



Review Article

Jason Vincent A. Cabañes* and Mia Franchesca M. Luna

Digital media research from beyond the West: theoretical directions from Philippine-based journals

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Abstract: This article contributes to the intensifying calls to globalize and decolonize the field of media and communication by broadening the possibilities for digital media research. To do so, it takes a deep dive into a set of 27 works on digital media from five Philippine-based journals, all of which were published during the COVID-19 years of 2020–2023. Collectively, they spotlight the entanglements of technologies with the distinct and diverse political, economic, and socio-cultural realities outside the West. Through a qualitative thematic analysis, our article identifies how the different works in our selected set are clustered along three key themes: on digital deliberations, digital intimacies, and digital promotion. There were a few of them that did not align with these themes, but nevertheless also indicated emerging vectors from which to see the entwinement of digital media with the dynamics of Philippine society. All these present expanded lines of theorizing research about digital media that connect with but, importantly, also go beyond the typical concerns of scholarship generated in the West.

Keywords: digital media; decolonial; Global South; non-West; Philippines; Global

This review article contributes to the intensifying calls to globalize and decolonize the field of media and communication. In line with the remit of the journal *Online Media and Global Communication*, it argues for the value of engaging with scholarship published in journals based outside the West. Alongside similar moves across

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***Corresponding author: Jason Vincent A. Cabañes**, Department of Media, Communications, and Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, 8 Lewisham Way, London 6E14 6NW, UK, E-mail: j.cabanes@gold.ac.uk. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6276-9198>

Mia Franchesca M. Luna, Department of Communication, De La Salle University, Malate, Manila, Philippines, E-mail: miafmluna@gmail.com. <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4543-9705>

different areas in the field—such as in political communication (Freelon et al. 2023); journalism and mass communication (Moody-Ramirez et al. 2023); and applied media studies (Orbe et al. 2022)—this piece intends to broaden the possibilities for digital media research by spotlighting the entanglements of technologies with the distinct and diverse political, economic, and socio-cultural realities in the non-West.

In the 2000s, there was already a significant push to expand the scope of mainstream media and communication scholarship beyond the West (for example, see Curran and Park 2000; Thussu 2009; Wang 2013). These initiatives sought to include empirical work from the non-West to better reflect the world's diverse experiences of media production, representation, and consumption. Although well-meaning, they tended to be underpinned by the problematic logic of “normative de-Westernization”, that is, “of representing ‘the Other’ but from within the prism and norms of ‘the Self’” (Willems 2014: 9). These initiatives contributed to an expanded representation of non-Western case studies in mainstream scholarship. However, they did not do enough to question the Western dominance in the field's politics of knowledge production that, for the longest time, “ha[d] marginalized existing analyses of media and communication in Asia, Africa, and Latin America” (Willems 2014: 9).

In the late 2010s and today in the first half of the 2020s, the calls to reconfigure the Western-centric character of media and communication have grown more radical. One of the most prominent of these campaigns has been #CommunicationSoWhite. In their seminal piece, Chakravarty et al. (2018) point out the continued pervasiveness of white masculinity in mainstream scholarship. Going beyond the issue of including more non-Western scholarship in mainstream media and communication, they underscore the value of “attending to structures of power embedded within knowledge production” (Chakravarty et al. 2018: 261). They particularly posit race as a key analytic in making sense of how the disciplinary norms of the field operate in their reproduction of knowledge and distribution of resources. By this they mean the “political relation of antagonism between institutionally dominant White populations and dominated non-White populations” and, crucially, “an inherited Western, modern-colonial practice of violence, assemblage, subordination, exploitation and segregation” (Hesse 2016: viii). In a follow-up work, Ng et al. (2020) contend that crucial to pushing back against media and communication being Western-centric is attending to academic practices that feed into the conditions that shape the emergence of theory and data. These include “research, hiring, evaluating, training, citing, and celebrating” (p. 146). To do so, we need to move away from thinking of such practices as part of a zero-sum game. We should instead work towards “coalitional mobilisations” that not only bring multiple forms of marginalization to the center of the field, but also deconstruct what the center actually means (Ng et al. 2020: 146).

It is within the context laid out above that we build on extant scholarship that takes non-Western contexts as a starting point for theorizing digital media and society (for example, Arora 2024; Davis and Xiao 2021; Lim and Soriano 2016; Madianou and Miller 2011; Mutsvairo et al. 2023). We attend to relevant articles published in Philippine-based journals from between 2020 and 2023. In writing this piece, we looked at 27 pieces from across the following five journals: *Plaridel: A Journal of Media Communication and Society*, *Kritika Kultura*, *Philippine Sociological Review*, *Asia Pacific Social Science Review*, and *Talastásan: A Philippine Journal of Communication and Media Studies*.

Here we have deliberately chosen to spotlight the context within which the articles we are reviewing have emerged. In doing so, we subvert how dominant scholarship in media and communication tends not to be reflexive about their being anchored in the West and, as such, influenced by its “modernist intellectual and institutional structures” (Shome and Hegde 2002: 261). By putting front and center that the pieces we discuss are from the Philippines, we are not merely indexing their contribution to diversifying the kinds of works discussed in mainstream digital media scholarship. We are especially not saying that the usefulness of their insights is only confined to the country. What we are doing is showing how the distinct realities of a non-Western context like the Philippines allows for theorizing research about digital media that might not come easily when one is steeped in the equally distinct realities of the West. Importantly, we also show that such theorizing can inform and thereby expand the theoretical vistas for digital media research in other contexts, whether non-West or West.

1 Researching digital media in the Philippines

Our rationale for setting the years 2020–2023 as the timeframe for the articles we have reviewed has to do with the intersection of two significant historical moments that amplified the centrality of digital media to everyday life in the Philippines. The first moment was COVID-19 and how hard it hit the country (WHO 2021). It became one of the global hotspots of the pandemic, many times placing at the top of the rankings for active cases and deaths in the Western Pacific region. Filipinos—especially those in densely populated urban centers—were consequently pushed to move much of their life online (Cabañes and Uy-Tioco 2021). The second moment was the ascent of Rodrigo Duterte as President of the Philippines and the authoritarian impulses that he brought to the country’s governance (See 2021). The Duterte government’s approach to COVID-19 was militaristic. It imposed across the country one of the most severe and longest lockdowns in the world, lasting for over two years (Associated Press 2022). This situation meant that many Filipinos, especially those in

urban centers, had to continue with their heavily online lives for longer than other people in many other parts of the world. These twin events in the Philippines meant that one important theme that cut across the research published from the years we have chosen was a concern for the intensification of the entwinement of digital media with people's lives. What makes this body of work of interest is how distinctly pronounced this concern was. This is consequently something that can illuminate related experiences in different contexts around the world.

