

## PANEL 4

## Media Framing and Coverage: Competing Images and Collective Action



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The struggle for media visibility is central to the repertoires of collective action of social movements. In his book *The Strategy of Social Protest*, William Gamson identifies the media as the “central battleground” for challenging groups (1990:147). Social movements rely on the media to spread their message to a target because of the latter’s omnipresence and extensive reach. The content of media coverage may radically influence the prospects for mobilization of challenging demands and movements, as it affects public awareness and perceived importance of a particular issue; hence, in itself, the media system’s openness to social movements is an important component of the political opportunity structure (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Likewise, in a society where the media often set or build the agenda, media advocacy has become a huge component of social-movement strategy. As such, a protest without media coverage is often a nonevent.

Using the case studies of the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), the Stop the New Round Coalition (SNR), and the Transparency and Accountability Network

(TAN), this presentation attempts to answer three basic questions on the relationship between social movements and the media:

1. How does the movement project itself and its issues to the media?
2. How do the media frame or portray the movement and the problem or issues that it with?
3. Does coverage focus more on form rather than substance?

However, the data presented in this paper were merely culled from the discussions on media advocacy in the case studies. No systematic inquiry on the media coverage was undertaken. Only a cursory reading of news accounts about the coalitions was done. Furthermore, this paper focuses only on the news media, which differ in both character and effect from other forms of mass communication.

## MOVEMENT-MEDIA TRANSACTION

The seminal work of William Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld offers a conceptual framework about the ways in which social movements relate to the news media. They argue that the interaction involving the media and social movements is "a transaction between two complicated systems of actors with complex internal relationships," which has both structural and cultural dimensions (1993:115).

The structural component focuses on the power and dependency aspect of the relationship and the consequences of the asymmetries, while the cultural draws attention to the contest over meaning (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). It is a fact that movements are generally much more dependent on the news media rather than the opposite, thereby giving the latter more power in the relationship. Social movements need media coverage for three purposes: *mobilization* or reaching their constituency by influencing media discourse; *validation*, wherein receiving standing in the media is often a necessary condition before targets of influence grant a social movement recognition and deal with its claims and demands; and *scope enlargement*, or drawing in third parties as mediators, partisans, or sympathizers through broadening the scale of conflict (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). On the other hand, the news media seek out social movements as "they provide drama, conflict, and action; colorful copy; and photo opportunities" (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993:117). Social movements, however, operate in a market environment in which they are only one source of news among many.

In terms of the cultural feature of the relationship, both movements and the media are intertwined in the interpretation of events or the struggle over framing. A frame is a central organizing idea, suggesting what is at issue (Benford and Snow 2000). While journalists play a central role in the construction of meaning by supporting a storyline in reporting events, they also serve as gatekeepers deciding which sponsors of frame are granted standing, and selecting what to highlight. Often, this process reflects the power differences in the larger society (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). Some ideas are given more privilege than others, and some are simply put in the uncontested realm of media discourse where they appear as "transparent descriptions of reality, not as interpretations, and are apparently

devoid of political content" (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993:120). It is a challenge for social movements to ensure that their issues are within the contested sphere.

In actuality, social movements do a double framing job: they frame the issues and themselves. This is also the case with the news media. However, it is possible that the news media cover the issues and recognize the validity of the movement's claims and demands, but dismiss the movement itself or make it appear marginal in status compared to other actors (Hammond 2004). This is where the movement's tactical plan in terms of media advocacy comes into play, and acknowledging the news media not just as a channel but also a target is a critical first step.

## ABOUT THE MOVEMENTS

FDC, which emerged in 1987, brings together a broad spectrum of political blocs and their sectoral groups as well as technical experts and personalities. The positions that originally united the organizations and individuals under FDC were as follows: implement a moratorium on foreign debt service payments until acceptable terms based on the country's capacity to pay are won in a new agreement; disengage from loans that did not benefit the people, particularly those tainted with fraud; and limit foreign debt service payments to no more than ten percent of export earnings to enable the country to finance its economic recovery. SNR is a broad grouping of public-interest groups and individuals that spearheaded a Philippine campaign against the launching of a new round of negotiations in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the Fifth Ministerial Meeting of the trade body in 2003. Thus, central unities of SNR were as follows: opposition to a new round of WTO trade negotiations; opposition to further WTO trade and trade-related liberalization; and opposition to the incorporation of the "new issues" of investment, competition policy, government procurement, and trade facilitation into the WTO agenda. TAN is made up of a diverse group of anti-corruption oriented civil-society organizations. These groups frequently met in different forums during the largely anti-corruption mobilizations launched against former president Joseph Estrada. TAN was created in November 2000. It specifically aims to serve as a mechanism for coordinating transparency and accountability initiatives of civil society; engage government, the private sector, and the citizenry in a comprehensive strategy to promote transparency and accountability; and formulate, advocate, and, where appropriate, implement strategic reform initiatives.

