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Non-violence Approach: The Challenge In Philippine Broadcasting

Professor Clarita Valdez-Ramos

ABSTRACT

Enigma of Freedom

The following research is a discussion of the problem that go with freedom in Philippine media and the non-violence approach solution that goes with it. The Philippine society being vulnerable to the deceptions of media's compromised coverage of conflicts, elections and its related gimmicks have now gone used to the traditional way of reportage. The research begins by focusing on the free press and the tribulations that go with such freedom. Continuations are the battle over television ratings that result to compromised coverage of news and the war in Mindanao, southern part of the country and how the media cover it. This paper aims to present the scenario in newsgathering and identify the reasons why some news correspondents sensationalize in news reporting. In addition, this paper aims to provide possible solution to address some problems besetting broadcast journalism in the Philippine setting.

Introduction

The status of Philippine media at present can be traced from its origin that dates back from the colonization of the Spaniards, a period that lasted for almost 400 years. It was followed by another 50 years of American regime and almost a decade of Japanese rule before it was taken over by Filipinos. The Philippines remains as an attention-grabbing case to many observers of democratic development in Asia. It is ironic, however, that the media having the autonomy or being the most free from government control, the country remains to be one of the most dangerous places for broadcast journalists. Backing the reason

that has caused such irony is imbibed in the 1987 Constitution under the Bill of Rights, Article III, Section 4: No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or the press, or the right of the people to peaceably assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.

Media freedom in the Philippines is a matter of history. With the Filipinos' desire to gain liberty from foreign oppressors, the press was the first medium of communication to the public which was first used by the activists. The press was their agent for expressing dissension and public grievances. Reformation was advocated in Spanish publications as well as in the Philippine language, Tagalog. In these early times, it was only the educated Filipino elites from Spain who wrote and published the papers that were then smuggled in the country. The papers were then read also by the elite Filipinos who were campaigning for positive change against the colonial government of Spain. Not much later, a newspaper called Kalayaan (Freedom) which was written in the Tagalog language was also published. As Melinda Quintos de Jesus, Executive Director of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility in the Philippines quotes it, 'journalism in the name of political advocacy gave expression to pent up feelings of subject people, evolving a dramatic style that would serve as a rhetoric for dissent as well as revolution'.

When the Philippines finally gained independence from the Spanish regime, the fight was not finished though. The Republic of the Philippines was born and was proclaimed by General Emilio Aguinaldo who later became the first President. However, it was yet another colonization that the Philippines had to go through because the proclaimed independence was short-lived for the American regime had to take over. The Americans took over the land and ruled for almost half a century. There was a shift from Spanish to American language. The Americans introduced the use of radio as a vehicle of communicating information. The United States rule sent Filipinos in the US and was taught of the republican style two-party system of government and the press. It was when they were taught that aside from the three branches of government: executive, legislative and judiciary, they were oriented of the press being the fourth estate of the government.

Table 1 : Demographic Profile of Campaign Reporters

Gender	Male – 46%	Female – 54%
Mean age	34 (range from 21 – 63)	
Years in Journalism	11 (mean)	
Highest degree earned	Bachelor’s (76%)	Postgraduate (15%)
Monthly income	P 10, 000 – P 19,000	P 20, 000 – P 29, 000

Source: PCIJ Survey Results (2004)

With the occurrence of the Second World War, after the rule of the Americans, the Japanese took control of the land. The Philippines was under the Japanese rule, which as most historians consider, the last colonizer of the country. The nation of seven thousand one hundred islands became a stop-over for foreigners which greatly influenced its identity, which to some extent, have caused confusion on its national identity.

