Media Framing of Disaster Responses in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how selected Philippine online news outlets, such as ABS-CBN, GMA, and Rappler, present government responses to natural disasters. It uses content analysis and draws on media framing to examine how the government and disaster-affected people are portrayed in news stories about disaster events. The study focuses on three areas: the patterns of government response, the types of frames and tones used in the coverage, and the sources cited in the stories. A total of 60 online news articles were analyzed, covering four major natural disasters between 2014 and 2020. The findings show that government actions reported in the news mostly fall within the preparedness and response stages of disaster management. It was also found that the most common frame is the attribution of responsibility. In terms of tone, local government actions are generally reported in a positive way, while national government actions are often framed as inadequate or slow. This difference reflects how proximity and visibility influence the portrayal of leadership during disasters. The analysis also shows that the news reports rely heavily on official voices such as government leaders, professionals, and representatives of non-government organizations. Voices of affected residents, local communities, and ordinary citizens are largely absent. This pattern suggests that media coverage tends to present disasters from a top-down perspective. The examination of these framing practices also contributes to ongoing discussions about media and governance in the Philippines, especially on how news reporting shapes public understanding of government actions during times of crisis. Through this analysis, the study also contributes to the sociology of disaster by demonstrating how disaster reporting in the Philippines reflects underlying political dynamics.

Keywords*:* disaster, government response, media framing, media tone

INTRODUCTION

Media coverage of events and crises worldwide is central to how people construct their knowledge and attitudes about them. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media does not merely reflect societal events but actively shapes and constructs social reality by determining which issues are newsworthy. This agenda-setting function of the media is critical in times of disaster when public understanding of the situation is largely dependent on the media's portrayal. However, media outlets face significant limitations, including time constraints, access to sources, and resource allocation (Allan 2013). Consequently, the portrayal of disasters often suffers from incomplete or biased reporting, as journalists prioritize stories that will attract the largest audiences. These constraints frequently manifest in how the media frames disasters, influencing public perception and potentially obscuring critical aspects of the event.

Disaster reporting is frequently shaped by media judgments regarding newsworthiness, which are influenced by broader social and political dynamics (Tierney, Bevc, and Kuligowski 2006). News outlets tend to focus on dramatic or sensational aspects of disasters, such as human suffering or property damage, at the expense of covering long-term recovery efforts or root causes (Boin et al. 2005; Moncada, Martinez-Villegas, and Perez 2023). This selective framing, often unnoticed by the public, has significant implications for how audiences assign responsibility and evaluate government responses. Media portrayals can reinforce or undermine public trust in institutions depending on how tone is used to convey competence, empathy, or failure (Sapir 2022).

With this, the present study focuses on content analysis of disaster reporting in selected online news outlets in the Philippines. This analysis is particularly important given the country's vulnerability to natural disasters such as typhoons, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, and the media's crucial role in shaping public response to these events. The study examines how media outlets frame government responses to disasters, with a specific focus on how tone is used to differentiate between local and national responses. This approach is parallel with the work of Quarantelli (1981, 1987), who has long argued that media portrayals are critical in influencing societal reactions to disasters, including preparedness, mitigation, and recovery efforts.

Moreover, understanding how natural disasters are framed by the media is essential for developing a sociological perspective on disasters. According to media framing theory, the media often select certain aspects of perceived reality and highlight them to promote a particular problem definition or interpretation (de Vries 2004). When coverage disproportionately emphasizes sensational elements, such as political blame games or elite conflicts, it can overshadow more practical concerns like preparedness and mitigation (Houston et al. 2012). Building on this, the present study seeks to contribute to the sociology of disaster by revealing the political dimensions of disaster reporting in the Philippines. In doing so, it takes a crucial step toward mediating the often problematic relationship between media organizations and social scientists, who have long criticized the media's tendency to prioritize drama over substance (Rodríguez, Quarantelli, and Dynes 2007).

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study seeks to encourage social action among media practitioners, policymakers, and disaster management professionals. It argues that online media outlets should focus on delivering clear, actionable information during disasters, rather than

emphasizing political controversy. By shifting toward coverage that highlights disaster preparedness and recovery, the media can play a constructive role in mitigating the social and economic impacts of disasters in the Philippines. Moreover, a stronger cooperation between media organizations, local governments, and civil society is essential for improving disaster response strategies.

