

The persuading effects of media



The mass media in the Philippines, being the universal source of information, contributes a great influence on our thinking and behavior. This term paper will focus about the impact of media coverage on elections and how it persuades the electorates' behavior. My purpose is to explore the effects of mass media on political power in the Philippines and to show how the media simultaneously disrupt and defends the status quo including the advantages and disadvantages during election campaigns. The first part of this paper will provide and support the ideas of how a fair election is measured in a democratic country. It will also focus on the media's substantial role on the voting behavior that will contribute towards a greater understanding of mass media in our country. The second part deals about the past situation of the media which concerns the different election frauds, corruption, and violence. I will also add an overview about the media's monopoly and commercialism. But among these, the most favorable part is the emergence of the new media through the use of the introduced technology. I will also discuss how the different forms of media campaigning using various campaign strategies through TV ads, polls, debates and others can persuade the voters. Furthermore, this term paper will also argue about the effect of money on election results, whether it is an advantage or a disadvantage to the political candidate. Lastly, I hope to show that communication and persuasion works between the media and the public, that we and others can also influence the media.

How to measure a fair election

In a democratic country like the Philippines, where universal and equal suffrage is a must, the media plays a significant and substantial role for the

development of the society. The media is responsible for ensuring free, fair and equal elections. To make a democratic form of government possible, essential conditions are required. For a country to be democratic, they must secure universal and equal suffrage. The political system must entail recognition of protection of civil liberties and rights. The freedom of speech from candidates and political parties must not be restricted. Enforceable laws must be implemented to prevent election fraud and vote tampering. It must be ensured that an electorate's choice of party or candidate cannot be used against him or her by secret ballot voting. (socyberty. com, 2009) But in general term, it can be said that the people must be the highest form of society.

The role of media before, during and after elections

The fact that the media plays a great role in lives is well known, but its role as a political tool is also well rooted in the political systems. During times of elections, which are seen by many as the hallmarks of democratic political system, the media are expected to undertake very specific roles. It is a cliché, but media as the voice of the public, in the course especially of elections, must be able to inform, educate, enlighten and involve the electorate. Brandt, Hughes, and Rasmussen (2006), have discussed the major tools needed by the media in a fair report and coverage of the elections. They have to provide a platform and forum for controversial societal debates. The news media play the vital role in a democracy of providing the public information on which they can base their decisions on public issues. They have the duty to criticize undemocratic behavior of politicians, to educate the general public in respect of democracy, and to

secure a fair and balanced coverage of elections. The watchdog function of the media is especially crucial during times of electoral campaigns and elections themselves. More importantly, the media's role is to scrutinize the candidates and parties and expose on the same issues and to give voters enough information to compare their positions. The media must report what the parties' and candidates' are saying, even if it does not reflect issues the people want to address (pp. 14-19). If the media coverage in the press and television is not free, fair and equal, the results may be prejudiced. Political discussions cannot be avoided in the print media, political stories are aired on television every day, commercial radio airs political news every hour, and paid political announcements are encountered in all media during campaigns. Candidates' use of the media can have a strong impact upon those who make up their minds about candidates during the campaign. It is within human nature to believe what is told to us. We tend to believe the media because research is done by them and they are a main source of information. The media remains important since they are the means by which people obtain current affairs both inside and outside of the Philippines – however bias it may be. Overall, the media are always present with new stories on political activities.

The new media

The entrance of the modern era meant the advent of modern technology accessible to the public. For the first time in history, the Philippines embraced technology and transformed greatly the electoral system of the country during the May 2010 elections. The Philippine elections have frequently been marked by allegations of widespread cheating and other

