

Pop Culture and the Rise of Social Media in the Philippines: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

It is somewhat amusing that children in their formative years use technology as though it is a basic necessity for their development. With this statement alone, it is undeniable that commercial advancements in technology and the facility of the world-wide web creates a sort of transcendence in a faster and inclusive way that is not possible in the physical world. Nevertheless, if this very modern concept, if not an advent of a futuristic one, would be collapsed in the confines of a perspective of a still developing nation, what would be the outcome?

This study aims to look at the rise of New Media and social media in the Philippines, as well as its effect on the promotion of popular culture on the media consumers of the country. It will focus on several facets of Philippine contemporary life such as the political, economic, and social, and connect it with the cultural. By the end of this paper, there will be predictions regarding the future of the Philippine experience under these said circumstances should the current state of media in the country not change, a sort of an analysis that would allow readers to initiate their own introspection regarding media use.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Yahoo-Nielsen Survey of 2013, the top three sources of media consumption in the Philippines come from the television, the radio, and the continually rising internet usage. With these media vehicles, the so-called the fourth estate of the government, one can actually deduce that watching favourite shows on the television, listening to radio programs, or even surfing the world-wide web can have political, social, and economic implications.

This paper, thus, will look at these said implications-- the three interconnected tiers of Philippine life, said above -- and connect it with the popular culture in the Philippines to give an overview to the public regarding this obvious but unnoticed scene in Philippine media studies. Specifically, the objectives of this paper are: (1) to dissect the concept of popular culture in the Philippine context and locate its origin; (2) to connect popular culture to the usage of conventional media such as television and radio usage, and the rise of and social media or new media; (3) to locate interlocking concepts regarding popular culture and social media in the political, economic, and social aspects of everyday Philippine life to somewhat give an overview of the current state of Philippine media studies. One latent objective of the study, however, is to initiate introspection among the public regarding their usage or personal consumption of media in their everyday life.

To further give flesh and bone to the paper, the proponent will primarily use the literature and scholarship of the following authors:

1. Bienvenido Lumbera - for popular culture and its origin and implications
2. Michael Hauben - for the theory of the Netizen and his perspectives on the individual as a user of social media

3. Herman and Chomsky - on the political-economic implications of media
4. McCombs and Shaw - for the Agenda -Setting Theory of media and its implications
5. Graeme Turner - on the democratisation of media

Although each author is quite focused on a singular topic, there are still parts of each that connect with each other, and will be part of the analysis.

The study is somewhat limited for this will only cover the said topic in a very macro level and not in a more specific and specialised way. More so, most literature except Lumbera, are from non-Filipino authors but they do address the topic in a very universal manner. The methodology is somewhat limited for it only includes pure archival research, and bias regarding the personal usage of media on the perspective of the author may also cause further limitation. More so, the media to be discussed here is the media conglomerate part of Philippine media, and not the state-owned part for the former is the more evident and profitable side, while the latter is quite ignored or neglected by the general public, and one can say, the government itself.

This study, nevertheless, sets a ground for a new frontier in Philippine studies research for thus far, social media in the Philippines, except for statistical data, seemed to be untouched. No matter how moot and futile this exercise may seem to some, the author reiterates that things included in the paper needed to be known by the public in a very word-of-mouth conversational manner, and even though everything about the topic of the paper seems obvious, it has always been unnoticed and, therefore, should be given the chance to be placed under the attention and scrutiny of the general public and not only by scholars, students, or members of the current intelligentsia.

RELATED LITERATURE

Popular Culture in the Philippines

"Building a culture has to start with a foundation, and that foundation must necessarily be the culture of the Filipino people if this could be separated with the encrustations grown on it by colonial rule."

Popular culture, according to National Artist for literature Bienvenido Lumbera in his book *Revaluation: Essays on Philippine Literature, Theatre and Popular Culture* (1984), is highly different from the folk culture and nationalist culture of the Filipinos. In a nutshell, folk culture is the way of living in a place in a specific time and portrays the practices of a certain people, and on how they cope to survive with nature. Nationalist culture is the culture created through colonial resistance with the collective of a people on a given place and time. These two are different from popular culture which can be traced even in the period of Hispanization of the Philippines.

