Marites Culture in the Philippines: An Emergent Online Gossip Phenomenon

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Abstract: This research article explores the emergence and characteristics of Marites culture in the Philippines, specifically focusing on its role in shaping social relations and communication during the pandemic and the present. Utilizing literature review approach and sociological perspectives, the study analyzes media reports and online sources to investigate the origins, features, and implications of Marites culture. The research emphasizes the significance of Marites culture as a reflection of broader social and cultural trends in the Philippines, including the increasing importance of online communication and the influence of traditional gossip practices. Moreover, the study examines the potential advantages and disadvantages of Marites culture, such as its ability to disseminate information and shape public opinion, as well as its potential to spread misinformation and trigger social tensions. The findings underscore the necessity for a critical and nuanced understanding of emerging cultural phenomena, considering their historical, social, and cultural contexts and implications.

Keywords: Marites Culture, Literature review approach, social and cultural trends, social media, emergent phenomenon.

1.0 Introduction

In recent years, the Philippines has seen the emergence of a distinctive online gossip culture known as Marites (Legazpi, 2021). Named after a popular character in a local TV series, Marites refers to individuals who are highly attuned to the latest news

and gossip, and who are skilled at disseminating this information through social media and other online platforms (Parnala, 2022). The individuals who participate in this culture are highly skilled in gathering the latest news and gossip, and they use social media and other online platforms to disseminate this information. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the Marites culture has taken on a new level of importance, as more Filipinos have turned to online communication to stay connected and informed (Green, 2021).

Marites has become a notable phenomenon on social media in the Philippines, largely due to its practice of sharing gossip and news online. The term "Marites" has been coined as a local version of the US term "Karen," which refers to a white woman who is perceived as demanding or entitled beyond what is considered normal (Legazpi, 2021). In 2020, Marites gained popularity when some individuals expressed their concerns about the lifting of the liquor ban by Manila Mayor Isko Moreno. This led to the use of the phrase "Manahimik ka, Marites", which means "Be quiet, Marites", which gained traction online. However, the exact origin of the use of the name "Marites" is unclear. The emergence of Marites highlights the role of social media in shaping cultural practices and the transmission of information, particularly during times of crisis.

In the Philippines, social connections and networks are crucial for both personal and professional success (Reyes & Liao, 2018). The Marites culture reflects this emphasis on social relationships and the need to stay connected with others. The use of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, has made it easier for people to gossip and share information, opinions, and rumors with a wider audience. As a result, Marites culture has become an integral part of the social fabric of the Philippines (Mendoza, 2021).

Traditional gossip practices have also influenced the Marites culture in the Philippines. Gossip has been used for centuries to build social relationships, establish group norms, and enforce social control (Baumeister et al., 2004). In the Philippines, gossip has played a similar role, providing a way for people to stay informed about their communities and build social relationships (Reyes & Liao, 2018). The emergence of

Marites culture has allowed Filipinos to continue this tradition of gossiping, albeit in a modern and technologically advanced form. The Marites culture in the Philippines reflects broader cultural trends in the country, such as the importance of social connections and the influence of traditional gossip practices (Mendoza, 2021). This culture represents a fusion of traditional and modern communication practices that have been adopted and adapted by Filipinos to suit their changing social and technological contexts. From a sociological perspective, the Marites culture reflects broader cultural trends in the country, including the significance of social connections and the influence of traditional gossip practices (Parnala, 2022). Gossip has long been used in many cultures as a way to bond socially and exchange information. The emergence of online communication technologies has only expanded the reach and speed of gossip, making it more accessible and widespread (Henderson & Gilding, 2004). The Marites culture represents a fusion of traditional and modern communication practices that have been adopted and adapted by Filipinos to suit their changing social and technological contexts (Mison, 2022)

The emergence of the Marites culture in the Philippines has become increasingly significant as more people rely on social media to stay connected during the pandemic and up to the present day. This cultural phenomenon has become an important source of information for Filipinos. However, the spread of rumors and misinformation that comes with gossip can also result in social tensions and conflicts (Luo et al., 2021). This underscores the need for a critical and nuanced perspective on emergent cultural practices, considering their historical, social, and cultural contexts and implications. Thus, this research article aims to examine the Marites culture in the Philippines by exploring its characteristics and impact on social relations and communication. It also aims to analyze the roots of Marites culture and its implications for society. The Marites culture reflects a fusion of traditional and modern communication practices, which

provides insights into how people use technology to connect and communicate in the digital age.

