

## ISOJ 2020: Day 1, Keynote Session

### *Technology's impact on democracy*

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- **Keynote speaker:** [Maria Ressa](#), founder and CEO, Rappler, Philippines
  - **Chair:** [Reg Chua](#), global managing editor, operations, Reuters
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**Rosental Alves** Good Morning, America. Welcome to the 21st International Symposium on Online Journalism, the first online only ISOJ, or ISOJ, as many ISOJers prefer to say. My "good morning" is a Hollywood inspired salutation that I have been using for about two decades when I start my classes here in Austin to cheer up my students and make sure they are really awake and ready for the serious issues we discuss in class. I bring that cheering up effort to ISOJ along with the seriousness of the topics we address in this conference, especially in the terrible times we live in now with the pandemic, the attacks against journalism and the effort to reinvent media in the digital age. And I add to that, the fight for racial justice that we have been seeing lately.

I am Rosental Alves. I'm the founder of ISOJ and the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas.

We will make this opening session very, very brief. First, I will turn it over to my colleague and long-time partner at the symposium, who leads the ISOJ research component, Dr. Amy Schmitz Weiss. Then we will hear from the Dean of the Moody College of Communication, Dr. Jay Bernhardt, and then our special guest, Alberto Ibargüen, president of Knight Foundation, which has been the main sponsor of ISOJ. So now I turn it over to Amy.

**Amy Schmitz Weiss** Hi, everyone, it's great to have you with us today. As research chair for the ISOJ, I'm excited for the panels you'll be hearing this week. This year's research program features a robust look into online journalism scholarship from the power and privilege issues that arise in the media industry to the way stereotypes and gendered perspectives continue to play out in media coverage. You can check out the amazing work of some great scholars in the research breakfast panel and the main research panel featured later this week. The latest issue also of the ISOJ journal is now out as well, so check out [ISOJ.org/research](https://www.iso-journal.org/research) to see the latest articles published from the conference. And now I'm going to turn it over to Dean Bernhardt.

**Jay Bernhardt** Thank you so much, Amy, and thank you, Rosental. It's an honor to be here, and I hope you're all safe and well during this extremely challenging time. Since I first became dean of the Moody College of Communication in 2015, it's always been a highlight of mine every April to go to the auditorium of the Blanton Museum of Art on the UT campus to welcome journalists, media executives and scholars from all around the world to another ISOJ.

So like everyone else, I was so sad this year when ISOJ had to be canceled earlier because of the global pandemic. But I'm equally glad to see that now, as Rosental has been saying, "ISOJ is back with a vengeance." Indeed, it is back online. We have put the "O" back in ISOJ. So this year's ISOJ is bigger than the traditional in-person conference by

several times over than ever before. There are a record number of speakers, 80 in total, and I'm certain that this year's conference coming at such an inflection point in history, will have an unprecedented impact on the news industry and on the academic fields of journalism and communication.

For 21 years now, ISOJ has been a unique conference that helps close the gap between industry and academia. In its early years, it was a one-day conference that focused only on the news industry. Those early conferences helped bring pioneering editors and producers of online journalism here in Austin to the academy here at the University of Texas with our School of Journalism and the Moody College of Communication. In 2004, ISOJ gained a second year and a new component, academic research. Scholars interested in researching the emerging field of digital media came to Austin to present their findings to their academic peers, but also to professionals and practitioners. And this engagement between professionals and researchers has been a core strength of ISOJ, and it's resulted in the creation of a journal for the publication of peer-reviewed research and papers on this topic. This Thursday during a research panel, ISOJ will actually present the publication of the tenth volume of the ISOJ Journal. So my sincere congratulations to Amy and Rosental, the coeditors of this journal, on your 10-year anniversary.

I'd also like to take a moment to plug the ISOJ website, which is an exceptional resource for both researchers and professionals. Not only does it contain all the ISOJ journals since the first edition, but also all of the papers presented at ISOJ conferences since 2004. The website is also a repository that captures the evolution of digital journals and has transcripts, videos, slides and testimonials on the creation and growth of digital media going back to 1999. So if you haven't seen it, I encourage you to check it out at [ISOJ.org](http://ISOJ.org).

Again on behalf of the University of Texas at Austin and the Moody College of Communication, it's my great pleasure to welcome you to the online ISOJ 2020 and to wish you all a great conference.

Now, it's my honor and my privilege to introduce our guest of honor this morning, Alberto Ibarguen, president and CEO of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, to share his thoughts. Welcome, Alberto.

**Alberto Ibarguen** Thank you very much. It's a great and rare pleasure to be here with you this morning, Dean Bernhardt and Professor Schmitz Weiss, welcoming you to the 21st ISOJ annual conference. You may hear, just to prove that we're not in the same place. We not only have different backgrounds, and we are social distancing. We have different backgrounds. But I think I've got some construction in the neighbor's apartment. So if you hear a little noise, don't fiddle with your sound. It's me. I'm sorry. I apologize ahead of time.