According to Lumbera, popular culture in the Philippines was created and used by the Spaniards to the native Filipinos or Indios via plays and literature to get the heart of the natives and win it. The colonial origins of popular culture found in the Philippines can be traced by looking at salient developments in Philippine literature. The first permanent Spanish settlement began

replacing the native culture with a Christian and European tradition. The children of the native elite under the tutelage of missionaries became a core group of intelligentsia called 'ladinos', as they became instrumental "in bringing into the vernacular, literary forms that were to be vehicles for the "pacification" of the natives". Forms of popular theatre and literature such as "the pasyon, sinakulo, and korido ensured the acceptance and spread of Christianity, and the komedya and awit did the same for the monarchy." Popular culture as introduced by the Spanish was "popular" to the extent that it was a "watering-down of Spanish-European culture for the purpose of winning the general populace over to the 'ideology' of the colonial regime." Popular culture at the time was created by colonial authorities, with the aid of the local intelligentsia, to promote the interests of the Church and the State.

However, once the native intelligentsia saw the effects of popular culture and knew how to work its way as propaganda, they soon used the Spanish weapon against them. In the 19th century, through the Propaganda movement, the native intelligentsia used the same forms of popular culture to "undermine the power of the abusive friars and rally the populace to put an end to colonial rule" one example is the work of Marcelo H. del Pilar when he soon used prayers such as the 'Aba, Ginoong Maria' and 'Ama Namin' in a sort of parody to strike against the abusive Spanish Friars.

The advent of American colonialism brought, the properly so-called, popular culture to the Philippines. The liberal policy regarding the printing press, soon through radio, television and film, increased the circulation of of popular culture forms. Not only through these forms but also in new media then, such as films. Hollywood films had a near-monopoly in the Philippine market especially in the absence of European movies due to World War I.

Early on, the local intelligentsia has the same apprehensions over mass media as they called it commercialisation, or vulgarisation of art. According to Lumbera, the local intelligentsia noticed that "Popular literature as a commodity intended for a mass market was seen to pose a threat to serious artistic work, because the writers accommodated his art to the demands of the publishers and editors who were more interested in sales rather than aesthetics." More so, "...popular culture is not created by the populace... rather, it is culture created either by the ruling elite or by members of the intelligentsia in the employ of that elite, for the consumption of the populace."; it is "...'packaged' entertainment or art intended for the profit of rulers, be they colonial administrators or native bureaucrats and businessmen."

To see it in Lumbera's lens, "Popular culture is power, and whoever wields it to manipulate minds is likely to find its literary and technological machinery turned against him when the minds it has manipulated discover its potency as a political weapon."

The Theory of the Netizen and Democratisation of Media

The word netizen, though it has been used popularly in current times, is actually a word from the theory of Michael Hauben (1996) is a corrupted term from the phrase "Net Citizen". According to Hauben, as netizens, geographical separation in the actual reality is replaced by existence in the same virtual space called the internet. More so, along with the power of using the internet is the power of the reporter given to the netizen for a netizen could actually be a source of primary

information regarding certain topics or issues. Hauben profoundly cautions that the internet can, nevertheless, be a "source of opinion" though he said that a netizen can train him/her self to discern real from fabricated information.

This prophecy will soon be reflected in Graeme Turner's book called the Demotic Turn (2010) but in a certain extreme way for even news reports are often bent to suit the "infotainment" genre favoured by the general audience. According to Turner, there is a rise of opinionated news as reporters tend to bend the news to the stories they often favour. A concrete example of this is tabloidization, or sensationalising small news items and making a big deal out of such.

The Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting theory of McCombs and Shaw can be simplified by saying that the media influences people to focus its attention on something under a certain agenda. It can make people think that something is actually happening when something is not, or give special attention or focus on certain subjects or topics and hype it to make an impression that something big is going on. To give an example, the agenda-setting theory can be seen in a newspaper wherein the headline is supposed to be the biggest news there is, and the other items, decreasing in font size and the farther its location from the front page, the lesser priority it has. Similarly, in a news programme, wherein the reporter or news anchor gives too much air time to a certain news, or depending on the arrangement of the news items, the more pressing issue it is. This theory can also be applied in the radio, or on new media such as the internet.

