

Developing a Philippine National Communication Research Agenda by Marco M. Polo

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Abstract

This paper offers perspectives on the state of Philippine communication research and provides suggestions as to how a National Communication Research Agenda (NCRA) can be crafted in order to provide clear direction for the academic and research community to produce relevant and responsive research that will not just contribute to the body of knowledge but will also aid in national development and is also responsive to industry needs and expectations. The National Communication Research Agenda is envisioned to be coherent, extensive, inclusive, and exemplary.

Practical recommendations in conducting research-based activities will also be discussed. A survey among members of the Philippine Association of Communication Educators (PACE), other media and professional organizations, and other stakeholders looked into research areas that need to be prioritized for undergraduate, graduate and faculty/scholarly studies. Respondents provided valuable insights and suggestions on research thrust, areas and directions to pursue.

The survey was administered online, a total of 68 respondents participated in the survey. Key interviews were conducted with notable scholars and communication sector leaders and experts.

The NCRA is envisioned to be aligned with international, national and local research and development needs and initiatives of the communication sector. It will be divided into priority areas, a specific time frame will also be identified, performance indicators will also be set and a regular review process will be suggested in order to keep the agenda updated and relevant.

Endorsement for the recognition and adoption of the the draft NCRA will be sought from the Commission on Higher Education and the association of public and private higher education institutions in the Philippines. Funding schemes will also be identified and other sustaining efforts will be put in place in order to ensure the viability of the agenda.

Introduction

It is about time. The communication discipline and profession in the Philippines needs a focused and deliberate research agenda that will aid in the advancement of scholarly research and at the same time contribute to development efforts.

Several disparate efforts have been initiated to this effect from higher education institutions that crafted their own research agenda to scholars such as Dr. Crispin Maslog, Dr. Elena Pernia, Dr. Higinio Ables, Prof. Ramon Tuazon among others that have written about it in their books and lectured extensively on the matter in various fora. For its part, the Research and Publication Committee of the Philippine Association of Communication Educators (PACE) was tasked by the PACE Board of Trustees to initiate discussions on the drafting of a National

Communication Research Agenda (NCRA). The committee as tasked to invite and involve stakeholders in the discipline to share their insights, lend their inputs and share their aspirations for a research agenda that is relevant and responsive.

A survey instrument was administered in order to gain insight from communication and media educators, school administrators, partners, industry heads and other stakeholders. This is seen as a significant step towards surfacing the issues, priority areas and road map towards the drafting of an NCRA. Subsequent activities will include face to face consultation with stakeholders, workshops and circulation of a draft document to all concerned parties.

The NCRA is envisioned to be a relevant guide to the country's communication landscape and in filling in research gaps and in addressing the needs of the various sectors and stakeholders of society.

This study sought to respond to the following research questions, to wit:

1. Present an overview of the communication research landscape in the Philippines.
2. Find out if communication schools have their own communication research agenda.
3. Determine if these schools support the idea of having a national communication research agenda.
4. Identify priority research areas and generate ideas and suggestions
5. Serve as a guide for policy makers, funding/donor agencies and researchers in allocating resources.
6. Contribute to providing evidence-based solutions to significant social issues.
7. Maximize and rationalize the use of limited resources and to minimize the repetition or duplication of research efforts.

The State of Philippine Communication and Media Research

Why give a damn about Philippine communication and media research? It matters, for if we know and remember our past, we can live a meaningful present which will help us work towards a better future.

It cannot be denied that in our discourse on democracy, free expression, the right to be informed and to information, the role of communication and media is important. An open and free media environment may not be the only reason or condition for the continued enjoyment of democracy. But as pillars of society, media as an institution is essential due to its far reaching effect, influence and contribution to our political, economic, cultural and technological life. Communication permeates all human activity and significantly influences the way we decide and live.

Many scholars have produced significant work about communication media's present and prospects for the future. They have looked into today's media, its impact and its influence. There are those that have theorized about what media will be like in the future or what trends and directions will shape, take place and change the landscape. Though there are notable scholars that have done research about media history particularly about its role and impact in certain periods of our history (Maslog, 1998-2015, Enriquez, 2004, Pernia, 2008), much has still to be done in order to fill the many gaps or to bring to the fore many insights and pertinent information about our media's storied past. We may all be familiar with the major evolutions and revolutions of Philippine communication and media, but these focus mainly on the mainstream and the so-called Manila-centric media. Little is known or has been written about the media that existed, thrived, struggled and evolved in the many parts of the country. The so called alternative press, community media, indigenous media,

marginal media and the many other names it has been called has been under the radar all these times. This is an example of an under researched area.