Knight Foundation has been a supporter from the very start of this conference and a supporter of Professor Rosental Alves and his work for the entire period. In fact, it's gone on now more than two decades, which I think qualifies for calling this the Rosental Alves-era. Not simply a period of time, but an era. With my colleague Jennifer Preston, who's our vice president for journalism, and her predecessor, Eric Newton, who had the same job before, we have supported the Knight Chair in Journalism at UT Austin. We have supported the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas.

And in welcoming you to this year's conference, it's really important to stress the importance of this moment as opposed to all the ones in the past. I don't think the importance of journalism in a time of magical thinking has ever been greater. I think never

has it been more important for journalists not merely to understand and be comfortable with, but to dominate technology and digital platforms. And I'd also, at the end, like to add my word of welcome and support to Maria Ressa, who will be honored a little later in the program.

The importance of journalism in the era of misinformation on digital platforms, where bad information, malicious information can go anywhere, everywhere, immediately. The importance of journalism at a time of the COVID-19 pandemic, where it is so important for us to have correct and true information. The importance of journalism at a time when it is so easy to fake political speech because the fake speaker can go directly to the audience as easily as a journalist can. Never in our lifetimes were fact so easy to fake or so important to get right. Because if you get the wrong facts, people can die, societies can wither. This is really, really an important time. And frankly, in the area of explanatory journalism, at least, never has there been a time when it is more important for us to understand each other across barriers or differences of race and economic classes.

So this is all the stuff of great journalism. And the critical part of this, and the part that ISOJ has always gotten right, is that it is not merely enough to get published. It is really important to get read, and you will not get read if you're not digital in the world where we are. We used to say when Rosental and I were first talking about this, "in the world we are entering." This is the world we've entered and are now totally up to our ears in, and so this is not going away. Journalists must be able to master, not simply be able to handle. They must be able to master the digital technology, the digital platforms. Knight is there to support. Knight will continue to support programs that help journalists transition into digital media and help journalistic organizations do the same. But it is really something that journalists have to embrace. You must make this part of your mission, as much as a commitment to verification journalism, a commitment to mastering the technology.

I want to say just a word quickly. So I mean to say the obvious, that's why conferences like this are so important, because this is where we share information. This is where we make contacts. This is where we find the resources to do this thing right. I do want to say a quick word about Maria Ressa. I had the privilege of presenting in 2018 for a Knight International Journalism Award at the ICFJ, and later she was honored by the CBJ, both organizations that a Knight Foundation is proud to support. For years, this woman has been standing up to oppression, to people who are trying to silence her, to people who are trying to push her aside. She will not be moved. And it is with really humble and great pride that I participate in part of a program that will honor her and her work.

So with that, welcome all. I hope you enjoy the conferences. Be sure to attend Jennifer Preston's conference, and I'll turn this back over to Rosental. Thank you for being here.

**Rosental Alves** Thank you so much. Thank you so much, Alberto. I am glad you mentioned our strong solidarity to Maria Ressa. We all should stand for her in these difficult moments. It's now my honor to turn it over to Reg Chua. Reg is going to be the chair and moderator of Maria Ressa's talk. Reg is the global managing editor operations at Reuters, responsible for editorial operations, including budget, safety and security, logistics, everything, as well as being a liaison with corporate technology, and research and development teams, etc.. A native from Singapore, he has known Maria Ressa for at least a couple of decades and is very familiar with Rappler and the harassment that Maria has been suffering. So, Reg, please.

**Reg Chua** Thank you, Rosental. It's an honor, but more than that, a pleasure, to introduce our keynote speaker. An accomplished journalist, a champion and a beacon for press freedom, a leader of a woman-led organization standing up to misogynistic and sexist attacks. And most importantly, a friend. For those of you who don't know Maria Ressa, the founder and executive editor of Rappler, the Philippine news organization that's holding President Rodrigo Duterte to account, well, that's your loss.

Rappler has been at the forefront of an independent journalism in the Philippines, which is sadly a rapidly shrinking space, and she and her colleagues have paid a price for it. Maria has been convicted of a crime called cyberlibel for an article published before the law came into effect. She faces up to six years in jail for that. But that's not all, there are a string of other cases pending against her, including for tax evasion and illegal foreign ownership of Rappler.

Now, all of this is happening against a backdrop of threats and incessant online attacks against her and other independent journalists from an army of weaponized trolls, the recent closure of the country's largest broadcaster, and the passage of a tough new national security law.

You'd think Maria would despair faced with these challenges, but she must be one of the most relentlessly optimistic people I've ever known. I first met her, dare I say it, nearly 30 years ago when I was first posted to Manila. She was a young reporter working for CNN then. And I have to say she looks pretty much exactly the same now as she did then, so being hopeful clearly does something to the aging process. She went on to become bureau chief in Jakarta, wrote two books about terrorism in Southeast Asia, led the Philippines leading TV news organization, and then went on to start Rappler. And there's tons to say about Rappler. It is an amazing achievement, a digitally savvy news organization that turns out great journalism led by women in, let's face it, a pretty macho nation, and most astoundingly, makes money. And there's so much more to say about Maria as well, but more importantly, she has much to say. So without further ado, here's Maria Ressa.

