financial and political rewards.
- **Context:** Disinformation as a term has become both banal and laden with heavy baggage. Administration and opposition politicians have taken on disinformation as their own advocacy. At the same time, there is greater interest from civil society to experiment with regulatory and community solutions to improve the information environment.

1. Introduction

- **Responses:** The commitment from people coming from diverse sectors—advertising, arts and culture, comedians, librarians, lifestyle publishing, and community leaders from different regions—to collaborate toward new solutions with journalists, activists, lawyers, and academics expands possibilities for creative and community-grounded responses to disinformation.

Illiberal political leaders have not only been the main beneficiaries of these disinformation and influence operations, they have also normalized the legal intimidation of journalists, activists, historians, and fact-checkers and deepened the public’s distrust of experts. Meanwhile, civil society has mounted its own defense of the information environment by creating new coalitions that have pledged to fight disinformation. This report maps out the country’s creative and diverse anti-disinformation space. We argue that, just as influence operators have continuously evolved, the anti-disinformation actors themselves need to catch up, fortify current strengths in fact-checking, and invest in long-term solutions that hold power into account and empower ordinary citizens to be responsible participants in the public sphere.

We present our findings in five sections. We begin by taking stock of disinformation trends in three electoral cycles (Section 2). We then zoom in to 2022—the year Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was elected president—and track the content of disinformation over a one-year period using TootBa.info crowdsourced data and reports from Internews’ team of social media researchers (Section 3). Government and domestic politics are among the most reported categories of disinformation, with occasional spikes in reporting of historical distortion. The final substantive section of our report maps out anti-disinformation initiatives in the Philippines (Section 4) and concludes with proposed paths forward (Section 5).

This report is a companion piece to our previous paper *Parallel Public Spheres: Influence Operations in the 2022 Philippine Elections*, and provides updates about our team’s Community Engagement Plan to implement collaborative and citizen-empowering solutions in bridging divided publics.¹

1 Ong et al., *Parallel Public Spheres: Influence Operations in the 2022 Philippine Elections*.

2. DISINFORMATION ACROSS THREE ELECTORAL CYCLES

Disinformation in the form of blatantly false claims have evolved to influence operations where hyperpartisan narratives offer wildly divergent interpretations of political issues and events.

Listed in Table 1 are the main characteristics of disinformation tactics, actors, context and responses across three electoral cycles.

2.1. 2016: Angry Populism Turbocharged by Social Media

2016 was a pivotal year for authoritarian politics around the world. The 2016 elections in the Philippines—as elsewhere like the United States, United Kingdom, and Brazil—swung the pendulum away from liberal democratic politics towards angry populist politics, defined by an anti-establishment rhetoric. The mainstreaming of disinformation through social media definitely played a part, but Rodrigo Duterte himself in the Philippines—much like Donald Trump in the US and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil—was the central figure who reshaped the political environment.

Considered the first “social media election,” the 2016 presidential elections showed us how media manipulation could become a viable part of the election winner’s toolkit. Strategic Communications Laboratories (SCL Group), the parent company of Cambridge Analytica, publicized its role in the branding of a strongman leader, the image presented by Duterte during the campaign period.²

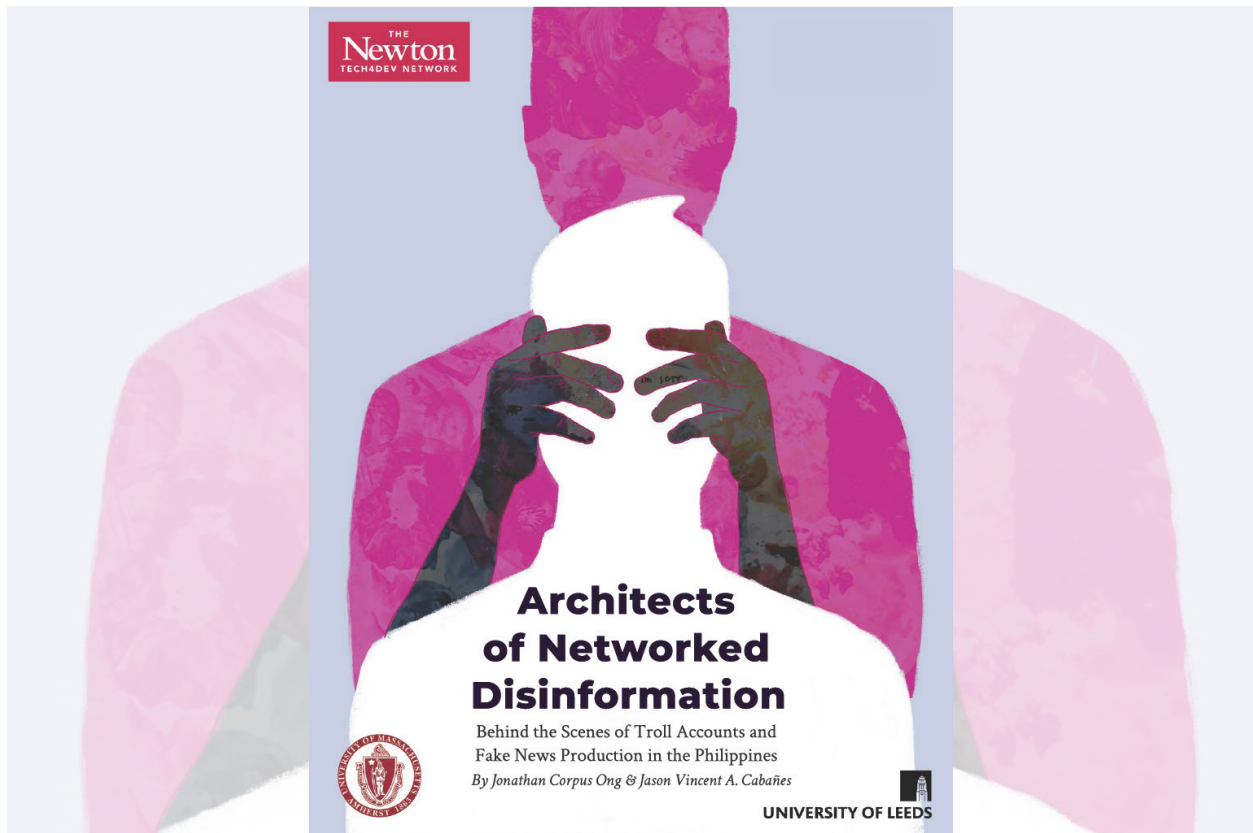
2 Robles, “How Cambridge Analytica’s parent company helped “man of action” Rodrigo Duterte win the 2016 Philippines election.”

2. Disinformation across three electoral cycles

Table 1. **The Evolution of Disinformation Across 3 Electoral Cycles**

	2016	2019	2022
Tactics	<p>Sowing distrust on liberal elites and journalists</p> <p>Normalizing vitriolic speech on mainstream and social media platforms</p>	<p>Micro-targeted disinformation</p> <p>Seeding disinformation in messaging apps</p>	<p>Self-sustaining information-media-fantasy ecosystems catering to each political camp</p> <p>Sowing distrust on fact-checkers, historians, disinformation researchers</p>
Actors	<p>President and his group of bloggers/ macro-influencers</p> <p>Parody and pseudonymous accounts on social media</p>	<p>Micro- and nano-influencers</p> <p>Parody and pseudonymous accounts</p>	<p>Elected politician as lifestyle content producer</p> <p>Knowledge influencers</p> <p>Hyperpartisan broadcast news anchors and political commentators</p>
Context	<p>Duterte’s angry populism as shock effect to the political system</p>	<p>Consolidation of administration’s political influence; sustained attacks against government critics</p>	<p>Replacing the EDSA narrative with alternative and consolidated myth about martial law “golden age”</p>
Response	<p>“Fake news” was a new term we were still trying to understand</p> <p>Media literacy</p>	<p>Facebook commissioned third-party fact-checkers</p> <p>Election coalitions mobilized around fact-checking</p>	<p>Regulatory experimentation (SIM Card Registration Act)</p> <p>Anti-disinformation has been adopted by civil society coalitions as well as politicians across the political spectrum</p> <p>Brigading and canceling organized by social media “warriors”</p>

2. Disinformation across three electoral cycles



Ong and Cabañes' study revealed the central responsibility of local advertising and public relations experts in the conduct of dirty political campaigns on social media, whom they referred to as “the architects of networked disinformation” in the country.³ This network identifies touch points that can provide a constant stream of salient campaign messages for the audience. What the disinformation-for-hire industry does is that it “hijack[s] people’s sentiments and sow[s] public divisiveness” and exploits loopholes and weaknesses in campaign finance regulation and social media content policy.⁴

These architects assemble fake account operators and influencers to continuously seed partisan information, hijack online conversations, and disrupt information flows online in favor of their politician clients. One example of this is the inorganic engagements around the hashtag #IlibingNa (lit. #BuryHimNow), referring to a campaign gathering public support

3 Ong and Cabañes, *Architects of Networked Disinformation*.

4 Ibid.

2. Disinformation across three electoral cycles

for a heroes' burial for the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr.⁵ Amplified by then-President Duterte himself, this contributed to the whitewashing of the Marcos legacy and indicated the Marcoses' early investment in social media click armies. Clearly, social media manipulation already proliferated even outside of electoral campaign cycles.

As a response, fact-checking and media literacy initiatives became the default response of civil society organizations. Meanwhile, government regulations struggled to reform campaign finance laws to foster more transparency in campaign ad spending. Platforms became more proactive with content moderation online, but always fell behind in cat-and-mouse games with savvy disinformation influencers. While platforms, government institutions, and civil society tried to respond to the firehose of falsehoods online, disinformation innovations were quick to evolve and evade.

2.2. 2019: Influencer Culture Meets Digital Campaigning

The 2019 senatorial elections was a litmus test for the popularity of the Duterte regime. The Duterte administration's bets ran under the party-coalition *Hugpong ng Pagbabago* headed by his daughter, then-Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte. It was an overwhelming success for the Duterte administration, winning 9 out of 12 senatorial seats. This landslide victory emboldened disinformation actors to spread wild conspiracies and justify the administration's moves to intimidate journalists and activists. At the same time, influencer industries increasingly got folded into political campaigns.