Today, there are about 200 educational institutions that offer Undergraduate and Graduate degree programs in communication. Programs range from Communication, Journalism, Broadcasting, Film, Development Communication, Multi-media among others. However, no extensive review or inventory has been done to map and describe the kind of research produced by these institutions. If at all, some institutions have crafted its own research thrusts and others have extensively presented and published research outputs. But in terms of its contribution to nation-building for example, little is known about the impact of the discipline apart from the studies on media effects, communication patterns, social impact and trends and practices that are the subject and content of many research conferences organized by institutions and organizations such as the National Communication Research Conference (UP COMRES, PCS and PACE), Philippine Journalism Research Conference (UP, UST, PUP, AIJC), National Development Communication Conference (CDCEPP) and the Annual Research Conference (PACE)

If at all that there have been research about communication and media in the Philippines, only a handful are published or widely disseminated. For example, it is only in more recent times that media organizations themselves have tried to produce documentaries or write stories about its own media history, the events, the institutions and the personalities behind its growth, struggles and development. Though commendable, much still needs to be covered and done.

At the academic front, there seems to be a correlation and a variation on the level of productivity and scholarly endeavor among researchers. This is mostly evident on the resources that are allocated by more resourceful or resource-blessed institutions who are capable of funding research, and there are only a few educational institutions that have the capacity to do so. There is also the challenge of making historical research a priority, versus market-led or driven needs, popular culture, eccentric areas and policy obstacles.

Sadly, funding for research on communication and media is largely in the hands of the researchers themselves or is modestly subsidized. There may have been some philanthropic gifts here and there or commissioned studies by publishers or grants given by some government agencies like the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the National Historical Institute (NHI) or the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to name a few, but these are small. These are not enough to cover significant areas or substantial to produce ground breaking findings or to discover or re-discover new knowledge. In fact, in a recent evaluation of the National Higher Education Research Agenda of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), communication research is hardly cited as a resource or beneficiary of research funding, neither has its impact been acknowledged.

Although there are a number of institutions that have purposively done communication and media research, its quality is another story. In a study of typologies of higher education institutions (HEI), Bernardo (2003) as cited by Clemena and Acosta (2007) laments that only a handful of HEIs in the sample can be considered as research universities. In fact, only two HEIs met the criteria for doctoral/research university categories.

It is about time that independent and disparate efforts of conducting communication research be synthesized and synergized in order to come up with a more integrative, multi and cross disciplinary approach at studying communication and media.

In the case of media historical research for example, there are many media organizations and institutions in this country, but many of them have been unable to systematically take care of its own media products, records and artifacts. It is only in very recent times for example that a large media corporation has decided to put up its own museum for the many shows it has produced and memorabilia it has accumulated all these years. Sadly, even many of the large media associations and organizations do not have sufficient resources, expertise, time and space in order to handle their artifacts. This in itself can be a future project for collaboration. These organizations are also good starting points at looking at our media history. They are rich in experience, and resources, but their lack of technical know-how, capacity and capability at properly preserving these resources will endanger their legacy and contribution. In the long run, they might lose all of these to the elements of nature, time and neglect. This is the case of many of our classic films, now defunct publications, lost recordings of musicians and artists, destroyed, damaged or decaying media tools and equipment to name a few.

There is therefore a need for more scholars, partners and stakeholders to take on the responsibility of conducting research on communication and media issues and areas in the Philippines.

Developing and Defining a Philippine Communication Research Agenda

Several forums have been organized that sought to define a clear Philippine communication and media research agenda. Such endeavors have not been easy to convene and more so to arrive at a consensus on priorities areas and approaches. Critical areas include: what are the substance, types and parameters of communication and media research are we talking about? Which of these should be the focus of scholars doing work on and in the Philippines?

