

The Manila Times

Loida Nicolas-Lewis, and not social media, is the threat to democracy

By [ANTONIO P. CONTRERAS](#) on December 13, 2016 [Analysis](#)



ANTONIO P. CONTRERAS

SOMEONE has had the audacity to claim that the trolls that have invaded social media are poised to destroy democracy because they allegedly undermine the factual basis for a rational, modern political community.

I would argue that it is people like Loida Nicolas-Lewis who threaten democracy.

Indeed, social media falls prey to lies and deception. However, it is valid to argue that traditional media, where Maria Ressa and Rappler are inhabitants, has also a history of propagating lies and deceptions. The so-called post-factuals and post-truths are in fact structured reactions to the epidemic of a captured and controlled press that has long monopolized the production of facts and truth.

And behind them loom the more sinister political interests which unelected, unaccountable people like Nicolas-Lewis with her vast wealth tries to control, buy and influence.

Traditional media, far from just reporting the news, has become a powerful shaper of opinions. News anchors have become important figures, even as news reporters have become celebrities and opinion makers.

Corporate media has been captured by powerful interests. Giant networks compete for ratings and audience share. It is in this playing field that news is no longer factual reporting, but an enterprise that has to have drama with news presented in soap-operatic fashion in order to survive the ratings war. The more blood and gore the better; the more

scandal the merrier. Gone are the days of the boring talking heads on TV. The era of live reports, embedded reporting and editorialized anchoring has taken root. News personalities have become endorsers not only of particular political perspectives, but even of particular product brands, even as they become brands themselves.

Media became a powerful political institution that acquired enormous influence in shaping the political agenda. It can make governments and break presidents.

It is this media representation that bred resistance from those who refuse to be taken in by its control and influence. The onset of social media is the single most powerful counterforce that emerged to challenge the power of traditional media. With cheap smartphones and free internet, the base for citizen engagement in the production of public discourse widened, and the monopoly of media over the production of facts and truths has been effectively challenged.

BBC, Rappler, Ressa and some elitist political analysts try hard to make sense of the predicament that traditional media is facing, and have accused social media, particularly Facebook, of undermining the factual basis of democracy. They forget that such factual basis has long been undermined by corporate and traditional media, where money and power, which people like Loida Nicolas-Lewis wield, have co-opted and bought.

Traditional media loves to point to the presence of accountability and editorial control which they say will always protect the integrity of news from credible sources. This led to the creation of a false dichotomy between responsible reportage and irresponsible trolling. Some journalists think they are legitimate just because they have an office and an editorial mechanism, and that they are members of some press club, yet are in fact acting like the trolls they love to bash.

Trolling is not just about anonymously bashing public posts in social media. Trolling is also seen in a relentless campaign to paint one political personality, or a particular event, in a bad light. Rappler has in fact trolled Bongbong Marcos and Jojo Binay.

The pretense by corporate media that they have quality controls embedded in their editorial mechanisms that vet the news falls flat in the face of the fact that their editors have their own political preferences, though they try hard to deny this. Reporters and anchors unabashedly display their politics when they editorialize in their reports, or in posts in their own social media accounts.

In contrast to the trolls in social media, those done by people in established media platforms is the kind of trolling that can be dangerous, for it is imbued with a sense of denial, if not arrogance, stemming from professional expertise, born of a sense of entitlement to facts and truth.

It is this kind of media practice that rich people like Loida Nicolas-Lewis attempts to buy, control or influence.

And this is an assault on democracy too.

Recently, the New York Times translated into Filipino a piece critical of President Duterte, a highly unusual practice for a newspaper of its nature. One has to wonder what gives, or who gave.

Fortunately, Sass Rogando-Sasot, Mocha Uson, Thinking Pinoy and others are there to foil attempts by corporate media and their elite sponsors to have a franchise on the production of truth and facts.

Contrary to what has been falsely claimed by some analysts, social media is not destroying democracy. Instead, it is turning democracy into a discursive battleground for the production of truth and facts, by giving notice to people like Loida Nicolas-Lewis that they better watch out.

5 Comments



kelly on [December 13, 2016 8:33 am](#)

New York Times has shown its true blood. One vein of this evil news org is connected to another viciously evil local news entity, the so called Philippine Daily Inquirer. No wonder, New York Times has ‘filipinized’ one of its garbage articles. Bad for them, social media and some great souls such as you, Sass, Mocha, Thinking Pinoy are fearless and would do every thing to unfold the tiniest lies the yellow companies planted in Philippine soil. My sincere thanks to you Sir Contreras. Please don’t stop exposing the truth behind the lies the yellow company had instilled in our minds for years. This is for the motherland!!!

[Reply](#)



Emperor JC on [December 13, 2016 8:17 am](#)

Rappler, if you’ve noticed looks comical on their headlines because anything about BBM or Digong will surely have an “angry” remarks while those about leni, yellows and the reds will have “happy” remarks. He whom God wanted to destroy will first make them mad. Lol.

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jess nazario on [December 13, 2016 6:23 am](#)

Was not sure of Ressa's gender so I did not include the name Ressa.

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jess nazario on [December 13, 2016 6:17 am](#)

We must have become a nation of wimps ! Imagine our democracy being threatened by a host of persons in the distaff side...Leila, Loida, Leni, Morales, Grace, Sereno, Risa(?), Dinky, Deles, Ferrer, etc....Sad ! Very sad ! Nasaan na ang mga ,macho natin ?

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art on [December 13, 2016 5:04 am](#)

Your article is always a refreshing read. More power to you and may you remain true to your principles.