**Maria Ressa** It is so good to see you, Reg. Thank you so much. And I know there's so many friends out there. Thank you for spending your time with us.

I am going to start with a trailer that actually when I watched it, the whole thing what's happened in the last four years, hit me, and I want to show it to you because this film is going to be coming to you on August 7. So let me play it. (Plays video.)

"Mr. President, is it important that people be afraid of you? Fear?"

**Rodrigo Duterte** "Yes."

**Maria Ressa** "Hello and welcome. I'm Maria Ressa."

**Narrator** "Maria Ressa carries the torch of press freedom in a country held in thrall by a populist president."

**Maria Ressa** "It started with the drug war."

**Rodrigo Duterte** "Do not do drugs because I will kill you."

**Maria Ressa** "President Duterte began his administration with the drug list."

**Rodrigo Duterte** "This is the drug industry of the Philippines."

**Maria Ressa** "He showed everyone a list. People on that list started dying."

**Rodrigo Duterte** "I'm telling the Filipino people it's going to be bloody."

**Maria Ressa** "We demanded the government be held accountable."

**Narrator** "Duterte was annoyed by our reporting."

**Rodrigo Duterte** "You are a fake news outlet. You would be allowed to criticize us, but you'll go jail for your crime."

**Maria Ressa** "We started getting attacked on social media. The government created disinformation networks, so people have no idea what the truth is. I was getting an average of 90 hate messages per hour."

**Narrator** "We don't even know whether we can trust the police to protect us."

**Rodrigo Duterte** "Just because you're a journalist, you think you're exempted from assassination."

**Narrator** "We didn't even realize how dangerous it is for you."

**Maria Ressa** "Why are you crying?"

**Narrator** "Because I'm scared for you."

**Narrator** "Maria Ressa has been arrested. The charges against Ressa were aimed at intimidating those who challenged Duterte's rule."

**Maria Ressa** "So why should you care about what happens in the Philippines? They test the tactics of how to manipulate America in our country. If it works, they pour it over to the rest of the world."

**Narrator** "Maria Ressa was one of four journalists named as Time Magazine's Person of the Year. Maria won't be afraid, I'm afraid for her."

**Maria Ressa** "What we're seeing is death by a thousand cuts, little cuts of Philippine democracy. We will not duck. We will not hide. We will hold the line." (End of video.)

"Hold the line." It's a phrase I started saying in 2017, and really it was because we felt that if this is the line of our constitutional rights, we felt power coming at us, trying to barrel through. And if you stepped off the line, you can't reclaim that ground back. So since then, that's really been our battle cry. I will follow this with a presentation on exactly how social media was weaponized. And here it is. This is called "Hold The Line."

I think after the filmmaker Ramona Díaz followed us for a year and a half. Her first day of shooting was actually the day that I got arrested, and I was detained overnight. Well, June 15 this year was my conviction, along with Rey Santos, who's a former colleague. And,

you know, I guess one of the basic stuff I'd love to put in context for you is exactly what three big things that have changed everything for us.

The first, of course, is COVID-19. That's happened to everyone around the world. But this is our 18th week of lockdown, and it is only getting worse. Unfortunately, security is driven. We have a president who has treated this with very harsh words. On April 1, and I'll remember April Fools, on April 1, he had a late-night nationwide telecast. He just told Filipinos, "Stay at home. If you violate quarantine, it's going to be bad." And then he told the security forces, and this is a direct quote, he said, "Shoot them dead." The next day, a 63-year-old farmer gets stopped at a checkpoint, and he's not wearing a mask. And the police report just said that essentially he was drunk and he came at the police with a knife, and he was shot and killed. There are many more instances like this that have happened since then. That's the first, COVID-19.

The second is, Reg mentioned it, the shut down of our largest broadcaster. Imagine CNN getting shut down, CBS, or in England, BBC getting shut down because power doesn't like what they're reporting. And this is something that is unthinkable. But on May 5, with all of us under lockdown, one order, a cease and desist order, was given to the network, and within a few hours, it went black. And the last time that happened was in 1972 when President Marcos declared martial law, and it was shut for 14 years.

The third is, again Reg mentioned, the anti-terror law. This is something now that just came into effect midnight Saturday. And this now means that a small group of cabinet secretaries can designate someone, a critic, a journalist, designate me a "terrorist," and because of that, you can be arrested without a warrant and held for up to 24 days.

All of this is still under the backdrop of fear and violence. Because, of course, there was another damning UN report that looked at the dismal record of human rights, the continued killings, and the words of President Duterte and how these encourage that.