Agencies, sectors and institutions that have successfully adopted a research agenda manifested the following characteristic for its research agenda: it is coherent, extensive, inclusive, and exemplary.

Now is this possible? practicable? realizable? Different stakeholders must come to terms and consensus with these issues. There must be wide ranging consultation, and involvement of more stakeholders in order to arrive at a research agenda that is coherent, extensive, inclusive and exemplary.

In defining the research agenda, this paper takes cue from the work of Lugalambi (2009) who posits that in defining a research agenda, the following must be taken into consideration: the nature of the agenda, the shapers of the agenda, the motivations of the agenda and the issues of the agenda.

1. What is the Nature of the Agenda?

Given the diversity and complexity of Philippine society this can be seen as both a boon and a bane in terms of defining a Philippine communication research agenda. The dynamic relationship between media, government, civil society, the general public and other entities and institutions leads to various dichotomies in terms of the development and evolution of media in our society and the role and impact of communication. Since phenomenon are by definition multi-faceted, impacted by a host of influences and influencers ranging or coming from political, economic, cultural and technological spheres, media influences and affects these spheres. A communication research agenda would have to be likened to a dish called 'chopsuey', it has to be a melting pot of various characters and elements. For example, though mainstream media has largely been Westernized, there are pockets of local and indigenous media

systems that existed that deserve the same attention as the established mainstream. Methods should be a variety of qualitative and quantitative approaches, the many methods in the other social science disciplines will definitely help the researchers. Methods such as ethnography which is the forte of many development communication institutions and researchers can be one of those that can be utilized. Institutions with media studies programs should also use its research tools such as media archaeology in order to conduct media history research. Indeed, among the social science disciplines in the country, media research is among the under researched or less of the work of our scholars make it out of the bookshelves to be shared. But in the populist view, issues of media in society and in various aspects of public life have received a lot of attention.

Institutions and professional organizations such as the Philippine Association of Communication Educators (PACE) and the Philippines Communication Society (PCS) can also contribute to defining the nature of the agenda by organizing and gathering scholars, academics, teachers and other stakeholders in order to discuss, dialogue and debate research issues. This would hopefully lead to a more programmatic approach to research which in turn could lead to better a understanding and appreciation of our complexities, commonalities, and differences, further enhancement or diffusion of research skills, institutionalization of a research culture in the school curricula and even in the day-to-day work of a teacher and enhanced synergies among the different players and stakeholders.

2. Who are the Shapers of the Agenda?

Partners and stakeholders have their own priorities, thrusts, preferences for what should be the focus of the research agenda. These stakeholders come from a broad spectrum of society, all bringing their own agendas. Other key players will have to be identified and will be invited to come to the table to present their expectations, offer resources and discuss concerns. Those who come and commit support, express interest and contribute expertise and resources will influence the shape of the agenda. The key now is how to strike a balance, arrive at a consensus and come to terms with regards to plotting a clear course for the research agenda. These influencers will give recommendations and make decisions that will chart the direction of the research agenda. There will be issues on: turfing, egos, funding, incentives among others but these can all be discussed and resolved through dialogue.

3. What are the Motivations for the Agenda?

This key question of who shapes and who sets the agenda must be answered honestly by all the stakeholders. Transparency is key if there will be a concerted and well-coordinated agenda. Some motivations will be driven by need, others by want and others by a combination of both. What needs to be taken into consideration is of course the needs and interests of the researchers themselves. This will be the single most important driving point that will lead to the production of relevant and responsive research. Which in some cases is watered downed or compromised due to a variety of factors (.e.g. time, resources, lack of expertise etc.)

There will be issue such as the complain of research users especially those in industry and policy makers that academic research is irrelevant. It is of course not just with our discipline. The key here is critical engagement of all stakeholders. It cannot be avoidance, it cannot be distrust and it cannot be to each his own. If we are to push for a realistic and practical research agenda, all players must be open to listen to each other and to talk constructively about their needs and wants for the agenda.

One of the recurrent themes in these debates is that researchers should be sensitive to the needs of individuals and industries that might use their research.