Apart from the timeframe we have chosen to focus on, the Philippines in itself is a valuable case study in examining digital media life in the non-West and particularly in the global South. It can say much about how such technologies matter to the lives of people in other similar contexts, from which the internet's so-called "next billion users" are emerging (Arora 2019).

For one, the Philippines is an exemplar of a society where people have deeply incorporated digital media into many dimensions of their lives, even if the telecommunication infrastructure around them is heavily underdeveloped. The country has been called the "text messaging capital of the world" and the "social media capital of the world" because of its population's pervasive digital media use. Filipinos are indeed one of the most online people in the world. According to the Digital 2024 report (Kemp 2024), they spend a daily average of 3 h 34 min on social media versus the global average of 2 h and 32 min. The report ranks their social media use as fourth highest in the world, behind only Kenyans, South Africans, and Brazilians, all of whom are from the non-West global South as well. Digital media have consequently transformed Philippine society in crucial ways, as people's engagements with them have "recast family relationships, civic consciousness, work and professional life, and forms of social organization" (Lorenzana and Soriano 2021: 4). Yet, it is important to remember as well that the country is a developing nation where the population have access to digital technologies that is "limited, unequal and constrained" and, ultimately, only "good enough" (Uy-Tioco 2019: 156; see also M. G. Santos 2021; The World Bank 2020). There are concerns that this kind of access recasts and reinforces the country's class hierarchies, with its elites enjoying the advantages of those in the West whilst its working-class face numerous limitations. To be sure, the latter's lived experiences of good enough access "can be described as positive and empowering" (Uy-Tioco 2019: 167). However, such an access also raises concerns about digital media "as tools to expand capital's reach, enhancing the center's ability to control the periphery and ensuring the efficient circulation of capital" (Uy-Tioco 2019: 167).

Related to the point above, the Philippines also speaks to the complicated positioning of many non-Western countries in relation to the planetary infrastructures of today's digital media. On one hand, it can be construed as marginal. This is because of the asymmetries in the global digital industry that manifest, amongst other things, in how the developed countries of the West "exercise imperial control at

the architecture level of the digital ecosystem: software, hardware, and network connectivity” (Kwet 2019: 3). This asymmetry can also be seen in how the industry’s labor demand is concentrated in the same Western countries, whilst the glut of its labor supply comes from the non-West and especially the global South (Lehdonvirta 2016; Wood and Lehdonvirta 2019). The Philippines struggles to hold to account this industry and its global players. Because leading big tech companies and digital labor employers are invariably based outside the country, they are beyond the reach of its national laws (for example, Lanuza et al. 2021; Serzo and Aiken Larisa 2020). On the other hand, the Philippines is at the cutting edge of innovative ingenuity as regards dealing with the disruptive nature of digital media developments. It is part of those non-Western, global South countries that are adept “navigator[s] of all manner of forced disruptions, leapfrogging obstructive systems, norms, and practices to rapidly reinvent [themselves]” (Arora 2024). For instance, Filipino digital workers who are cognizant of the challenges of overturning the dynamics of the global industry have been finding creative means to improve the conditions of their labor (Soriano 2023). Although their attempts at pushing back at the industry’s exploitative infrastructures are often still emplaced within the logics of neoliberal capitalism, these moves are nevertheless “alternative solidaristic formations that build on local cultures of cooperation ... [that indicate] openings for perhaps larger forms of community-led change” (Soriano 2023: 3969).

Apart from issues of political economy, the Philippines is a rich case for exploring the socio-cultural implications of digital media use in former non-Western colonies in the global South. It crystallizes how this use is necessarily imbricated in broader societal dynamics shaped not only by colonial histories, but also by contemporary trajectories that are still structured in coloniality (Alatas 2022; Go 2018). Those in the postcolonial non-West often engage with digital technologies in ways that navigate intimate, familial, and communal relationships that are “glocal” (Cabañes and Uy-Tioco 2022). They negotiate between the complicated pulls of the so-called “global culture” as expressed in Western modernity on one hand and the “local culture” as articulated in vernacular logics on the other hand. For people in the Philippines—including its migrant and cultural minorities—this means attending to the enduring influence of its over 300 years of colonization under Spain and its over 40 years of colonization under the USA alongside the continually evolving and multiple cultures of today’s Philippines. For the overseas Filipinos who comprise around ten percent of its 115 million population, this also entails attending to the distinct cultures of the over 200 countries in which they reside (Opiniano and Ang 2024). The complexity of the glocal quality of the digital media use of those in the Philippines and of Filipinos abroad can be gleaned in the well-established scholarship on how they do, amongst many other things, transnational intimacies (for example, Atienza 2021; Collantes and Cabañes 2023; Ong 2017), familyhood (for

example, Acedera and Yeoh 2022; Cabalquinto 2022; Madianou and Miller 2011), and community (for example, Lorenzana 2016; McKay 2016; Umel 2023).

2 The review process

Since we wanted to zero in on articles in Philippine-based journals that were about digital media in the country, we employed homogeneity-focused purposive sampling (Patton 1990). For one, we prioritized articles addressing the Filipino context. This included works that looked at digital media use in relation to people within the Philippines as well as to overseas Filipinos. As previously mentioned, we tried to capture the distinct pandemic moment by limiting our review to articles published between 2020 and 2023. From this set of works, we then identified themes of scholarship in recent years.