electoral malpractice. It was a subject to criticism since the security of the electoral process and its capacity to preserve the sanctity of the ballot and the will of the electorate was put to question. It has always been a manual process from voting to the canvassing of results with the local and national positions. Consequently, we have had hurdled so much because of the slow and tedious process. But due to the advanced technology available in the modern era, the Filipinos' most awaited election was taken to another level. Generally, the automated election fulfilled the promise of speed but complaints and controversies remained (Meisburger, 2010). Many Filipinos until now were not sure whether the new process worked well enough to hold credible elections. Even automated election provided high security, there were still computer experts that bombarded the whole system or hacked the computers and manipulated the results. And I think that it is actually possible that cheaters came from the people who developed the system. Unfortunately and ironically, the press, despite of the intense focus on the new voting machines, failed to highlight critical problems during Election Day. But in my own opinion, the main problem we encountered during the May 2010 automated election was “ transparency”. People were not able to see the actual process of counting the votes and several doubted if the results are really correct. Reporting on the first automated election also posed new challenges to the media. The press had to be alert to new kinds of problems as well as to keep the coverage on the day itself interesting. But it was obvious from the first hours of coverage that the television networks were clearly prepared to resort to the magic of technology to keep audiences tuned in. The media is intensely influential in the present day's systems of domination. Because the majority of the public does not in fact hear political

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speeches, witness activities, or observe actions of leaders, they depend on the media to exhibit the news in an accessible form. It becomes easy to comprehend how vital the media is, and what will be the effects of the news on the society whenever it is presented. Even a little change of news has the potentials to greatly influence public opinion (people. virginia. edu).

Dirty Politics: Bias Media and Corrupt Candidates

On the further side of the media, television has been with us for more than thirty years (Del Mundo, 1986, p. 10). By any standard, thirty years is long enough to develop a meaningful mass medium. Although in the past, the role of media is not as great as it is today. During an election, it was not surprising to see the media being harnessed to serve the politicians who held media power. Rocamora, for instance, concluded that “ Cheating is a well-developed art in Philippine elections. Local Politicians are adept at manipulating the process from beginning to end.” (Rocamora, 1998, p. 23). So having no doubt, the media with its own weaknesses, would most likely practice bias electoral processes. Corruption in the media industry is a fact, and it is worst during elections. There is a general feeling about the political bias of the media that it is too negative. They place an importance on finding out what is wrong, but do not tell the complete picture about what is being done. There are indeed media networks that are owned by families who are biased in favor of certain candidates. We can see this prejudicial act most often when the media had begun to be very one-sided in terms of reporting the news. The media should be obligated to tell the truth and not manufacture or elaborate stories, even if it does not sound as good. It has and will continue to destroy the careers of some and make the careers of

others. Even though most of the television news stations are owned by wealthy individuals, they should not be so biased. The media and the politicians only want us to see what a perfect world we live in, so they tend to hide the truth or work their way around it. But that is not always the case; sometimes desperate politicians are simply exaggerating when they condemn the alleged bias of the media. They tend to highlight the critical views reported by the media but they overlook the balanced presentation of facts in news reports. Another unjust intervention was experienced by the media during the Marcos era. Independence of the media has always been viewed with admiration everywhere in the world. But in 1972 to 1981, when martial law was declared during the regime of President Marcos, media monopoly started. Not just one agency was organized to do the job. Thus, the media suppression of the Marcos era restored the powerful and influential appetite of the public for news. But unfortunately, until now, the media's authority, security and freedom was not completely fulfilled (Del Mundo, 1986, pp. 77-89). Moreover, the recent Maguindanao massacre would be the worst example of election-related violence, wherein many members of the press and media was killed and abducted. Therefore, these malpractices and bad connotations simply imply the common term "dirty politics" which I think is not fair because politics must always be understood in a larger context. And talking about the status quo, generally it is the media that is bias and the politicians that are corrupt.

Defining a “CAMPAIGN”

In the course especially of elections, we cannot exclude the fact of the emergence of inevitable frauds and intense violence. Every now and then, the media conclusively reports about the most compelling issues and irregularities related to elections, especially during the campaign period. A campaign is the period right before citizens make a real political choice. Campaign activity is more likely to register on voters’ minds as the Election Day draws near (Brady, Johnston & Sides, 2004, p. 2). According to Brandt, Hughes, and Rasmussen (2006):

“ Most parties make their leader the centre of attention so voters who like the leader will vote for the party’s candidates. So the party’s election campaign is composed of speeches, party rallies and press conferences featuring the party leader. But the media’s job is not just to repeat all the words spoken by the leaders. There should also be information in the news story about where the speech was given and how many people were there and what was the reaction of people in the streets, and what did political opponents say. Voters deserve to know so they can compare and decide for themselves.” (Brandt, Hughes, and Rasmussen, 2006, p. 16).