Politicians in particular are increasingly demanding that researchers be responsive to prescribed public goals. This is not merely a matter of value for money. Politicians and policy makers are demanding that publicly funded research should answer to national objectives such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and government's own poverty reduction strategies. To the extent that media and communication researchers can demonstrate ways their work can effectively improve the performance of these institutions, however that performance is conceptualized and measured, the field will gain more respect among those we expect to apply its accumulated knowledge. While it is necessary to maintain a respectable distance from the industry and the policy bureaucracy to ensure scholarly autonomy, some scholars have gone overboard by distrusting these institutions on impulse and suspecting their motives with ideological zeal. Critical engagement would be preferable as it would provide a sound foundation for reciprocal appreciation of each other's roles.

4. What are the Issues on the Agenda?

A comprehensive review and assessment of national development policy goals, issues of public interest, critical issues concerning media are to be balanced with organizational goals of all stakeholders involved in the process.

Stakeholders must identify which areas are in dire need of research or are under researched. Consequently the skills and knowledge base of participants, practitioners, educators, students and policy makers will have to be enhanced.

Suggested Activities and Initiatives

At the interim, what can be done in order to address the need for a more comprehensive communication research agenda? Here are some suggestions.

The approach to answering this question must be multi-pronged. It has to be a collaboration among concerned groups and institutions, some policy review and changes, the development of a clear research agenda and the crafting of concrete action plans.

It cannot just be via the scholarly avenue wherein academics produce research as an output of completion of graduate degrees or in the conduct of institutionally commissioned or external or independently funded research. Scholarly work must also be clear about the media fields and disciplines that it will cover. These parameters must be defined or at least characterized.

An approach that offers a lot of potential is action-oriented research. This can be a good training ground to do scholarly research and for the teachers this makes a lot of practical sense. These are curriculum infused or fueled activities that can be research-backed or driven. For example, in an introduction to media studies class, students can be tasked to collect media artifacts, in an editorial management class, students can be tasked and be exposed to different media organizations, in a public relations class, students can be tasked to look for media personalities and do a extensive profile about them or even organize an event to showcase their work or to honor them. In a development communication subject, students can look into various forms of community media and do an extensive profile about them. In an advertising class, students can look into various types of advertisements found in various media channels and study them. The options and possibilities are endless. In fact, many teachers have already been doing some of these activities. What we need is to align them with a clear research agenda and to direct the activities towards contributing to the fulfillment of the agenda. If this is done it will make the experience

with our students o journey into the realm of discovering and rediscovering our storied media past enjoyable and meaningful.

Another approach is to go beyond our comfort zones and collaborate and partner with other entities in the school, community and society at large. There are many opportunities that can be explored on this.

At the institutional level there are several activities and approaches that can also be done. For example: inclusion of research on communication and media in the school, college or departmental research thrust or agenda. Since schools accumulate a lot of student outputs and projects, why not establish a media museum (real or virtual) to put these outputs on display? It can be interactive to that visitors can get to experience these media artifacts. Rethink about throwing away your enlargers in favor of the digital cameras, the various media storage formats from the floppy, micro discs, 45” and 60”, turntables etc. These may look old, obsolete, archaic or junk to some, but these artifacts have so much to show and tell the present and next generations. Preserve them, keep them working and running. Put up a media lab or a media archaeological museum or lab for these instruments and tools to find a new home, to continue to breath life and continue to teach us where we come from and what it was like during its heydays.

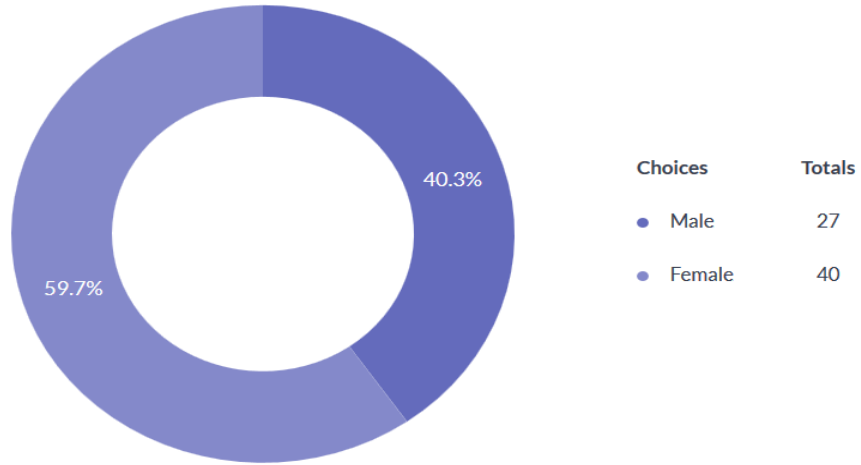
Such may be the state of communication and media research that there is a need to conduct more vigorous and rigorous research in order to justify policy improvements or to demonstrate to society (not just the politicians) the intrinsic value of communication and media to society.