In selecting the journals to be included in our review, our primary parameters were reputation and accessibility. As regards reputation, we took an in-depth qualitative look into five journals that are well-established and well-regarded in Philippine academia, especially as they are published by some of the country's most recognized universities and academic organizations. For this piece, we included the following:

- (1) *Plaridel: A Journal of Communication, Media, and Society (Plaridel)*: Published by the University of the Philippines, *Plaridel* (which is the pen name of Spanish colonial era writer Marcelo H. del Pilar) fashions itself as a national journal of communication (Plaridel Journal Org n.d.). Alongside the works of Philippine-based scholars, it has also featured those from other Asian countries.
- (2) *Kritika Kultura (KK)*: Published by the Ateneo de Manila University, *KK* (or “Cultural Critique” in English) is an international peer-reviewed journal on language, literature, and cultural studies (AJOL 2024). *KK* seeks to promote innovative scholarship that challenges conventional perspectives, particularly in Philippine, Asian, Southeast Asian, and Filipino-American studies.
- (3) *Asia Pacific Social Science Review (APSSR)*: Published by De La Salle University, *APSSR* aims to serve as a prominent platform for authors to share compelling perspectives and relevant topics in the social sciences (DLSU Publishing House n.d.). It emphasizes studies pertinent to the Asia-Pacific region, initiating more studies in the non-Western context.
- (4) *Talastásan: A Philippine Journal of Communication and Media Studies (Talastásan)*: Published by the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, *Talastásan* (or “Discourse” in English) is a peer-reviewed e-journal that aims to develop research culture. It promotes both theoretical and empirical research in the field of communication and media (Talastásan 2022).

- (5) *Philippine Sociological Review (PSR)*: Published by the Philippine Sociological Society, *PSR* serves as the official journal of the country's premier professional organization in sociology. Since 1953, it has featured empirical research focusing on the Philippine-context and culture (Philippine Sociological Society n.d.).

Following our homogeneity-focused purposive sampling, we chose journals that were all headquartered in the Philippine capital of Manila. They exemplify the Manila-based institutions that dominate the country in many international university research rankings, such as *The Times Higher Education World University Rankings*, *The QS World University Rankings*, and *Edurank*. One key reason for this is that the availability of higher education research funding and support in the country tends to center in the capital (Bayudan-Dacuycuy et al. 2023). This situation can be said to be symptomatic of the “imperial Manila syndrome”, which is about how “provinces that are farther away from the capital in terms of its geodesic distance are more likely to experience higher rates of poverty, and economic, social, and political underdevelopment” (Tusalem 2019: 236). It is consequently important to stress that our limited sample should be thought of as indicative but not exhaustive of important Philippine-published research on digital media. Non-Manila-based publications would offer distinct theoretical and empirical avenues for digital media research that we do not highlight here. So, although we are unable to attend to non-Manila journals in this piece, we recognize that they are equally important to examine.

Meanwhile, as regards accessibility, we had to make difficult trade-offs as regards inclusivity and representation in favor of facilitating broader dissemination and accessibility to a wider audience. First, we selected journals that interested scholars would be able to easily access online. This meant that we did not look into journals that had no readily available online archives. Second, we also decided to limit our selection to articles published in the English language, as this is still, for good or bad, the lingua franca of global scholarship (Alhasnawi 2021). This meant that we also did not look into the articles in other Philippine-based journals as well as in our chosen journals that used the national language of Filipino and the many other languages of the country as their medium of communication. We are aware that, unfortunately, our choices exclude many valuable insights presented in Philippine scholarship on digital media and society. They certainly reflect the ongoing challenge of striking a balance between accessibility and inclusivity in the pursuit of global research and scholarship.

Across the five journals we considered, a majority of the relevant articles on digital media were published in *Plaridel*. Seventeen out of 27 articles (approx. 63 % of the total) appeared in *Plaridel* and were published between 2020 and 2023. Meanwhile, four out of the 27 articles (approx. 15 % of the total) were from *APSSR* and were

published between 2020 and 2023. Moreover, three out of 27 articles (approx. 11 % of the total) were from *KK* and were published from 2022 to 2023. There were another two out of the 27 articles (approx. 7 % of the total) from *Talastásan*, both of which were published in 2022. We additionally found one out of the 27 (approx. 4 % of the total) articles in *PSR*, which was published in 2021.

We conducted a qualitative thematic analysis that identified the key elements and recurring themes among digital media scholarship in the Philippines. To do so, we tagged related keywords and similar content, thus delineating the evident themes across the literature. We also looked at the predominant topics addressed within each article to derive the central ideas and key arguments of the authors. Concurrently, we noted the main areas of literature that the articles engaged with and how they articulated their contributions to existing scholarly discussions.

Ultimately, we grouped the digital media-oriented articles into three themes that indicated their common areas of concern. These thematic threads pointed to how the heightened digital media use of Filipinos during the pandemic meant that these technologies had significant value in the many dimensions of people's daily lives. Of the total 27 articles, six were on digital deliberations (22 % of the total), nine were on digital intimacies (33 % of the total), and eight were on digital promotion (30 % of the total). We also had a group of four articles that we categorized as "others" (15 % of the total), as their themes did not fully align with other recurring themes that emerged from the selected works. In the rest of the paper, we discuss the insights offered by the articles under each of the identified themes.

3 On digital deliberations

The six articles that we placed under the theme of digital deliberations all look into the role of online technologies in whether and how people "come together, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, to discuss political issues they face" (Bächtiger et al. 2018: 2) (see Table 1). They bring to the fore the complicated role of the Philippines—alongside other non-Western transitional democracies like Indonesia, Brazil, and India—as regards amplifying divisive online discourses that have become a key problem for global democratic politics. In the West, this divisiveness has been crystallized primarily in "the rise of incivility, political polarization, the normalization of disinformation and the growing appeal of finding simplistic solutions to complex problems" (Curato et al. 2020: 56). In the Philippines, meanwhile, one can see how such dynamics have been mediated by the tension between a historical embedding of deliberative norms by anti-colonial movements and post-colonial builders of liberalism on one hand and an increasingly strong

Table 1: Articles on digital deliberations.

Title	Author/s	Journal source	Year published
The climate of incivility in Philippine Daily Inquirer's social media environment	1. San Pascual, Ma. Rosel S.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2020
Consumed by affects: Kwentong Jollibee [Jollibee Stories], happy objects, and the formation of intimate publics	1. De Chavez, Jeremy	<i>Kritika</i> <i>Kultura</i>	2022
Electoral disinformation: Looking through the lens of Tsek.ph fact checks	1. Chua, Yvonne T. 2. Soriano, Jake C.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2020
Reclaiming the indigenous body: Discourse, social media, and the aesthetic of Igorot activism	1. Calabias, Jose Kevin Cesar B.	<i>Kritika</i> <i>Kultura</i>	2022
Not your ordinary catfishing story: The role of cancel culture behind the hashtag #SamMoralesisOver	1. Cañal, Bonne Christine O. 2. Capuyan, Ira Cozette C. 3. Del Pilar, Hannah Pamela M. 4. Enolpe, Myril Eloise S. 5. Loseo, Susan Mae P.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2022
Contested social representations of a religious ritual in the Philippines. Text mining online discourses on the Traslación	1. Medriano, Jose 2. Torio, Jose Abelardo	<i>Plaridel</i>	2022

strand of illiberalism that has been recently amplified by digital disinformation, on the other hand (Curato 2021).

