

Internationalization of a Crisis Situation: The Effects of Mediatization in the Haiyan Crisis in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The crux of the discussion of this paper centers on the mediatization of a natural disaster and its effects to the subsequent internalization of the crisis situation. This paper aims to present how the media contributed to the internalization of the crisis, in what way did it affect the crisis from the point of view of disaster management and what pedagogical values can be learned from the crisis situation. Using content analysis of newspaper articles and social media postings for a certain period of time, the researcher argued that the super typhoon Haiyan as a natural cataclysm is more than just a meteorological or natural phenomenon that buried a country in deep crisis; it was, in fact, a socio-political phenomenon that raised a number of issues that have had effects along political, economic, social, cultural and administrative dimensions. In this paper, the researcher looked into how this crisis was mediatized. The tremendous media mileage that the “Haiyan crisis” has gained from various mainstream media outlets transformed it into an “international humanitarian crisis event” that captured the attention of the international community. On the basis of the lessons learned from the “Haiyan crisis” the researcher presented some insightful inputs for policy recommendations along climate change response, recovery and adaptation.

Keywords: Climate change, Climate change adaptation, Super Typhoon Haiyan, crisis response, disaster and risk management ecotourism

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The predisposition of the Philippines to natural hazards such as the strong typhoons, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions can be attributed to its geo-physical characteristics. Although the country abounds with natural resources and rich biodiversity, it is at the same time a hotbed for natural calamities being situated in the Pacific Ring of Fire. It is not uncommon for the country to experience at least around 20 tropical cyclones a year. The country’s weather bureau, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, Astronomical System Administration (PAGASA) estimates that of these 20 tropical cyclones that visit the country annually, about ten

(10) of them fully become typhoons, five (5) of which have the potential to be destructive. It is worthy to note that the number of these destructive tropical cyclones has markedly increased in the recent years (Dela Cruz, 2016).

In the past decade, the Philippines is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change in the Southeast Asian region. It is prone to climate hazard such as typhoons, drought, landslides, and sea-level-rise. The Global Climate Risk Index (CRI) developed by Germanwatch released a longitudinal report for the year 1996-2015 relative to the effect of extreme weather events both in terms of casualties as well as economic injuries or losses that occurred on

the basis of the data obtained from the Munich RE NatCatSERVICE, which documents worldwide one of the most reliable and complete databases on this matter. Accordingly, the Philippines is ranked 4th in the Global Climate Risk Index as among the countries most affected from 1996-2015 (German Watch Report, Global Climate Risk Index Report, 1996-2015).

Due to its being prone to high disaster risk, the Philippines notched the 3rd place as among the global hotspots of disaster by a 2016 UN World Risk Index report released by the United Nations University-Institute of Environment and Human Security.

It is very important to understand the complexity of natural disasters like typhoons as a crisis phenomenon as they inflict not only economic loss to the country but most importantly they cause loss of hundreds and even thousands of lives and untold sufferings to the people.

This paper looked into how media played a role in the shaping and framing of the crisis. In the Philippines the local media plays a vital role in the political and social life of the people. It is considered to be among the most influential institutions in the country. The media played a major part in toppling down the former Filipino dictator President Ferdinand Marcos. It also played a crucial part in bringing former President Joseph Estrada before the impeachment court. The same media was instrumental in transforming the perception on the nature of the super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis from being a domestic concern into an international crisis phenomenon.

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENTS

In general, this paper aimed to analyze and assess how the mediatization of the Haiyan crisis impact crisis management in the Philippines. The researcher sought to address the following research queries:

1. How mediatization affect crisis management mechanism of the Philippines government in dealing with

the Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis?

2. How did mediatization transform the nature of the Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis from being a domestic concern into an international crisis situation?
3. What pedagogical value can be derived from the analysis of the Philippine experience for climate change response, recovery and adaptation in dealing with natural disaster?

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As a research strategy, this paper made use of descriptive-analytic mode of analysis in reconstructing the Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda incident on the bases of existing documents and reports issued by government authorities, reports from the various forms of media, and existing scholarly studies on the subject. In order to address the research questions posed at the outset of this paper regarding the effect of politicization and mediatization in the dynamics of crisis management in dealing with the Haiyan/Yolanda crisis, the researcher used thematic analysis of some press releases from the government and reports from the media and interviews done among crisis manager personalities by both local and international media.