After the World War II, the Philippines already had its own government, finally. It took almost half a century before the Filipinos had the time to control their own land. However, there are also some negative implications that freedom hold. Many do not know what it really is to the extent that some have abused it without them knowing it. The Philippines being composed of three major islands: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao encompass cultural differences. The debauched reproduction of information on newspapers and tabloids, and over the radio and television entails confusion to the public about which is which, what is what, when is when and who is who – the basics of reporting that many have forgotten to do properly. In addition, cases such as inaccurate information, passages out of perspective, sensational and ambiguous headlines rule the airwaves. One-sided opinion columns also eat a lot of the newspaper. Problems of competence, credibility and responsibility also scourge the performance of the media in the country. The low salary or income of workers in the field of reporting has also tempted practice envelopmental journalism. Table 1 shows the details of how reporters covered the 2004 elections in the Philippines where

the media greatly influenced the voting population. Such problems have raised questions and suggestions about the quality of media education in universities and colleges around the country. It is obvious that mass communication and journalism courses badly need a re-evaluation and that immediate action to these matters have to be addressed.

Much Ado About Ratings

Viewership, with all its importance is so far the biggest battle in any television station in any land, more so in the Philippines where who gets what first wins. Broadcast programmers, especially among rival stations set the trend as to what is aired at the specific time for their target audience. This maybe based on the survey on the listener- ship and viewership on a particular day-part. In the Philippines, most news reports are aired in timeslots at an hour when people get home from work and students from school. Most news programs occupy the 6:00 PM to 7:00 PM hour, Mondays through Fridays. To still get hold of the audience, some television stations still hold a weekend newscast which lasts for half an hour.

There is nothing wrong with regards to the positioning of news programs. But, searching deeper, some reports no longer end up as news. Some end up already as entertainment. Taking for example footages of field reporters in war-torn areas of the country broadcasting news where cannons of different types dominated the air only to find out that it has all been set up for the sake of lively and realistic reporting. Television news coverage has yielded vivid images but has contributed little to understanding the situation.

Table 2 : Cases Received by the KBP Standards of Authority, 1992 – 2002

Nature Of Complaints	No.
FM Overmodulation	94
Coverage of Gambling/Airing of Gambling Results or Tips	31
Personal Attack/Defamatory Statement	27
Offensive Statement on Air	19

Unfair, Biased, or Irresponsible Reporting	18
Commercial Overloading	10
Indecent Attire, Exposure, Behavior, Gesture, or Picture	8
Offensive Footage or Advertisement	7
Others	19
TOTAL	233

*excludes cases dismissed due to lack of merit of jurisdiction

Source: PCIJ Survey of Results (2004)

In terms of entertainment, most programs are syndicated. Most channels air foreign programs from Mexico like Thalia's films such as Mari Mar and Maria Mercedes; Taiwan, where example was the craze on Meteor Garden that captured the Filipino audience where it starred a poor girl studying at an elite university and was bullied by four rich guys; and lately, South Korea where examples of which are Princes Hours and Jewel in the Palace. Looking at both sides of the situation, there is nothing wrong with showing foreign films in the Philippine television but it has already come to an extent that most programs, about 75% of most if not all television stations have prioritized such instead of the production of local programs where the local talents or the Filipinos themselves are the ones who are being hired. This fad has caused much loss in the television industry. In addition, it has led to brain-drain of Filipinos, thinking that anything foreign is better.

This situation shows the propaganda of television owners in the country. It just shows that most television owners care more on the profit. The production of local entertainment programs is much more expensive. They had to pay for the talents, the production materials, promotions, etc while syndicated programs are much cheaper. They only had to pay for the talents, specifically the dubbers, the translator and the copyrights.

This is what happened to entertainment in the Philippines that is why you will no longer be surprised when you ask somebody along the street what is the national anthem of the country. You will always get the latest soundtrack or theme song of the most popular soap opera with that question.

Compromised Coverage

Coverage of the 2004 presidential elections and the 2007 elections has no difference at all. As elections reflect the quality of democracy and the level of political discourses in a country, media reports, specially the television hold out to be the most criticized.

Flaws such as the political agenda that the media follow where they go after spin-doctors and campaign managers, personality-based and celebrity-oriented coverage, and pay-offs of news organizations get a big buzz from critical thinkers and wise voters.