In line with the above, two of the articles show how online democratic deliberation in the Philippines continues to be captive to political issues that emanate from the still geopolitically dominant West. They underscore how the country has been subjected to a dynamic connected to the rise of populism in the West, which has sought to mobilize people through negative emotions like fear and hatred, thereby bypassing the complexities of democratic deliberation (see Nikunen 2023). That said, they also capture how the country refracts these dynamics in ways that are reflective of the postcolonial condition of its politics (see Stoler 2016; Webb 2022).

San Pascual (2020), for one, characterizes how the growing climate of incivility in the public politics of the established democracies of the West manifests itself in the context of the Philippines. As a case in point, she looks at the comments section of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, which is the digital version of one of the top broadsheets

in the country. She pays particular attention to what the most common forms of incivility are and to whom such comments are directed. San Pascual contends that whilst these incivilities tend to be personal forms of attacks like character assassination and name calling, they do not necessarily silence people. They can, however, spur them into engaging in further uncivil discussion. Given the vulnerability of the still nascent online spaces for deliberative democracy in the Philippines, she wonders if such discussions can actually further democracy or only undermine them.

In the work of De Chavez (2022), he sheds light on how the toxicity of online spaces in the Philippines have been co-opted by neoliberal logics, again a dynamic that one also finds in the West. He focuses on Jollibee, a popular Filipino fast food chain, and their highly successful Kwentong Jollibee (or Jollibee Stories) digital marketing campaign. He discusses how Jollibee uses personal experiences—like as collective fantasies of family and the collective Filipino identity—to offer affective bonds to the Filipino public. Within the context of mainstream Filipino society where family and cultural identity are valorized, such bonds seem particularly desirable, especially given the increasingly toxic quality of online discourses in the country. De Chavez, however, criticizes these conjured affective bonds as feigned and something opportunistically turned into commodities. He points out that the Jollibee campaign mobilizes simplistic visions of an ideal life that offer to unite audiences through the appeal of products and, ultimately, elide any true resolution of the intricate structural issues of the Philippines' online spaces of deliberation.

The other four articles, meanwhile, point out how the Philippines is also at the cutting edge of initiatives that seek to push back against toxic politics, as it seeks to harness digital media's capacity for democratic dynamics. The country is unfortunately an innovator in the global digital disinformation industry and has even been called the "patient zero" of the global epidemic of information disorder (see Harbath in Deinla et al. 2021). But then again, it is also where initiatives not only of counter-disinformation but also of genuine deliberative discussions and community bridge-building broadly are being put to the test (see Felix et al. 2023).

Chua and Soriano (2020) not only provide valuable insights into the nature of electoral disinformation in the Philippines, but also aim to identify ways of countering it. They discuss the trends and characteristics of disinformation during the 2019 midterm elections, circulated mainly on Facebook, and how disinformation negatively impacts electoral processes in the country. They also highlight the initiative undertaken by Tsek.ph, a collaborative fact-checking endeavor established by three universities and 11 newsrooms. The authors emphasize how digital media has been used to combat disinformation and red-tagging, as well as safeguard its diverse range of victims.

Similarly, Calabias (2022) highlights how digital media can be used as a facilitator to empower marginalized voices in a context of political toxicity online. He delves

into online activist media that aims to make a stand against red-tagging and the fabrication of criminal charges against the Igorot people, an indigenous community in the Philippines. Through the use of activist media and online mobilization, Igorot activists harness Facebook as a platform for creating counter-discourses against then-president Rodrigo Duterte's anti-terrorism logic.

Cañal et al. (2022), meanwhile, take a distinct stand on cancel culture, which refers to vocally “condemning offensive and displeasing acts, beliefs, or certain stigmas in an attempt to demand accountability from the perceived offender” (Cañal et al. 2022: 91). Their work contends that this phenomenon can, in certain contexts, foster the empowerment of marginalized queer communities. They argue specifically that cancel culture empowers victims and minorities to denounce offensive actions that might otherwise have been silenced prior to the emergence of these digital media platforms.

Medriano and Torio (2022) also attend to how online discourses can foster necessary democratic contestations. They look at this issue in relation to the *Traslación*, a significant religious ritual in the Philippines that is observed by millions of devotees every year. The authors show how such discourses reflect not only the predominant sentiment expressing support for the idea of the *Traslación* as a valid religious rite, but also a substantial amount of discussion about the ritual as fanatical and potentially idolatrous. In doing so, they reveal that online spaces not only serve to amplify the already extant diversity of expressions about religious rituals, but also to air out important contentious public discussions about its place in Filipino society.

4 On digital intimacies

The nine articles on digital intimacies speak to how online media have become spaces wherein the heightened tension between what is perceived to be “modern values” and “traditional values” play out in people's intimate experiences. They look into how these spaces play out in the lives of both those who reside in the Philippines and Filipinos who reside abroad (see Table 2). As feminist scholarship has long pointed out, deeply personal things such as intimate relationships are absolutely political as well. The contestations have ratcheted up in the West, with their current culture wars prompting the scholar Judith Butler to ask, “Who's afraid of gender?” (Butler 2024). The Philippine case concretizes how the tendency for some quarters to equate modern values of intimacy with the West and traditional values with the non-West is problematic (Cabañes and Uy-Tioco 2020; see also Mohanty 1984). These forces do not neatly fit into such definitions in the country's context, as some Western colonial influences actually manifest as a conservative force whilst more vernacular

logics actually manifest as a progressive force. This is because whilst many such former colonies are characterized by distinct socio-cultural dynamics, what is often considered local in these places is also a result of their interactions with global forces that stem from both their colonial histories and contemporary postcolonialities (Grewal and Kaplan 1994).