2.0 Methodology

Research design. This is exploratory type of research which to provide an in-depth analysis of the Marites culture phenomenon in the Philippines by utilizing a literature review approach. A literature review is a unique method of comprehensively critiquing and synthesizing findings in meta-level to generate new knowledge (Synder,2019) Various sources such as articles, media reports, social media posts, and blog entries were reviewed to explore the emergence, features, and implications of the Marites culture.

Mode of Data Analysis. The study utilized a systematic and comprehensive approach to analyze the data to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The characteristics and implications of the Marites culture were also examined in relation to broader social and cultural trends in the Philippines. The literature review approach involved analyzing various media reports and online sources related to the Marites culture. The sources were selected based on their relevance and reliability to the study. A content analysis approach was utilized to identify key themes and patterns related to Marites culture in the data. The information gathered from various sources were compared and contrasted to ensure the validity of the findings.

3.0 Results and Discussions

Through the comprehensive literature review, an analysis conducted to investigate the emergence, features, and implications of the Marites culture. The review encompassed amount of data from various sources, including articles, media reports, social media posts, and blog entries. The research prioritized the emerging cultural phenomena, taking into account their historical, social, and cultural contexts and the resulting implications. The analysis emphasized several themes identified from this process.

Affinity of Filipinos towards gossip can be attributed to its historical roots.

As social beings, individuals have an inherent need for a sense of belongingness and connection with others. Information has become a valuable commodity, and sharing it about others may lead to a perceived increase in social acceptance (De Leon, 2022). According to social identity theory, people tend to form their self-concept and social identity based on their membership in specific groups, and gossip can serve as a means of bonding and establishing group cohesion (Gottfield, 2019).

> "Filipinos are socially inclined, we are connected with our
> peers". By nature, we like to gossip. But there is a certain
> population, or what I would call in the video as 'species,' that
> are well-versed in the art of gossiping. That's the Marites."

The statements implied that Filipino culture is socially oriented, with a natural inclination towards gossiping, and that the Marites represent a specific population that excels in this activity. This phenomenon could be understood through the concept of social capital, which refers to the resources and benefits that individuals gain through their social connections (Wittek et al., 2000). In Filipino culture, social capital is often derived from strong social ties, which can include family, friends, and community relationships. These connections can provide individuals with a sense of belonging, support, and access to resources that can contribute to their overall well-being. However, social ties can also serve as a means of social control, with gossip being a tool for monitoring and enforcing social norms and expectations (Adam, 2021).

The Marites culture, as described, could be seen as a manifestation of the social capital and social control functions of gossip. The Marites are individuals who are skilled at gathering and disseminating information, often about their peers, as a means of gaining social influence and control. This behavior may serve to establish and reinforce social hierarchies and power dynamics within a community (Martinescu et al., 2019).

Looking back to the historical roots of "*tsismis*" culture in the Philippines and its potential function as a coping mechanism can be supported by literature on the role of

gossip in social and cultural contexts, as well as the historical and cultural factors that have shaped Filipino society. Research has shown that gossip plays an important role in the social and cultural lives of many communities, serving as a means of communication, social bonding, and conflict resolution (Baumeister et al., 2004). In the Filipino context, gossip has been described as a form of social currency, with individuals using it to gain social status, build alliances, and maintain social order (Ro, 2018).

The historical roots of *"tsismis"* culture in the Philippines can be traced back to the colonial era, when the Spaniards imposed a hierarchical social structure that emphasized loyalty to authority and discouraged dissent (Eudin, 2022). Gossip and other forms of subversive communication, such as the use of code language, were used by Filipinos as a means of resistance and survival, enabling them to share information, build networks, and challenge the authority of the colonial regime (Nakpil, 2008; Eudin, 2022). From a sociological perspective, the prevalence of *"tsismis"* culture in the Philippines can be understood as a reflection of broader cultural and historical factors, including the legacy of colonialism, the importance of social relationships and networks, and the role of communication in shaping social norms and values.

The art of rumor mongering is not new in the Filipino culture

Rumor mongering, which involves spreading unverified or false information about individuals or groups, is a common social phenomenon that can have negative consequences. This activity is a form of communication that often contains negative or salacious content, and it can cause harm to the targets of such rumors (Zong et al., 2023).

Sociologically speaking, Filipinos may engage in rumor mongering to fulfill their need for social connection and validation. Social identity theory suggests that people derive their self-concept from their membership in specific groups, and spreading rumors can serve as a means of bonding and establishing group cohesion (Dong et al., 2013). Rumor mongering can also be motivated by a desire for power and control, as individuals who spread false information may use it to manipulate or influence others (Hyman, 2018).