Another hit where media people are being watched out is on how they cover the war that is going on between the military and the rebels of Mindanao. Major network's news reporters have their own choice of cuts as to what is to be shown and what is to be dumped. They cover the situation with never been ordinary combat footages, action-packed, and the worst, entertaining acts.

Violence in the media has become so common that it is no longer surprising or new whenever such are aired.

Kbp (Kapisanan Ng Mga Broadkaster Sa Pilipinas) / (Association Of Broadcasters In The Philippines)

The Kapisanan ng mga Broadcaster ng Pilipinas (Association of Broadcasters in the Philippines), an organization that has been in operation since its establishment in 1972 has not gotten far as to its responsibilities in monitoring. At present, it has over 152 television and radio stations nationwide to watch. KBP's Standards Authority bans the showing of 'unnecessary or excessive violence and morbid, sensational, or alarming details that are not essential to factual reporting'. From 1992 to 2002, the KBP has received a total of 233 cases that have violated the Standards Authority. Most of which are FM overmodulation on the case of radio.

After the declaration of Martial Law in 1972, self-regulation has been the norm in Philippine media. However, since how broadcast industries guard their ranks have never been credible, KBP was

mandated of imposing fines and censures to those members who have been found to be violating the standard set by the board. Table 2 shows how radio and television have been monitored strictly by KBP.

Towards A Culture Of Non-violence

The Philippines, an archipelago of 7,107 islands is a nation of diverse culture. It is a nation where the English language or even its national language, the Tagalog is not often understood by the majority of the citizens yet it is the most often used language of the media.

In this time of Information Age, the adage “think globally, act locally” has find its way when used properly through development communication, the non-violent approach I have found to address the pressing criticisms with broadcasting or the new media.

May I again give you a brief background of how development communication started in the Philippines. According to the former dean of UP Los Baños College of Development Communication, Dr. Nora C. Quebral, it started as a concept from a symposium on breakthroughs in agricultural developments in December 1971, “to promote quality and to develop the human potential and eventually to improve the quality life of the end users.” In other words, agricultural communication which is developmental in nature is clearly identified as the answer to the needs of the majority of people in the Philippine society. It is within this context that I would like to further discuss the radio program which I used to handle and expanded its airing to seven regions in Luzon namely: Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Abra, Pangasinan, Tarlac and Occidental Mindoro. It is called “The Tobacco Farmers’ Hour”. It was primarily aired to improve the quality of life of the tobacco farmers through disseminating information on the scientific breakthroughs in tobacco farming and eventually produced high-yielding variety of tobacco, which corresponds to a higher price. It continued operation for almost 20 years.

This radio program is just one of the major activities in my former agency, the Philippine Tobacco Research and Training Center, an agency which gave me the opportunity to be one of its scholars and as such I based my masters thesis on evaluating the program in terms of its level of knowledge, attitude and practice of the tobacco technology by the tobacco farmers.

Most of the tobacco farmers had a moderate level of knowledge of the tobacco production and a favorable attitude to the radio program although, they had a low level of practice of the technology as the study found out that tobacco farmers were hard-up in the implementation of technology for they lacked the means like in-puts. In-puts are in terms of money to buy waterpumps, gasoline, waterhose, or pipes and other labor costs. Nevertheless, I find it rewarding as a former program director when tobacco farmers would see me and personally show me their appreciation for giving them a program that answered their needs, that is the modern and scientific breakthrough in tobacco farming through radio program.

Now, the needs and wants of the audience should be given attention and importance. Meaning, we can provide an answer for both the needs and wants of our audience without sacrificing the ratings and advertisements, as these are vital to the existence of the Philippine broadcast industry. Broadcast communicators, academicians and the target audience should work hand in hand to further enhance the quality of program format not just by creating programs to satisfy their wants, meaning, purely entertainment but also creating programs to answer their needs that could help improve their quality of life.

This is also a challenge I give my students as indeed they are the next in line to become “change agents” and as “crusaders” of non-violence approach which I personally believe as developmental communication. This is the need of the majority of Filipino audience including that of the marginalized ones.

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