Ultimately, political ads and campaigns can affect who will win the election. As is true of other types of human relationships, first impressions can be very important as voters form their opinions about political candidates. Research on election decisions suggests that candidates' use of the media can have a strong impact upon those who make up their minds about candidates during the campaign. They can affect what the voters know, whether they will vote, whom they will vote for and why they will vote for that person. In general, people already have their own ideas when they view television, read newspapers, or log on to websites. To a man, the campaign staffs of politicians agree that the three requisites for a successful campaign are: media, machinery and money. (Coronel, Chua, De Castro, 2004, p. 123)

The media as a form of campaign strategy

Television campaigns come from various forms. It can be a form of commercial, debates, speech, press conference, polls or interviews which are aired on local television news broadcasts, talk shows and even game shows. The television commercial, the most powerful form of advertising is the most interesting and most complex kind of political advertisement. It is the main way that modern campaigns communicate with voters. It can give you as the electorate an idea of how trustworthy candidates are, how they communicate or connect with the people, how they behave under stress, how they sell their program and what do they stand for. According to a study made by Coronel, Chua and De Castro (2004), " The Arroyo and Lacson campaigns were most successful than the others in getting their spins across. This was because they had more sophisticated media strategies and

handlers. They had a clearer idea of the message they wanted to project and made sure that this message was successfully conveyed through the media.” (p. 21). Through TV ads, the audiences who are watching their favorite television programs will have a chance to meet the candidates and there is a possibility that they can recall them since they are shown in every commercial break. The advertiser will create another image of the candidate to make them appreciated and accepted by the target audience. The use of informal words, the inclusion of popular song and dance, the color, social issues, and the representation of people’s age, gender, profession and religion are very useful for the ads’ recall (Encabo, 2010, pp. 11-12). In a survey conducted by Fonbuena. Rufo and Tabunda (2008), during the campaign period itself, respondents were asked to name political advertisements on television that they could recall. An ad was considered correctly recalled by a respondent if the respondent was able to identify the candidates in the advertisements that they recalled. Political ads are effective in converting voter awareness into actual votes for the candidates to the extent only that these ads incredibly project an image of the candidate as one who will effectively address the issues and concerns of the electorate. Studies show that commercials and debates aired right before Election Day have the most effect on undecided viewers (pp. 27-28). Voters who have already formed their opinions are hardly influenced by the media to the point of changing their minds. But as defined by House, Ludwig and Stratmann (2009), advertising need not to be truthful in deceptive campaigns. Both types of candidates engage in campaign advertising claiming that they are of high quality. Hence, they define advertising as

deceptive when a low-quality candidate advertises that he is high-quality (p. 6).

Opinion polls, on the other hand, are mostly used by political parties to discover what issues a representative sample of voters think is important. As defined by Lange (1999), voting intention polls indicate the popularity of political parties/candidates, show ratings, and suggest the outcome of elections. Parties will sometimes change their campaign promises because opinion polls reveal what will be more popular (pp. 49-50). People always say in polls, they do not like negative campaigns but voting records seem to indicate that they are affected or influenced by them. Opinion polls also influence voters because voters like to know what their neighbors are thinking and may decide to vote the same way. As such, poll results could increasingly frame the coverage of the election campaign. Exposure to polls may serve to increase a general interest in voting in the public, but there is little to demonstrate a change in voter intention, which is what we call bandwagon effect. Opinion polls are only a brief sample of people's opinions at the time they were asked. Polls cannot predict how opinions – and votes – will change if voters learn new information. Polls should not become the lead story everyday because they may influence voters to follow popular opinion rather than think for themselves. Lange (1999) observed that debates have advantages and disadvantages, but on balance seem positive. On the negative side, it has been argued that mandatory debates would circumscribe the candidates' freedom to run campaigns as they wish that it is not always possible to have all party leaders participating and that debates tend to 'spotlight' the party leaders too intensely. On the positive

side, debates allow the candidates to face the public directly, they have been shown to heighten citizens' interest in elections and their levels of information, they are a means of enabling the public to make a direct comparison of the candidates, and as such are a useful supplement to the normal news coverage (pp. 28-29).