"These people are not exactly within the media, they are observers but they rehash and spin their own versions of what they've read. That is the danger there".

The statement implies that individuals who rehash and spin information that they have read can potentially distort the original message and create false narratives. This idea is supported by the concept of the "telephone game" effect, where information is passed from one person to another, leading to changes and inaccuracies over time (Breithaupt et al., 2018). These individuals who rehash and spin information can also be seen as gatekeepers of information, as they have the power to shape public opinion by controlling the narrative (Baker & McStay, 2017). This power dynamic highlights the role of the media as a social institution that can influence society's perception of reality (Hiarvard, 2008). Moreover, the proliferation of social media has increased the prevalence of this phenomenon, as individuals can quickly and easily share their versions of events, often without verifying the accuracy of the information (Tang et al., 2021).

Marites' Elixir: Blind items and the social media in fueling rumors

The term "Marites' Elixir" could be seen as a metaphor for the power of gossip to create social connections and provide a sense of belongingness, as well as a means of gaining power or influence through the manipulation of information (Martinescu et al., 2019). Blind items and social media are used as sources of gossip in Filipino culture. Blind items refer to anonymous pieces of information that are shared with the intention of creating intrigue and speculation (McNealy & Mullis, 2019). Social media platforms have also become popular channels for sharing and consuming gossip, allowing individuals to quickly and easily disseminate information to a large audience (Zeng et al., 2016).

"At times, the most explosive stories, not just in entertainment, begin with a blind item". Anybody can just spread a blind item whether it is true or false or in between".

"The cat is out of the bag so freely, unlike before when a blind item was subjected to editing and verification by newspapers. But now that practice is gone with everybody posting anything and anybody can just spread a blind item because of the freedom provided by the platform. "

The statements implied the role of blind items and social media in spreading rumors and potentially harmful information. Blind items are news stories that withhold the identity of the person or event involved and are often used to create suspense and intrigue (Musto, 2021). However, this practice can also be used to spread false or damaging information. In the context of social media, the spread of blind items and other rumors has become easier and faster due to the platform's widespread use and lack of editorial oversight (Tambini, 2017). According to The Journalist's Resource (2014) added that social media platforms have facilitated the spread of information and provided a means for ordinary individuals to participate in the media landscape, leading to a democratization of information.

However, the downside is the potential for the spread of misinformation and damaging content that can harm individuals or groups. This problem highlights the need for ethical and responsible communication practices that prioritize accuracy and fact-checking to avoid the spread of false information.

Information Literacy at the core

In the context of information literacy, it is important to recognize that some blind items and rumors circulated online are merely sensationalized versions of news stories cherry-picked from established media platforms (Machete et al., 2020). From a sociological perspective, this can be attributed to the influence of media institutions and the pressures of the digital age, which prioritize speed and sensationalism over accuracy and context (Philipps, 2014). Research has shown that the rise of digital media has led to a blurring of the lines between journalism and entertainment, with news outlets

increasingly relying on sensationalized stories to attract clicks and views (Hendriks & Kleemans, 2018). As a result, rumors and unverified information can quickly spread online, with social media platforms serving as a breeding ground for false information and conspiracy theories (Stano, 2020).

> "Social media has also the power to magnify the reach and impact of our stories. More importantly, it has challenged us to become better reporters because it gives us a pulse for what the public wants. At the same time, it pushes us to be more enterprising in getting entertainment stories that are still not out there."

The statement about social media's power to magnify the reach and impact of stories and challenge reporters to become better can be supported by literature on the relationship between news consumption and social media use among Marites and other audiences. Research has shown that social media has become an increasingly important source of news and information for many people, particularly those who are highly engaged with the latest news and gossip (Horne et al., 2018). This has created new opportunities for journalists to reach and engage with audiences, build their brands, and tell stories that resonate with their readership (Jones, 2017). At the same time, social media has also raised concerns about the quality and reliability of information, particularly when it comes to entertainment stories and other types of content that are often shared without proper verification or fact-checking (Lamprou et al., 2021). This has pushed journalists to become more enterprising and creative in their work, using a range of digital tools and strategies to stay ahead of the curve and provide value to their audiences (Pavlik, 2013).