## MOVEMENTS' MEDIA PROJECTION AND STRATEGIES

In the case of SNR, a particular challenge was the extremely low public knowledge and appreciation of international trade and WTO-related issues essentially because these are highly technical and unappealing, and have not yet been translated into a bread-and-butter issue for the common person. In an attempt to shape and influence public opinion through the news media, given an unenlightened population, SNR's approach was retrospective, but the threat of a new WTO round through a consensus in the Cancun Ministerial was always the overarching frame used. In terms of content, the media strategy of SNR oscillated from the core issues to the coalition then back again. In the beginning, the focus

was on basic introduction of the WTO, the Cancun Ministerial, and the implications of a new round. At the heart of the campaign, SNR decided to embark on an all-out public relations. The tactical objective was not only to heighten the issues related to WTO and Cancun but also to accentuate the role of SNR in all these through maximum media coverage. Finally, during the Cancun Ministerial, the coalition reverted to the issues, through its *Cancun Monitor* fed by the SNR delegates who were at the summit.

Conversely, the TAN's media campaign against corruption was based on three general objectives: to educate the general public about the nature, roots, and effects of corruption on our country's economic and political development; to call on the public to help fight corruption at all levels through the power of their votes and their collective action; and to raise anti-corruption as an election issue and platform for government.

Media-related activities of FDC, SNR, and TAN were nothing unusual. They regularly issued statements in reaction to government pronouncements or in response to certain developments in the trade negotiations. They held press conferences on various topics and events. They aired radio plugs and programs in national AM stations. Spokespersons appeared in radio and television interviews and carried the coalition's analyses and positions in the opinion-editorial sections of newspapers (e.g., Walden Bello's think-pieces in *BusinessWorld*). Demonstrations are treated as media events. Even full-page advertisements and bulletins were utilized. In all these actions, FDC, SNR, and TAN were involved in framing contests and theatrics of resistance.

### Framing Contests

SNR's demand for disclosure is a good example. In the run-up to Cancun, the Philippine government was largely reticent about its negotiating strategy for the summit. Since international trade is under the realm of Philippine foreign policy, negotiations are pursued behind closed doors by an elite group of experts in entirely secret diplomatic processes. By design, there are no built-in mechanisms for participation, especially from nongovernment actors. Information is treated as potentially debilitating to negotiating tactics and thus shielded from public scrutiny. According to Philippine Trade Minister and Chief Negotiator Manuel A. Roxas III, because of a confidentiality clause, the government could not reveal in detail the country's position in the talks. For government, public disclosure of positions and strategies prior to negotiation is like giving the rest of the 143 member-states of the WTO the upper hand. As an official of the Bureau of International Trade Relations stated, "Revealing the country's negotiating positions might hold the country's multilateral trade representatives hostage to other countries' negotiating tactics" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 19 August 2003).

This was, however, disputed by SNR. The coalition considered the government's secrecy as suggestive either of an absence of a negotiating position, which questions its preparedness for the summit, or worse, the existence of a proposal for Cancun that could be detrimental to the Philippine economy and that could instigate public outrage if divulged. Thus, in all of the issues and developments in the WTO within its campaign period, SNR called for transparency and democratic decision making, invoking the egalitarian principles of the right to be informed and

participate, and challenging government's contention that international trade policy making be confined to the technocrats.

In this strategy, academics and NGO figures were at the forefront.



Figure 1. An FDC picket invoking the Passion of Christ

during the Lenten season (see figure 1). This tactic is used not only to present the issue in an easily comprehensible manner, but also to capture the media's attention by its sheer theatricality.

Images from local and foreign popular culture also serve the same purpose. *Darna* and the *Da Vinci Code* were both deployed to get FDC's message across. In *Darna*, FDC is the heroine calling for freedom from debt (see figure 2), and in *Da Vinci Code*, House Speaker Jose de Venecia is the malevolent and scheming brain of the charter-change initiative that FDC opposes (see figure 3).

To reach a wider audience, a radio drama entitled "Piit at Liwanag sa Liwayway" (Darkness and Light at Dawn), based on the storyline of "Anatomiya ng Korapsyon" (Anatomy of Corruption) written by Malou Jacob and produced by the Cultural Center of the Philippines, was aired on Radyo Pitlag on 16-30 April 2004 just before the 2004 presidential elections in order to raise corruption as an important issue among the electorate. The radio drama presented the "struggle between good and evil, trickery and honesty, in a small progressing town in the country, with the conclusion that in the long run, corruption can never alleviate poverty."