The Survey of Communication Schools on the National Communication Research Agenda

A 16 item questionnaire was administered using surveyplanet.com and was sent via email and facebook posts to the respondents for a period of five weeks. The results were tabulated and analyzed. The following are the highlights of the survey.

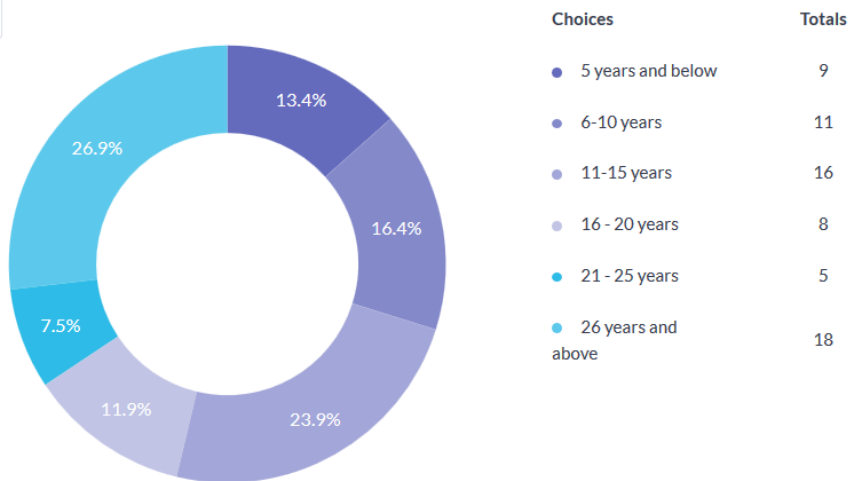
A total of 220 respondents were contact, 67 answered the instrument for a response rate of 30.45%. Majority of the respondents were female, 40 or 59.7% as compared to male respondents, 27 or 40.3%.

Q1 Gender
Multiple Choice



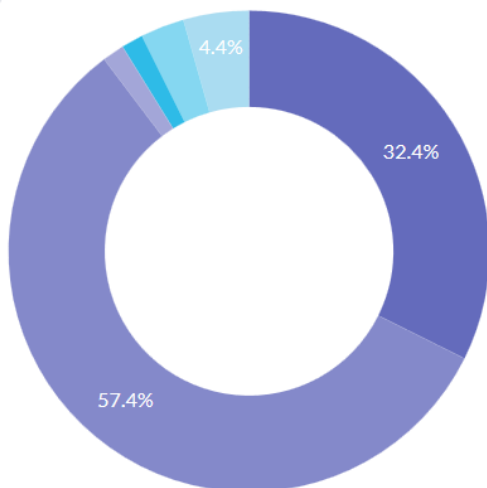
Majority of the respondents have been with the academe for more than five years.

Q2 Number of years with the academe/industry
Multiple Choice



Majority of the respondents came from Private Higher Education Institutions (39 or 57.4%) and State Colleges and Universities (22 or 32.4%).

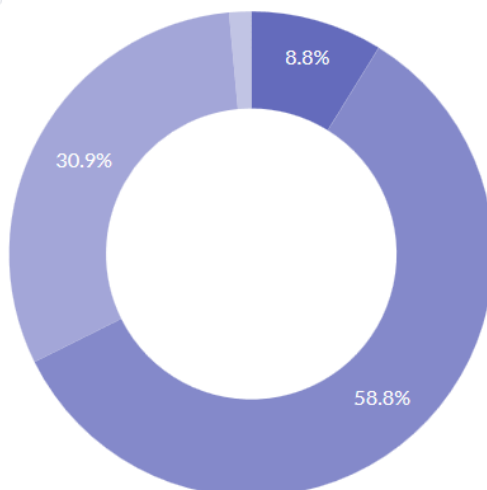
Q3 Please select the type of institution you are currently most affiliated with
Multiple Choice



Choices	Totals
State College/University	22
Private College/University	39
Local College/University	1
Other Educational Institution	0
Government Agency	1
Private Corporation	0
Professional Organization	2

Majority of the respondents have advanced degrees either a master's (40 or 58.8%) or doctorate degree 21 (30.9%).