From a sociological perspective, the emergence of Marites culture can be understood as a reflection of broader changes in the media landscape, including the rise of social media and the increasing importance of user-generated content (Posetti, 2017). As such, it represents both an opportunity and a challenge for journalisms, who must

navigate a complex and rapidly changing environment in order to succeed in their work. Research has shown that social media has fundamentally altered the relationship between news organizations and their audiences, with users now having greater access to and control over the content they consume (Martin, 2018). This has created new opportunities for journalists to engage with audiences, build communities, and create content that is tailored to their interests and needs (Van der Haak et al., 2012). At the same time, social media has also posed challenges for journalists, who must navigate an increasingly complex landscape of user-generated content, fake news, and viral misinformation (Bucy & Newhagen, 2019). This has pushed reporters to become more adept at using digital tools to verify information, build trust with their audiences, and tell compelling stories that resonate with readers (Batsell, 2015).

Beneficial or Detrimental?

Blind items, rumors, and gossip are common features of the media landscape. These practices are often controversial, as they can be seen as intrusive and exploitative. De Backer et al., (2019) argue that gossip serves as a site of cultural conflict and struggle over meanings, values, and norms. According to these authors, gossip is a form of communication that plays a significant role in shaping social interactions, especially in relation to the construction of identity and the negotiation of social boundaries. One such perspective is the concept of privacy, which is defined as the ability of individuals to control access to their personal information (Rainie, 2018). The invasion of privacy is a common concern when it comes to blind items and gossip, as they often involve the dissemination of personal information without consent. As noted by Marwick & Lewis (2017), "the dissemination of false or embarrassing information can have a devastating impact on individuals, particularly those in the public eye."

"There were blind items fed to us that didn't ever see print because they were injurious to a person's reputation or their family."

The impact of blind items, rumors, and gossip in media can be both beneficial or detrimental, depending largely on the context, the accuracy of the information, and how it is used. On one hand, gossip and rumors can play a positive role in society (Sunstein, 2014). As noted by Baumeister et al., (2014), gossip can serve as a cultural battleground for negotiating meanings, values, and norms, thereby playing a significant role in shaping social interactions and contributing to the formation of identities. In this way, gossip can foster a sense of community, as it allows people to share information and form social bonds. In the realm of media, blind items can sometimes serve as a form of investigative journalism, bringing to light issues or behavior that may be of public interest or concern. For instance, misconduct by public figures or within institutions may first surface through blind items, eventually leading to more formal investigations and, in some cases, justice (Kunert et al., 2022).

However, the potential for harm is substantial. The invasion of privacy, as highlighted by McFarland (2012), is a significant concern. Individuals, particularly those in the public eye, can have their personal information disseminated without their consent. This can lead to serious consequences, such as damage to their reputation and harm to their family. Furthermore, if the disseminated information is false or misleading, it can cause unjust harm and distress (Tsfat et al.,2020). In the case of individuals in the public eye, such as celebrities or public figures, the consequences of privacy invasion can be particularly severe. Their personal information, including sensitive details, may be exposed to the public, leading to a range of negative outcomes. This can include reputational damage, loss of privacy, and harm to their professional or personal relationships (Ahmad et al., 2023). False or misleading information that is disseminated as part of privacy invasion can also have significant repercussions. When inaccurate or damaging information about an individual is shared widely, it can cause unjust harm and distress. This can lead to personal, social, or professional consequences, affecting an

individual's well-being, relationships, and opportunities (Himma-Kadakas & Ojamets, 2022).

Is Marites a Friend or a Foe?

Marites culture has both positive and negative implications for society. On the one hand, it can serve as a source of information and entertainment, and it can facilitate social connections and community building. On the other hand, it can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes, spread misinformation, and contribute to the erosion of privacy and trust (Sheldon, 2019).

From a sociological perspective, Marites culture can be seen as a reflection of broader social and cultural trends, such as the increasing importance of online communication and the influence of traditional gossip practices (Stoica, 2021). According to Baym (2015), digital technologies have transformed interpersonal communication and social relationships, creating new opportunities for people to connect and share information. Marites culture can be seen as a manifestation of this trend, as individuals use social media and other online platforms to disseminate news and gossip.

However, the spread of information through Marites culture is not always accurate or reliable. Manila Bulletin TechNews (2022) notes that gossip practices in the Filipino cyber community can be used to spread rumors and false information, which can have negative consequences for individuals and communities. In addition, the dissemination of personal information through Marites culture can also contribute to the erosion of privacy and trust, as individuals may feel exposed and vulnerable. Marites culture can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to the marginalization of certain groups. For example, Thorbjørnsrud (2016) argue that social media platforms can reinforce existing power structures and amplify the voices of dominant groups, while silencing marginalized voices. In the context of Marites culture, this can mean that certain individuals or groups are unfairly targeted or stigmatized based on rumors or gossip.