On the other hand, in a three-day teaser prior to a full-page advertisement on nontransparency in trade negotiations published in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*,

### Dramaturgy and the Theatrics of Resistance

On issues that persist for a long period of time, journalists are often compelled to find a fresh angle. As such, if there is a lull especially when the issue has no progress in the policy-making arena, social movements are compelled to take action so that the news media sustain its interest. Using images that are deemed to be easily understood culturally, FDC resorted to images from the *sinakulo* (Passion play) in its demonstration on the water issue



Figure 2. FDC's *Darna*

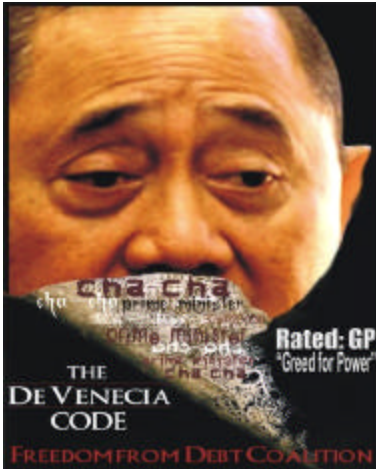


Figure 3. FDC's take on secrets and conspiracies in the Arroyo administration

SNR used caricatures and mockeries denigrating the country's chief negotiators—Department of Agriculture Secretary Luis Lorenzo and Trade Minister Roxas—and President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (see figure 4).

In such strategies, there is more focus on form than substance.

## MEDIA COVERAGE

In this section, I discuss only the media treatment of SNR. By and large, both SNR and its three major issues—the WTO, Cancun Ministerial, and the Philippine trade policy—were covered extensively by *BusinessWorld*, *Today*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and *The Manila Times*. A cursory reading of the news accounts reveals that media coverage

highlights more of the issues rather than events, and SNR was often the only nongovernment actor granted standing in the news.

### Issues: From Technical to Superficial

Treatment, however, differs from one newspaper to another. In most of the reports, particularly those that appeared on the business section, the technical details (e.g., tariff rates, subsidies, statistical trends, etc.) were emphasized. On the other hand, political and social questions (e.g., democratic governance, dynamics of trade policy making, sectoral interests, etc.) were the themes in a number of news articles located on the front page. There were also instances wherein the spotlight was aimed at the infighting among and between members of the legislature and the executive, overshadowing the policy in question. Those that attempted to concentrate only on the issue at hand were, however, comfortable with the “for-or-against” frame, which, obviously, barely scratched the surface.



Figure 4. SNR's teasers published in a national daily

This certainly is not new. As Melinda Quintos de Jesus of the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility affirmed:

In reporting on complex policy news such as E-VAT [Expanded Value Added Tax], the tendency of the press is to classify policy in terms of black and white or good or bad. This leads to the debunking of ideas and proposals, without first clarifying what problems the proposed policy is trying to address. (2001:28)

### **Movement: "Dual" Character**

On the other hand, there were divergences in the treatment of SNR, depending on the event being covered. In news reports about SNR's press conferences and policy briefings, as well as congressional inquiries and developments of the WTO talks wherein the SNR perspective was included, SNR was often described as a "policy advocacy organization," a "cause-oriented group," a "coalition of nongovernment organizations (NGOs), farmers, laborers, and other stakeholders," or an "industry group." On one occasion, SNR was even referred to as "moderate." In contrast, SNR was labeled a "militant movement," "anti-globalization activists," and "a formation of Left groups," naming political blocs comprising the coalition (Akbayan! Citizens' Action Party, Bukluran sa Ikauunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa, Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya, and SANLAKAS) in news accounts of demonstrations and protest rallies.

A propensity to draw attention to personalities or so-called media stars was also apparent. Because of his reputation as an expert and critic of the WTO, University of the Philippines professor Walden Bello served as interlocutor of SNR's positions. This is also the case with FDC and its president Ana Marie "Princess" Nemenzo. Both Bello and Nemenzo were epitomized as *the* movement, gaining standing as main carriers of the issue frames.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the battle for coverage in the news media, social movements utilize a range of strategies, which involves contests of frames or interpretations of events and issues and the social construction of reality. But the event-driven logic of media operations puts social movements in a bind: often it must create spectacle at the cost of the message that it wishes to convey. Social movements, therefore, bank on the "dynamism" that histrionics and popular culture bring. In this case, the media visibility has a price.