I've said this a lot, but what few can see is exactly what role an American company plays in all of this. Right. And to me, I want to show you what the last four years have been. And let's just start with, you saw the photos of the conviction. Well, let's put when the narrative was seeded onto Facebook. Facebook, 100% of Filipinos on the internet are on Facebook. Facebook is our Internet. Right. And it was seeded in 2016, when "journalist equals criminal." "Journalists equals criminal" repeated. When it was first thrown at me, "Maria Ressa is not a journalist, she's a criminal," in 2016, it's easy to laugh. By next year, it'll be my thirty-fifth year as a journalist. And I just thought, "Oh well my track record is clear." It isn't so clear now because what social media does is you can repeat a lie a million times, and through repetition, a lie becomes a fact, especially if it's laced with anger and hate.

So what happened in 2016, repeated exponentially, and people then started to say, "Well, I've heard this. I've heard this. Maybe it's true." Then 2017, what happens is President Duterte, himself, officials begin to say the same thing, so you're coming bottom-up with social media and then top-down with power. In 2018, the weaponization of the law. And in that year, in about 14 months, we had 11 cases and investigations filed against us. I was in and out of investigations. And 2019, eight arrest warrants, arrested twice in a five-week period. And then of course, here we go to 2020, conviction. "Journalists equals criminal." This is how you create alternative realities. This is how you make a lie look like fact. This is democracy's death by a thousand cuts.

This slide I have used for at least three years, but it bears repeating. I said this, "If you can make people believe lies are the facts, then you can control them." Tim Snyder in "On Tyranny" says this, "If you want to rip the heart out of a democracy, you go after facts. That's what modern authoritarians do. Step one, you lie all the time. Step two, you say it's your opponents and the journalists who lie. Step three, everyone looks around and says, what's truth? There is no truth. Then resistance is impossible, and the game is over." We now have lived through several years of this.

It's first-hand experience for us, but as early as 2017, I started saying, "You have to look at the Philippines because our dystopian present is where you're headed. This is coming soon to a democracy near you if it hasn't gotten there yet." Because unchecked information operations from 2016 until today, it's been relatively unchecked on social media platforms, which have become behavioral modification systems. Unchecked, this means that you are actually changing the way people think and ultimately the way they act.

In 2017, Camille Francois, who's now with Graphika, called it "patriotic trolling," state sponsored online hate and harassment campaigns to silence and intimidate. Women in the Philippines were targeted at least ten times more than men, and there were these three steps that we first saw with the cautionary tale in politics. Senator Leila de Lima, she was attacked exponentially first, then sexual violence, misogynistic attacks against her, almost porn-like fake videos released. And then the third was to use hashtag #ArrestLeiladeLima. She's been in prison since February 2017. Right.

They also did try to trend the hashtag #ArrestMariaRessa. This is in May of 2017, and you can see it looks laughable today. But people tried to trend it. It didn't trend. And that maybe why they took at least two years to arrest me, but they did, right? So you can see social media was really the harbinger. It was almost like fertilizer, making the ground safe for whatever government action was coming. From here, from this Facebook page, it jumped to Twitter, a former campaign account. That's also another trend you've seen globally. Campaign pages become weaponized. And in our country, it became weaponized after President Duterte took office. On this one, this is a campaign page, "Call her to the Senate #ArrestMariaRessa." It jumps to a real person, an overseas Filipino worker, "I can smell an arrest and possible closure."

All of these things got worse over the years. Then it becomes sexualized. "Maybe Maria Ressa's dream is to become the ultimate porn star." And finally here, this is on Rappler's Facebook. "Me to the RP Government." This was a new graduate in college. "Make sure Maria Ressa gets publicly raped to death when martial law expands to Luzon. It would bring joy in my heart."

We took all the data and began to look at how journalists and news organizations came under attack. It is concerted, and it was so focused that you when you put it on a timeline like this, you can see that it was seeded during the campaign and then pounded. Each of these attack words pounded relentlessly, but it didn't become a solid line until the Drug War began.

So the first people attacked were actually normal people who challenged the deaths. You're talking about 30 deaths every night during this time period. And then you're talking by July, this is when social media had been effectively weaponized.

I'm going to fast forward and take you to today. This was the first. Now, it's beyond wave six of the different disinformation networks we lived through in the Philippines. It is so systematic that each one of these content creators create content for a demographic. But the one I want you to focus on is the mass base account. This is the Mocha Uson Blog. She is a former singer dancer who campaigned for Rresident Duterte, was given a government post in charge of social media for the government in 2017, and she now works for the government. From that, I want you to also see how the attacks evolved.

So we move away from just the normal, "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to behead you. Line them up like a firing squad and shoot them dead." You go away from that, and we go to these. This is where we begin to see an active effort to dehumanize. You can see here, right? My gender facial features, my color. I'm not being called different animals anymore because I've become an animal. This is the movement towards dehumanization. We've seen things like this, for example, when Nazi Germany was focusing on the Jews. This is now being focused on journalists in the Philippines.