A key issue of digital intimacies that three of the articles zero in on is queer relationships. These pieces point to the complex way that Philippine society has been simultaneously open and resistant to such relationships. On one hand, the country has seen significant progress as regards the proliferation of welcoming spaces for queer communities. Digital media have been central to this, as they have enabled new ways for these communities to seek romantic queer relationships (Chan 2018, 2023; Hobbs et al. 2016). On the other hand, the Philippines continues to be a predominantly traditional and patriarchal country, so queer communities are still

Table 2: Articles on digital intimacies.

Title	Author/s	Journal source	Year published
Cruising through spaces: Exploring the mediatization of gay cruising in the Philippines	1. Solis, Randy Jay	<i>Plaridel</i>	2020
Initiating gay relationships in the Philippines: A history of mediatization and place-making	1. Solis, Randy Jay	<i>Plaridel</i>	2021
Queered online pandemic relationships: Mobile expressions of intimacies, care, and emotion work	1. Labor, Jonalou S. 2. Alcazaren, Holden Kenneth G.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2021
Mobile sexuality: Presentations of young Filipinos in dating apps	1. Labor, Jonalou S.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2020
Are young adults sensual in mobile dating apps?	1. Labor, Jonalou S.	<i>Talastásan</i>	2022
Constructed sexual scripts among Filipino youth			
The language of hookups: A conversation and self-presentation analysis of Tinder chats	1. Jalagat, Joseph Ryann J. 2. Yap, Jerry R.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2021
Defamiliarized family: The “anak ng OFWs” emergent narratives on mediated communication and parent-child relationships	1. Pinzon, Mary Janette L.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2021
Sis, mamsh, kasodan: Belonging and solidarity on Facebook groups among Filipino women migrants in Japan	1. Navalta, Razel Andrea D.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2022
Understanding the social media news consumption among Filipinos as transnational-migrants in Thailand	1. Ulla, Mark	<i>APSSR</i>	2021

confronted with rigid heteronormative expectations about gender and sexuality (Cabrera 2017; Manalastas 2013; Tan et al. 2019). In relation to this, certain camps see digital media as a problematic contributor to undermining traditional values of intimacy, like monogamy and long-term relationships (Wu 2020).

It is within the context above that Solis (2020) assesses the impact of prevailing technologies on cruising behaviors throughout historical periods, culminating in contemporary dominant platforms like online dating apps and websites. Solis problematizes the liberating potential associated with the digital media use of upper- and middle-class “global gay” men. He points out that these tend to be undergirded by Western ideals and that, consequently, these generate problematically negative views of the “indigenous *bakla*”, that is, local Filipino gay men associated with lower-class status. Building on this theme in another piece, Solis (2021) turns his attention to the development of new cultural practices and activities in the context of initiating gay relationships. He underscores the contradictory vectors that emerge from how gay dating apps mediatize the initiation of gay relations. Solis recognizes that this kind of mediatization opens new avenues for gay expression. But he also raises critical questions regarding its alignment with the genuine needs of the gay community. He asks if brands are truly concerned with advocating for gay rights and empowerment as they claim or if they are simply exploiting the expanding pink economy for capitalist gain.

Meanwhile, Labor and Alcazaren (2021) examine online relationships among queer couples who were forced to be physically separated during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on their heightened use of digital media. The authors show that mobile technologies helped the couples manage their imagined emphatic romances by enabling synchronous and asynchronous rituals, which evoked their continued presence in each other’s lives. That said, the authors also talk about the limitations of this kind of communication. They specifically point out the ambivalence of the mediated care work the couples had to enact. It sustained their expressions of queer intimacies while sometimes being trapped in the heteronormative dynamics of their family homes. But at the same time, it reinforced kinds of emotional boundarymaking rooted in the often highly patriarchal upbringing of Filipinos.

Another three articles explore how digital technologies influence the negotiation and expression of youth sexuality, highlighting the role of mobile platforms in shaping sexual identities and behaviors. In recent times, young Filipinos—including those who define themselves as religious Catholics—have become concerned less about “right believing” and more about “right living” (Cornelio 2016). In line with this, they have also become less doctrinaire about sexuality, adopting a relatively more liberal and affirmative view of it, and even considering it as a normal topic of conversation (A. P. Santos 2021). Due to societal constraints and established social

norms, however, they cannot always openly express their sexuality (Chan 2023; Dabao 2022). The online has consequently become one of their spaces of refuge where they are able to express these sexual behaviors more freely.

As an illustration, Labor (2020) talks about the ways young Filipinos construct their self-presentation in online dating apps. He finds that they perform a range of self-presentations—from authentic to the inauthentic portrayal of their selves—in order to further their motives and intents for using these online platforms. Labor underscores that although such apps are often viewed as spaces of free self-expression and self-promotion, Filipino youth actually represent themselves in ways that are shaped not only by the features of the platforms they are using. They are also cognizant of the judgements of others that are grounded in societal and cultural expectations, hence their attempts to, amongst other things, idealize and conceal some parts of themselves as well as at times highlight and at other times hide their sexualities and identities.

In a different piece, Labor (2022) also explores the narratives of young adult mobile dating app users. He focuses on describing the discursive nature of their sexual communication during mobile dating engagements, documenting the symbolic presentations and features of their conversations. He underscores that mobile dating apps have modified traditional Filipino dating processes, enabling individualized approaches to dating experiences. They have allowed young adults to create contextual sexual scripts and enact appropriate dating discourses that forward their interests not just in seeking relationships, but also finding sexual pleasure.

A related study by Jalagat and Yapó (2021) looks into how dating app users structure their exchanges and present themselves in hookup-motivated conversations on Tinder. Across the diverse participants, the predominant image present in chats is being “provocative”, referring to being flirtatious and engaging in sexually explicit conversations. Their study nevertheless reveals that heterosexual Filipino users still adhere to traditional sexual scripts and a dominant patriarchal ideology wherein men take the lead in initiating and controlling conversations. Meanwhile, women are restricted by internalized gendered roles that compel them to act as passive gatekeepers, construed as socially acceptable femininity in the country. Even when women try to express sexual intentions, their attempts appear relatively restrained in comparison to men.