Q4 Please select the option that reflects the highest level of education you have completed:
Multiple Choice



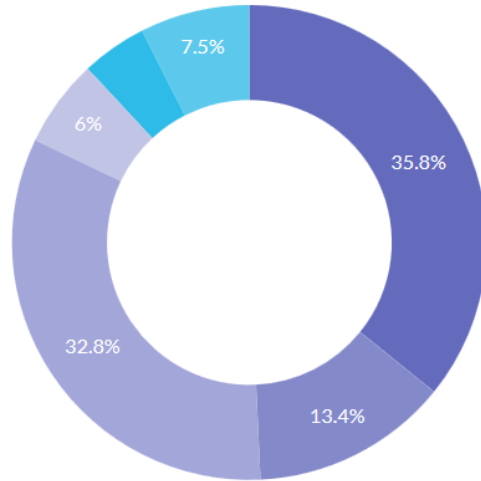
Choices	Totals
Bachelor's Degree	6
Master's Degree	40
Doctorate Degree	21
Other	1

Though many of the respondents were full-time faculty (24 or 35.8%) a good number were Program or Unit Heads or Coordinators or Chairs (22 or 32.8%).

Q5

Please tell us about your role at your institution/organization.

Multiple Choice



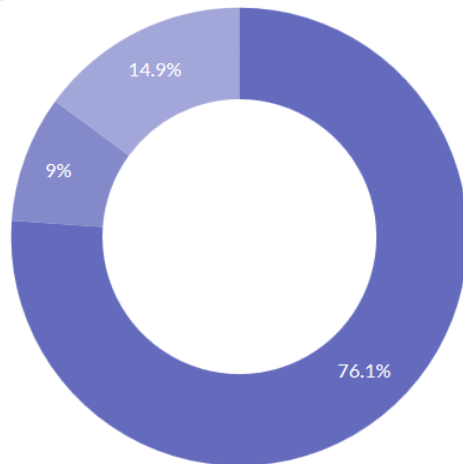
Choices	Totals
● Full-time Faculty	24
● Part-time Faculty	9
● Program Head/Coordinator/Chair	22
● College/Institute Dean	4
● Research Coordinator/Head	3
● Other	5

Majority of the respondents (51 or 76.1%) said that their institution has a research agenda or masterplan.

Q6

Does your institution (school/college/university/organization) have a research agenda/master plan?