4.0 SAMPLING DESIGN

For the mediatization aspect of the investigation, this paper made use of reports made by both local (TV Patrol, 24 Oras, Inquirer.Net, The Philippine Star, The Philippine Daily Inquirer, GMA News, ABS CBN News, etc.) and international (CNN, ABC, BBC, and Al Jazeera) broadcast and print media (The Time Magazine, The New York Post, USA Today, The Guardian, etc.).

The data obtained from the traditional media were complemented by social media postings in Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Case Description

The Philippines witnessed the most number of typhoons in 2013 and for the first time it ran out of letters to name them and had to begin at “A” again to name the next typhoon (typhoons are given Filipino names sequentially on the basis of the letters of the alphabet) (Milman, 2015). This year is likewise considered to be the year that will be forever etched in the living memories of the Filipinos who witnessed the most destructive and strongest typhoon that ever hit the country---the super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda. Next to Hurricane Patricia, super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda is the world’s strongest typhoon and the most ferocious storm that ever hit the Philippines (Merseareau, 2015).

Before it became a cataclysm, typhoon Haiyan started as mere low pressure area somewhere in Pohnpei, Micronesia on November 2, 2013 on the basis of the tracking made by the Joint Typhoon Warning Center (JTWC). On November 3, 2013, it developed into a tropical depression as categorized by the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA). On November 4, 2013, it intensified even more, with both the JTWC and JMA classifying it as a tropical storm and was assigned the international codename “Haiyan” (a Chinese word which means “petrel”).

On November 5, it hit Micronesia and is forecasted to hit the Philippines in the ensuing days. A day after, November 6, the JTWC estimated that the typhoon attained the category-5 super typhoon status. On the same day, the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration assigned the name Yolanda as its local designation and raised Signal Number 1 in eastern Visayas and Mindanao of the country.

On November 7, the JWTC estimated Haiyan as having attained one-

minute sustained winds of 315 km/h (195 mph) and gustiness of 378 km/h (235 mph). Alarmed by this forecast, the PAGASA issued an announcement to the public of the entry of Haiyan/Yolanda typhoon in the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) declaring in the morning eastern Visayas and Mindanao under Signal Number 3. The super typhoon wreaked more havoc in the evening triggering the declaration of Signal Number 4 by the weather bureau. Pre-emptive evacuations were conducted and classes in various parts of the country were suspended. In the evening, President Benigno Aquino issued a warning to the public as well as the local government units to take the threat of the super typhoon seriously and not to take chances. (Nr 19 Report, The Joint Typhoon Warning Center, US)

On November 8, the first landfall was noted over Eastern Samar. PAGASA reported a maximum sustained winds of 235 kph and gustiness of 275 kph. Low-lying areas including Tacloban City were flooded. Monster winds and giant waves devastated the coastal provinces that were hit by the typhoon (The Rappler, 2013). Crisis responders were unable to penetrate many areas because of power and communication breakdown. Major ports and airports were shut because of the damage caused by the typhoon.

On November 9, the typhoon gradually weakened as it crossed the South China Sea towards Vietnam. The PAGASA lowered down the typhoon warning signal across the country. In the afternoon, the super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda sailed out of the country but left behind horrible scenes of death and destruction. Airports began to resume operations while communication lines were expected to get their operations back to normal in 2 or 3 days (Cupin, 2013).



Figure 1.1. The Track of Typhoon Yolanda. (Source: The Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical Astronomical Services Administration)

In Guian, Eastern Samar, which received the first impact of the super typhoon, most of the structures were said to be completely flattened. Bodies of people trailed like piles of woods along the roads and along the bridges; trees were uprooted, knocked over and bent down; cars piled up along the streets; and houses were scratched like papers. Tacloban City is said to have experienced damage of massive scale.