So this one, we've also seen a different part of this. Again, I've seen this astroturfed on comments on Facebook where somebody is offering a reward to capture and kill me. So there's that. Then we go to this. This is a meme that came out after I got convicted. And again, because of the outcry, you can see here, what they did is they turned the narrative upside down. "She's the abuser of press freedom. This isn't a violation of press freedom." But take a look at what they did to my skin. I have eczema. It's atopic dermatitis, extremely dry skin. You know, it's bad to be a journalist when you have atopic dermatitis because it just means that whenever I get stressed, my skin gets drier. Right. It's itchy and dry. But here what they've done is they take something that they think you will be ashamed of or vulnerable, and they pound it. And here is how it plays out. They now call me Scrotum Face. And I'm sorry I should have warned you about this, but I thought about pixalizing this. But in the end, this is there publicly. I wake up to this. I see this astroturfed. When they make fun of me as scrotum face, this is the part that goes there. So this is inciting to hate, also another part where Facebook fails because its definitions of hate are not enough. So in this one, again, take a look at the dehumanization. Right. Because when you are dehumanized anyone can do anything to you. You're not a person.

And it keeps evolving over the years. This now takes the film "A Thousand Cuts." They took a Bloomberg photo, doctored the skin, and look, they're so proud of it that they put their logo, VOVPH is a Facebook page. This spreads on Facebook. And here we go, scrotum face. That's the kind of stuff we live in every day.

I just want to show the CIA part because now this was another narrative that was seeded in 2016. But this one now is going out multimedia, multiplatform and goes through email privately, publicly, the same way it is being spread on the private channels, on private messaging. But I want to remind you where this was first seeded on social media. Here on Mocha Uson's blog, the anchor of the distribution network for the government's social media. And here she says, "I heard from an inside source that Rappler is funded by the CIA."

I want to also show you. People ask me, "What about the chilling effect?" Well, it's Siberia. It's not a chilling effect, but this was the beginning. This one we captured it in two slides. I think this was the end of 2018, when I was receiving an award, and I was in the States. And then the government announced, the Department of Justice just issued a press release, and people thought I was going to get an arrest warrant, get arrested, because an arrest warrant was issued. So this shows you that when that story was covered, 34% of



the stories came from the Philippines, 27% from the United States. But keep track of the color, because when you scrape the story and then you punch them through natural language processing to see what kind of topics you can see, the ones that came from the Philippines all largely carry the Department of Justice press release. That's the chilling effect. But what did the American groups write? Well, they focused on the Duterte rights crackdown. There is a cost to doing this in the Philippines, and that's part of why we've been able to hold the line with your help.

This is the information ecosystem we live in today. And I would wager if you did something similar like this in the United States to map the information ecosystem on Facebook, for us, it's asymmetrical warfare. You have the majority, the center of it, controlled by pro-Duterte, pro-Marcos communities, disinformation networks working together, influencing real people. So real people believe this now, especially since it's been four years. And then you have a small group that is trying to retain.

I want to bring it to you here in the U.S. because if you think about it like this, in 2016, the mother report actually gave evidence that Russian disinformation networks were targeting Americans. And we know from the data that Black Lives Matter was targeted on both sides in 2016. Fast forward four years, and look at how Americans have been changed. It brings up everything that is under the surface and because it incites hate, it moves it to a level that would have been impossible before.

I want to just connected to the global disinformation network because what we found in the Philippines in 2018 was that our disinformation networks here were plugging directly to kind of like a global network that was there, that connected to data that was released by the Senate Intelligence Committee through the Senate Intelligence Committee hearings. And this was done by new knowledge, but you can see that it's connecting to the Russian disinformation networks, the IRA and the GRU.

There's more that can be said here. But I guess I want to end it with just this. All of this is meant to do two things. It's meant to pound a narrative to silence, and that is by hitting you, the journalist, the target, personally so that you doubt yourself, and then you be quiet because you don't want to be pounded. Who wants that to happen? But then the second thing, by taking that narrative out, by making you afraid, it's almost like PTSD, you also then flood the other route. We call it astroturfing, when you flood it to manufacture consensus. In our case, for example, it is president Duterte's popularity ratings. Everyone always says, "But he's so popular." Yes, it's buoyed by a great groundswell of manufactured consensus that does impact real people.

And I'll end it with his words, and this was just July 8. You know, I woke up and President Duterte now makes his comments very late at night, but on July 8 at 1 in the morning, Manila time, this is what he had to say.

**Rodrigo Duterte** "Ressa is a fraud, believe me. Give us time. It's too early for you to enjoy your awards. You are a fraud. We're just compiling at this state, and some day, in bold letters, we will show your incongruity. You are the fraud."

**Maria Ressa** So, I leave it there. I didn't really know how to react, so I kind of did it a more tongue in cheek. How do you react to a president who says that? "My incongruity." I actually kind of passed it as a joke, and I said, "Are you talking about me, Mr. President?" And then I just said something like, "Perhaps the president is seeing too much fraud from where he sits."

Reg, what would you do if you were me?

**Reg Chua** I have no idea. I was going to ask you that question. Maria, I mean, thanks. And one, it's great to see you. It's unfortunate that it's under these sorts of circumstances. There's a ton of stuff. There's a zillion things to ask you. I want to just focus on you for a moment, because I know that all of us are rooting for you. I know there's people in the audience that really want to help. You have great legal counsel both locally and internationally. We all know that. What can anyone in this audience or anywhere, what can they do to help you? What else do you need? What would make a difference?