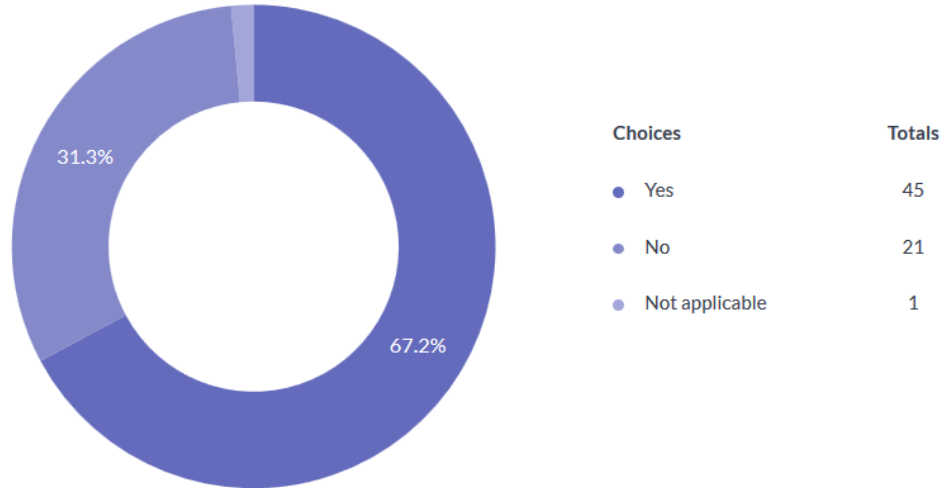
Multiple Choice



Choices	Totals
● Yes	51
● No	6
● I don't know	10

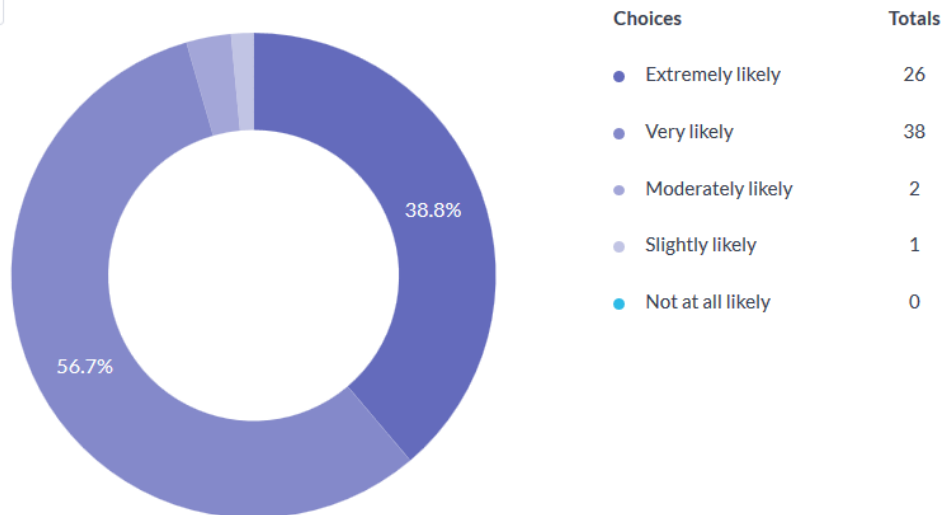
The figure however moderately declined when asked if their program/unit has its own communication/media research agenda (45 out of 67 respondents). Of the 21 who said they do not have a program/research agenda, majority are from private higher education institutions (13 of 21).

Q7 Does your program/unit have a communication/media research agenda?
Multiple Choice



When asked about the likelihood of they personally supporting a National Communication Research Agenda, majority (38 out of 67) said that they will very likely support a NCRA.

Q8 How likely will you personally support a National Communication Research Agenda?
Multiple Choice

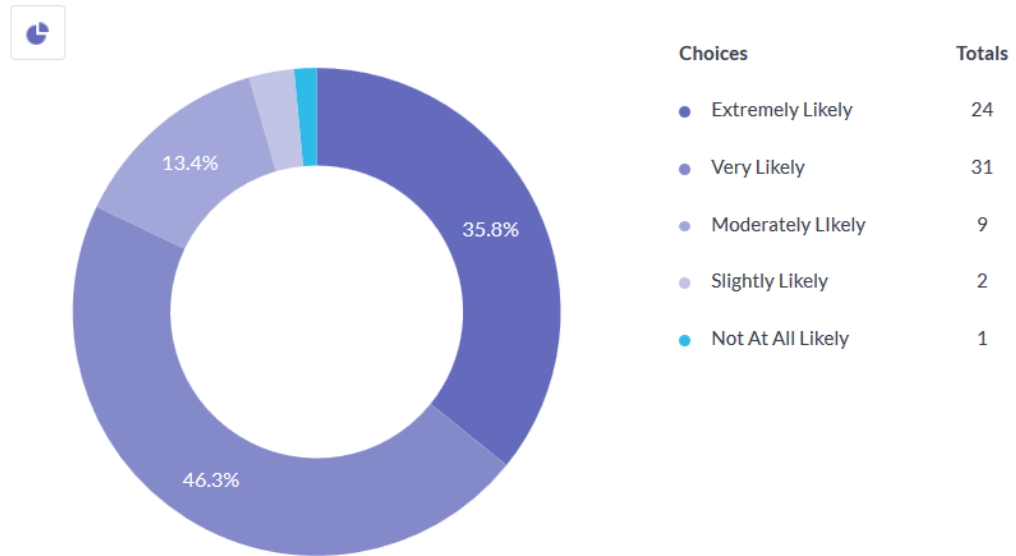


With respect to their institution's research priorities or in case of those that do not have a research agenda, respondents identified various priority areas or topics. The topics that got the most number of mentions are: communication, education, practice and pedagogy (26 or 38.81%) of respondents mentioning it. This was followed by Information and Communication Technology (24 or 35.82%) and Media-related (23 or 34.33%).