The overarching question guiding this study is: How does the media frame and politicize natural disasters in the Philippines? To answer this, the study is structured around the following specific research questions: (1) Who are the primary sources of information (e.g., ordinary citizens, government officials, experts) used by the media in disaster reporting? (2) What media frames are commonly used in online news coverage of natural disasters in the Philippines? (3) What tone do media outlets employ when reporting on government responses to natural disasters? and (4) What patterns of government response are presented in online news reports during disasters?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to uncover the underlying dynamics of media framing in disaster reporting, which can provide insights that can inform both academic scholarship and practical approaches to disaster management. Overall, it advocates for a more nuanced understanding of the role of media in disaster response, one that prioritizes preparedness and recovery over sensationalism and political conflict. However, I do not aim to remove the news regarding political conflict, as its absence would reduce the accountability of politicians during disasters. Rather, my aim is to highlight the importance of maintaining responsibility while promoting more solution-oriented reporting.

MEDIA FRAMING OF DISASTERS, TONAL BIAS, AND THE COMMAND POST POINT OF VIEW

The literature on disasters highlights three key themes in understanding media coverage. First, media framing shapes how disasters are interpreted by emphasizing certain issues, such as responsibility or preparedness, while minimizing others. Second, tone influences how government response is perceived, often portraying local officials more positively and national authorities more critically. Third, the command post point of view perspective emphasized the dominance of official and institutional voices in reporting, which limits the visibility of community experiences. Together, these themes show how disaster news constructs narratives that shape public perception and political accountability.

Media Framing in Disaster Reporting

De Vries (2004) explains that media framing involves emphasizing specific elements of reality in order to guide how people understand problems, assign causes, make moral judgments, and consider viable solutions. In disaster reporting, the framing of news is especially significant because it shapes how the public interprets the event, evaluates government performance, and understands appropriate responses. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five common frames used in news coverage, each with unique implications:

1. Attribution of Responsibility Frame—This frame presents an issue or problem in a way that assigns responsibility to individuals, groups, or institutions. In disasters, the media often use

this frame to either blame or credit governmental bodies for preparedness and response efforts.

2. Conflict Frame—This highlights conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions. For disasters, this can manifest in narratives of tension between national and local governments, or between the government and affected communities.

3. Human Interest Frame—This focuses on personal and emotional angles, often featuring victim stories to humanize the crisis and elicit empathy.

4. Economic Consequences Frame—This addresses the financial impact of a disaster on individuals, businesses, and government budgets.

5. Morality Frame—This includes moral or ethical evaluations, often invoking religious or cultural values to contextualize the disaster or response.

Recent scholarship demonstrates the continued relevance of these frames across different media contexts. For example, Rosemary et al. (2023) found that online media coverage of earthquakes and tsunamis in Indonesia frequently emphasized government shortcomings, material losses, and the suffering of victims, with more negative framing dominating. They also found that disaster preparedness messages tended to use religious perspectives more than scientific ones. However, coverage placed less emphasis on scientific preparedness details or discussion of long-term disaster risk reduction programs. Similarly, Hoon, Lim, and Mei (2022) found that humanitarian organizations on social media employed human-interest framing through visual storytelling, particularly images of victims and frontline workers, to increase public engagement. Notably, images that projected hope and resilience generated stronger responses than those that emphasized despair.

Emerging platforms have further diversified framing practices. Kim et al. (2022) found that gain-framed messages were more effective than loss-framed ones in encouraging users to share disaster-related posts, with perspective (first-person vs. third person) interacting differently depending on the framing. These studies collectively illustrate how framing choices not only influence public perception but also shape emotional engagement, political accountability, and civic action in the aftermath of disasters. Moreover, the rise of social media has blurred the boundary between professional and citizen-led reporting, allowing emotionally charged, grassroots narratives to circulate more rapidly. As a result, the practice of framing in disaster coverage increasingly reflects not only journalistic decisions but also the participatory practices of online communities.