The final three articles shift away from Filipinos’ intimate relationships towards their transnational family and community relationships. These articles are interested in how digital media use in the diasporic context facilitates transnational connections and bridges geographical distances but also, in the process, reshapes familial relationships and community ties. Indeed, online technologies have been crucial to how Filipinos “do family’ with but also in media” (Madianou 2018: 100). Amongst other things, they have shaped how married partners who live apart

negotiate their intimate and parenting roles (Acedera and Yeoh 2019) as well as how migrant parents and left-behind children define the terms of their relationship (Madianou and Miller 2013; see also Cabalquinto 2020; Paragas 2008). Online technologies have also enabled Filipinos abroad to establish community relationships that will nourish them. They can, for example, materialize the “aspirational geograph[ies]” (Arora and Scheiber 2017) of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) by offering possibilities for globally expanding their networks, beyond the ordinary limits of their social capital. They also allow OFWs to foster an “archipelago of care” (McKay 2016) that cements bonding networks across a range of milieu—including their social media groups, faith groups and community centers—collectively mitigating their precarious life conditions.

Pinzon (2021), for one, talks about the reconfiguration of the Filipino family in relation to OFWs. In OFW families, digital media defamiliarize face-to-face interactions that carry with them traditional notions of connectedness. But at the same time, these technologies enable a continuity in ideas about Filipino parental and gender roles, where the father is viewed as the family provider and the mother as the emotional anchor of the household. So whilst these communicative technologies transform people’s ways of doing family, they also enable novel avenues for continued imaginations of what the essence of “family-ness” is.

Navalta (2022) adds that mediated online spaces also facilitate connections among Filipino migrants, fostering a sense of community within their new environment. In the case of her study, Facebook groups aid Filipino women migrants in Japan in dealing with the social and structural marginalization that they encounter. Her study maps out the nature of affective belonging in such digital spaces and how intimacy is constructed and sustained among strangers. However, Navalta also notes that there are limitations to what can be achieved via Facebook groups, especially in terms of collective action for legal, social, and political change. She emphasizes that the technology orients Filipino women migrants towards relationships that are more “personal” than they are “political”. Within the platform then, they are not really able to address the broader social and political structures at play in Japanese society. Because of this, the personal stories of Filipino women are rarely discussed by the Japanese public, which leads to the persistence of these women’s misrecognition and stigmatization.

Parallel to this work on the relational element of digital media, Ulla (2021) talks about its informational element. He focuses on the news consumption practices of Filipino transnationals in Thailand and how it gratifies their social and personal needs. Ulla explains that for these migrants, keeping themselves updated with significant news and events back in the Philippines helps them stay connected with their families, as well as build bonds with their fellow Filipino migrant workers in Thailand. Therefore, consuming news on social media about their home country

gives them a sense of home away from home, holding deeper significance for them. However, this connection back home allows them to problematically elide their continued experience of alienation as outsiders in a host country where language serves as a social barrier between them and the locals.

5 On digital promotion

For the theme of digital promotion, there were eight articles that looked at the use of online communicative platforms—and social media particularly—to connect with different publics. They all underscored that the impetus for “promotion, promotion everywhere” (Edwards et al. forthcoming) persisted even in the online sphere of a country where access to the internet is only “good enough” (Uy-Tioco 2019) (see Table 3). These articles are important contributions to pushing back against the usual “ontological and epistemological decontextualization of promotion that so often marks scholarship and implies a universal reality where none exists” (Edwards et al. forthcoming). They show how promotional cultures cannot but be entwined with the realities of particular contexts and, in this case, of the non-Western global South.

Three of the articles are about digital influencers, defined as “shapers of public opinion who persuade their audience through the conscientious calibration of personae on social media, as supported by ‘physical’ space interactions with their followers in the flesh” (Abidin and Ots 2016: 155). These works connect with the already established literature on how central to influencer work is authenticity, which requires the ability to craft and maintain a self-brand that is genuine and relatable, yet still unique (Banet-Weiser 2021). It can be said that the articles contribute to expanding our map of the influencer strategies across the world (Abidin 2018). They show how, in this process, they function as ideological intermediaries, that is, conduits who personify and promote lifestyles that are inspirational, aspirational, and deeply neoliberal in their worldview (Arnesson 2023). That said, the articles also sensitize us to influencer dynamics that are very different from what one finds in the West. This is because in a country like the Philippines, what you find are primarily middle and upper class influencers selling neoliberal ideas to lower class audiences who have a love-hate relationship with the idea of Western modernity, which they at times aspire to and at times despise (see Shtern et al. 2019).

Both works from De Vera and Saludadez (2021) and Jalagat (2022) tackle YouTube vlogging from the perspective of Filipino vloggers. De Vera and Saludadez (2021) explore the firsthand experiences of those among them who are OG (or original gangster), a term used to describe those who had been active on YouTube before it

Table 3: Articles on digital promotion.

Title	Author/s	Journal source	Year published
YouTube vlogging as access to possibilities: A phenomenological study of an OG Filipino vlogger	1. De Vera, Marlon Jesspher B. 2. Saludadez, Jean A.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2021
From “welcome to my channel” to “please like, share, & subscribe”: A conversational analysis on the opening and closing strategies of Filipino YouTube vlogs	1. Jalagat, Joseph Ryann J.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2022
All hail, the baklang kanal!: Subversive frivolity in two Filipino influencers	1. Cabbuag, Samuel 2. Benitez, Christian Jil	<i>Plaridel</i>	2022
What we do when we #PrayFor: Communicating posthumanitarian solidarity through #PrayForMarawi	1. Crisostomo, Junesse	<i>Plaridel</i>	2021
Local e-governance and COVID-19 case reporting via Facebook: Configuring pandemic communications in social media	1. Bajar, Jayson Troy F. 2. Barker, Thomas	<i>PSR</i>	2021
Interacting effect of social media crisis communication and organizational citizenship behavior on employees’ resistance to change during the COVID-19 crisis: evidence from university employees in the Philippines	1. Puyod, Jenette Villegas 2. Charoensukmongkol, Peerayuth	<i>APSSR</i>	2021
Exploring a state college’s dialogic strategies and public engagement on Facebook	1. Silvallana, Daniel Fritz V. 2. Flor, Benjamina Paula G.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2022
Comparative analysis on the photographic self-presentations of the top Philippine universities in their official websites	1. Dela Cruz, AARichela L. 2. Gopez, Christian P. 3. Magahis, Leen A. 4. Resurreccion, Analiza D. 5. Demetrio III, Feorillo A.	<i>Plaridel</i>	2022

became commercialized. These vloggers emphasize that apart from the transformative aspects of this alternative career choice, there are essential skills required for success online. These include, among other things, knowing how to engage with audiences, interact with fans, collaborate with others, and present authenticity as genuinely as one can. Importantly, for the majority of their viewers who are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, these OG vloggers offer the idea of their work not only allowing one access to possibilities, but also as an expansion of one’s capabilities. Meanwhile, Jalagat (2022) analyzes the conversational strategies used by Filipino YouTube vloggers to engage with their audiences. They employ diverse opening and closing strategies in their YouTube videos that are aimed at nurturing a

profound sense of audience involvement, engagement, and belonging, even if, as just mentioned, they might come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. They deploy strategies that will ensure an atmosphere of friendliness and informality, thereby cementing their connection with their audiences. For instance, they constantly use the word “tayo” (or us) to reinforce feelings of collaboration and interaction.