**Maria Ressa** I don't really know. I mean, but I will tell you what's allowed us to still live. Right. I mean, it's been four years of this, and we've not just survived, we've thrived. Thrived in the sense that, you know, when you're held in fire, you become strong. So I think, thank you for helping us shine light. I guess part of it is because what is happening to us is coming your way, but they're actively trying to defend us. And that's so incredibly helpful because, you know, there are really bad days, but there are also amazing days when I look at what we can accomplish. I think this is a test case. It's a trial. Right. What can we do collectively, globally?

I think the third thing that's happened is that we've had huge legal fees, and we've been able to pay for those legal fees because of crowdfunding, because of the many people who've jumped in to help us. And that's allowed us to keep our operations not just moving, but growing. So we were able to consolidate what we do in the business of journalism, and keep our business moving forward and still be able to innovate.

But in the end, Reg, the biggest problem is that I live in the Philippines. I'm in Manila, and this is a choice for Filipinos. And I think, is there enough time? Will the fear stop us? Today, just over the weekend, we had noise barrages because ABS-CBN has been shut down so that people are trying to find ways. Just on Friday, this aide of President Duterte, who's now become a senator, Senator Bong Go, he actually asked the NBI to run after people who were, in his words, like "spreading lies" about him on social media, and subpoenas were given out. And on Friday, as a form of protest, he was cursed, very roundly. I think, over 60,000 posts that were using a curse and using a hashtag about him. But it was very cleverly done because, of course, the terror lies here. So I don't know where it will go. And that's a long answer to a very simple question. It's like, "Oh, no, please, help, Reg."

**Reg Chua** I wish we knew. Let me pivot a bit more and to sort of really your point about "coming to a democracy near you soon." And I fear, and I think most of us do, it's here. You know, there is obviously an election coming up in the U.S., all around the world. There's kind of two kind of related questions. What do you think of the steps, whether they're small or they're large, that the platforms are doing? You know, Twitter is putting warning labels out as an advertiser boycott or nation advertiser boycott. You know, what do you think of those steps that are going through? And I guess, you know, sort of to flip it on its head. If you had all the power in the world, what would you do? How would you change the platforms? What is your, I don't know if it's a magic solution, but what does your solution look like if you could just do it?

So it's interesting to me to see that the "most successful" in quotes, right, has been hashtag #stophateforprofit. But success is all relative. Because in the end, I don't know how the U.S. can have elections given the state of this behavioral modification system that

we call social media. Because in the end, we know and this was just a month ago, a Graphika just published, a Russian disinformation network that's been operating for six years. We know that it is still ongoing. We know that the microtargeting will allow anyone to actually. So the social media platforms have all this data about us. They know us far more intimately than we know ourselves. And they take our most vulnerable moment to a message. And whoever pays for that vulnerable moment, whether it be a company, or a government, or a politician, will be able to target us at that vulnerable moment. Right.

So now think about it like this. If in a platform you have lies spreading faster than facts, being able to be targeted when not everyone sees how everyone else is being manipulated, how can you have integrity of facts? You actually don't. That's been the problem. That's why our democracies have been pushed back. Right. So if you don't have facts, how can you have integrity of markets or integrity of elections? Everything starts with facts. How can people make the decision of whom to vote for if they don't have facts? Right.

So this is, Reg, you know, it's less than 100 days, and it's how can people vote? You have to go out into the real world. The second part of your question is what can we do? I mean, I think now Americans are panicking. I've seen some suggestions. "Well, then don't take any political ads." But it isn't just the political ads. The manipulation is everyone. And again, think about it like this. The platform itself and its design actually radicalizes. It pushes you to the extremes. So if at the beginning in 2016, which is when it was first discovered, but we know that these tactics were going on in these platforms as early as 2014.

So if you think about it like this, that let's say pro-Trump, anti-Trump, pro-Duterte, anti-Duterte, wherever it is, right; if you're here and you share facts at the beginning, the way the platforms designed growth, these are social media platforms, they designed growth using friends of friends. Great paper by Mark Granovetter, where it's talking about the strength of weak ties, but it closes the triangle. That's why it's so effective for growth, but it also builds filter bubbles and polarity into the system. So if you're pro-Trump, friends of friends, you're going to grow, you're going to grow the platform. You're going to move further here because your friends are going to be talking kind of like you, so you're not going to see the other side. And those people are growing their friends of friends, and they're growing further here. And they're going further here, and they're going further. And that's the reason why the public sphere has been torn apart. That's the reason why it's so easy to hear alternative realities.

We live in a time where the conspiracy theories have entered the center because lies laced with anger and hate spread fastest. Right. So this is problematic. It's a long answer to your question, but I don't see that you can have, if people are being manipulated, how can we actually have democracy?

**Reg Chua** And look, I mean, as a journalist, and with a roomful of journalists, I mean, the fact that facts don't matter is terrifying and suggests at some level that we should focus on getting information disseminated fixed.