Media Tone and Public Perception of Government Response

The tone of media coverage, understood as the emotional or evaluative character of a message, plays a crucial role in shaping how the public perceives government performance during disasters. Tone is often classified into three broad categories: positive, negative, and neutral (Cardwell and Cowan 2023). A *positive tone* conveys competence, reassurance, and empathy, often highlighting successful actions such as efficient evacuations or well-organized relief operations. A *negative tone* signals criticism, failure, or negligence, drawing attention to delays, scandals, or inadequate preparation. Meanwhile, a *neutral tone* delivers factual information without overt emotional or

evaluative judgment, typically associated with brief reports or official announcements. These tonal choices not only frame governmental action but also influence levels of trust, compliance, and engagement among affected populations.

In their content analysis of the U.S. newspapers covering Hurricane Harvey (2017–18), Ali and Gill (2022) found notable differences in media tone toward different levels of government during Hurricane Harvey. Across the articles, the overall tone toward government responses was nearly balanced. However, the federal government was portrayed somewhat more negatively. By contrast, state and local governments were depicted in a slightly more favorable light. These findings suggest that while coverage of government responses was not overwhelmingly critical, federal agencies were more likely to be framed as ineffective, whereas state and local officials were more often described as prepared and active.

The Philippine context reflects similar dynamics but with distinct nuances. Local media outlets sometimes employed cautious or restrained tones, partly due to political sensitivities and media ownership structures. However, the rise of social media has broadened the tonal spectrum, creating space for alternative voices and more emotionally charged narratives. Overall, tone does more than color narratives of disaster. It actively shapes emotional reactions, trust in institutions, and patterns of civic engagement. Positive or hopeful tones can mobilize communities, strengthen resilience, and promote compliance with risk reduction measures. Conversely, sustained negative tones, particularly when they highlight shortcomings without offering constructive alternatives, may deepen public cynicism or apathy toward government action. Neutral tones, while intending to convey objectivity, can also downplay urgency and fail to capture the human dimensions of disaster. These insights suggest that tone operates as a subtle but powerful tool through which media influence not only how disasters are understood but also how societies respond to them.

Command Post Point of View in Media and Disaster Studies

The command post point of view, a term introduced by Quarantelli (1981), describes a scenario where disaster officials control the flow of information to the media and researchers, shaping a narrative that aligns with official perspectives. This approach often results in disaster reporting that emphasizes the actions and viewpoints of authorities, potentially marginalizing the experiences and voices of affected communities.

In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda), which struck the Philippines on November 8, 2013, analyses of media coverage revealed a strong reliance on government sources. Haiyan, one of the most powerful tropical cyclones ever recorded, first made landfall in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, and then moved across the Eastern Visayas region, causing catastrophic damage in cities such as Tacloban. The storm produced sustained strong winds, massive storm surges, and heavy rainfall, leading to thousands of deaths, injuries to tens of thousands, and affecting more than 14 million people. Infrastructure damage was extensive, with over one million houses destroyed, major roads blocked, airports damaged, and critical agricultural and fisheries sectors devastated (World Vision 2023).

Within this context, Lim, Ngoi, and Tan (2015) found that local government officials were overwhelmingly the most cited sources in Haiyan coverage (45.6%), far exceeding NGOs (9.6%) and

other groups. In contrast, victims, eyewitnesses, and local residents accounted for only a small fraction of the cited voices, highlighting the relative marginalization of affected communities in media reporting. This pattern reflects the dominance of official narratives in disaster reporting, a dynamic aligned with the "command post point of view" described by Quarantelli (1981), where authorities control information flow and shape public understanding of disaster events.

The dominance of official voices was also evident in the health communication strategies employed during Haiyan. Cool et al. (2015) documented how the World Health Organization and national health authorities utilized social media primarily to amplify official advisories and preparedness messages. While this provided important public health information, it nonetheless foregrounded institutional authority and offered limited space for the narratives of communities themselves.

Furthermore, Takahashi, Tandoc, and Carmichael (2015) found that during Typhoon Haiyan, a large portion of Twitter communication consisted of second-hand information (e.g., relaying news or organizational updates), while first-hand reports from those directly affected were relatively rare. As a result, community or individual voices were underrepresented compared to institutional or organizational sources, which featured more prominently in the Twitter discourse. This structural limitation further entrenched the visibility of official sources and diminished opportunities to document community-led coping and resilience.