In the work of Cabbug and Benitez (2022), they focus on the representation of the *baklang kanal*. This is a distinct queer identity originating from Philippine Twitter, referring to “gays from the ditch” that was a derogatory term before it was reclaimed to mean “empowered, brave, social justice warriors” (Cabbug and Benitez 2022: 57–58). This phenomenon emerged as queer personalities on Twitter openly expressed their political views and disapproval against the former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte’s regime, captivating Twitter audiences in the process. They investigate how these influencers negotiate and utilize the symbolic concept of the *baklang kanal* to establish and maintain their influencer status. The appeal of these influencers who identify as *baklang kanal* is that they are refreshing to audiences, as they diverge from the conventional perception of influencers being predominantly middle class and aspirational. The article also emphasizes the importance of perceived authenticity in their self-branding efforts, strategies that they employ to connect with local audiences while navigating complex socio-political dynamics.

Meanwhile, three of the articles focus more on the online promotional culture of Philippine-based organizations. They illustrate how this is underpinned by logics grounded in the country’s “cultures of disaster”, that is, its societal dynamics that have been shaped by its history of ever-constant threat of natural hazards (Bankoff 2003). Crisostomo (2021) depicts the possibilities and limits of social media, particularly Twitter and its hashtag feature, as regards crafting framing narratives for mobilizing responses to humanitarian crises. She focuses on the hashtag #PrayForMarawi, pertaining to the terrorist siege of the largest Muslim city in the Philippines in 2017, and the impact of this hashtag. Although the online discourse gained significant traction, developed nationalism, and even brought it to international news, the campaign eventually dwindled. The relevance of the discourse failed to maintain relevance beyond the digital sphere and actually did not provide tangible assistance and meaningful help to the tragedy’s victims. Crisostomo argues that there is a “post-humanitarian” element to it all. Participating in the hashtag campaign can be about purging oneself of the guilt of not engaging, especially given how the number of disasters in the country that one has to care about can become overwhelming. In addition, Bajar and Barker (2021) look into the ways local governments can effectively utilize social media platforms and tools as part of their local e-governance especially during the COVID-19 pandemic where most communications

shifted online. They focus on the ways Facebook can be harnessed as their local pandemic communications, establishing it as the primary source of news and information. Although there has been significant efforts towards increased digitalization, many local governments appear to remain at the stage of still exploring the full potential of utilizing social networking platforms for e-governance purposes. The lack of clear guidelines for local governments to effectively manage and utilize digital platforms has led to a situation where citizens turn to other sources when the information provided seems incomplete or inconsistent. Although this need to find alternatives is understandable given Filipinos' long-standing exposure to multiple hazards, it unfortunately makes them vulnerable to misinformation.

Puyod and Charoensukmongkol (2021) also cover digital communications during the pandemic, examining how crisis communication through social media channels can significantly lessen the level of resistance to change in organizational contexts like universities. Although the authors find that social media can be a powerful tool for universities in the Philippines to use in delivering crisis communication, they point to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) as a key element to its success. They contend that because of the collectivist culture of Filipinos, university employees should first be willing to support their colleagues and the organization in general in getting through a crisis. Consequently, they emphasize the need for crisis communication to account for the cultural characteristics of employees in order to better anticipate their reactions.

The final two articles show how promotional culture has also seeped into the Philippines' higher education sector. The country's universities have had to play the global rankings game despite being multiply disadvantaged by their own lack of resources and by the game's Western-centrism and English-centrism amongst many other factors (see Cornelio 2023; Lasco 2023; San Juan 2021). This has meant a continued and, at times, problematic display of positivity that only entrenches global educational inequalities. As an illustration, Dela Cruz et al. (2022) aim to understand the ways the top four Philippine higher educational institutions (HEIs) visually represent themselves in their official websites. They argue that representation is built up from the interconnections between culture, power, and the institutions' websites in the growing visualization and mediatization of these HEIs. As Philippine HEIs face the demands of local and international accreditation bodies to enhance research production, they face increasing pressure to engage in the global rankings competition. This entails evaluating how effectively Philippine HEIs measure up against global standards. It is worth noting, however, that internationalization is of a lower priority for these HEIs in shaping their self-presentations. Another article that tackles the intersection of higher education and digital media is Silvallana and Flor's (2022) study that looks into the relationship-building efforts of a state college on Facebook. Their study highlights that although

institutions are beginning to incorporate digital media in influencing public engagement, this is still in its infancy and, consequently, playing catch-up with global players. They said that the state college they looked into focuses more on a monologic rather than a dialogic communication on social media, treating their social media profile as a tool for public information dissemination rather than a mutual, two-way dialogue.

6 Uncategorized articles

Despite not fitting into the four predominant categories above, we argue that it is important to also highlight the research possibilities offered by the four remaining articles in our selected set. Each of them indicate potentially new vectors of research for digital media scholarship in the context of a non-Western, global South country such as the Philippines (see Table 4).

One distinct study is Luna's (2023) focus on critical dance discourses in virtual spaces, particularly internet memes circulated on social media platforms. The article showcases memes alongside captions that elucidate the underlying meanings, briefly touching on the concept of intertextuality, conveyed by the memes in the context of dance. He argues that while internet memes are often overlooked, they actually play a crucial role in virtual spaces and offer democratized means of communication and criticism.

The works by Fajardo (2022) and Antonio and Magante (2023), meanwhile, both discuss how the advent of digital media has profoundly transformed societal norms and practices. Fajardo (2022), for one, discusses the transformation of the

Table 4: Uncategorized articles.