Aside from the old traditions of advertising, the innovative transformation of the society was considered as a milestone in the electoral system. I am not just talking about the May 2010 automated elections, but it is about how social media is changing the face of democracy through the use of different social networking sites in campaigning for a political party or candidate. Generally, traditional media and new media worked together for a more comprehensive coverage of the 2010 Philippine Elections. Rafter (2009) for example, stated that, the internet has assumed an increasingly important role in political communications and has provided new ways of communicating political messages with the public. Traditional concerns about television and radio political advertising are equally applicable to the Internet but there is no debate about regulating political content on the web (p. 29). TV news stations also marked a milestone in media history when they reported election updates in real time using the new media. They even used the Facebook and Twitter to post news updates and reports about the election. Most of the Social Media websites which have had a major worldwide impact on Internet usage and thus perceived international impact, like YouTube, Flickr, Blogger, WordPress, Google, Wikipedia, Myspace, Facebook and Twitter (eGovernment-Symposium, 2009, p. 7). As predicted by some experts and scholars, it is probably only a matter of time before

everyone will be able to vote over the Internet. Still, for those who create and air ads, the bottom line is the bottom line. The intended effect of political advertising or paid media is to win political battles by creating and delivering biased messages. Informing and engaging the public outside of one's supporters, when and if it occurs, is a by-product or secondary effect of the effort to win political battles.

Does money wins elections?

But the most intriguing factor that affects the decision of the electorate is the presence of money. Rocamora (1998), observe that for a candidate to win Philippine elections, they have to spend three times: once to get nominated, second to garner votes, third to get his votes counted, added to, and those of his opponents subtracted (p. 27). According to political scientist Ciyde Wilcox, money matters most when the candidates are least known to the voters, when they do not receive a lot of news coverage, and when paid advertising, which, of course, is expensive, can bring recognition and enhance images (Wayne, 1992, p. 52). As I have said, the ads play a big role in the entire campaign. The earlier the ad is aired, the earlier the candidate's rating goes up and the earlier the candidate can shift to conversion. Indeed, this means paying a longer period for advertisement slots. The cost of political campaign is rising and rising fast. The use of other modern technology has also increased expenditures. One 30-second ad can cost a candidate from P34, 000 to P243, 000, depending on the station and the time slot. These costs are already slashed by 30 percent, the legally mandated discount for candidates (Fonbuena, Rufo, Tabunda, 2008, p. 61). But because of factors such as popularity and acceptability, campaign

budgets may still vary from candidate to candidate. If a candidate is already popular, a lesser amount can be allocated for election paraphernalia. The amount a candidate spends will largely depend on the style of his/her political strategies. Literally speaking, before a sensible person joins a political fray, he/she should check his/her wallet first. Elections are indeed expensive affairs. Radio and television appearance, newspaper advertising, travel for the candidate, mailings of campaign materials, maintaining a network of campaign offices, taking polls, and raising money itself – all cost a great deal of money. The notion that the side with more money has a better chance of winning is very common. Lack of budget for the campaign can be solved through public and private funding. The ability to raise money is not only a matter of wealth but also of being able to attract funds from others. Way before the campaign period, funds can already be raised. It is obviously important for a financially challenged candidate to seek and accept whatever material support they can find. Sponsored activities like a ball, a concert, a movie premier, T-shirt sales, and bazaars can be organized. But most campaign donations would not come in until a candidate's showing becomes strong during the campaign period. Their contributions serve as insurance money, an investment they hope to draw from in the future. Another source, though largely unreported for obvious reasons, would be gambling and smuggling operations that seek the protection of the politicians.

According to Co, Lao, Sayo and Tigno (2005), potential candidates who do not have the financial resources and backing to undertake a campaign have a little chance of winning (p. 98). But apparently, I beg to disagree that financial outlays can guarantee victory in elections. Although the money

spent might still serve as a good index to electoral strength, the candidates and parties with the most money did not always win. Money however is only one factor. And even when relatively honest people do win, they have to spend so much money to campaign that they invariably become corrupt in order to recover their expenses or to return the favor of financial backers. Wayne (1992) stated that, theoretically, campaign spending should have a greater impact on the nomination process than on the general election, and on the beginning of the process than at the end (p. 51). Whether or not money determines campaign victors, it exerts an enormous influence on elections. Heard (1960), notes that the effect of money in politics is probably more certain in determining who the candidates will be than in determining the outcome of the elections. Although the main goal of those who sponsor political advertising is to win elections, advertising can also influence what citizens know about candidates and public policy and how engaged citizens are in their own governance. And, as discussed above, influencing what voters know, ads can influence whom voter choose (Goldenstein, Ridout, 2004, p. 211).