These findings highlight the nature of the command post point of view in disaster reporting. By privileging institutional actors, media and humanitarian communication risk overlooking the perspectives of those most directly impacted. Addressing this requires deliberate efforts from journalists, humanitarian agencies, and researchers to include grassroots accounts and community knowledge. Doing so can challenge the dominance of official narratives and contribute to more inclusive and accurate representations of disasters.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the media framing strategies employed by online media outlets in the Philippines in their coverage of natural disasters from 2014 to 2020. The focus is specifically on how these media outlets frame government responses to disaster events, with the goal of identifying the framing techniques and tones that shape public understanding of these responses. To achieve this, content analysis is employed as the primary research method. Content analysis involves the careful, systematic examination of recorded information, such as news articles, to identify recurring patterns, themes, and meanings. This method is widely used in media studies to explore various forms of communication, including news articles, television broadcasts, and social media posts. In this study, content analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of how media outlets construct narratives around government actions during times of disaster.

The data for this study consists of online news articles published between 2014 and 2020, specifically focusing on significant natural disasters in the Philippines. These events were selected based on their impact, as measured by the number of casualties and economic loss, and include Typhoon Glenda (2014), the Taal Volcanic Eruption (2020), Typhoon Ulysses (2020), and Super Typhoon Rolly (2020). Articles related to these events were gathered from three major Philippine

news outlets: GMA News, ABS-CBN, and Rappler. GMA News is a major television network with extensive national coverage and a strong online presence, offering news through both broadcast and digital platforms. ABS-CBN is another leading television network known for its wide-reaching news reporting on both traditional and digital media. Rappler, in contrast, operates online, producing news content with a focus on digital audiences and social media engagement. All three outlets are among the top ten most trusted news sources in the Philippines, with substantial social media reach and accessible online reporting.

The selection of these articles was guided by specific inclusion criteria: the article must focus on a natural disaster, must mention at least one government response, and must contain a direct quotation or interview with an individual. This approach ensures that the study captures media narratives that involve both official actions and personal accounts of the disaster's impact.

The analysis itself combines both manifest and latent content analysis. Manifest content refers to the explicit elements of the articles, such as cited sources, factual statements, and quotes, while latent content focuses on the deeper, often implicit meanings conveyed through tone and framing. The analysis follows a systematic process of inductive coding, where significant statements from the articles are categorized and labeled based on emerging themes related to the government's response and the overall tone of the coverage. These codes are then refined through an iterative process to ensure they accurately reflect the content of the articles.

By examining both the explicit and implicit elements of the media coverage, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the media frames government responses to disasters. Through this approach, the study will offer valuable insights into the role of media in shaping public perceptions of disaster management, as well as the broader implications for future disaster response and recovery efforts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Source Bias in Disaster Reporting

An analysis of the 60 online news articles reviewed in this study reveals a clear institutional bias in source selection, with government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and professionals serving as the dominant voices across disaster narratives. Table 1 shows that government sources were the most frequently cited, followed by NGOs, disaster management agencies, and police or military personnel. In contrast, voices from ordinary citizens and community leaders were cited less in the online news. This disproportionate reliance on official and professional perspectives confirms earlier findings by Lim, Ngoi, and Tan (2015), who noted the media's tendency to favor institutional actors for their perceived authority and access to information. It also reflects the long-standing patterns identified by Tuchman (1978) and Gans (1979), who documented how news routines structurally privilege elite sources overlay voices in everyday journalism.

The underrepresentation of citizens, particularly those from vulnerable communities, points to what Quarantelli (1981) describes as the command post point of view of disaster reporting. This model centers official narratives and institutional responses, often at the expense of capturing the first-hand experiences and challenges faced by disaster survivors. By framing disasters primarily

through the lens of formal governance and emergency management, media narratives risk reinforcing top-down storytelling that overlooks grassroots perspectives. Such an approach marginalizes the very individuals most affected by disasters, undermining the role of journalism in giving voice to the voiceless and potentially skewing public understanding of the social realities on the ground. In doing so, this sourcing pattern not only perpetuates information hierarchies but also reflects and reproduces broader societal inequalities in access to media representation.