Research Priority Areas	Frequency	Percentage
Communication Education, Practice & Pedagogy	26	38.81
Information and Communication Technology	24	35.82
Media/Media-related	23	34.33
Advocacy Communication	21	31.34
Risk, Disaster Management, Climate Change	18	26.87
S&T	16	23.88

The same is true on the respondents view if their institution will support a NCRA. Majority (31 out of 67) said that their institution will very likely support a NCRA.

Q10 How likely will your institution support a National Communication Research Agenda?
Multiple Choice



In terms of priority research areas for the National Communication Research Agenda, the many respondents identified media and media related topics (28 or 41,79%), Information and Communication Technologies (21 or 31.34%) and Communication Education including practices and pedagogy (16 or 23.88%) as the top three suggested research areas.

Priority Areas or Topics for the NCRA

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Media	28	41.79
ICT	21	31.34
Communication Education	16	23.88
Governance, Policy	14	20.90
Climate Change, Disaster & Risk Communication	12	17.91
Advocacies and Communication	12	17.91
Development Communication	11	16.42
Family & Gender	11	16.42
Arts & Culture	10	14.93

With respect to possible issues, challenges and barriers to the realization of a National Communication Research Agenda, the respondents identified many concerns and they were clustered according to the following: possible differences or diversity in research priorities and perspectives (36 or 53.73%), resource and funding limitations (31 or 46.27%), politics or lack of political will to implement the NCRA (20 or 29.85%) and lack of skills and capability of researchers (19 or 28.36%).

Issues, Challenges or Barriers to a NCRA

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Different, Diverse Priorities & Perspectives	36	53.73
Budget, Funding & Resource Limitations	31	46.27
Politics & Political Will to Implement	20	29.85
Lack of Capacity, Skills & Expertise	19	28.36

As part of the ongoing process for the drafting of the NCRA, the researcher intends to meet or organize discussion with various key industry associations and professional groups such as the following:

- CDCEPP - Consortium of Development Communicators, Educators and Practitioners of the Philippines
- PCS - Philippines Communication Society
- KBP - Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas
- PRSP - Public Relations Society of the Philippines
- PIA - Philippine Information Agency
- PPI - Philippine Press Institute
- Adboard - Advertising Board of the Philippines
- PELS - Philippine E-learning Society
- FDC - Film Development Council of the Philippines
- NRCP - National Research Council of the Philippines
- CHED - Commission on Higher Education
- UMPG - United Print Media Group
- MORES - Marketing Opinion and Research Organization of the Philippines

Issues for Further Discussion

In closing this paper, some additional points and questions need to be raised. For example, are we just to focus on communication and media only, which communication or media are we referring to? How does it play out in the equation of the agenda? With the advent of new information and communication technologies, this has led to convergence, fragmentation and increasing complexity of media organizations, systems, products, processes and enterprises. The blending of practice and theory has resulted to complementing or confusing views. This is largely due to the wide and diverging definitions and conceptualizations of media and communication.

As a caveat it must be noted that such openness, expansiveness and inclusiveness can also lead to multiplicity of themes, frameworks, and methods among others. But if these will lead to increased interest and increased output of scholarly and practical output for documenting, telling and sharing our experiences of media and the dynamics of communication then it would be good to see theories, paradigms, concepts challenged by our scholars, researchers, students and other stakeholders for this could lead to new areas of research, or a better understanding of ourselves and our world.

Part of the challenge too in defining the Philippine communication research agenda is ensuring the quality of the scholarly output, that ethical practice is observed, and that the agenda must constantly be revisited in order to be mindful of the changing mediascape and socialscape.

Furthermore, what is the Philippine perspective in terms of the media research agenda? The answer lies in the hands of the Filipino scholars working in collaboration with other scholars. We must offer our own grounded, local, indigenous applications and interpretations. It must be based on our realities, our experiences so that the resulting agenda and body of work is responsive and relevant.

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