Platform regulation evolved towards more aggressive takedowns of hate speech and inauthentic accounts—Facebook had taken down 95 pages and 39 accounts, some of which promoted pro-Duterte content in ways that violated spam and authenticity policies⁶—but campaign finance reforms hardly made any impact. Facebook made attempts to track official political ads online, but regulatory loopholes remained in tracking influencer marketing and other paid troll operations.

5 Ibid.

6 Meta, "Removing a spam network from Facebook in the Philippines."

2. Disinformation across three electoral cycles



In response to more active content regulation, disinformation operations shifted from macro- and mega-influencers to micro- and nano-influencers. Micro- and nano-influencers enabled targeted campaigning to niche audiences who came to trust them via their “greater engagement and affinity”.⁷

This innovation made disinformation more prevalent, more integrated in campaigns, and more difficult to catch. There was a notable pivot to digital operations in campaign spending for almost all politicians, from the national down to the local level. Whereas previous campaign budgets mostly revolved around ground wars (in-person appearances and rallies) and air wars (broadcast media advertising, including television and radio), now social media budgets included a sizable allocation for social media campaigning. This directly contributed to the rise of hyperpartisan news on social media. Alternative news pages, hyperpartisan

7 Ong, Tapsell, and Curato, *Tracking Digital Disinformation*.

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YouTube channels and websites, as well as local community pages and closed groups on Facebook also played greater roles in shaping online sentiments compared to 2016.

Adjustments in platforms' content moderation rules and community guidelines led to more Facebook takedowns,⁸ and fact-checking and media literacy initiatives remained the dominant counter strategy. Politicians led a few high-profile investigations naming and shaming influencers, but failed to introduce any real accountability to social media campaigning. They may have been reluctant to introduce strong regulation as they benefited from the opaque regulatory system overseeing electoral campaigns.

2.3. 2022: Parallel Public Spheres Sustained by Competing Information Ecosystems

Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s overwhelming victory represented the completion of his family's redemption arc. Building off years of historical revisionism and investment in social media operations, Marcos now wielded an information-media-fantasy complex serving its passionate fandom. This information ecosystem is composed of a hyperpartisan broadcast channel, knowledge influencers on television and social media platforms, TikTok teens, and operators on messaging apps. Their propaganda and strategic performances of victimhood successfully upended the traditional representations of heroes and villains in the EDSA People Power Revolution.

New disinformation actors came into play during the 2022 elections. We identified new personalities—such as knowledge influencers and an incumbent senator—who used creative content that swayed public opinion and skirted around regulations. Knowledge influencers included credentialed academics and hyperpartisan vloggers who convey “expert” justifications of politicians' policy positions while casting doubt on “mainstream” academics, pundits, as well as credible pollsters. They also advanced narratives targeting disinformation researchers, historians, and fact-checkers. Meanwhile, an incumbent senator employed professionally produced parody skits and lifestyle vlogs to attack the opposition. These skits continuously tagged liberals as out-of-touch with the masses, and the use of her official social media accounts to distribute these skits as entertainment content skirted around campaign regulations.

8 Gleichner, “Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior From the Philippines.”

2. Disinformation across three electoral cycles



Following the shutdown of one of the country’s biggest media networks, new partisan channels also emerged to fill in information voids on topics such as the Marcoses’ wealth. Influencers on TikTok relied on its short-form format and accessible video editing features to spread propaganda, gamify election content, and spectacularize political disinformation.⁹ While there are corrective and entertaining accessible content on the platform, TikTok’s platform transparency leaves a lot to be desired relative to other platforms, and its randomized algorithmic recommender system does make it vulnerable to influence operations. The platform, however, has recently made changes to its community guidelines to institute a strike system in order to crack down on repeat offenders.¹⁰

9 Lanuza, Fallorina, and Cabbuag, *Understudied Digital Platforms in the Philippines*.

10 De Bailliencourt, “Supporting creators with an updated account enforcement system”; Pappas, “Strengthening our commitment to transparency.”

2. Disinformation across three electoral cycles

Within this pressurized and polarized political landscape in 2022, activists and “keyboard warriors” reverted to “fighting fire with fire” using techniques of canceling and brigading. Celebrities, public personalities, and businesses that become associated with the Marcos campaign were subjected to calls for cancellation, meaning a boycott of their services, products, and general status. Brigading also became more common across both camps. Coordinated mass reporting and mass commenting sprees on partisan content online served as new venues for political expression—but not necessarily conversation. We view these as last-ditch efforts to try and reclaim whatever political discursive space has been lost over the years.

3. DISINFORMATION IN 2022

Aside from tracking the evolving tactics and agents of disinformation, our research team conducted a secondary analysis of Internews' TootoBa database, where social media monitors from eight provinces (covering nine local languages, including English) collected and categorized false, misleading, and out-of-context claims posted on social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok. Our analysis is based on data from TootoBa.Info—a disinformation reporting platform developed under Internews' Initiative for Media Freedom and Internews' Six-Track Engagement Against Disinformation initiative (STEAD-i).¹¹

TootoBa.Info received a total of 7,663 reports of deceptive, inaccurate, and misleading posts in 2022. Each post was categorized according to its content and reasons for classifying the content as disinformation—for example (1) government and domestic politics or content about government officials, agencies, and affairs; (2) history or posts that distort or misrepresent historical events; (3) health including those that relate to diseases and treatment; (4) media or content that attack or discredit media practitioners and organizations; (5) environment and climate change where false claims are made on scientific data about climate change and/or disasters; (6) religion where posts produce hateful messages using spiritual language or content that misrepresent religious groups or personalities; (7) international politics, diplomacy, and foreign investment including conspiracy theories on foreign interference in Philippine affairs; (8) entertainment and celebrities or posts that target people outside government; and (9) finance and business or content related to bogus cash prizes and investment scams.¹² Internews' taxonomy of topics was initially meant as an internal guidance for social media monitors, instead of an exhaustive list of content containing disinformation. While these topics are not mutually exclusive, these were further developed and enhanced over the period of data collection based on the submitted reports.

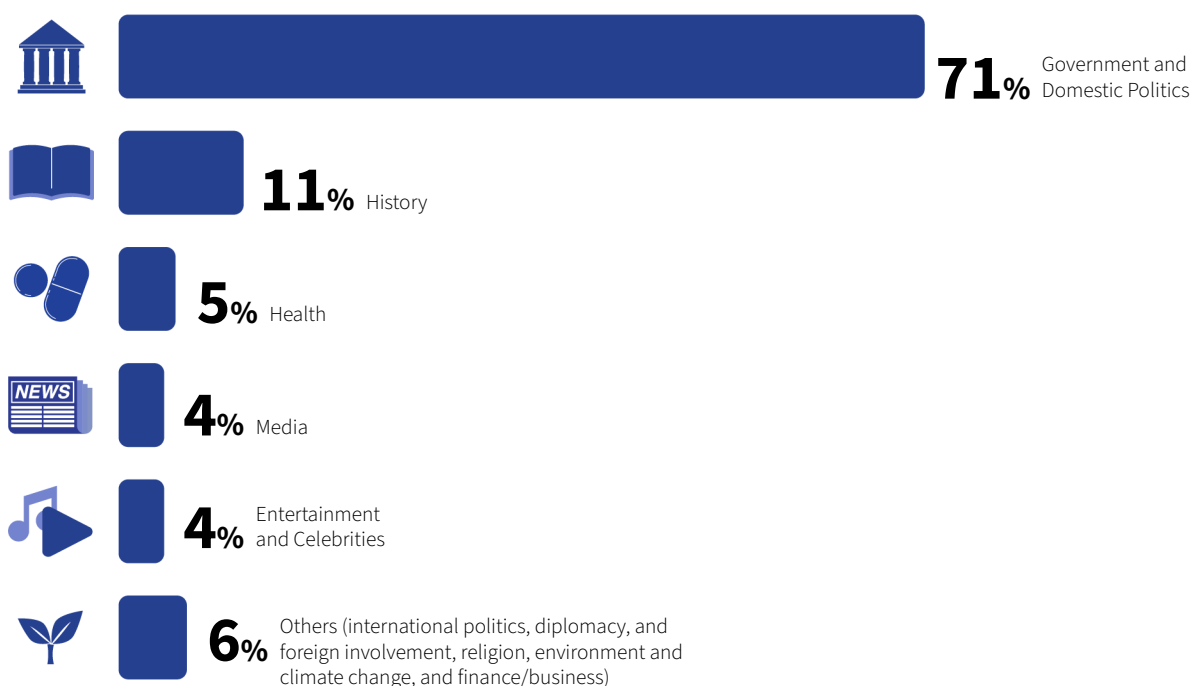
11 See case entry of TootoBa.Info in Participedia: <https://participedia.net/case/12412>.

12 See <https://participedia.net/case/12412>

3.1. Government and domestic politics were most popular topics of disinformation

Government and domestic politics were the most frequent topics of disinformation (71%; see Figure 1). Subtopics related to this category include National and Local Politics, Red-tagging, Elections, and Policy or Law.

Figure 1. Main Topics of Disinformation in 2022



Election-related disinformation was prevalent in the first quarter of 2022, leading up to the elections in May. For example, Facebook pages such as “Kurapsyon QC” accused Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte of corruption. There were posts insinuating irregularity on the city’s audit of intelligence funds and pandemic relief goods.^{13, 14} By March 2022, there were 24 coordinated pages across several platforms that criticized and made fun of the mayoral

13 <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/rSQK5>

14 <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/vSp2p>

3. Disinformation in 2022

candidate. These pages remained active throughout the campaign period with content amplified by Pinoy pop culture/parody accounts such as VinCentiments—a page known for producing satire and parody supporting Marcos-aligned candidates. In September 2022, a few months after elections, these coordinated pages became inactive or unavailable.