Source type	Frequency
Government Officials (Local/National)	42
Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)	24
Disaster Management Agencies (e.g., NDRRMC, DRRM Offices, etc.)	18
Police or Military Personnel	14
Scientist/Experts (Meteorologist, Engineers, etc.)	11
Affected Citizens	6
Community Leaders (e.g., barangay captains, local elders)	5
Journalists (as first-hand observers)	4
Religious or Faith-Based Leaders	2
Others (e.g., business owners, volunteers)	3

Table 1. Sources of Selected News Article. Sources: ABS-CBN News, GMA, Rappler.
Note: Articles may contain multiple sources. Thus, the total exceeds 60.

Recent studies have further highlighted the implications of this sourcing imbalance. For instance, Figueroa (2022) examined newspaper coverage of Hurricane Harvey and found that journalists' reliance on predominantly white authority figures, such as first responders and government officials, led to the perpetuation of damaging racial and gender stereotypes. The study noted that people of color were often portrayed as victims, while white individuals were depicted as rescuers, reinforcing false narratives about communities of color and federal systems.

In the context of Japan, Okumura et al. (2019) analyzed media coverage of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and found that Japanese media primarily conveyed official information from the government and power industry, rather than seeking alternative sources to assess the seriousness of radiation exposure. The study emphasized that Japanese media often view their role as cooperating with the government during emergencies, even if this means sacrificing their watchdog function.

These findings highlighted the need for more inclusive sourcing practices in disaster reporting. By incorporating the perspectives of ordinary citizens and marginalized communities, the media can provide a more comprehensive and authentic portrayal of disaster impacts. Such inclusivity not only enriches the narrative but also enhances the public's understanding of the full spectrum of disaster experiences, contributing to more effective and equitable disaster risk governance.

Media Frames in Disaster News: The Attribution of Responsibility Frame

This study analyzed online news articles from major Philippine news outlets, published between 2014 and 2020, focusing on significant disaster events such as Typhoon Glenda (2014), Typhoon Ulysses (2020), Super Typhoon Rolly (2020), and the Taal Volcano Eruption (2020). The analysis revealed that the attribution of responsibility frame was among the most prevalent across the sample. The attribution of responsibility frame assigns blame or credit to specific actors, most frequently the government, for the causes or consequences of a disaster (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000). For instance, a Rappler article on Typhoon Ulysses emphasized the government's inadequate preparation and inter-agency coordination, assigning blame to both local and national authorities (Rappler 2020a).

Similarly, an ABS-CBN report on Super Typhoon Rolly highlighted the government's accountability in mitigating disaster impacts and addressing the urgent needs of affected communities. An official statement from the Palace assured the public of ongoing relief operations: "Tiniyak ng Malacañang...na hindi pababayaan ng gobyerno na magutom ang mga residente ng Catanduanes..." [Transl.: Malacañang assured that the government will not let the residents of Catanduanes go hungry.] (ABS-CBN 2020a). This statement reflects how the government sought to project an image of responsiveness and empathy, framing its role as a protector of vulnerable populations during a crisis.

In contrast, a GMA News article emphasized public frustration with the perceived sluggishness of national action. The report noted, "President Rodrigo Duterte insisted... that the government was not slow to respond... after it seemingly took cries for help from residents to bring national government attention..." (GMA 2020a). The phrasing of this statement illustrates how the media spotlighted tensions between official reassurances and citizens' lived experiences, subtly questioning the credibility of government claims. By juxtaposing public appeals with official denials, the report framed the response as reactive rather than proactive, reinforcing skepticism toward national leadership during disasters.

Among the six commonly identified frames in media studies, the prominence of the attribution frame in this study aligns with earlier research that has highlighted its centrality in disaster coverage. However, the findings from this research diverge from Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) conclusions, where the conflict frame was observed as more persistently applied. This difference suggests that Philippine disaster reporting leans less on framing disasters as clashes between actors and more on assigning responsibility, whether in terms of praise or blame.

The dominance of the attribution frame emphasized a recurring pattern in Philippine media, which is the politicization of disaster response. Reports frequently foreground government actions across preparation, response, and recovery stages, shifting the focus of public discourse from the lived experiences of affected communities and long-term resilience to questions of performance, accountability, and political leadership. Such framing, while highlighting urgent governance issues, risks narrowing the public imagination of disasters to a political scorecard rather than a social and humanitarian challenge.