The impact of media on the electoral system

The overwhelming power of the mass media is something that we accept as fact. We are dependent on media for information. Media have become our connection to the real world. Indeed, there have been a lot of contributions media has made in politics, particularly during elections. The availability of media coverage during elections from the nomination period to the canvassing of votes, keeps the public informed of all the crucial events that occur during the elections. In the present times, it has gained a greater

importance than how it was in the past. Filipinos much more now than ever in the past, rely on the mass media in deciding whom to vote and which issues are important. There is a hunger for information and citizens are much more attentive to media reports during elections than in other times. It has thus gained more influence over the voting behavior of the electorate and greater power in altering the opinions of the people. During campaigns, bad publicity can mean almost certain death to a promising political career to a politician. No matter what good things a person has done in the past, if the media decides to publish the bad, their chances are blown. Population as a whole also recognizes the large role the media plays in their lives. They are well aware that the press plays the most dominant role in determining which issues and events are considered significant (Brandt, Hughes, Rasmussen, 2006, pp. 15-17).

Conclusion

The media's role in politics is even more significant. They help shape the political culture, and have the power to make a candidate appealing or repulsive. The media can also lead the general public to misunderstand the actions of one particular political group, and as a result, other political parties have to face a difficult political situation. Encabo (2010) concluded that politicians and advertisement producers believe that advertising allows candidates to reach even the uninterested and unmotivated citizens like those who are not paying attention in news reports, debates, and other campaign event (p. 20). The media is primarily needed to fix itself to reporting on politics, not shaping it. The media should not have the bias of the nation, but should offer information to allow ideas to form liberally and

independently. The nature of the impact of the media coverage is perhaps most dramatically evident in people's awareness of the candidates and the consequences for how they vote. In the coverage of elections, media fulfills different roles. This includes informing, enlightening, and educating the electorate, providing a platform and forum for controversial social debates, forming public opinion, and serving as a watchdog on the side of the citizens. Among these roles, the duty of informing the electorate is the primary and the other roles are only ancillary and fall under this primary role. The media has also the ability of affecting the behavior and decision making of the electorate. Many factors are to consider in determining the voting behavior of the electorate; and though there is no certainty on the extent that media affects the decision making process of the electorate, media is one of the few things that can count heavily on affecting and changing the opinions and decisions of the electorate. Apart from persuading the electorate, the media can also persuade the political candidates. The media influence the decision and actions of politicians and officials, change their priorities and can reduce their ability to control events. Another thing to consider in the influence of media in elections is the campaign financing that is required of candidates in order to afford the media resources necessary for advancing the campaign. The costs on campaign financing have escalated primarily due to the fact that it is expensive to employ media resources. However, though it is expensive, but because it is believed to be the most effective medium of campaigning, it is the least likely expense in campaign financing to be cut. The high costs of campaign financing pose problems for less affluent candidates. It is a disadvantage for the poor candidate who does not have the necessary resources necessary to run a campaign which will be able to

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employ media as one of its medium of advertisement. Because of this, the integrity of the electoral system of a democratic nation such as the Philippines becomes flawed. People, based on democratic theory, should have equal opportunity to run for office regardless of economic status. But because of the high costs imposed by media on running a campaign, this is hardly true. There is therefore a need for the strict implementation of campaign finance laws during elections so as not to put an advantage on the wealthy and a disadvantage on the less affluent candidates. The media plays a crucial role in the realization of this goal. Through these insights, it is therefore true that media persuasion does not only work between the media and the public, but logically speaking, we and others can also influence the media. Both positively and negatively, the mass media contributes a great factor in affecting the decisions of the electorate because it exercises a powerful role in the electoral processes by informing and educating the public.

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