Some election-related disinformation was combined with red-tagging or a tactic that accuses personalities of being members, allies, or sympathizers of the Communist Party. In February 2022, there were reports of posts that accused Manila Mayor and presidential candidate Isko Moreno Domagoso of being a communist sympathizer. Edited photos of Isko Moreno posing beside the founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines Jose Maria (Joma) Sison were uploaded, with captions such as “Iskomunista Jomagoso,” a portmanteau of Isko and *komunista* (communist) and Joma and Domagoso. There were similar memes targeting re-electionist Pasig Mayor Vico Sotto, with memes labeling him “Vicomunista.” Vice president and presidential candidate Leni Robredo received similar attacks, as in the case of a Facebook post by an official from the Duterte government who claimed that the CPP-NPA-NDF¹⁵ supplied large crowds in Robredo’s campaign rallies.¹⁶ Robredo supporters reported the impact of such disinformation on the ground, with some youth volunteers in Davao verbally harassed in their volunteer center, while others received bomb threats during campaign sorties.^{17, 18}

Red-tagging did not stop after the elections. Next to national politics, red-tagging is another popular sub-topic of disinformation under government and domestic politics. Until the end of 2022, we continued to monitor malicious posts accusing members of the political opposition as being part of the communist group. Aside from digital harassment, acts of red-tagging also translate to offline violence. In November of 2022, cartoonist-teacher Benharl Kahil was murdered after being red-tagged. Through online art, Benharl was known in his political commentary against disinformation and the government.¹⁹

15 Acronyms for Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), New People’s Army (NPA), National Democratic Front (NDF).

16 FactRakers, “No proof that communist groups supplied Robredo campaigners.”

17 <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/tigtq>

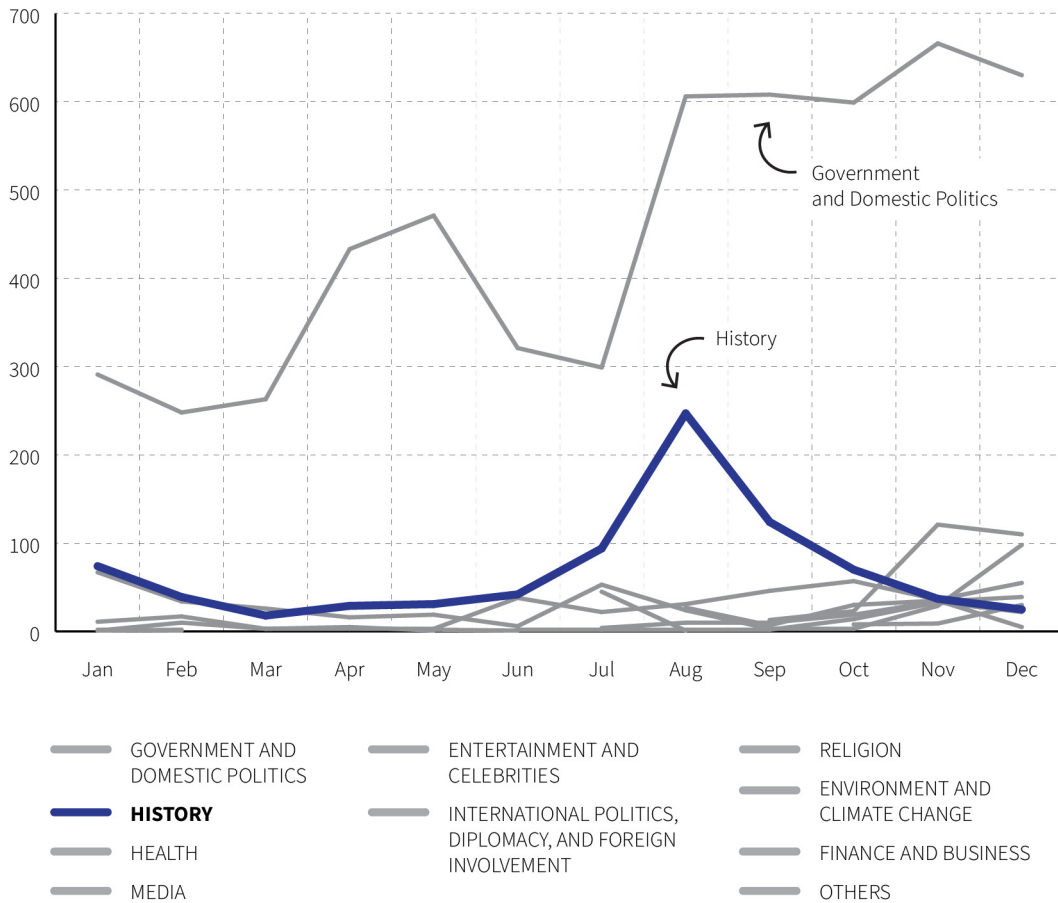
18 <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/aCpT6>

19 Salgados, “Red-tagging preceded murder of Sultan Kudarat teacher-cartoonist.”

3.2. Historical distortions mobilize sentiments of hope and threat

We observed spikes of historical distortions in the months of January to February and July to September 2022 (see Figure 2). One can infer that these posts were timed for the commemoration of the EDSA People Power Revolution in February, Marcos Jr.’s first State of the Nation Address in July, and the fiftieth anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law in September.²⁰

Figure 2. Topics of Disinformation Over Time (2022)



20 See also Tsek.ph, “Disinformation attempts to rehabilitate the Marcoses, disparage EDSA.”

3. Disinformation in 2022

We zoom in on two examples of historical distortions to analyze their functions in constructing a coherent worldview for people who believe in these narratives: the Marcos gold myth and the EDSA conspiracy theory. We find that the Marcos gold myth mobilizes sentiments of hope, while EDSA conspiracy theories provoke feelings of threat. Together, both sentiments serve the function of legitimizing the return of the Marcoses to power.

The Marcos gold myth are stories often told on YouTube that portray the Marcos family as inheritors of tons of gold from the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr.²¹ YouTube channels such as “Pinas News Insider” and “Sa Iyong Araw” tell stories of gold bars stored in banks or vaults around the world to be monetized and distributed to all Filipinos once Marcos Jr. is in power. There have been reports about direct harm caused by these myths. In November 2022, a trader lost over five million pesos to scammers who offered to give him a cut of seventeen trillion pesos worth of Marcos gold.²² There were scam sign-up pages on Facebook where people are asked to give personal information to “receive” gold bars.²³ With publicly disclosed data, they become more vulnerable to various forms of scam and phishing.

While it is easy to dismiss people who fall for these myths as naïve citizens desperate for quick fixes, our on-going research suggests that there are deeper stories that underpin the popularity of the Marcos gold myth.²⁴ These myths have long been part of popular imaginary in the Philippines but has become even more resonant with the return of the Marcoses in the political center stage. We find that people who hear these myths interpret them in various ways. In our fieldwork,²⁵ we met people who interpret these myths literally, others critically, and many with ambivalence. Regardless of how people interpret these myths, we find that they serve a particular function in everyday conversations, which is to create space for people to discuss their fantasies (e.g., what will you do with a million pesos) as well as prompt reflection about realistic aspirations of where they want their lives to be headed. Our conjecture is that these myths are popular because of their discursive function—they open hopeful conversations, or at the very least, joyful banter.

21 Reyes, “‘Ecstatic’ loyalists await their share of the Marcos wealth but is it Fool’s Gold?”

22 Boiser, “Trader duped by seniors in ‘Marcos gold’ investment.”

23 <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/Nz04V>

24 See Curato, “The Golden Age of Disinformation.”

25 Curato’s field research was supported by the Norwegian Research Council (Project No. 314849).

3. Disinformation in 2022

Meanwhile, conspiracy theories about the EDSA revolution provoke feelings of threat. These conspiracy theories cast doubt on the extent to which the EDSA revolution was a popular mobilization or mass uprising. “EDSA Revolution is a FAKE Revolution. It is a Power Grab or Government Takeover,” is an example of a Facebook video that portrayed the revolution as a conspiracy among oligarchs, communists, and the Catholic Church to take power.²⁶

These conspiracy theories about the past are connected with conspiracy theories about the present, most clearly articulated by deceptive posts about electoral fraud. This narrative gained momentum in the aftermath of Leni Robredo’s successful vice-presidential bid in 2016, which Marcos Jr. continued to contest until today. In February 2022, a series of fake posts were published online that included manipulated photos alleging ballot pre-shading and tallying of forged results in multiple municipalities. A Facebook Page called “XSOX Group” was also created that had warned against the use of Smartmatic’s vote counting machine and claimed that the results of the election had already been decided according to leaked documents. Three members of the group were arrested after having access to Smartmatic data through an ex-employee and offering “hacking” services to politicians. The Cybercrime Investigation and Coordinating Center (CICC) then claimed the hackers were incapable of altering the polls and were only driven to scam politicians.²⁷ Around the same period, Duterte administration government officials started to engage in separate efforts (e.g., Senate investigations on alleged hacking of COMELEC servers) that would have given credence to allegations of election fraud in the 2022 elections.²⁸ Even Senator Imee Marcos cited the XSOS Group’s Facebook posts in an executive session with senators and other government officials about the alleged security breach, legitimizing the fears and broadening the reach of the conspiracy theories.²⁹ Ahead of election day on May 9, vlogger Sangkay Janjan alleged that the camp of Leni Robredo planned to manipulate the elections by orchestrating blackouts on the day of the election. On election day itself, Internews received reports, ranging from claims of unsealed/spoiled ballots in overseas voting to vote mismatch between the shaded ballot and voter receipt.