This framing has broader implications for how audiences perceive both disasters and governance. As Albrecht (2017) argues, media framing is not merely descriptive but shapes public

opinion and influences political behavior during crises. By consistently spotlighting governmental shortcomings or delays, media outlets can reinforce public skepticism and feed into politicized narratives that overshadow collaborative solutions. At the same time, this may weaken public engagement in disaster preparedness and recovery efforts, as crises are viewed less as collective challenges and more as arenas of political contestation.

Local government being the savior VS National government being the free rider
The online media in the Philippines adopts distinct tones when reporting on local versus national government responses to disasters. In coverage of local responses, reports often highlight positive aspects, portraying local efforts as effective and proactive in mitigating the adverse impacts of disasters. This favorable tone is reflected in how local government units (LGUs) are credited for their timely actions, community-based interventions, and visible leadership during crises.

For instance, Rappler's reporting on Typhoon Ulysses commended the efforts of LGUs, highlighting that they had been actively responding to multiple crises despite limited resources and the pressures of the concurrent COVID-19 pandemic. The article notes:

> Monilla passed the buck to the local government units (LGUs), saying they cannot 'micromanage' LGUs. 'Yung pag-a-alarm po o pagbibigay ng abiso sa ating mga kababayan, nakasalalay po 'yan sa ating mga local government units because they have prepared this contingency plan,' [Transl.: The task of raising alarms or giving advisories to our fellow citizens depends on our local government units because they have prepared this contingency plan,] Monilla said. But LGUs have been at the front line all year long, responding to back-to-back crises such as the pandemic and the previous storms. (Rappler 2020b)

By highlighting the resilience and commitment of LGUs, the report positioned local leaders as the backbone of disaster management.

A similar narrative appeared in ABS-CBN's coverage of Typhoon Glenda in Albay. The outlet emphasized how proactive local actions directly reduced casualties, stating: "Dahil sa maagap na pagkilos, nakamit ng lalawigan ng Albay ang kanilang layunin na walang masawi sa hagupit ng bagyong Glenda. [Transl.: Because of prompt action, the province of Albay achieved its goal of zero casualties during the onslaught of Typhoon Glenda.]" (ABS-CBN News 2014). In this statement, the emphasis on "maagap na pagkilos" (prompt action) framed LGUs as capable and efficient, reinforcing a narrative of local competence in protecting communities.

Rappler's coverage of the Taal Volcanic Eruption carried the same tone, stressing logistical support and inter-local cooperation: "Local government units in and outside of Batangas province are doing their part to help the affected communities and evacuees amid the ongoing eruption of the Taal Volcano" (Rappler 2020c). In this way, LGUs were consistently depicted not only as responsive but also as collaborative, capable of mobilizing collective action across local boundaries.

In contrast, media reports on national government responses typically portrayed them as inadequate, delayed, or reactive. This critical framing often pointed to a lack of empathy,

transparency, or readiness, highlighting leadership gaps at the national level. For example, Rappler's coverage of Typhoon Ulysses quoted Sorsogon Governor Francis "Chiz" Escudero, who bluntly expressed the need for stronger national leadership: "Former senator and now Sorsogon Governor Francis' Chiz' Escudero said the 'national government should step up.' 'Sorry, but the National Government should step up to the plate on disaster response and should show more empathy to the victims of recent calamities,' Escudero said in a Facebook post" (Rappler 2020b). By spotlighting Escudero's criticism, the report framed the national government as absent and emotionally detached in its response.

These examples reveal a consistent dichotomy in Philippine disaster reporting. While local governments are framed as effective, initiative-taking, and close to their communities, the national government is often depicted as reactive, distant, and politically insulated. In contrast, Brunken's (2006) analysis of Hurricane Katrina coverage found that federal authorities were portrayed more positively than local actors, whose actions were often framed more negatively**.** The Philippine case presents an inverted dynamic, where local responses are cast in a more favorable light than national ones, highlighting how tone and framing not only inform but also allocate responsibility and shape public perceptions of institutional effectiveness. Moreover, this differential framing contributes to heightened dissatisfaction with the national administration, especially among citizens already critical of its leadership. Such discontent is further amplified through social media platforms, where narratives of failure circulate widely and intensify public scrutiny.