Similarly, the highly technical and complex issues of trade are uncontroversial and difficult to angle in the news stories. Journalists are still guided by the news values that determine whether a story would make news or not: conflict, oddity, prominence, etc. Emphasis on the issues' technical language makes them removed from politics, thus confining them to the uncontested sphere of the media discourse. But framing the issues in such a way that "conflict" is created (e.g., accent on infighting among parliamentarians and technocrats and the use of "for-or-against" frame) does not necessarily imply discursive contestations because of the sheer superficiality of the coverage. In addition, in news media's treatment of a movement, there seems to be a prejudgment of their character based on the

actions they are engaged in: if the news is about marches and demonstrations, the movements are labeled “militant,” “anti,” or “Left”; whereas if it reports on state-movement engagement, they are “policy advocacy” or “cause-oriented” groups. Media celebrities who are luminaries of Philippine civil society also become symbols of the movement, although they may not be representative of the constituency that the movement claims to mobilize.

To conclude, the strategies of FDC, SNR, and TAN seem to correspond to what drives the news media. Having years of experience in engaging journalists, they have mastered the art of attracting attention to themselves. Nonetheless, if the political economy of image production is always taken as a given, then it remains a challenge to social movements to frame their issues in such a way that the message is not compromised—that substance is not conceded to form.

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## Reactions

**GLENDA GLORIA** (MANAGING EDITOR, *NEWSBREAK*):

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to this forum. I have a personal interest in the topic because I began my career as a journalist covering social movements for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in the late 1980s. Those were good times not only for the media but for the social movements as well.





This came to mind as I was reading Ms. Quinsaats's insightful paper. It tackled relevant issues that confront the media and social movements today: power relations, the harsh demands of the market, the perennial challenge of having to balance form with substance, and the endless question of whether social movements are correctly setting the agenda or are allowing the media to set the pace in the engagement.

The paper highlights the fact that social movements face two nagging problems vis-à-vis the media. First, the media is so event-driven that social movements need to squeeze all their creative juices to attract attention. Second, beyond the theatrics of protest events, the media seems uninterested in the core of the social-movement agenda. It requires the journalist to flex more than his or her visual faculties to see the issue more critically and immerse himself or herself in the agenda. Thus, we have a situation in which social movements are forced to play by the media's rules. These rules, however, do not necessarily enrich public discourse.

The paper asked a valid question: should social movements just cater to what drives the media? To help us understand the dynamics and chart a more fruitful engagement between the two very complex sectors, I think we ought to acknowledge one basic fact that I think the paper did not touch on: the global media landscape has changed. The context in which the Philippine media and social movements operate now is vastly different from two decades ago. It is worth asking whether social movements have seen this change and are prepared to adapt to it.

We can start by acknowledging this change. First, there is admittedly the dominance of the television (TV) medium. TV is king, and that is why social movements are forced to be more theatrical and perhaps even hysterical in their conduct toward the media. Focusing on print media might not be helpful if we are to chart forward-looking strategies vis-à-vis the media. Indeed, TV is a potent force, which is probably why social movements are forced to resort to theatrics today. This is also probably one of the reasons why social movements, skilled in discourse and writing, are getting drowned in a sea of TV-savvy media subjects. Finally, the power of TV can also account for the tendency to cover social movements only when they get water-cannoned or tear-gassed or when they are making noise because social movements know little else that could attract enough TV attention.

In 1986, newspapers lorded over the industry. The print journalists were the hot shots then. Now, that is no longer true. In a 2003 Social Weather Stations survey, only 11 percent of Filipinos said they read newspapers every day, while 60 percent said they watch TV daily. The total circulation of Manila-based broadsheets and tabloids is estimated at 1.5 million, which is about the same volume as when Marcos was just ousted.

What is the dominance of TV telling us? That the average Filipino, who does not belong in the first place to a reading race, has a shorter attention span than he had twenty years ago. That the average Filipino, who is poorer than he was twenty years ago, can no longer afford to buy newspapers or magazines. He has little else but free TV and radio as sources of information. And a cellphone, of course.

In the golden days of newspaper journalism, we used to think that we created events and shaped them through exposés. But stories now are more event-driven, as what Ms. Quinsaats's paper says, and that is largely because of TV. TV journalists

are in a round-the-clock search for drama in the streets, for things that could shock or entertain the public. Therefore, it does not harm social movements if they prime their best-looking and most articulate leader to be the “face” that represents the group. If Walden Bello is the icon on mass movements against the unfettered global trade, so be it. But the bigger challenge is to look for little Walden Bellos in the countryside who have a story to tell, who have a face to show, and whose miserable lives—thanks to globalization—will not fail to tug at the heart of Filipino viewers. TV dominance forces social movements to do more than what they are doing now—holding press conferences, granting interviews, and holding forums—and to embrace what is basic in journalism: to bring journalists to the trenches, so to speak, so they could come face to face with real people with real stories to tell. Do not bore them with numbers; titillate them with stories.