These conspiracy theories ask audiences to stay alert and suspicious of the political opposition. In many ways, they are connected to posts about the Marcos gold myths, for

26 <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/Dpqiu>

27 Lalu, “CICC says arrested hackers can’t manipulate polls, only out to scam politicians.”

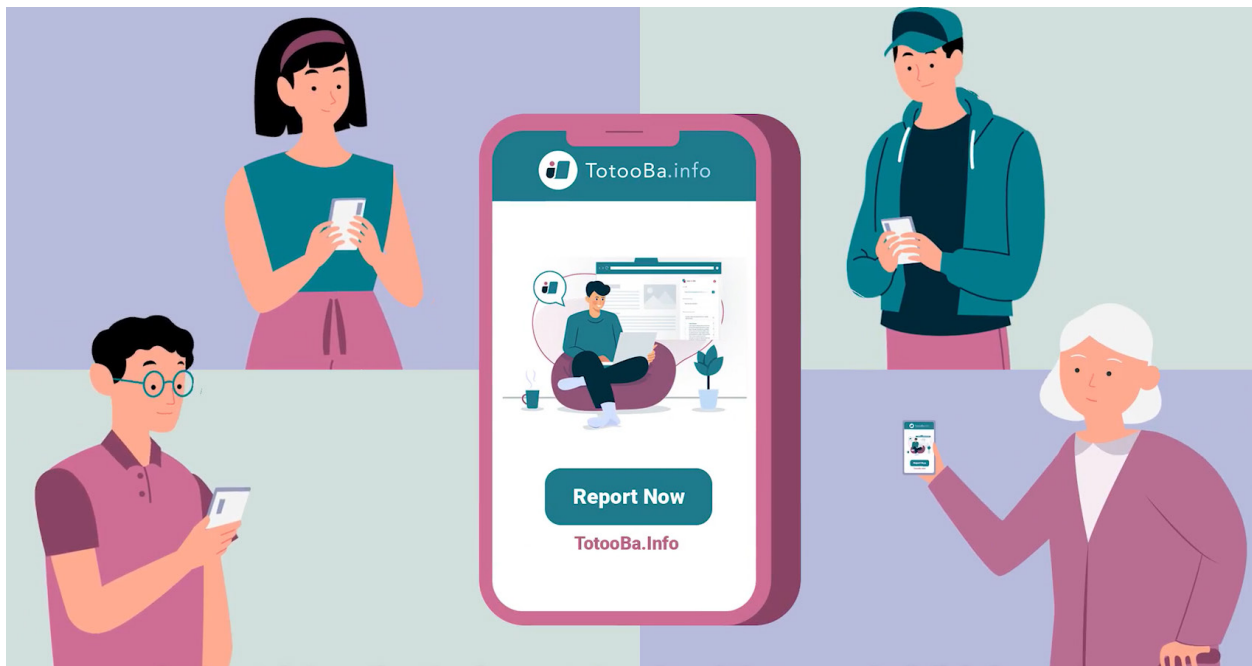
28 Ramos, “Senate probe sought into alleged Comelec server hacking.”

29 Lopez, “Comelec, Smartmatic deny security breach claim by Imee Marcos.”

3. Disinformation in 2022

conspiracy theories threaten people that the wealth promised to them may be taken away if the presidency is stolen from the Marcoses. It connects with broader frames of victimhood, where the Marcoses are always vulnerable to malicious forces, hence the need for unity and vigilance. In fact, these narratives were consolidated as the story line of *Maid in Malacañang*, a film featuring the Marcos family’s tales of struggles, maltreatment, and betrayal leading up to the EDSA People Power in 1986.

3.3. The importance of tracking influence operations



It may come across as surprising that historical distortions only account for 11 percent of reports on deceptive, malicious, and inaccurate posts on social media. In 2022, cases of historical distortion and revisionism reported to TootoBa.info were done in the context of election-related disinformation, thus some reports were labeled as such. Further, given that majority of disinformative content is in the form of videos that tend to cover numerous topics, lengthy videos could include false claims about the Marcos Sr. regime with the intent to promote his presidential bid, so they could have been tagged as election-related disinformation, or broadly under the main topic of government and domestic politics.³⁰

30 We thank the Internews Philippines team for this clarification.

3. Disinformation in 2022

Aside from incorporating false claims in lengthy videos, we also find that historical distortions no longer only come in the form of posts that blatantly disregard historical facts, but also use the art of political branding, deploying cinema, lifestyle entertainment, and influencer vernaculars to sanitize atrocity and present an alternative narrative about historical heroes and villains. In effect, historical distortions become increasingly difficult to detect and monitor, and therefore difficult to address. Traditional fact-checking protocols would find it harder to capture these other genres that creatively convey historical revisionism and flip traditional representations of the EDSA revolution's heroes and villains.

The TootooBa.Info database project has opportunities to expand and innovate in the future. First, resources can be more strategically directed toward supporting monitors and volunteers focusing on disinformation targeted at local communities, language groups, and internet subcultures to expand the database and track seasonal and emerging forms of disinformation. Second, there is an opportunity to nudge monitors to dive deep into understudied social media platforms including TikTok, while sustaining efforts at monitoring Facebook as the most used social media platform in the country. Third, a review of typologies is timely as the database expands. Developing more precise categories will be useful, especially in anticipation of monitoring new forms of disinformation aimed at shaping the public conversation in the upcoming midterm election. Fourth, typologies may be analyzed in relation to dominant and appealing disinformation narratives such as the victimhood of the Marcos family and distrust in mainstream media, experts, and academics. Findings from this analysis may inform the storylines and delivery style of future prebunking initiatives.

4. COUNTER-DISINFORMATION INITIATIVES

There is an array of initiatives to counter disinformation in the Philippines. Journalists, advocacy groups, funding agencies, academics, politicians, and the creative sector are among the key players in these initiatives.

This section provides an inventory of projects and advocacies that counter disinformation. We find that these initiatives have evolved over the years but not necessarily in a way that keeps up with the changing character of disinformation and influence operations. Most initiatives, we find, remain focused on truth-telling and verification, building citizens' capacities to spot trolls and identify "fake news." These are important but they are no longer enough. They need to be complemented with aggressive accountability initiatives addressing the financial infrastructures and incentive systems that reward spreading disinformation. We also need community-level solutions building new spaces for dialogue, moral education and reflection, worker mobilization, and cross-sectoral "whole-of-society" collaborations.

4.1. Legal and regulatory reforms

Legal and regulatory reforms have been one of the focus areas of counter-disinformation initiatives in the Philippines. We observed two approaches to these efforts.

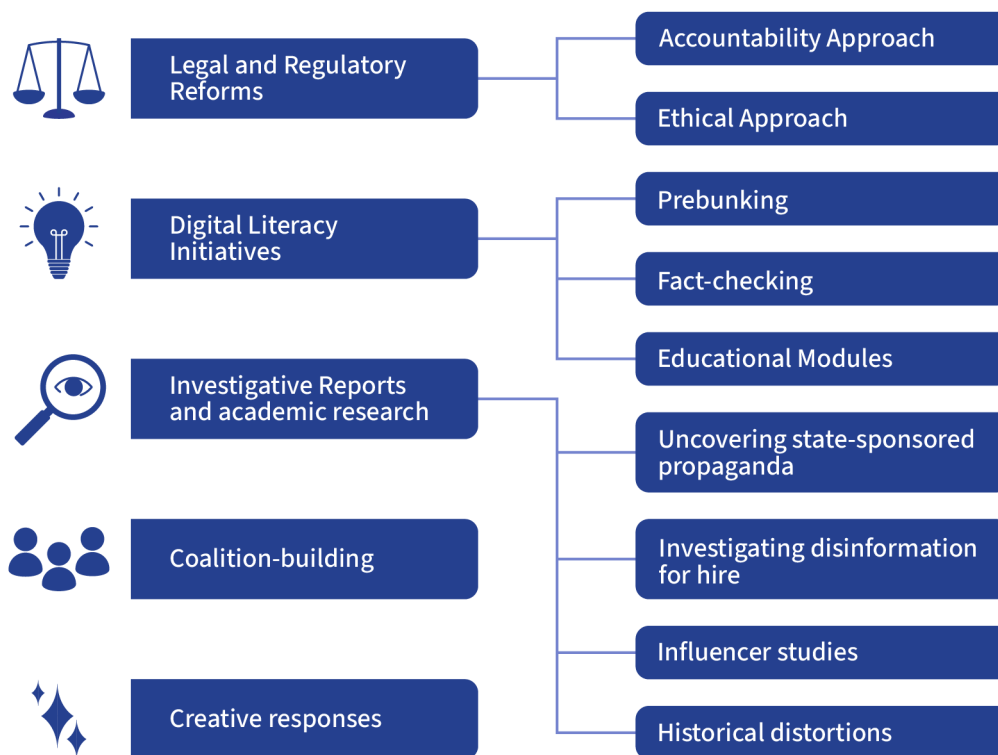
4.1.1. Accountability approach

The first one advances an accountability approach. This approach is often taken by government officials, as in the case of public hearings in aid of legislation where politicians named and shamed influencers for their offensive behavior online. For example, in October 2017, Duterte-aligned influencers and bloggers were asked a series of questions during Senate hearings, aimed at holding them for their "crass" online behavior and biased coverage.³¹ These transpired as "legislative theater" with politicians centering themselves as

31 *Philippine Star*, "Senators berate Mocha, other pro-Duterte bloggers."

4. Counter-disinformation initiatives

Figure 3. **Categories of Counter-disinformation Initiatives**



victims of disinformation and hitting back at the bloggers who wronged them. This focus on social media influencers saves platform companies and “chief architects” of disinformation campaigns within powerful advertising and public relations firms from much needed scrutiny.

The recently passed SIM Card Registration Act takes a similar approach. Proponents of a previous version of the bill claim that the legislation can address the spread of “fake news” by baring the identity of actors behind scams and troll operations.³² The government is also exploring means to cut off social media access to phones with unregistered SIM cards.³³ Journalists and rights groups criticized this law for violating data privacy and providing government tools for mass surveillance. Foundation for Media Alternatives published a review of the act highlighting major gaps in its implementation such as concerns with its

32 Senate of the Philippines, “Dilon stands by anti-troll provision in SIM card registration bill.”

33 Robles, “Philippines’ crackdown on anonymous SIM cards prompts backlash.”

4. Counter-disinformation initiatives

potential for weaponization against journalists and government critics, telcos possessing users' sensitive information becoming easy targets for data breaches, and its exclusion of already disadvantaged users residing in remote areas.³⁴ The report suggests a haphazard implementation by the government which disregards its own data and learnings from other countries. Furthermore, the report describes how scammers have quickly adapted to the legislation and found new ways to push phishing links to users.³⁵

Some advocacy groups and members of the political opposition have also taken an accountability approach, particularly those that advocate the use of the country's punitive libel laws to hold agents of disinformation accountable. Vice presidential candidate and senator Francis Pangilinan, for example, filed a cyber-libel case against "Maharlika," a YouTube channel accused of besmirching the reputation of the senator and his family during the election campaign. The Movement Against Disinformation (MAD)—a coalition of legal professionals—initially took this approach until 2022, when it shifted gears and issued a statement calling for the decriminalization of libel and focused their efforts in improving platform regulation.