Yet, despite the significance of these portrayals, few studies have examined how such tonal differences between local and national government coverage shape public trust and political discourse in the Philippines. While earlier works highlight the impact of tone and framing in other contexts, there remains a gap in understanding how Philippine online media specifically constructs disaster narratives and contributes to the politicization of response. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how disaster coverage frames institutional effectiveness, distributes responsibility, and influences public perceptions of governance during crises.

Patterns of Government Response
Preparedness Stage
The preparedness stage encompasses activities undertaken in advance to enhance the ability of citizens to respond effectively to disasters (Tierney 2006). An analysis of online news articles reveals that preparedness activities conducted by both local and national governments primarily include disaster planning and the allocation of budget and funding.

Disaster planning emerges as a recurring theme in government preparedness efforts across various news reports. For instance, ABS-CBN's coverage of Typhoon Glenda highlighted the government's emphasis on disaster planning as a core component of its preparedness strategy. Similarly, during Typhoon Rolly, which occurred amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, disaster planning also entailed effective evacuation management. A Rappler article emphasizes that strategic planning for typhoons during the pandemic was a top priority for government agencies:

> Part of the evacuation planning that we have specified for our LGUs is that dapat naka-imbentaryo na sa kanila lahat ng facility ng local government na pwede gamitin sa evacuation center. Hindi pwedeng gamitin, hindi pwede magdala tayo ng evacuees doon sa COVID-19 facilities. Bawal talaga. [Transl.: They must already have an inventory of all local government facilities that can be used as evacuation centers. It can't be used, we can't bring evacuees to COVID-19 facilities. It's really not allowed.] We cannot mix the sick with those who are not, Timbal said." (Rappler 2020e)

Another common pattern observed in government preparedness activities is the proper allocation of budget and funding, which is essential for the effective implementation of disaster plans. For example, in the case of Typhoon Rolly, a Rappler article reported that government officials ensured sufficient funding was available to maintain an adequate supply of relief goods for affected communities. This financial preparedness played a crucial role in enabling the successful distribution of aid and in enhancing the overall effectiveness of the disaster response efforts. According to Rappler, "The NDRRMC would also provide additional help to LGUs. Although some LGUs have used their quick response fund (QRF) during the pandemic, which is 30% of their local disaster risk reduction management fund, Timbal said they have allowed LGUs to use the remaining 70% allotted for preparedness" (2020e).

The proper use of disaster funds highlights the value of financial flexibility in emergency management. By coordinating with local governments, national agencies can ensure that resources are directed where they are most needed. This approach not only supports efficient relief distribution but also strengthens community preparedness for future hazards. In doing so, budget allocation becomes a key factor in building both immediate response capacity and long-term resilience.

Response Stage

The response stage involves activities designed to address and mitigate the impacts of a disaster (Tierney 2006). Based on the analysis of online news reports, two dominant patterns emerge in government responses during this stage: the provision of relief operations and the implementation of evacuation efforts. Following Typhoon Ulysses, for instance, the government's immediate response included the distribution of food to affected populations, reflecting a strong emphasis on relief efforts to support disaster-stricken communities. Rappler wrote: "Rodrigo Duterte on Saturday, November 14, announced the creation of a new task force to "streamline" rescue, relief, and rehabilitation efforts for those who were affected by Typhoon Ulysses and recent typhoons" (2020e).

Relief operations were also prioritized during Super Typhoon Rolly. As stated by the NDRRMC in an interview with Rappler: "Meron naman tayong stockpile ng relief support items. Ang mga warehouse natin across the country ready for distribution and deployment. Given that situation, prepared naman tayo" [Transl.: We do have a stockpile of relief support items. Our warehouses across the country are ready for distribution and deployment. Given the situation, we are prepared.]" (Rappler 2020f).

Evacuation efforts were prominently implemented during the Taal Volcano eruption. A Rappler article highlighted that the top priority of government agencies was the immediate evacuation of families to safer areas. According to the report: "As of 8 am on Monday, over 3,000 families composed of 16,780 individuals were moved to different evacuation areas around the province" (Rappler 2020g).