Aside from TV, there is also the growth of the Internet, which the paper did not tackle. There is the emergence of so-called “citizen journalists,” who blog their way through the convergence of multiple media platforms. The question that social movements need to ask themselves now is not so much how they should engage these media channels—that is a given—but whether they could mobilize and build consensus from diverse, dispersed, but very interconnected communities.

I do not agree that social movements have to create a spectacle each time they need media attention. Social movements simply have to be more creative in thinking of ways to get their message across. Journalists are not just inspired by what is odd or problematic. They are driven by human stories. This is especially true in the Philippines now because TV networks are in a constant battle for ratings. A lot of human drama is happening in the countryside. But unfortunately, even media coverage or media framing is so urban- and Metro Manila-centered.

Thus, the real challenge is to give the media and the public what they both need (which accounts for substance) and want (which accounts for form). The question has ceased to be a matter of simply choosing between substance and form. We have to give them both. The real challenge is to take the media out of a box and treat it as an evolving industry—one that lives within certain contexts, one that is vastly dependent on technology, and one that is full of contradictions: fueled by capitalist money but fired up, for the most part, by public service.

Social movements need not sort out this contradiction; they only have to live with it. Contradictions are, in a way, fueled by uneven power relations, which leads me to my next comment. The paper points out that power relations is one-sided in favor of the media, presumably because social movements need the media. That is partly correct. But to use this as framework for describing the engagement assumes a transactional relationship. Both sides treat each other on the basis of what they can provide. Thus, when there are no corrupt officials to expose or policies to criticize, the engagement seems to come to a halt. As consequence, because of the nature of their jobs, journalists tend to hunt for more sensational stories, leaving the issues of social movements once again out of the limelight.

However, social movements can and should continue the engagement, continue pitching story ideas or sending data to journalists even during the “off-season.” Social movements ought to know that in the end, they have nothing to lose by educating people who need to be educated. And I guarantee you, journalists are among those people.

**IRIS CECILIA GONZALES**

(SENIOR REPORTER,  
*BUSINESSWORLD*):

I agree with the paper that social movements recognize the importance of framing issues to present to the media, whether their end goal is to mobilize or educate people or to move the policymakers. However, social movements also need to understand that the media work on various frames and that there are several factors why an issue is covered by the media.

It should also be noted that each media organization has its own biases. Some focus heavily

on the social-movement organizations while others are more oriented toward their issues. In the same vein, some TV stations emphasize the entertainment value in choosing issues and presenting them.

Besides the organizational predisposition, social movements have to contend with the individual biases of journalists. I have colleagues who are not interested in covering the World Trade Organization because it is too technical. In my case, my interest in the anti-WTO campaign was born out of being assigned to the trade and industry beat as a reporter of the *BusinessWorld*. I covered the Stop the New Round Coalition, one of the organizations tackled in the research.

I would like to share with you my experience with SNR. As the paper mentioned, it is a time-bound campaign against the launching of a new round of WTO talks. Was I convinced of the "demand for transparency" frame that SNR consistently used? Not necessarily, but it gave me a very good lead. I pursued this, went to the side of the government, and pressed trade officials to explain what accounts for their nondisclosure. This was how I framed some of my stories in the run-up to the Cancun Ministerial.

In addition, social movements have to deal with the differing advocacy interests of journalists. During the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference of the WTO, I observed that a reporter from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* covered the protest, while other reporters covering the business beat focused only on the progress of the trade negotiations. There are also instances when some journalists choose not to cover press conferences on certain issues. And even if the journalist is interested in the issue, the coverage depends on the angle that he or she wants to focus on.

An important aspect about the practice of journalism is that, aside from the lack of ethics, some journalists do not have adequate training and education. They have dismissive views of activists. In effect, they fail to go beyond the spectacle in protest actions and pursue the issues. I believe social movements should also educate the media as much as they do with the public. For its part, the media should also be open to learning from social movements, not only to gain story

leads but, more important, to have an in-depth understanding of their issues and advocacies.

I have mentioned some realities from the field that social movements might want to consider in coming up with ways to frame their campaigns. I agree with the author that it is a challenge for social movements to frame their issues in such a way that the message is not compromised. The media have the capacity to analyze, but information may be limited. Thus, one challenge for the media is to emphasize substance more than form. We need to constantly study and keep ourselves updated.

## MARIA LOURDES MANGAHAS

(VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND  
CONTENT DEVELOPMENT, GMA  
NETWORK INC.):

A colleague of mine mentioned a famous dictum: the role of the journalist is to make the important interesting and the interesting relevant. I think this is food for thought for social movements as well. If you want to do your advocacies through the media, it is important to make them interesting *and* relevant.