Some accountability approaches pose risks of endangering civil liberties and concentrating power to political incumbents. They also tend to punish easy targets rather than hold accountable political elites and chief architects of disinformation.

There have been accountability efforts that do not utilize legal means to take down malign actors like the website trollexposer.com.³⁶ Initiated by the group US Filipinos for Good Governance ahead of the 2022 presidential elections, it produced a network map of accounts identified as displaying troll-like activity and reported them to Facebook. The group identified around 100 troll accounts and encouraged visitors to contribute by teaching them how to spot and report trolls themselves.

34 Foundation for Media Alternatives, *Promises broken and prophecies fulfilled: A look at the SIM Card registration rollout in the Philippines*.

35 Flores, "DICT: Scammers adapt to SIM Registration Act."

36 <https://trollexposer.com/>

4. Counter-disinformation initiatives

4.1.2. Ethical approach

The second approach foregrounds ethical responses to disinformation. It sets out normative commitments needed from governments, international organizations, tech platforms, advertising and public relations industry, and other stakeholders and advances action plans that give weight to these normative commitments.

The Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE) advanced this approach in the 2022 presidential election. They put together a (non-binding) code of ethics for advertising and public relations firms which call for practices of accountability and transparency when handling accounts of political clients.³⁷ While this call did not gain traction in relevant industries, our research team continues to advocate for this approach, as it assigns responsibility on the most accountable agents of influence operations and could potentially connect to more institutionalized “brand safety” evaluation mechanisms for the information environment, similar to the innovations introduced by Check My Ads Institute in the United States.³⁸

At a global level, Nobel Peace Prize Winner Maria Ressa is leading a ten-point action plan which calls to limit the power of big tech and advance a rights-based approach to disinformation. Included in the action plan are calls for tech companies to initiate “independent human rights impact assessments,” and public disclosure of “all aspects of their business—from content moderation to algorithm impacts to data processing to integrity policies.”³⁹

The Philippines’ current legal responses to disinformation can be further improved. First, there are clear gaps for creating self-regulatory mechanisms within the countries’ advertising and public relations industries where disinformation-for-hire operations continue to hide in plain sight. This requires civil society advocates to cultivate anti-disinformation “champions” within the ad and PR industries to advance organizational reforms from within.⁴⁰ Second, the country can introduce better regulation in monitoring and evaluating the political campaign practices. Disinformation content is often an outcome of unethical and unfair

37 Roset, “Why we need an elections code of conduct for the PR and ad industry.”

38 checkmyads.org/

39 Rambol, “Launched action plan to support journalism and fight disinformation.”

40 Ong, Tintiangko, and Fallorina, *Human Rights in Survival Mode*.

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political campaigning practices such as overspending and skirting regulatory loopholes. With its lack of resources and increased politicization, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) alone is unable to cope with tracking campaign expenditures and holding abuses into account. Regulatory reform is needed for fair elections and healthy political speech in the contemporary information environment. Civil society, journalists, and academics need to lobby policymakers to introduce new mechanisms for data collection and monitoring of electoral campaign content and expenditure. The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism's (PCIJ) annual campaign finance monitoring has consistently revealed abuses of spending through independent research based on their limited sources—with no follow-through accountability mechanism in Philippine law. We need a more robust transparency and accountability framework for election monitoring, thus ensuring a more accurate collection of media campaign content and politicians' campaign expenditure while introducing punitive sanctions for abusers.

4.2. Digital literacy initiatives

There are various dimensions to digital literacy initiatives. Some initiatives focus on developing people's online skills to effectively discern the quality of content they see on the internet. For example, TikTok partnered with the Commission on Elections and launched the #eLeksyonSerye campaign, together with GMA News and Public Affairs, which turned the platform into an avenue for education on voters' rights and disinformation ahead of the 2022 elections. We discuss below fact-checking, prebunking, and open-access digital literacy education modules as popular and emerging types of digital literacy initiatives, respectively.

4.2.1. Fact-checking

Fact-checking is one of the most visible responses to disinformation in the Philippines. Big and small media outlets receive training and follow global standards of fact-checking as members of the International Fact-Checking Network.

Journalists consider fact-checking as the first line of defense against disinformation as it is the fastest possible response each time one spots falsehoods circulating online.

4. Counter-disinformation initiatives

Philanthropic funding for media freedom supports fact-checking organizations in the Philippines. VERA Files and Tsek.ph are among the most prominent initiatives. Being a nonprofit media organization, VERA Files produces independent fact-checks while Tsek.ph is an electoral effort led by academics and journalists. By 2022, Facebook institutionalized partnerships with three third-party fact-checking organizations to support their content moderation decisions.⁴¹ Meanwhile, media support nonprofit Internews launched the Philippine Fact-Checker Incubator (PFCI) ahead of the 2022 national elections which trained fact-checking organizations around the country. Community-based fact-checking projects are also in place, as in the case of Pinas Forward which trained volunteer fact-checkers (“fake news slayers”).⁴²

The genre of fact-checking has evolved in recent years. From 2016 to 2020, many fact-checking efforts shifted their focus from correcting the false claims of attention-seeking social media influencers and “viral rumors” spread by anonymous accounts. Today, fact-checking groups are more conscious about the ways in which the initiative can inadvertently amplify the reach of misinformation and popularize notorious influencers themselves. Groups such as Fact Check Philippines have worked on minimizing the visual prominence of falsehoods in their fact-checks, while VERA Files furthers this by omitting false claims in headlines and thumbnails in fact-checks on their website. Some fact-checkers now commonly report broader narratives as opposed to individual falsehoods.

4.2.2. Prebunking

Prebunking takes the “prevention-is-better-than-cure” approach to disinformation. Recognizing that fact-checking does not spread as quickly as false claims, journalists and advocacy groups have taken the strategy of “inoculating” the public against disinformation. This involves creating opportunities for the people to learn how to spot the logics of disinformation and in so doing, develop “psychological resistance” against disinformation.⁴³

41 Hoy, “How Meta is Preparing for the Philippines’ 2022 General Election.”

42 <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/RDEA0>

43 Roozenbeek, Van der Linden, and Nygren, *Prebunking interventions based on “inoculation” theory can reduce susceptibility to misinformation across.*

4. Counter-disinformation initiatives

Figure 4. Maguindanao version of Salig Bangsamoro Rumor Bulletin Issue No. 7 on COVID-19

Salig
MAGUINDANAO

Ngin den ba i pedtalan na mga taw?

RUMOR #1
so COVID-19 a bago na mga bityala a pakaagaw sa akal nu mga taw.

"Su bago a sakit a COVID-19 a nakapabun sa Europ endu sa USA na mas makagilek endu mabagel uged na dapon ged minatay nin. Sya sa cotabato city, na ten e taw a ya maytu naalatan u nya a sakit na kena nilan bun gageram sa tidu tidu. Gatawan tanu so mga kaper a pebpasitive amengka gulan tanu so RT-PCR test anantu na makakuru kanan, pinaka masda geawu nin so taw antu na naarenan na COVID-19. Umangkuwana na ditau banamantag so nya a sakit kagina gapatunu pon pagtempen so mga sintomas u nya sakit. Ten e taw a minatay sya sa COVID-19, na lusa a mga taw na malala ren ged e sakit nin. Lazgun nilan na makit bun sa kapatay apiya dala virus. COVID-19 na dala bun u ged na bityala a pakaagaw sa akal nu mga taw sa ten e galini makapanteyel sa kota. (mama doctor, 60+ umul nin.)"

Rumor risk level: Medium Platform: Facebook Reactions: 72
Comments: 11 Shares: 43

Sawal

Su nyaba a bityala di pakasugat na ini-post na isa a doktor sya sa Cotabato city, sa pedtalan nin sa su COVID-19 pantay kanu bagu a balangan nin na isa bu a ukit a ipapekgagilek kanu taw. Su bagu a klasi nu COVID-19 na benal, endu importunate salkitaw I katawan tanu inya ka endu kaawan tanu o ngin I diet a gaulan tanu. Su mga scientists na natun nilan atawka nelay nilan su nyaba nakabagu banya a klasi nu COVID-19 sya kanu bala kanu dunya, lusa sa United Kingdom (klasi B.1.1.7), lusa South Africa (501.v2), endu sa Brazil (B.1.1.284).

Mas malengkas su kabelapat nin kumin sa kanu nabunpan nin a COVID-19 uged na dala po ibidinsya sa mas mabagel I tama nin atawka ka sakit a paka enggay nin atawka malengkas I kapag kadakel nin kanu bilang nu minatay sa COVID-19. Madakel a mga pangagi I pinggula endu gatawan ba talaga ngin su nyaba. Sya salkitaw a bansa atawka ka dalpa, su Department of Health na naka enggay sa 17 a kasu na nakakawa sa UK variant anyu sya sa dalpa tanu.

- Nuna na kasu, nakapabun sa UAE kanu January 8, Taga Quezon City endu nabagel den
- 12 a local a nakapamagala lusa Bontoc, Mountain Province
- 2 mimbalingan a nag abroad a mga Filipino ebbun sa Lebanon
- 2 lusa La Trinidad, Benguet endu Calamba City, laguna

Sya menem kanu mga ped, lusa Sulu na minggula silan sa 14-day lockdown kanu January 4 ka endu ka makatangka su mga taw kanu bagu a klasi na COVID-19 a nelay lusa pagubay nilan a luger man su Sabah. Su kabeg siruku menem sa kaped travel na naka sundul sa January 18. Sa Cotabato City, aden OFW a dala bun etuy na symptoms uged na naka tagapeda sa aden COVID-19 UK variant kanu January 26.