On November 10, the Department of Social Welfare and Development estimated that around 9.53 million individuals and a little over 2 million families were affected by the super typhoon. The next day, November 11, the Congress proposed a Php 10 billion rehabilitation fund for the calamity. The Philippine National Police mobilized approximately 900 personnel to affected areas, with 400 personnel to be deployed in Tacloban City. The Office of the President declared a “state of national calamity” on the evening. On November 12, the government implemented a price freeze and on the succeeding day the Senate increased the rehabilitation fund to Php 15 billion. Foreign and international aid arrived in great number. On the final reckoning of the damages it inflicted, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council

reported that the catastrophe left behind 6,300 dead, 28,688 injured and 1,062 still missing (NDRRMC Update: Final Report, Re. Effects of Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan). November 06-09, 2013.)

5.3. Mediatization and Its Effect in the Transnationalization/Internationalization of the Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda Crisis

The occurrence of super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis was covered before, during and after by the largest local print media in the country such as The Philippine Star and the Philippine Daily Inquirer; the giant local news broadcast media such as ABS CBN’s TV Patrol News and GMA’s 24 Oras; the local radio broadcast stations such as DZRH and DZMM. Online media news portal such as The Rappler likewise provided comprehensive coverage of the typhoon. Here are some samples of headlines which appeared on the local media:

- “World’s Most Powerful Typhoons Hits Philippines” (ABS CBN News)
- “10,000 People Feared Dead in Leyte--- Police” (The Rappler)
- “Yolanda’s storm surge like a bomb, earthquake” (The Philippine Star)

International media coverage of CNN, BBC, NBC, Al Jazeera, The Guardian, The Time, The Economist, The New York Post, The Telegraph, to name a few framed news stories in such a manner that the Haiyan/Yolanda crisis penetrated the sense of humanity of the readers and viewers, appealed to their pity and solidarity and inspired states, state actors, and international public figures to express support and mobilize some responsive actions to help save the children, men and women. Here are some examples of story lines from the various foreign media:

“Super Typhoon Smashes Into the Philippines” (USA Today)

“Typhoon Haiyan: At Least 10,000 Dead As Angry Survivors berate Philippines President Benigno Aquino” (The Telegraph, UK)

“Supertyphoon Haiyan Tears the Philippines Apart” (The Australian, Australia)

It is worth to mention the role of social media at this point. The social media played a very significant role in circulating the news and updates relative to the status of the typhoon and the damages it caused. Using Radian 6 as a form of social listening analysis during the one-week period (November 08-14, 2013), phrases and words such as “super typhoon Yolanda,” “Yolanda,” and “Haiyan” appeared 3, 243, 826 times (The Anatomy of Social Media Use During Super Typhoon Yolanda. November 21, 2013.).

To break this figure down, it is interesting to note the following observations: 74.9% of the mentions were from Twitter; 19.2%, Facebook; and 2.7% for mainstream news. Twitter became very useful during the post-disaster stage where many tweets about the updates on damages and call for help were documented. It was on November 12 where the most mentions were noted which reached almost 573, 000. This coincided with the coverage of the CNN, an international news outlet. An article of CNN reporting the scale of damage received around 2000 comments. Global calls and response for aid, donation

and assistance for Yolanda victims was likewise overwhelming in the social web. A total of 290, 729 mentioned “relief efforts,” “donations,” “medical missions,” and “financial aid.” This also coincided with the CNN coverage on November 12 (The Anatomy of Social Media Use During Super Typhoon Yolanda. November 21, 2013.).

As regards the response of the government to the crisis, 73.9% of the responses from netizens was negative; only 23.1% of the responses was positive. This negative reaction also reached its height on November 12 when the international news media CNN covered the aftermath of the crisis.

Indeed the media played a significant role before, during and after the crisis in the typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda. In fact, it played more visible role as first-line of information provider to the public than the Public Information Department of the government. They were the first to give first hand information about the status of the typhoon, the extent of damages it inflicted and updates on the rehabilitation and recovery efforts of the government. They were instrumental in uncovering issues surrounding the crisis and were relied upon heavily on information on precautionary measures not only by the wide public but also the government at large. They were the first providers of information, first to get scope about the disasters and provide the newest tidbits. The presence of international media who did interviews and coverage on ground zero was really inspiring and admirable. They presented different angles and dimensions of the crisis. They also provided ample space and time in the unfolding of the crisis.