The political-economy of media

According to Hermann and Chomsky's Propaganda Model, a model they have used to check the various political-economic implications of mass media, there are several filters to use in relation with the topic to check the propaganda machine of mass media.

These filters are the following:

1. The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, profit orientation of the different mass media firms
2. Advertising as the primary income source of mass media
3. The reliance of the media on the information provided by the government, business, and these "experts" funded and approved by such sources and agents of power

Note that there is also two more filters ("Flak" as means of disciplining the media, anti-communism as a national religion and control mechanism) but that would be irrelevant with the current study.

ANALYSIS

The proponent, especially based on the history and origin of popular culture in the Philippines, attributes the rise of popular culture to such technologies like the television, radio, and the internet, and the popularisation of the said technologies because of the usage of such in the everyday culture. Nevertheless, the seemingly innocent usage or consumption of media in different ways beholds power in its interstices.

This paper, as mentioned will look at three tiers on how media spreads popular culture, and affects the aspects of Filipino life such as the political, economic, and the social.

Political- Economic Aspect

The easier to figure out among the three is the economic. According to Lumbera, popular culture in the rise of technologies like the television and the radio, soon deteriorated the notion of art and made it appear that it is consumable and a commodity. He called it, as he said, according to other artists of the time, vulgarisation of art. He meant that art forms were popularised by the use of technology and were tailor-fit to exactly serve the taste of the greater audience, sacrificing its quality in the process. This phenomena or grievance, if one may call it, can also be seen in Turner's argument regarding the rise of infotainment. Infotainment is the trend of making an issue seemingly pressing enough to give an ample or little new information, but more so, entertainment to the public.

According to the Yahoo-Nielsen 2013 Survey, infotainment is one of the most searched content and sites most visited in the Philippines. This meant a lot of irrelevant news we see on the television or internet that can be dismissed as a fad but were given the limelight to amuse people, and people seem to buy it. Just look at websites like Yahoo, itself, for it offers a lot of interesting articles which may seem to catch the interest if the public but also to cross-promote.

Cross-promotion is a term referring to the promotion of an advertisement in a very subtle way inside another program, or the like. Aside from acknowledging that the reason why there is this so-called "vulgarisation of the art" and the "rise of infotainment" to attract advertisers to advertise in commercial breaks during television or radio shows, or popping-up in the websites, cross-promotion has been a wide practice and people can actually sense it but not look it straight in the eye. Imagine watching a movie and seeing a product endorsement of the main protagonist being used in it, say coffee, and he or she prepares and drinks the coffee in one of the scenes -- that is cross-promotion. The latent or subtle manifestation of endorsing products. Even in the internet, there are a lot of articles planted just to make an advertisement and these are often the infotainment ones. Even video games have cross-promoting activities, or even radio jockeys do it in a very conversational and suave manner. For lots of years, cross-promotion has been commonly practiced, but the problem does not end there.

Cross-promoting activities in various media platforms can not always be subtle, for there many now with explicit exercise of such, and in connection with Lumbera's sacrificing the art grievance, it can already be seen that media does not proliferate art, or material with high value but sacrifices all these, even the content, form, and quality of popular culture just to use it as an advertisement. as an expample, a whole dialogue os story plot can be twisted, to bend, bow and scrape to the demands of the main benefactor -- product endorsements.

Socio- Political Aspect

It was a common saying that whoever has command of the economic power also wields the political. In the study of pop culture and Philippine media, one can already see that the economic and political aspects were highly mutual conditions that are beneficial to each other. This statement is logical for, according to Herman and Chomsky, media really gets all the income from advertisements and whoever has the bigger sponsorship gets the media attention, or programs will be bent according to how their product endorsement vis-a-vis cross-promotion would fit.

It is important to notice, however, that media's power does not only reside on the the economic, but also to the monopoly of sources, as cited also by Herman and Chomsky. There are limited sources by which media can get information, and with it, they control -- government, businesses, and the like -- whatever is going in and out of the information tube.