Su Ministry of Health nu Bangsamoro Region na pidtalan nilan sa su OFW na salid bun a pedyakapan mga taw a penggalbek sa kabangamot. Pinakamapya a enggulan para madsanggian nu ginhawa taw endu su mga pamilya tanu su nya ba kapekgadakel na mga bagu a sakit na dikena kagilek uged na su katuntay sa kanu nya ba. Ipalalayun su adit a kapenggagas sa lima, kapenggagamit sa masks amengka belyu sa walay, ka-maintain sa isa ka metro a pagalitan, kapangabung sa masimpit a kabamagubay, naridu wasto a adit sa kapembatuk amengka sya sa madakel a taw.

Nando tademan tanu e su katibayan nu virus/ kanam na embidabida e ukilin sya kanu mga tao kagina mapakay a yanin ipalay na (botok, mayaw, matenggaw nando kaped pan) uged na su kaped kasi na dinin ipabagilay sunamba a mga tanda. Su kaalit nu sakit na sigi bun e kablakaw nin kabagalat nin kanu ped a taw na su mga matuwa nando mga malmo edsasakit na kaalatanin surtuba.

DIKA MAPADTADAY SU KA'ABUNG NENG KA, UNUTAN TANU SU MGA DET A PENGGULAN

There are various examples of prebunking in the Philippines.

- VERA Files published explainers on how to spot satirical posts⁴⁴ and COVID-19 vaccine misinformation.⁴⁵
- GMA Digital Video Lab's InoculatED will make use of artificial intelligence to create tools and news products that protect their viewers from misinformation.⁴⁶

44 Nuval and Berdos, "How to check for satire?"

45 Hanopol and Ting, "Five red flags to look out for in COVID-19 vaccine misinformation."

46 GMA, "GMA Network's Digital Video Lab wins Google News Initiative Challenge for 'InoculatED.'"

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- Ateneo School of Government’s What the Fake?! Ang Fake News Challenge ng Bayan is a web-based game training young voters to spot fake news.⁴⁷
- Internews, IDEALS, and the Coalition of Moro Youth Movement executed Rooted In Trust⁴⁸ which targets the Muslim provinces of Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao. Using community-centered information exchange loops, the effort spawned an online bulletin of COVID-19 misinformation (see Figure 4) accompanied by tips helping users spot similar errors in the future.
- Visual artist Kapitan Tambay, in partnership with Internews, created a series of light-hearted prebunking videos aiming to reveal disinformation actors’ methods by applying them to relatable, everyday concepts.

Prebunking initiatives present a promising way forward for misinformation monitoring. We suggest that prebunking efforts do not conform to existing stereotypes of the “bobotante” and the “troll,” which perpetuate anti-masa sentiments. Prebunking initiatives can be more inclusive and empowering if their scene-setting and examples encourage reflection and empathy, and not just knee-jerk judgment of people who fall for misinformation.

4.2.3. Educational modules

Aside from journalists, educators have also been at the forefront of this space for digital literacy initiatives. Building on fact-checking and prebunking as necessary skills, educators have created open access resources that increase the visibility and accessibility of these skills. These modules usually focus on critical thinking skills and provide more accessible and static educational materials for audiences who intend to learn not only for themselves but for other people in their circles as well. For example, Media Commoner⁴⁹, Probe⁵⁰, and Out of the Box⁵¹ have taken steps to integrate critical disinformation research in their modules and help popularize local knowledge.

47 <https://www.inclusivedemocracy.ph/fakenewschallenge>

48 <https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/One-Internews-Philippines-long.pdf>

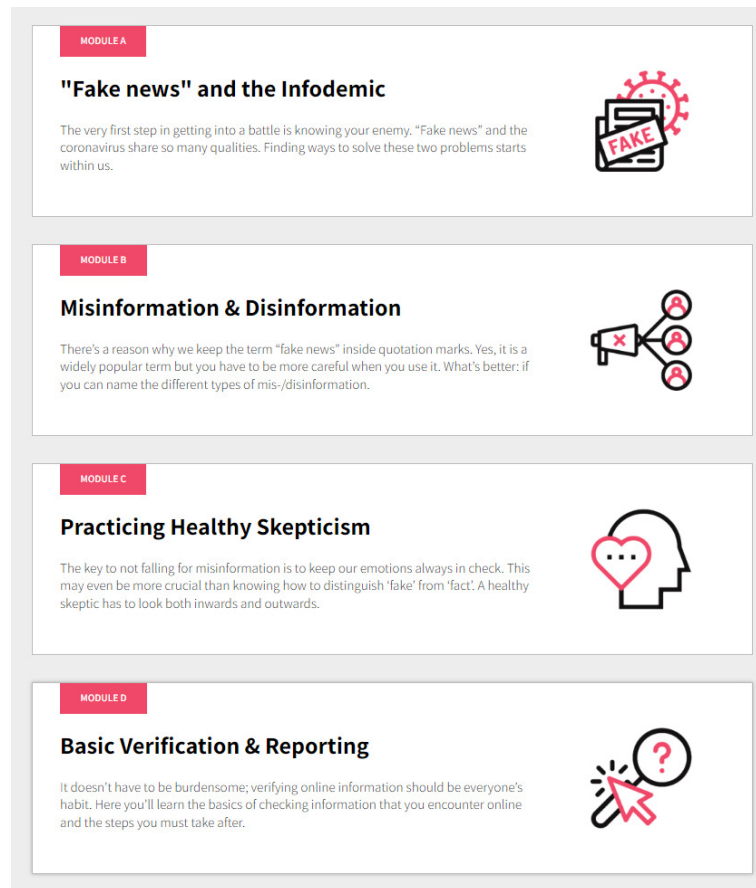
49 <https://www.instagram.com/p/CmJOyFALXmG/>

50 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=862483724830432>

51 <https://www.ootbmedialiteracy.org/>

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Figure 5. **Out of the Box Media Literacy Initiatives' #IWASFAKE Basic Learning Course**



- Out of the Box Media Literacy Initiative launched a website containing remote learning resources to empower teachers to incorporate prebunking resources in their curriculum (see Figure 5). Materials are available in English, Tagalog and Bisaya.
- InforMedia's Fight the Infodemic campaign trained parents and high school students to identify credible sources of information.
- Probe's "The Budol Fight" series engaged influencer Macoy Dubs who simplified findings from disinformation scholars for the general audience using snarky humor and parodies of influence operators.
- #DigiTalino by Limitless Lab saw digital literacy training for underserved sectors that helped them spot and fight disinformation. The program produced 66 Master Trainers who rolled out the program to different communities nationwide.

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Future media literacy efforts can expand on recent efforts like #DigiTalino by producing micro-targeted educational modules whose examples are familiar with specific underserved and underrepresented demographics, such as elderly people, overseas Filipino workers, or Mindanaons. Media literacy efforts can use more inclusive and empowering messaging that disrupts anti-poor stereotypes and not reinforce the dangerous trope that *the masa* as the gullible demographic of fake news.

4.3. Coalition-building

Coalition-building is a key feature of initiatives against disinformation in the Philippines. This initiative recognizes the importance of a whole-of-society approach, which requires bridging professional silos and forging partnerships.

Coalition-building underpins the fact-checking community in the country. [Tsek.ph](https://tsek.ph) is a pioneering coalition focused on fact-checking and convened journalism scholars, media practitioners and civil society actors to publish over 1,000 fact-checks in the leadup and aftermath of the 2022 election.⁵² Rappler also established a multi-sectoral coalition called #FactsFirstPH which convened over 120 local groups for the 2022 elections.⁵³ The coalition employs a multi-layered approach to addressing disinformation: fact-checks by fact-checking and news organizations, monitoring and distribution of fact-checks by a wide network of civil society actors and organizations, research by members of the academe, and legal support from independent lawyers and legal coalitions. #FactsFirstPH has produced over 1200 fact-checks as of this writing and continues its engagement with its members even a year past the 2022 elections.

The Asia Foundation’s Initiatives for Advancing Community Transformation (I-ACT) project is a long-term initiative that provides human rights advocates with avenues for collaboration, capacity-building, and funding.⁵⁴ I-ACT aims to bring in evidence-based research and strategic communication expertise to the human rights sector, helping them move beyond traditional strategic frames around denouncing human rights violations toward more engaging and participatory efforts that use multimedia platforms.

52 Labiste, “Fact-checking in the Philippines: The Quest to End Disinformation in Elections.”

53 <https://factsfirst.ph/about>

54 <https://humanrights.ph/about-us/>

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Academics have also led in creating broad-based coalitions with civil society actors such as the Consortium on Democracy and Disinformation⁵⁵ and the Ateneo School of Government's Inclusive Democracy⁵⁶ research program which attempts to promote empirical approaches toward economic and political reform via coalition-building by convening movers and stakeholders from a range of sectors.

4.4. Investigative reports and academic research

Investigative reports and academic research generated knowledge on the nature and impact of disinformation in the Philippines. In this section, we identify some themes covered in these studies, the debates emerging in the interpretation of disinformation's power in the public sphere, and the implications of these studies in counter-disinformation initiatives (see Appendix 1 for a list of academic research on disinformation).

Overall, research needs to move beyond the lurid curiosity of influencers towards studying what makes them so seductive and successful. This may mean moving away from typical discourses of uneducated, uninformed voters to scholarly literature unpacking the multifaceted landscape of fake news and online propaganda, such as moving away from mainstream verification interventions toward identifying pain points in the disinformation-for-hire industry and holding accountable their industry leaders.

4.4.1. State-sponsored propaganda

Online news site Rappler published a series of reports in 2016 unmasking state-sponsored propaganda. In this account, the Duterte administration was portrayed as running a tightly controlled, top-down, organized machine that generated pro-Duterte fake accounts and bots that amplified the President's message, rallied public support, and sustained Duterte's popularity throughout his presidency.