5.3.1. The Effect of Mediatization in the Transnationalization of the Haiyan/Yolanda Disaster

Mediatization has a powerful impact in modifying the nature of this crisis from a mere domestic concern into a transnationalized phenomenon. The perception of this crisis which started as

local was transformed into an international humanitarian crisis that transcended beyond the domestic level. The massive coverage of the media from the different parts of the globe was instrumental in the transnationalization process of this crisis.

There were two different ways through which the effect of the media is visible in transforming this crisis from a domestic one into a global phenomenon, to wit: the involvement of state actors and non-state actors in solidarity with the Philippine nation and the mobilization of foreign humanitarian aid and assistance; and the immediate response from well-known figures and personalities from politics, religion, business and entertainment.

The most visible effect of media in transnationalizing or internationalizing this event is in terms of translating the incident into an international humanitarian crisis which necessitated the involvement of state actors and non-state actors in solidarity with the Philippine nation and the mobilization of foreign humanitarian aid and assistance.

The stories and images of the crisis that the media has circulated in print, broadcast as well as in the internet created good story lines that mobilized an international community towards solidarity and ultimately sending aid and assistance for the victims of the catastrophe. It can be said that without the media, the Philippines will not be able to receive such generous humanitarian assistance from the different nations of the world.

It can be argued that the media exerted a great impact in transnationalizing the crisis and eventually mobilizing the international community to extend humanitarian assistance to the victims of this disaster. In terms of response and aid, the devastated regions of super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda humanitarian crisis received a generously overwhelming attention from the international community compared to other humanitarian crises in the past.

A total of 58 foreign governments, more than 50 international NGOs, 136

national societies, and various international organizations extended humanitarian assistance in cash and/or in kind. (Cabigao, 2015). Over-all, the Philippines received as much as \$865,151,866 (P41.8 billion) foreign aid according to the United Nations Office for Coordination (UNOC). Accordingly, financial assistance from the US, EU and UN alone hit \$231,587,655 (P11.19 billion). This figure is equivalent to 26.77% of the total foreign aid received by the Philippines (Gavilan, 2016).

The news about the Philippines being devastated by a disaster echoed to the different corners of the globe and reverberated in the six (6) continents. The world, shocked by the massive scale of tragedy that fell on the country, extended expression of solidarity and sympathy with the Filipinos. Key figures in politics, religion, business and entertainment industry sent their commiseration with the victims in the social media as well as appealed for help.

The extensive coverage of international news media can be pointed out as the most important factor in bringing this crisis into the world. International news outlets and channels such as the BBC, ABC, NBC, CNN, AL Jazeera, The Guardian, The New York Times, The Time, The Economist, The Rappler, among other media organizations created tremendous interest and sparked attention of people across different sectors of the international community. The social media such as Facebook and Twitter were more than social tools they become important information platform for people to discuss and talk about the crisis, create social networks that eventually instrumental in helping the Philippines in this crisis.

Heads of states, religious leaders, business entrepreneurs as well as celebrities from the Hollywood flooded the social media such as Twitter and Facebook with their condolences and sympathy with the bereaved families of the survivors and launched campaign for humanitarian assistance for the Filipinos. It is interesting

to note the sequential progressive cumulative effect of mediatization that either started or occurred simultaneously with the involvement of state actors and non-state actors and like a domino effect, rippled through other relevant and significant sectors of the society such as the business and entertainment industries.

In sum, the foregoing discussion indicates how mediatization can affect the very nature of crisis from a local concern into an international humanitarian concern. In this peculiar case, the media was instrumental in transnationalizing the crisis in a rather positive manner as it resulted to a more awakened citizenry, jolted unresponsive and incompetent government officials to improving the country's crisis management framework and mobilized state and non-state actors to launch campaign for humanitarian assistance and operations.

6.0 Lessons Learned For Climate Change Response, Recovery and Adaptation

As the saying goes, experience is one of the best mentors. This may sound like a cliché but to a great extent, it conveys an elemental truth that ought to be prospectively taken into account not only by the Philippines in dealing with similar crises that are induced by climate change in the future, but also of other countries which may find themselves in the shoes of the former.