A slightly different question. So journalists obviously have an incentive and a whole system built around wanting people to honor facts. Right. That's what we do. And you're right, I mean, markets and so on need facts as well. But it seems to me it's hard to get a coalition of people together who really say this is an issue. I mean, you know, some politicians don't see it as an issue. Obviously, journalists do see it. How do you think about mobilizing

people together to be able to say "this is a problem" beyond the pointy-headed intellectuals who say, "well, this is bad"? But how do you make it in people's interest to work with this?

**Maria Ressa** You know, we're going through this right now in the Philippines, and it's one of the biggest debates we've had. So I'll give you a quick example. On Monday, today, I am one of the signatories for a petition at the Supreme Court against the anti-terror law. But we had an ethical discussion with the journalist because some of the people who signed this petition, and it's great in content, but some of the people are politicians. And so the journalists were saying, "Well, should we be signing with them?"

And, you know, in the end, I guess this is what I see. When it is a battle for facts, when it is a battle for facts, for truth, journalists are activists. And I think we also, like in the Philippines, I sounded the alarm. I am seeing things, and I face jail. I mean, I'm shocked at where we are. And it is no longer business as usual. And I think that's part of what I'm trying to say is that we each have to ask ourselves, "What are you willing to sacrifice for the fact? What are you willing to sacrifice for the truth?" And if we can't answer that, these coalitions are not going to work. Because in the end, all of those little things in the old world, they're gone, at least in the Philippines right here.

And there have been instances in history where journalists have come together with different sectors of society. The Markovs, for example, in 1986. Right. But I think about South Africa apartheid. I think about Nazi Germany. Right. I mean, but we can't do this too late, and that's part of the problem. So advice, please tell me. I think this is part of the problem.

And here's the other thing. How do you get people together to even talk about this when the distribution of the message gets dispersed, when we are caught in our own little filter bubbles? And in the end, the old power of journalists, the ability to distribute facts, that's not ours anymore.

So it's a great question, and I don't really have an answer. I think we're living our way into the answer. And for me, it's a race against time. And this is where it's very personal because I'm not going to buckle down. I don't feel like I can. I really don't feel I can. I can't back down because I know that, you know, this is right. And so really now we're living in a country that's really become; President Duterte is the most powerful leader this nation has ever had. And the shutdown of ABS-CBN, the fact that their franchise was denied, shows you a captured legislature at the behest of the president. We essentially have a dictatorship masquerading as a democracy with rule of law. What do you do? Do you give in, or do you hold the line? And what are the costs of doing that?

**Reg Chua** Thanks, Maria. We could talk for hours, I know. But we do have to leave time for others to get questions. And I'm going to just remember the "hold the line" and the battle for facts, both of which are critical lines. So we should take a break now. We can wave at ourselves, watching ourselves on Monday, and turn it over to the audience. So thanks, Maria, and we will pick this up instantly, I think.

Hi again, and we're back. You may not have thought that we had gone away. But we spoke on Saturday, and now we're back. So a couple of things. There's a zillion questions. We don't have a huge amount of time, so we're going to get through as many as we can. I'm just going to stipulate all the questions that basically say, is this the same as in my country? The answer is "yes, it is." So we're not going through those. I think I'm going to

try and just start with, again, at the personal level. How do you and journalists like you, what's your advice for journalists who are facing this level of attack? What can you do? How do you manage to get through a day, a year, all of this?

**Maria Ressa** We have two ways in Rappler that we've dealt with it. First is among our team. We're about 100 people. And for our reporters, those who come under intense attack, we really talk about it. We help each other. And then when you're under attack, someone else responds for you. Right. One school of thought inside Rappler is, shut off. You have to have time to shut off. I'm the other school of thought, which is that I want to know because whatever it is that they think I'm vulnerable at, I want to embrace it so that I take the sting away, and whatever they throw will make me stronger. That's what I hope. Right. And Nietzsche said it, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." So that's what we've found works in Rappler.

**Reg Chua** You must be incredibly strong at this point. I'm going to try and bundle together a bunch of other questions, which is really about what can be done. And so I think the fake news laws in some countries, there's discussions about regulating social platforms. There's fact-checking as a journalistic exercise, and I know Rappler does some of that. And then there's frankly calling out journalists or so-called journalists who may not be telling the truth, or at least shading the truth. How effective do you think they are? And I guess sort of as a more practical question, what can any individual journalist or any individual news organization do to try and move the ground?

**Maria Ressa** Not much. I mean, I hate to be this blunt, right, and this is part of the reason we need to understand the tech. This is a tech problem. And, you know, there's a book called "Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow." Daniel Kahneman won the Nobel Prize. This is a thinking fast problem. The tech has done it, like I referred to a behavioral modification system. Right. We can turn out the best content, the best stories, but it just won't get distributed as far as the lie laced with anger and hate. That's the nature of it. Right. So I think it's regulation, number one. Accountability, number two. I always say that we became targeted because we were fighting impunity, not just of the Duterte administration and the drug war, but the impunity of Silicon Valley. This has enabled this poisoned information ecosystem where hate, this toxic hate, is a part of the air we breathe.