Similarly, the evacuation of communities was a critical component of the government's response to Typhoon Rolly. The NDRRMC emphasized the significance of secure evacuation and relocation sites, which were mandated by President Duterte to minimize the typhoon's impact. As Rappler has stated: "While local government units (LGUs) have schools as an option to house evacuees during the typhoon, he said there were more than 100 dedicated evacuation centers across the country. He said these facilities were built during the pandemic as ordered by President Rodrigo Duterte" (2020e).

The findings of this study reveal that media reports predominantly highlight government actions during the preparedness and response stages. However, research shows that such government-led measures often face structural and institutional limitations. For instance, Arroyo & Åstrand (2019) find that in Leyte after Typhoon Haiyan, permanent housing recovery was heavily constrained by institutional and policy barriers, especially delays in procurement, limited budget control, and rigid regulatory norms, as well as difficulties in securing legal, suitable land for resettlement. These factors resulted in much lower housing output than targets, housing designs that were generic and inflexible, and the perpetuation of vulnerabilities already present before the disaster. They also show that political elites were able to influence land allocation and benefit from public housing programs, raising questions about equity in access and outcomes. In line with these challenges, Santos et al. (2015) highlight that in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, preparedness measures such as hazard-based zoning, climate-resilient building codes, retrofitting vulnerable structures, and mainstreaming climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction into local land use planning (e.g., via Comprehensive Land Use Plans) are necessary. They emphasize the need for legal frameworks and institutional policies to support these measures, while also identifying capacity, enforcement, and implementation challenges among local governments.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examined the framing, tone, and sourcing practices of online disaster news coverage in the Philippines. The analysis of 60 selected articles revealed that the dominant frame that prevails is the attribution of responsibility frame, which assigns blame or credit for disaster outcomes. In this way, this frame not only shape public understanding of disasters but also influence perceptions of institutional accountability and responsiveness. More specifically, the study found notable tonal differences in how media outlets portrayed different levels of government. Local government officials were frequently cast in a positive light, with narratives emphasizing their initiatives such as localized evacuation efforts, community-based relief distribution, and coordination with NGOs. This finding resonates with previous studies (*see* Brunken 2006), which suggest that local governments are often framed more sympathetically due to their proximity to affected populations. By contrast, the national government was often portrayed more

critically, with the media drawing attention to delays in response, insufficient preparedness, and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

In addition, the content analysis further identified four recurring patterns in the reporting of government responses: (1) disaster preparedness plans, (2) implementation of relief operations, (3) discussions around budget allocation and funding transparency, and (4) evacuation and relocation efforts. These patterns correspond to the preparedness and response phases of the hazard cycle, emphasizing the media's focus on immediate institutional actions rather than long-term recovery or resilience-building. Another important observation concerns the homogeneity of news sources. A majority of the articles relied exclusively on institutional sources, primarily professionals, local and national government officials, and representatives from non-governmental organizations. Notably absent from these reports, however, were the voices of ordinary citizens, particularly those from marginalized communities who are most vulnerable to disasters.

As a result, this lack of bottom-up reporting potentially limits public engagement with the full social and emotional dimensions of disasters. It may also contribute to a distorted public discourse in which structural vulnerabilities, community resilience, and grassroots experiences are underrepresented. Consequently, the public's understanding of disasters is filtered through a political lens, emphasizing institutional action and elite commentary over community realities. However, as I previously mentioned, this is not to diminish or excuse the shortcomings of government response, but rather to highlight how media practices shape which aspects of disaster experience receive visibility.

It is also important to acknowledge that this study focused solely on online news content from three Philippine media websites, which constrains its ability to assess the broader impact of disaster reporting on public perception, behavior, and trust in institutions. Therefore, future research should adopt mixed methods approaches, including surveys, interviews, and audience analysis, to better understand how media framing and the politicization of disasters shape public opinion and response. Moreover, expanding the scope of analysis to include other media formats, such as television broadcasts, radio coverage, and alternative online platforms (e.g., social media and independent news outlets), may provide a more holistic view of disaster communication in the Philippines.

Finally, triangulating media narratives with official reports from disaster management agencies (e.g., the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council) could help distinguish whether negative portrayals stem from 'biased' framing by journalists or actual shortcomings in government disaster response. Such comparative studies, in turn, would contribute to a more accurate evaluation of both media practices and institutional effectiveness in times of crisis.

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