One enlightening but painful reflection that can be learned from the Philippine experience of the Typhoon Yolanda is that the first and the hardest to be affected by climate change-related disasters were the poor. Their conditions made them more susceptible and vulnerable during calamities. The occurrence of the Typhoon Haiyan made them even more vulnerable to new impending disasters in the coming years. It can fairly argued that disasters in most developing countries like the Philippines have telling effects regarding puzzling dilemmas in development planning, social exclusion,

inequity and conflicts, bad governance and unsustainable development.

In the simple analysis done in this paper, here are some important lessons learned which other countries can abstract from the Philippine experience:

On Adequate Crisis Preparedness.

One of the grievous mistakes that crisis managers of the country failed to do is that while it is true that they have prepared, their preparation seems not enough. Knowing the strength and potential capability to cause catastrophe of the typhoon, they should have expected the worst scenario and therefore should have matched it with the kind of preparation commensurate to it. Command centers should have been set up in a place where the crisis will less likely to jeopardize its structure and integrity. It is lamentable to say that in this crisis, the command centers which were put up in certain places were the first to be wiped out by the storm surge. Equipment and personnel should have been placed in red alert before the onset of the crisis. Evacuation centers should be disaster-proof to withstand the onslaught of the typhoon so that they may save lives rather than serve as death traps for evacuees. Pre-emptive evacuation should have been done in the most reasonable opportunity possible and exercise of police power to forcibly evacuate people is necessary with the ultimate goal of saving lives in the end. Crisis responders and managers should have been constantly in the loop in terms of communication, if possible various modes of communication and back-up ought to have been used and employed. The institution of risk reduction strategies as a governmental practice cannot be compromised if the primordial intent of the government is to prevent or mitigate loss of lives, damage to properties and other assets, and the costly reversal of development gains. Preparation is always better than cure. The prompt and intelligent execution of risk reduction strategies well ahead of time makes a lot of better sense than repairing the damages in the aftermath of the catastrophe.

On Responding to the Crisis. Coordination and collaboration are twin brothers in time of crisis. Politicians should set aside political differences in the meantime to effectively address the crisis. A clear mechanism on protocols, rules and framework should be put in place relative to coordination. A flowchart for coordination showing respective functions of unit or group should be clearly delineated and should provide for flexibility and improvisation in some exceptional cases. It is also equally important that crisis managers should be visible to the public during the crisis so that the people are assured that they are responding accordingly to the demands of the circumstances, thus encouraging and inspiring other officials and individuals to collectively take action to resolve the crisis. During the Haiyan/Yolanda crisis, some public officials were heavily criticized for hiding their heads in the sands like ostrich and were rarely seen and heard. The safety of the crisis responders and their families should be given adequate attention. They would not be able to respond to the call of their duty if they are equally bothered by the safety of their loved ones. They could not care more for other people, if it meant abandoning their families whose lives are similarly in danger.

On Recovery and Rehabilitation. During the crisis, one of the most visible loopholes that surface during the recovery phase is that of lack of mechanism on how aids and donations can be coordinated. There were confusions which slowed down the rehabilitation efforts of the government. Hence, the need for clear and definitive mechanism on the coordination of donations and assistance from individuals and organizations.

7.0. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the analysis and findings of this paper, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda is a highly mediatized and circularized

incident. Local and international media in its various forms (local and international, print and broadcast, digital and social media) presented stories and tales, circularized far and beyond the confines of the Philippine archipelago and presented different angles and perspectives before, during and after the crisis.

2. The mediatization of the super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda crisis caused the transnationalization or internationalization of the crisis. That this crisis was internationalized by media is evidenced by the following: the involvement of state actors and non-state actors in solidarity with the Philippine nation and the mobilization of foreign humanitarian aid and assistance; and the immediate response from well-known figures and personalities from politics, religion, business and entertainment. The mediatization of this crisis, it is well to note in this analysis, brought positive consequences in terms of response of the government and the international community during the response and recovery phases of the crisis.
3. The Philippine experience in this crisis conveys valuable lessons to other countries which may find themselves in the same situation in the future. These lessons can be seen in the preparation, response and rehabilitation phases of crisis management.

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