Enlightened and Responsible Marites

The term "Enlightened and Responsible Marites" could be seen as a colloquial expression referring to individuals who actively engage in online information exchange and are known for their ability to gather and share the latest news and gossip within their social networks (Lariosa, 2021). This cultural practice has both positive and negative aspects. On one hand, it can facilitate the rapid dissemination of important news and raise awareness about social issues. It can also serve as a mechanism for holding individuals and institutions accountable. On the other hand, it may contribute to the spread of misinformation and rumors if not approached critically and responsibly (Osatuyi, 2013). The advent of digital technology and social media has provided individuals with increased access to information and a platform to share their perspectives. This has influenced the dynamics of communication and information flow within and giving rise to an empowered and connected community of news gatherers and sharers (Thorson & Wells, 2016).

> "People have to grow more self-aware and sensitive when they represent themselves in social media, and participate in discourse, "I think, people are becoming more conscious of their responsibilities, in as much as they are realizing that freedom of expression is fragile, and may at once be curtailed by the powers that be."

The statement implies the importance of self-awareness and responsibility in social media use and discourse. According to Chambers (2013), social media platforms provide individuals with new opportunities for self-expression and social interaction. However, these platforms also create new challenges for individuals in terms of managing their online identities and navigating complex social dynamics. As a result, individuals must be more self-aware and intentional in their use of social media to avoid negative consequences. Castells (2010) argues that social media has transformed the way individuals communicate and interact with each other, creating new forms of social

organization and collective action. However, this transformation has also led to new forms of power and control, as governments and corporations seek to regulate and manipulate online communication. As a result, individuals must be more sensitive to the potential consequences of their online actions and participate in discourse with a critical and informed perspective (Yan, 2021).

In terms of mental health, research has indicated that excessive use of social media can lead to negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Vannucci et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2016). However, self-awareness and responsible social media use can mitigate these effects. By being mindful of their online habits, individuals can recognize the potential pitfalls of excessive social media consumption and take steps to prioritize their well-being. Moreover, responsible social media use involves critically evaluating the information encountered online. The proliferation of misinformation and fake news on social media platforms has raised concerns about the impact on public opinion and democratic processes (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). By being critical consumers of information and fact-checking before sharing or endorsing content, individuals can contribute to a more informed and reliable online discourse.

Additionally, responsible social media use entails respectful and constructive engagement with others. Online platforms often witness the rapid spread of incivility, hate speech, and cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). By practicing empathy, tolerance, and respectful dialogue, individuals can foster a more inclusive and positive online community. To cultivate self-awareness and responsible social media use, educational initiatives and interventions play a crucial role. Research suggests that media literacy programs can enhance individuals' critical thinking skills, empowering them to navigate the complexities of the online environment (Livingstone et al., 2019). By promoting digital literacy and ethical digital citizenship, these programs contribute to a more responsible and empowered online population.

The rise of "Enlightened and Responsible Marites" highlights the significance of self-awareness and responsibility in social media use and discourse. By being intentional, critical, and informed users of social media, individuals can contribute to a more positive, productive, and ethical online environment.

4.0 Conclusion

This research provides valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of gossip, rumors, and social media use within the Filipino Marites culture. The deep-rooted affinity towards gossip can be traced back to historical origins, social capital, and the innate human need for social connection and validation. While gossip and rumors can serve as tools for communication, social bonding, and community cohesion, they also carry inherent risks. Invasion of privacy, dissemination of false information, and perpetuation of harmful stereotypes are potential consequences. Therefore, it is crucial for individuals to exercise responsible social media use and cultivate self-awareness to navigate the online landscape effectively. By promoting positive discourse, critically evaluating information, and fact-checking, individuals can contribute to a healthier digital environment. Education and media literacy programs hold significant importance in fostering critical thinking skills and promoting ethical digital citizenship. Striking a balance between the benefits and risks associated with gossip, rumors, and social media necessitates individuals to be mindful, well-informed, and responsible digital citizens.

5.0 Limitation of the study

The limitation of the study lies in the absence of primary data collection and analysis. The discussion is based on existing literature, observations, and general knowledge about Filipino culture and social media use. While the statements provided offer insights and perspectives on the topic, they are not grounded in specific empirical research or data specific to the Marites culture. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution and seen as a starting point for further investigation. Additionally, the

generalizability of the findings may be limited to the specific context of Filipino culture and may not be applicable to other cultures or societies.

6.0 Directions for future studies

Future research could involve empirical studies, surveys, or interviews with individuals from the Marites culture to gather firsthand data and explore their experiences, perceptions, and behaviors regarding gossip, rumors, and social media use.

Declaration of conflict interest

The author has no competing interest to disclose.

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