What seems to be lacking in the paper is the idea of who takes command in the relationship. And I propose that social movements should assume control. That means

not being passive, but mastering the media to produce the best results. Social movements need to know what the media do before a story is aired on TV and radio or goes to press. They should not immediately feel overwhelmed and helpless in face of the premises that the paper just argued, such as the idea of the media's emphasis on economic interests and power relations. I do not dismiss these claims because they are very true and correct. Social movements have to deal with these realities and look for ways of using the media effectively or possibly winning them over to their side.

In my journalism classes, one of my objectives is to teach students to understand the relationship between the various media platforms. Although I do not discount the power of television, which Ms. Gloria emphasized earlier, I believe that print is as important because it is the medium of reference and record. As a medium, TV has the greatest impact, whereas radio has the greatest reach. A convergent use of these platforms, in my opinion, will give social movements the power to push their campaigns across a wide audience.

However, print media also carries its own politics. I would like to point out an issue on consumption. In terms of readership, newspapers and other print



materials are important to A, B, and C audience groups. Newspapers have a huge market base among policymakers, development agencies, expatriates, and global Filipinos. Unfortunately, print is a medium that hardly reaches the masses, to whom social movements bring their advocacies. Thus, in looking at the protest and campaign images that were sampled in the presentation, my first question was, why were they written in English? English is not the language of people from the C, D, and E social brackets. English is the language of law and commerce. If a social movement that tries to challenge existing political structures wants to reach a broad audience, English should not be the medium of advocacy.

I think that the paper should also look at other media platforms that are important to Filipinos. There are movies, books, and magazines that should be important to advocates of social causes. Regional newspapers are increasingly becoming more relevant voices in their communities than national newspapers, mainly because the former is comparably low-cost. Likewise, the wire agencies or bureaus of foreign media in Metro Manila have the technology that enable the faster circulation of news worldwide, sometimes ahead of the national dailies.

It would also be significant to look into digital media such as the Internet and mobile phones. EDSA 2 and 3 have shown the power of the digital media, particularly as it formed protest action with the help of mobile texting. I urge social movements to look into various forms of media, and not just focus on print or TV.

Forms of media differ in terms of the accessibility of information and the type of learning it provides. Print and, in a way, TV and radio engage in linear learning. At present, the emergence of the so-called "global village" has opened new avenues, such as hypertext learning. What social movements can do is to come up with strategies that take into consideration the new media forms and technologies available today. They should not limit themselves to traditional media.

I will move on to comment briefly on the campaign polemics of social movements as presented by Ms. Quinsaat. Because of tight campaign schedules, most social movements are compelled to follow the usual routes of photo-ops and spins to get fast results. In my opinion, social movements must reach for a much higher goal. They should turn into expert sources for journalists and media practitioners. Being expert sources means being the authority on the topic. It means that journalists consult them even if there are no protest events because they have a reputation as reliable sources of information and insight. These are important qualities because the test of a good story is really fairness and accuracy, not sensationalism. The Freedom from Debt Coalition, for example, has established itself very well as the authority on issues concerning debt, power, water, and other utilities.

Unfortunately, only a few civil-society groups or nongovernment organizations (NGOs) are in the same league. My problem with some social-movement organizations is that they approach me with their campaign that will run for probably a week or a few days. When the project is done, they dump the journalist. And then they would come back the next time they have a campaign and ask, "Can you write about us again?" To me, that is not an expert source. An expert source builds good relationship with the media. My experience has shown that many of these organizations care less about the media.

An expert source is someone who constantly monitors the issues. The problem of groups is that they are only good for the duration of the campaign. A case in

point is a movement working on reproductive health issues. The group became visible when they caused a ruckus in Congress lobbying for reproductive health rights. Between that moment and the passage of the bill, however, the network did not hold public discussions of the different facets and nuances of the issue, which gave bishops opposed to their cause more media mileage. Because the reproductive health groups were not actively engaging the media, they lacked consistency in the eyes of the public. What we can learn from this is that relationships with the media do not happen overnight. It should be planned months or years ahead of the protest event and should be sustained after the rallies are finished.

I now move on to the issue of form over substance. Much as the media value form, they appreciate substance because it offers a menu of resources. Some media practitioners want in-depth analysis of issues while some prefer stock stories. That does not mean that the movement has to succumb to their every wish. The group needs to take command of the relationship, even when the media are not demanding the story packages being offered to them.

Earlier we discussed difficulties of “putting a face” on our campaigns. I think the problem here is just part of developing the group’s expertise. Branding is integral to developing advocacies. Who should be the poster boy of fair trade, for example? It is important for the media to identify a solid image or identity. The media need credible personalities or institutions that can speak for the movement to effectively cover the campaign. But because of the sudden turnover within social-movement organizations, it is sometimes difficult to determine who “owns” the advocacy, experts with whom the media can forge long-term working relations.