This report was based on big data analysis from Rappler's own proprietary software supplemented by interviews with Cambridge Analytica whistleblowers. Among Rappler's key findings include the systematic use of sophisticated "behavior modification" methods that

55 <https://fightdisinfo.ph/who-are-we>

56 <https://www.inclusivedemocracy.ph/participate>

4. Counter-disinformation initiatives

account for Duterte’s surprise electoral victory, as well as the successful rebranding of the Marcos family.

This account, however, is contested. Using computational analysis, political scientists challenged this account and argued that Duterte’s massive online support was an extension of genuine grassroots support.⁵⁷ We affirmed this argument in our 2022 study *Parallel Public Spheres: Influence Operations in the 2022 Elections* where we challenged analyses that fixate on social media’s totalizing effects on the voting behaviors of the “uneducated *masa*.” We argued for a more expansive framework to understand social media effects, that include critique of political elites’ changing campaign messaging strategies based on influencer culture and emerging digital trends.⁵⁸

4.4.2. Disinformation-for-hire

Jonathan Corpus Ong and Jason Cabanes’ *Architects of Networked Disinformation*, published in 2018, goes behind-the-scenes of disinformation production and sheds light on the identities, motivations, and work arrangements of so-called “political trolls.”⁵⁹ Debunking common assumptions about low-income workers operating in troll farms in political strongholds loyal to Duterte or Marcos, they discuss how contemporary political campaigns are designed in the boardrooms of advertising and public relations firms, enlisting the talents of young entrepreneurial professionals motivated by a range of financial and political incentives.

Architects of Networked Disinformation articulates the problem of information disorder as not simply about the proliferation of false content engineered by populist leaders and their social media influencers but about easy complicity and unscrupulous business practices within the country’s thriving creative and media industries.

Warren De Guzman’s investigation of Twinmark Media Enterprises advances similar findings. His report revealed that money and ad revenues in hundreds of thousands of dollars motivated young digital workers and writers to produce misleading and hateful clickbait

57 Sinpeng, Gueorguiev, and Arugay, *Strong Fans, Weak Campaigns*.

58 Ong et al., *Parallel Public Spheres: Influence Operations in the 2022 Philippine Elections*.

59 Ong and Cabañes, *Architects of Networked Disinformation*.

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content.⁶⁰ Similarly, Rappler revealed that social media celebrities were paid millions of pesos to spread pro-Duterte propaganda published by Twinmark’s Trending News Portal and other similar Facebook pages.⁶¹

4.4.3. Influencer studies

Recent academic research examined influencers’ speech styles and common narratives. Jose Mari Lanuza and colleagues’ study on TikTok sought to understand how Filipino influencers on the platform curate content to game the algorithm and make themselves go viral.⁶² Content creators—such as history enthusiast Mighty Magulang and Dr. Kilimanguru—are fighting back to correct distortions to Philippine history or medical misinformation that have been observed in the platform.

Many undergraduate and graduate students, whose works can be found on Academia.edu, have attempted to study rhetorical styles of influencers across social media platforms, demonstrating the academic relevance of this field of inquiry.

4.4.4. Historical distortions

Academics have responded to historical distortions on social media by publishing research that shed light on the Marcos regime.

The Far Eastern University’s Public Policy Center conducted a review of select Grades 5 and 6 Araling Panlipunan (social studies) textbooks which found that many textbooks did not provide substantial discussion on the history of Martial Law, which renders many young Filipinos vulnerable to historical distortions on social media.⁶³

Thus, new collections such as *The Marcos Era: A Reader*⁶⁴ and *Marcos Lies*⁶⁵, which analyze the impacts of martial law, are timely. In 2022, the Ateneo de Manila University Press replenished

60 De Guzman, “Twinmark Media earned millions of dollars before Facebook takedown.”

61 Elemia, “Stars, influencers get paid to boost Duterte propaganda, fake news.”

62 Lanuza, Fallorina, and Cabbuag, *Understudied Digital Platforms in the Philippines*.

63 Far Eastern University Public Policy Center, “#TwistedTruths: The dilemma of Philippine History Textbooks.”

64 Anastacio and Abinales, *The Marcos Era: A Reader*.

65 Ariate Jr., Reyes, and Del Mundo, *Marcos Lies*

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its print copies of Primitivo Mijares' *Conjugal Dictatorship* originally published in 1976. *False Nostalgia: The Marcos "Golden Age" Myths and How to Debunk Them* provides readers a guide on how to navigate martial law-related historical distortions.⁶⁶

A group of educators and concerned citizens established the Martial Law Museum, an online hub housing teaching resources on martial law and continues to organize events in the Ateneo de Manila University.

4.5. Creative responses

Creative responses to influence operations have started gaining ground.

DAKILA has utilized a mix of online and offline efforts in addressing key human rights issues, all while harnessing and fostering the power of communities. To address the surge of historical distortions surrounding martial law, DAKILA established the Digital Museum of Martial Law in the Philippines,⁶⁷ while holding on-ground film screenings of *11,103*, a documentary about martial law survivors.⁶⁸

The podcast *Catch Me If You Can* (hosted by Kat Ventura and Jonathan Corpus Ong) explores the shadowy world of influence and paid troll operations.⁶⁹ It is an experiment in translating academic research to popular audiences and aims to both educate young people about the many ways they could get recruited to the disinformation economy and empowering ordinary workers to discuss complicated ethical dilemmas they face in the media industry and working with political clients.

Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines also launched ThinkTalk (hosted by Atom Araullo), an online forum series tackling various social issues in the country from Philippine history and war on drugs to the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷⁰

66 Punongbayan, *False Nostalgia: The Marcos "Golden Age" Myths and How to Debunk Them*.

67 <http://martiallaw.ph/>

68 https://web.facebook.com/ActiveVista/posts/5787619731250942?_rdc=1&_rdr

69 <https://www.pumapodcast.com/podcasts/catch-me-if-you-can>

70 <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=466701438806475&set=a.162430902566865>

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Figure 6. **Sample comic strips from Katipan Tambay (left) and Tarantadong Kalbo (right) for the Foundation of Media Alternatives' Comic Series on Disinformation**



Break The Fake Movement⁷¹ educates influencers to becoming media and information literacy advocates through their Media Civics Lab: Fact-Checking Academy.⁷²

Artists led the creation of visually appealing campaigns against disinformation. Kapitan Tambay started a disinformation inoculation series situated in the everyday life of a Filipino that tackles the need to become more critical of information seen online.⁷³ In collaboration with the Foundation for Media Alternatives, illustrators Tarantadong Kalbo,⁷⁴ Marian Hukom,⁷⁵ Jesie Castro,⁷⁶ and Manix Abrera and Kikomachine Komix⁷⁷ initiated an artistic comic series that demonstrates how to identify fact from fiction, differentiate misinformation and disinformation, and spot media manipulation strategies (see Figure 6). Designed to be

71 <https://breakthefakemovement.com/>

72 <https://mediacivicslab.breakthefakemovement.com/fact-checking-academy/>

73 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=677887697480467>

74 <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4789034537805250&set=pcb.4789037624471608>

75 <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4652879014754137&set=pcb.4652885528086819>

76 <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=5042485745793460&set=pcb.5042500849125283>

77 <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4470997512942289&set=pcb.4471020746273299>

4. Counter-disinformation initiatives

informative and relatable to wider audiences, the artists used vivid storytelling that captures the Filipino imagination such as scenes during a drinking session and at the “Social Media Department of Hell,” among others. These artworks are then featured in Drawing Dissent, an exhibit on online disinformation.⁷⁸

78 <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=563330245983794&set=a.406354711681349>

5. PATHS FORWARD

In international forums, the Philippines has been recognized for its cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to combat disinformation that may serve as inspiration to other members of the region. As a patient zero of disinformation, the country is in a unique position to influence policies and approaches that governments and civil society organizations can take based on successful and not-so-successful experiments. Efforts at institutionalizing cross-country initiatives via a regional coalition or South-to-South learning spaces would give more weight to calls for platform accountability that address the region's specific vulnerabilities. In order to move the needle forward, actors in the Philippines can support a diversity of long- and short-term solutions and technical and sociological interventions, and foster collaborations across organizations and sectors.

For disinformation studies to actually have an impact on the problems it claims to want to address, we need to complement verification and literacy efforts with diverse accountability pathways that can target local industries of disinformation production. Clearly, disinformation-for-hire research needs more advocacy pathways connected with legal-accountability and legal-ethical approaches, and requires coalition-level support.

Future prebunking and digital literacy efforts can also be more inclusive and creative, such as by shifting their usual contexts of spotlighting the “gullible masa” in lecture examples, video explainers, and prebunking to deepening understanding about the middle class' and elites' complicity and responsibility in spreading and producing misinformation.

Future digital literacy interventions can also combine insights from deliberative democracy methods to address communities' local anxieties and grassroots needs. Community-level efforts are needed to create new spaces for exchange in the aim of depolarization and building a healthy public sphere.

Our humble contribution to this urgent need to expand our imaginaries of solutions comes in the form of the call for partners for the Community Engagement Fund. These interventions aim to change the narratives around disinformation and dispel elitist clichés of the dumb voter, produce critical educational materials that also specifically target diverse age and ethnolinguistic groups, support creative workers and whistleblowers, and create formative

5. Paths forward

conditions for depolarization and community dialogue. The initiative likewise provides mentoring and funding to local organizations, activists, educators, and other individuals who want to develop their own interventions that aspire to appeal to distinct Filipino sensibilities while still empowering ethical and critical thinking towards disinformation.

Since the launch of the fund, the fund has received a total of 18 submissions from a diverse pool of applicants: from educators to local civil society organizations, private sector, and engaged citizens. Four grants have been awarded to partners—based on the comprehensiveness and novelty of the project proposal in addressing key thrusts of the fund—belonging to the education sector as well as Filipino non-profit youth-oriented socio-civic organizations. Their proposals focus on micro-targeted digital literacy and historical revisionism interventions using children’s storybooks and parental discussion guides, storytelling activities for orphaned children, and training programs on prebunking and critical disinformation studies for secondary level teachers. The hope is that developing these interventions alongside communities will make them embrace it more. When communities take ownership of interventions, these become more salient in their everyday lives and become more potent to combat influence operations that exploit information voids and social anxieties. More importantly, it promotes communities’ agency to shape their own democratic aspirations and rebuild trusted institutions of public welfare.