So just two things that could be done almost immediately is make the platforms accountable. We're accountable when we were the gatekeepers. And the number two, there have to be incentives for the platforms to protect the users, to protect the front liners, the journalists. Right now, there are very, very, very, very, very few incentives. In fact, you can argue based on the market cap and what happens to Facebook's valuation, it all depends. Every time it spends more on data privacy, their value goes down in the market. Right. So they don't have incentive to protect us financially. Well, what about if there's legislation that says every user can take out their own data? Because in the end, we created this data. This is ours. And what the platforms have done is to use machine learning and artificial intelligence, to pull out the patterns, and to feed our most vulnerable moment to a message, and feed us the right message that they've been paid to give. Right. So data portability is one. There's a great book by Sinan Aral from MIT coming out in September. It's called "The Hype Machine." He recommends social network portability, and there have been a lot of research that has looked at that. Right. If you take out user data and social network data and you comport it to another social media platform, then you don't have to do antitrust measures against a large company like Facebook. Because, frankly, Reg, just really said, "Look, we all have the same problem." We do because we're all on the same platform.

**Reg Chua** Sort of slightly around that as well, I guess, is again coming back to what journalists can do. Because I mean, look, I take your point. There's been really interesting proposals that have been put out all around the world on how you can regulate this data sharing, this data portability and so on. From a journalist's perspective, you know, there is some argument about objectivity. There's some argument about sort of just the facts, about not sort of making more advocacy around what you say or at least being much more firm about "this is a fact," "and this is true." And, you know, which is sort of an outgrowth of fact-checking. Does any of that, do you think, in your mind make a real difference? And is that the kind of journalism that you think Rappler and others should be should be pursuing?

**Maria Ressa** No, thank you for bringing that up because I slid through it earlier. Look, we're fact-checking partners of Facebook because facts are now debatable. But here's the reality, and all the studies have shown this, even though we fact-check it, once we find the lie, that fact-check doesn't spread as far and as fast as the lie. It doesn't get to the right people. It doesn't get to the people who have already been convinced by the lie. So this is where I say that journalism is a thinking slow process, while the actual targeting, the lies, are a thinking fast problem.

So that book by Daniel Kahneman. We have two ways of thinking as human beings. Thinking fast, instinctive, emotional, this is what we did to survive when we were evolving. And then there's the thinking slow, rational thinking, we take apart the facts. We tell a story. Well, in the platforms where the world's largest distributor of news is Facebook, on that platform, the product we do, journalism, no matter how wonderful it is, and how well we do, we spend careers learning to tell good stories, it doesn't spread as fast as the salacious lie. So that's something. That's why I think it is the design of the platform that needs to be addressed. And, you know, how do we fight our battles in the last four years? I look at Pareto Principle, and Facebook is always, the social media platforms, are always part of where I spend my time, because if I can get some kind of reform, some shift that will trickle down, it is exponential.

In the meantime, if we keep doing just our jobs as journalists, and this is crazy because our job is huge, our mission is huge; but if we just stick to that, it is like playing whack a mole. It just pops up in other places. Does that sound too negative?

**Reg Chua** Well, I was going to say we do have to wrap up at this point, so I was hoping not to wrap up on too negative a point. But I will say that, look, you've given us a lot to think about. Clearly, as you say, just doing our job is not enough. I think we have to think about how we mobilize society to realize this is a problem. It's not unlike sort of climate change. We're not fixing climate change, but we're telling people it's a problem. And we hope through that we can get some change done.

So, look, I want to thank you. I want to thank you not just for being here, but thanking you for your service to the industry, to the profession, to your country. And I know if you were in person here, there would be a standing ovation right now. So I am actually standing, so I'm going to give you one. And I hope everybody else where they are gives you one as well. So thank you so much. I'm going to hand back to Rosental.

**Rosental Alves** Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Thank you so much. This was really a great session. I am moved. Maria, thank you for what you're doing. I have admired you for many years, even before all these problems that have been following with the

success of and the build up of Rappler. So huge, huge thank you, for you. We all should stand for Maria Ressa and all journalists fighting for freedom of expression and democracy around the world at this moment. I am glad to see people from all over the world here. This is truly a global conference, Maria and Reg. We have people really from all over. So it was a great start.

I also want to take a moment to give an incredibly huge thank you to our sponsors. Thanks to the Knight Foundation, Google News Initiative, Microsoft, Univision, JSK Journalism Fellowships at Stanford, the Trust Project and the Moody College of Communication for making ISOJ online possible.

In just a few minutes, we're going to have a workshop on data journalism. And then a good segue way for this, actually, it's a panel with national reporters about the election in the United States. And then the following with Jennifer Preston will be on local news. So stay tuned, and don't miss the party this evening. That will be a virtual party that will blow you away. All right. Thank you. Bye bye. Thank you, Maria.