In terms of media projection or coverage, it is not a question of putting emphasis on quality or quantity. Quantity can be misleading. You can have a hundred stories that will boil down to meaningless clutter if the issue does not reach your captive audience, and if it does not provoke or change behavior or policy. Quality is also important in effective campaigns. Identifying the target audience and determining desired outcomes should also be undertaken. Ultimately, the campaign should strike a balance between quality and quantity to be effective. Social movements have to reinforce the good message that they want to present through the media.

I have observed in our discussion the tendency for us to look at the media as the endpoint of advocacies. Let me say this as a reminder especially to members of social movements. You cannot make the media your deputy or lieutenant. It is really the public you want to reach—the Filipino people. Berlo’s very simple communication model—SMCR (source, message, channel, receiver)—tells us that most often, social movements think that it ends with the C, which is the media. They neglect the receiver or their audience. You need to be conscious of to whom you are communicating your message.

To round up my reaction, I think it all boils down to great storytelling. Everybody wants a great story. Everybody wants a story told with all the elements of form, voice, texture, language, and substance in place—stories that could move their minds and hearts, stories that could move them to take action. But I have encountered social-movement organizations that still use tired, worn-out language or jargon, laden with technicalities. These impede communication.

In journalism, simple writing is really best. A word that is more than three syllables can be considered visual stoppers on the page. A good word is short and

crisp and conveys a mental image. So before using the term “globalization” in your campaigns, it would be good to ask the following questions: What does globalization mean to ordinary Filipinos? What are the three images that immediately come to mind? Great storytelling should be built on simple writing that connects with the public. If social movements intend to be experts, they should take note of these precepts.

In relation to good storytelling, campaigns could use a little sense of humor. Protests do not have to be angry to provoke action. True, these are serious issues that you are campaigning for, but you could show confidence that you have mastered the issue by smiling once in a while. Protest images that show activists linking arms or raising placards are rather worn-out. You already have a good handle on the content; this time, focus on the form of your campaigns so that you can effectively communicate to your target audience.

## Open Forum

**TERESITA BALTAZAR** (PRESIDENTIAL ANTI-GRAFT COMMISSION):

It is a fact that social movements are competing with other groups that have big budgets allotted for media coverage. How do you overcome that? Social movements are focused on what is happening to our country, and what has to be done. We hope that the media share that inclination. Maybe social movements will have a better chance of pushing for reforms if the media could share our views.

**AMADO MENDOZA JR.** (DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES [UP]-DILIMAN):

I agree with Ms. Mangahas that social movements should take more than just a “*galit*” (angry) stance. In fact I would recommend the “heckling” stance in dealing with government. Some government officials are so easy to irritate that they could use some humor, however disruptive.

It would have been good to have Vicente “Enteng” Romano of eLagda in the session. Mr. Romano is an *e-mandirigma* (cyberwarrior) who single-handedly launched a movement through the electronic media. This shows the possibilities that new media, such as the Internet, offer for collective action.

I also believe that while social movements should make use of new media, we need not be slaves either. We should use the media as target of our protests if the occasion calls for it. I once had a defective product from Siemens and found that there were other dissatisfied customers like me. I linked up with them through the Internet and before we knew it we were already holding a class suit against Siemens. There were ten of us who filed the suit, all coming from different countries. I used the same strategy when I had a problem with the Internet service of the Philippine Long Distance Telecommunications (PLDT) Company. I pooled several families who also had complaints about the service. PLDT met with our

group and yielded. From those experiences, I realized how big institutions can actually bend when threatened by collective action.

The point that I am making here is that we are not powerless. Flexibility can be an advantage especially when we are confronted by large organizations. As little as three, four, or five individuals can come together to challenge an organization of ten thousand members. All we need is to coordinate, to put our heads together and come up with strategies, and to act on these plans.

### **MALOU MANGAHAS:**

I agree with Professor Mendoza that social-movement organizations do not have to feel hostages by the media and the little generousities that we allow for your stories. Like I said, take command of the relationship. I also believe that the media should take the side of the NGOs. But the media are particular about information accuracy, which can be traced to the reliability of the source. I think journalists would be glad to work with you as long as your issues are relevant and the information you provide is accurate. If the advocacies are compelling, the insight is good, and the information is fresh, you will definitely win the journalist's support.

### **GLENDIA GLORIA:**

I would like to comment further on social-movement organizations building relationships with the media, particularly about the realities of contracting media for the coverage of their activities. It is rather unfair to look at the media as power-hungry species. Admittedly, there are some reporters who really expect to be materially compensated even before they take on a project. In my opinion, though, financial compensation is secondary to building a good working relationship with the media. At *Newsbreak*, budget is not an issue because for us, it is the media organization that should be spending.