Title	Author/s	Journal source	Year published
The girls that get it, get it: On critical dance memes	1. Luna, Jonathan Jared	<i>Kritika Kultura</i>	2023
Campus radio version 2.0: The convergence of campus radio with digital media	1. Fajardo, Kim Bernard G.	<i>Talastásan</i>	2022
A study on the influence of digital finance on bank account ownership of Filipinos	1. Antonio, Carlo Ian 2. Magante, Maire Carroline	<i>APSSR</i>	2023
Millennials in the information age: Disjuncture amidst technological innovations	1. Calara, Alvaro N.	<i>APSSR</i>	2020

radio industry amidst the emergence of digital technologies. He notes that with the rapid advancements in technology, radio has struggled to keep up with the changes. He then identifies efforts to help radio's adaptability to and relevance for the digital age, such as using social media to broaden listenership. Antonio and Magante (2023), for their part, talk about the emergence of digital mobile banking and its impact on financial practices of Filipinos. Their study highlights how digitalization improves financial access of underserved populations, encouraging more mobile users to open bank accounts in recent times. Both discussions contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of digital media usage.

Finally, the article by Calara (2020) examines the disconnections experienced by millennials as regards internet use, especially about how innovations impact their daily lives. His work contributes to the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and internet use by looking into the existence of cultural lag (Lauer 1973) in the Philippine context. He underscores how the rapid evolution of the internet has left certain social structures grappling to comprehend and adapt to escalating concerns surrounding its usage.

7 Conclusion

In this review article, we looked at 27 works on digital media in five Philippine-based journals, all of which were published during the COVID-19 years of 2020–2023. Reflecting the prolonged mediated lockdown life undergone by many Filipinos, they spoke about the intensified centrality of communicative technologies in people's everyday experiences. The works clustered along three key themes: on digital deliberations, digital intimacies, and digital promotion. There were a few of them that did not align with these themes, but nevertheless also indicated emerging vectors from which to see the entwinement of digital media with the dynamics of Philippine society.

What we did in this article was to highlight the situatedness of our selected set of scholarly works in the context of a non-Western global South country such as the Philippines. We showed that taken collectively, these works allow us to think about expanded lines of theorizing research about digital media that go beyond the typical concerns of scholarship generated in the West. They sensitize us to the distinct ways that digital media become entwined with societal dynamics in the Philippines and other similar contexts in which find themselves: challenged in terms of digital access but also intense in their online engagements; at the margins of the global digital industry but also at the cutting edge of innovative ingenuity in dealing with it; and

shaped by the always-already global quality of their colonial histories and post-colonial trajectories but also of the local logics grounded in their vernacular cultures.

Here, it is important for us to say that future reviews of digital media scholarship in Philippine-based publications can provide an even more enriched view of its contributions to theorizing research by addressing the limitations of this paper. This means including reputable journals beyond those headquartered in Manila and works that use Filipino and the country's other languages. This also means going beyond journal articles and looking at other forms of publication, such as the many relevant and groundbreaking Philippine-published books, book chapters, and public reports that have come out in the last years.

Nevertheless, across the works we did review, one can already see how Philippine scholarship on digital media has strongly sought to push scholarly discussions about the field beyond the concerns of the West. This is even if they at times use Western theorizing on online technologies as their take-off point, something that is understandable given the continued dominance of such ideas in the discipline. Those on digital deliberations, for one, highlight the many layers of a post-colonial society within which the Philippines' democratic politics is mapped onto. They show that the possibilities for the country's still nascent online public spaces to lean towards more or less democratic conversations cannot be separated from issues that materialize colonially rooted dynamics, which still "wrap around contemporary problems" (Stoler 2016: 1). Amongst other things, these include ongoing contestations around Western-inflected ideas surrounding civility, cultural identity, and religion.

Meanwhile, the pieces on digital intimacies insist that we reflect deeper on the easy distinctions one might make between what values are Western and non-Western as well as progressive and traditional. Many of the works point out that social media platforms have become spaces where Filipinos and others who live in the Philippines negotiate with many complicated imaginaries of intimacy (see Collantes and Cabañes 2023). For example, there is intimacy within the frame of the country's still predominant Catholicism, which is both rooted in Spanish colonization but also expressed in a distinctly Filipino way, and within the frame of Western modernity, wherein the emphasis on individual choice can be liberating but also be problematically incorporated into neoliberal capitalism.

Finally, the works on digital promotion weigh the possibilities and limits of creativity in light of a global South context (see Arora 2024). This brings to mind the Filipino notion of *diskarte*, which is about being a creative problem solver especially in light of the constraints imposed by one's condition (see Morales 2017). As the pieces show, the constraints are many in the Philippines, from the underdevelopment of its telecom infrastructure to its vulnerability to natural disasters to its built-in disadvantage in the games of global academia. At times, promotional

workers overcome these challenges with their ingenuity, as in the case of digital influencers who continually innovate on their strategies for connecting with their distinct audiences. At other times, they also find themselves endlessly playing catch up, as in the case of those working for Philippine organizations who are confronted with daunting structural issues that they cannot resolve on their own.

To further entrench the value of the insights on digital media research from Philippine-based publications for other non-Western and Western scholarly works, we suggest that the articles published in Philippine-based journals should more explicitly articulate the value of their findings for other scholars across the world. Apart from discussing the implications of their insights within the Philippine context, they should also point out the theoretical openings and directions that these suggest for broader digital media scholarship. Some of the articles in the set we reviewed already do this. But this needs to be done more consistently.

Related to the above, the articles can do more to highlight their engagement with non-Western and global South scholarship. For example, it would be helpful to have a more robust dialogue with works on digital media coming out of Philippines' regional neighbors in Southeast Asia, and then hopefully expand from there (see Alatas 2022). After all, there is much that can be gleaned by addressing other theories that also use the non-West and the global South as their starting points. Doing so will enable scholarship published in Philippine-based journals to contribute further to the project of the latter solidaristically transforming the Western-centrism of today's global landscape of media and communication theorizing broadly and digital media research particularly (see Willems 2014).

Alongside the two points above, we also suggest that digital media scholarship from the West should also engage with the distinct lines of thinking that emerge from non-Western global South contexts such as the Philippines. It is often the case that the former have to situate themselves in relation to the former. But it is very rare for the former to be asked to situate themselves in relation to the latter (see Glück 2018). This is a matter of justice, of course, but it is also a matter of building digital media research across the world that is theoretically complex and contextually nuanced.

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