More over, one must also check the relation of media to its audience. Because of popular culture, media is actually used to create a certain agenda on its viewers, and the resulting relationship is a political one wherein the one controlling here is the media company or institution. According to McCombs and Shaw's Agenda-Setting Theory, media can make us think about something by conditioning our minds in a very latent manner, most especially through salience. It means that if ever the media company wants you to think about a political stand or buying that special perfume, they will do it in repetition and via cross-promotion using several advertising techniques. Surveys such as Nielsen give the media companies an idea what formula would work on a sellable television show, or the like. This can be equivocal with the idea that the "naked" news in several western news companies are created not because they need people to watch news, but also to make them watch and earn their share in the advertising arena. One can argue that some news articles can be imaginary or bloated to be sensationalised and news-worthy. Thus, media, through its influences, indirectly commands the people to behave the way that is favourable to them.

This argument, however, is rapidly changing through leverage, for there is a thing called media democratisation and that is connected with the rise of social media.

To break the monopoly of media conglomerates on the information flow can be attributed with the democratisation of media via the internet. Michael Hauben's theory of the Netizen, when he coined the term in the late 1990's imagined the world's physical limits collapsed via the faster streaming of information and communication via the internet, and true enough, the effect is limitless and transcendental -- quite a benchmark of a 21st century high technology. Hauben also imagined the democratising power of media, for everyone can voice out their ideas via the internet, but this can only be achieved if everyone in the society, even those in the margins, can be given the chance to voice out their ideas.

In the Philippines, the internet usage penetration is more than thirty per cent as of 2012, and is continuously rising (Yahoo-Nielsen, 2013). According to the same survey, more Filipinos use tablets and mobile phones to access the internet, and with the rise of smart phones in the country, we can assume that the projected number can be rising exponentially. However, the

democratisation of media, even if away from Hauben's ideal 100% penetration in the society, is still evident in the society, and this is via social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the like. Among the three, Facebook, is the widely-used platform (Yahoo-Nielsen, 2013).

Public opinion rises from these sites, proliferation of liberal ideas happen especially in the Philippines for the government never censors the content though there was attempt in the Cyber-crime law. The agenda and capability seemed to prove its political worth in the Philippines last September 2013 when, as though an Arab or Persian Spring that were so-called Twitter or Facebook Revolution, through the facilitation of social media, many Filipinos all around the Philippines and the world joined a simultaneous protest they called the "Million People March" (Garchitorea, 2013).

In everyday life, one can see the leverage done by media conglomerates in the social media scene by making an account for famous reporters and television or radio channels so that they can also make real-time broadcasting simultaneous with the real-time updates of social media information dissemination (Garchitorea, 2013). This is soon proved to be beneficial when media companies make news out of public opinion often found in tweets or posts in social media sites, as predicted earlier on through the rise of talk radios (Turner, 2010). There are even portions wherein mere viewers, through mobile devices, are made to report on a first-hand account of a storm surge or anything, and send the clip via internet instead of sending a real and trained reporter to check out the situation. This phenomena, will, nevertheless, prove to be beneficial if Hauben's theory of a democratised society, via the internet wherein all people are given access, plus the required training to voice their selves out as Netizens, would materialise.

CONCLUSION

To summarise the paper, popular culture was first introduced and given flesh and bone through the study of Lumbera. It will be the foundation of the media we see today, and it fleshed out reasons why media commands economic, political, and social power in the Philippines. Through several media theories, it was shown that in media's main goal via the proliferation of pop culture creates a commercialised world as it generated income through advertisements, and whoever command economic power commands the political, as well. Media companies can also facilitate pop culture to make their audience behave the way they would be favourable to them, also because they monopolise the information stream. This can also be countered with the democratisation of media through the facilitation of social networking sites and by projecting ideas as a netizen on the internet. This may cause leverage but may not completely achieve its full potential for full democratisation can be done if all people in the society can gain full access with the said technology. It may also have down effects for media companies can use Netizens as primary sources of information, as though "empowering" them. This can also be countered with education if the public on how to use social media that would benefit them.

"Popular culture is power, and whoever wields it to manipulate minds is likely to find its literary and technological machinery turned against him when the minds it has manipulated discover its potency as a political weapon." (Lumbera, 1984)

The future of social media's political, economic, and social facility as a tool, or a weapon, against media conglomerates and the advertising machinery, or the government or any institutional agenda may still be achieved if the general public, especially those in the margins who were always victimised by the false images shown through media, should discover and use its full potential. # # # #