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Appendix 1.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO DISINFORMATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Title	Author(s)/Editor(s)	Publication Year
BOOKS/EDITED VOLUMES		
From Grassroots Activism to Disinformation: Social Media in Southeast Asia	Aim Sinpeng and Ross Tapsell	2020
The Marcos Era: A Reader	Leia Castañeda Anastacio and Patricio N. Abinales	2022
Trolls for Sale	Jonathan Corpus Ong	2022
How to Stand Up to a Dictator: The Fight for Our Future	Maria Ressa	2022
Marcos Lies	Joel F. Ariate Jr., Miguel Paolo P. Reyes, and Larah Vinda Del Mundo	2023
False Nostalgia: The Marcos “Golden Age” Myths and How to Debunk Them	Jan Carlo Punongbayan	2023
JOURNAL ARTICLES		
When Disinformation Studies Meets Production Studies: Social Identities and Moral Justifications in the Political Trolling Industry	Jonathan Corpus Ong and Jason Vincent A. Cabañes	2019

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Title	Author(s)/Editor(s)	Publication Year
Digital Disinformation and the Imaginative Dimension of Communication	Jason Vincent A. Cabañes	2020
Electoral Disinformation: Looking Through the Lens of Tsek.ph Fact Checks	Yvonne Chua and Jake Soriano	2020
Disinformation Trends in Southeast Asia: Comparative Case Studies on Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines	Emy Ruth D. Gianan	2020
Strongman, patronage and fake news: Anti-human rights discourses and populism in the Philippines	Jefferson Lyndon D. Ragragio	2021
The information-seeking behavior and levels of knowledge, precaution, and fear of college students in Iloilo, Philippines amidst the COVID-19 pandemic	Daryl L. Superio, Kristen L. Anderson, Ryan Michael F. Oducado, Myrna T. Luceño, Vince Ervin V. Palcullo, and Maria Vanessa T. Bendalian	2021
The Link Between Fake News Susceptibility and Political Polarization of the Youth in the Philippines	Imeldia Deinla, Gabrielle Ann Mendoza, Kier Ballar, and Jurel Yap	2022
Mobilized and Polarized: Social Media and Disinformation Narratives in the 2022 Philippine Elections	Aries Arugay and Justin Keith Baquisal	2022

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Title	Author(s)/Editor(s)	Publication Year
Demystifying disinformation shadow economies: fake news work models in Indonesia and the Philippines	Jonathan Corpus Ong and Ross Tapsell	2022
Philippine Elections 2022: The Dictator's Son and the Discourse around Disinformation	Jonathan Corpus Ong	2022
Challenging Misinformation in the Online English Language Classroom in the Philippines	Paolo Nino Valdez, Gina Ugalingan, and Leif Andrew Garinto	2022
Platforms, Alternative Influence, and Networked Political Brokerage on YouTube	Cheryll Ruth R. Soriano and Fatima Gaw	2022
Broadcasting Anti-Media Populism in the Philippines: YouTube Influencers, Networked Political Brokerage, and Implications for Governance	Cheryll Ruth R. Soriano and Fatima Gaw	2022
BOOK CHAPTERS		
The Rise of Trolls in the Philippines (and What We can do about It)	Jason Cabañes and Jayeel Cornelio	2017
Fake News and Scandal	Jason Cabañes, C.W. Anderson, and Jonathan Corpus Ong	2019
Curing "Patient Zero": Reclaiming the Digital Public Sphere in the Philippines	Pamela Combinido and Nicole Curato	2020

Title	Author(s)/Editor(s)	Publication Year
Social Manipulation and Disinformation in the Philippines	Steven Feldstein	2021
Contextualizing Fake News: Can Online Falsehoods Spread Fast When Internet Is Slow?	Edson C. Tandoc Jr.	2022
Media System Incentives for Disinformation: Exploring the Relationships Between Institutional Design and Disinformation Vulnerability	Jose Mari Hall Lanuza and Cleve V. Arguelles	2022
REPORTS		
Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines	Jonathan Corpus Ong and Jason Vincent A. Cabañes	2018
The Changing Face of Fake News	Nicole Curato, Jonathan Corpus Ong, and Ross Tapsell	2019
Tracking Digital Disinformation in the 2019 Philippine Midterm Election	Jonathan Corpus Ong, Ross Tapsell, and Nicole Curato	2019
Politics and Profit in the Fake News Industry: Four Work Models of Political Trolling in the Philippines	Jonathan Corpus Ong and Jason Vincent A. Cabañes	2019
Mitigating Disinformation in Southeast Asian Elections	Jonathan Corpus Ong and Ross Tapsell	2020

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Title	Author(s)/Editor(s)	Publication Year
Multistakeholder Dialogue on Electoral Disinformation	Nicole Curato and Jonathan Corpus Ong	2021
Understudied Digital Platforms in the Philippines	Jose Mari Hall Lanuza, Rossine Fallorina, and Samuel Cabbuag	2021
Information Dystopia and Philippine Democracy: Protecting the Public Sphere from Disinformation	Yvonne Chua, Nicole Curato, and Jonathan Corpus Ong	2021
The Digital Public Pulse	Fatima Gaw, Jon Benedik A. Bunquin, Julienne Thesa Y. Baldo-Cubelo, Fernando dIC Paragas, and Ma. Rosel S. San Pascual	2021
Human Rights in Survival Mode: Rebuilding Trust and Supporting Digital Workers in the Philippines	Jonathan Corpus Ong, Jeremy Tintiangko, and Rossine Fallorina	2022
Patient Zero: A Study on the Philippine Information Ecosystem	Rappler	2022
Parallel Public Spheres: Influence Operations in the 2022 Philippine Elections	Jonathan Corpus Ong, Rossine Fallorina, Jose Mari Lanuza, Ferdinand Sanchez II, and Nicole Curato	2022
The Dilemma of Philippine History Textbooks	Maria Serena I. Diokno, Kerby C. Alvarez, Francisco Jayme Paolo A. Guiang, Dondy Pepito II G. Ramos, and Aaron F. Viernes	2022

Title	Author(s)/Editor(s)	Publication Year
WORKING PAPERS		
Information Disorder in Asia and the Pacific: Overview of Misinformation Ecosystem in Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam	Yvonne Chua, Diosa Labiste, et al.	2019
When Fake News Infects Political Networks: Case Study of the Tallano Gold Myth in the Philippines	Ronald U. Mendoza, Camille Kristina S. Elemia, Juan Miguel M. Recto, and Bea Alyssa B. de Castro	2022
Misinformed or Overconfident? Fake News and Youth Voting Likelihood in the Philippines	Gabrielle Ann S. Mendoza, Kier Jesse Ballar, Jurel Yap, and Imelda Deinla	2022

Appendix 2.

LIST OF ACTORS AND PROGRAMS ACCORDING TO APPROACH TO DISINFORMATION

Approaches

Actors and Corresponding Program

Legal and regulatory reforms

Accountability approach

- Movement Against Disinformation
- US Filipinos for Good Governance: trollexposer.com

Ethical approach

- Legal Network for Truthful Elections
- Maria Ressa
- Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

Digital literacy initiatives

Fact-checking

- ABS-CBN
- Agence France-Presse
- Baguio Chronicle
- Break the Fake Movement: Media Civics Lab: Fact-Checking Academy
- Christian Esguerra: Facts First
- Fact Check Philippines
- Fact Rakers
- FYT
- Human Rights Victims' Memorial Commission
- Interaksyon
- Internews: Philippine Fact-Checker Incubator
- Juan Health PH
- MindaNews
- News5
- Now You Know
- Philstar.com
- Pinas Forward
- PressOnePH
- Probe: TSEK/EKS
- Project Gunita
- Rappler
- Tsek.ph
- VERA Files
- Wiki Society of the Philippines

Approaches

Actors and Corresponding Program

Digital literacy initiatives	Prebunking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ateneo School of Government: What the Fake?! Ang Fake News Challenge ng Bayan • GMA's Digital Video Lab: InoculatED • Kapitan Tambay: inoculation series • Coalition of Moro Youth Movement (CYM), Initiatives for Dialogue and Empowerment through Alternative Legal Services (IDEALS), and Internews • VERA Files
	Educational modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • InforMedia: Fight the Infodemic • Limitless Lab: #DigiTalino • Out of the Box Media Literacy: #IWASFAKE Remote Learning • Probe: The Budol Fight
Coalition-building		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ateneo School of Government: Inclusive Democracy • Consortium on Democracy and Disinformation • Movement Against Disinformation • Rappler: #FactsFirstPH • The Asia Foundation: Initiatives for Advancing Community Transformation (I-ACT) • Tsek.ph
Investigative reports and academic research		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian Center for Journalism: Ads for News • Ateneo School of Government • Consortium on Democracy and Disinformation • Far Eastern University Public Policy Center • Internews • Philippine Media Monitoring Laboratory • Rappler • University of the Philippines Journalism Department • University of the Philippines Third World Studies Center: Marcos Regime Research program

Appendix 2

Approaches

Creative responses

Actors and Corresponding Program

- Akademiya at Bayan Kontra Disimpormasyon at Dayaan
 - Artists for Digital Rights Network: *Counter-Narratives*
 - Break the Fake Movement: Media Civics Lab: Fact-Checking Academy
 - Cartoonist Zach
 - Commoner
 - Dexter Doria: #DidiSerye
 - Digital Museum of Martial Law in the Philippines
 - DAKILA - Philippine Collective for Modern Heroism
 - Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines: ThinkTalk
 - Foundation for Media Alternatives: Drawing Dissent, Comic Series on Disinformation
 - Jesie Castro
 - Kikomachine Komix
 - Manix Abrera
 - Marian Hukom
 - People for Accountable Governance and Sustainable Action (Pagasa): Truth and Tessie #TitaTessie #TnT
 - Pitik Bulag
 - PumaPodcast: Catch Me If You Can
 - Tarantadong Kalbo
 - The Martial Law Memorial Museum
-

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