Based on my dealings with social movements, I agree with Ms. Mangahas that some organizations tend to be seasonal; that is, they only approach or talk to us when they plan to do a campaign or when a major event linked to their issue comes up. That is more expensive, in a way, because if you launch a campaign, then you will need to come up immediately with a budget for media coverage. But building a long-term relationship with the media—constantly sending them data even if you feel that you are talking to a blank wall—is much more profitable.

When Walden Bello's representatives came to *Newsbreak* to cover the anti-WTO campaigns during the Hong Kong Ministerial, they came with a lot of documents. That would not have been a problem if we had reporters who are as passionate about these causes as Ms. Gonzales. In most cases, you cannot really expect the journalists to write about your activities if you simply dump all the documents, all the information on their lap. You have to help, to be available to answer queries, not only during the peak of the event but also when we do follow-up stories later on.

In determining whether to accept projects, we would ask questions such as: What is the human interest in this story? How will this be different from last year's story (in the case of the successive rounds of anti-WTO campaigns)? We would also ask the organization to give us something beyond numbers and policy statements. Some journalists are quick to dismiss projects that they feel have little human interest, or if members of the movement are not interested in sharing knowledge and insights based on technical information even if the issue is relevant.

I will just cite an example of one successful story related to the WTO that *Newsbreak* ran last year. Of all the stories, the case of the shoemakers in Liliw, Laguna, got the most feedback. The story had all the elements to attract a broad readership. *Newsbreak* covered those moments when shoemakers and small entrepreneurs staged their grievances in public because they were forced to sell China-made shoes. The story carried an emotional tone and had a personal touch on the readers. Even if readers were not fully aware of anti-WTO issues, Liliw had a familiar ring to it; Liliw is often associated with locally made slippers.

Media partnerships are not really expensive, but they involve hard work. Although sometimes it is difficult to come to terms with the fact that social movements have to educate the media. You have to constantly engage us even if you do not need results the next day, even if we are not coming up with certain stories tomorrow. Treat the media the way you would treat a marriage partner, not a one night stand. Both the movement and the media have to elevate that relationship and give it a fuller commitment.

## IRIS GONZALES:

I would like to address the point on allotting huge sums of money for media coverage. I agree that engaging the media does not have to be expensive, and that at the end of the day it is how good the story is that counts. I have received numerous invitations from NGOs where I was fed well but there was really no story to do, which was supposed to be the whole point of the meeting.

There are other practical considerations, such as when there are more pressing issues to cover. The tendency of the journalist, of course, is to give priority to more

urgent news. Then there is also the time element we have to deal with. In most dailies, reporters need to get their stories in by 3:30 in the afternoon, so we can only do news coverage before lunch at the least.

**ADONIS BRINGAS** (CONCERNED  
CITIZENS OF ABRA FOR GOOD  
GOVERNANCE [CCAGG]):

I would like to share one of our movement's major accomplishments that benefited from a positive partnership with the media. For the first time in the history of the province, eleven engineers of the Department of Public Works and Highways were suspended from their posts on corruption charges. They were given a sentence of no less than nine months. The district engineer involved in the case has retired.

I mention this because this incident inspired the formation of the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance's crusade against corruption. I would like to acknowledge the help of the media, which was instrumental in our efforts to bring justice. A local radio station—dzBA—followed the case and covered our initiatives. Incidentally, the station manager was a founding member of the CCAGG. It was a partnership wherein corruption was a concern not only of the NGO but also of the media. The radio station hyped up this issue because most people in Abra are very passive toward corruption. People in government agencies were not apt to disclose or provide information easily. Some even refused to cooperate because they did not want to be involved in the issue. With the help of the media, government agencies became less reticent. We gained access to information as well as public support for our cause.

Until now we are fortunate to have the support of dzBA. The station airs a weekly radio program that deals with the issues that we are struggling for in the province. The partnership is based on familiarity and has been a very fruitful one. But familiarity may also breed contempt. Some mass movement-media partnerships are too accommodating that they become unproductive. I think that organizations still have to be mindful and critical of their media partners, before the relationship becomes one with too much comfort that nothing is accomplished anymore.



**LILIAN MERCADO-CARREON** (OXFAM GB-MANILA):

There have been occasions when the media have given generous support to social movements and this has yielded effective results. One such case is the partnership

of Tabang Mindanao and the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (PDI), which launched the humanitarian campaign for Mindanao. There is also the Adopt-a-School project, which was a collaboration of PDI and other groups including the corporate sector. My questions therefore are: First, when and how does that happen? What motivates media establishments to collaborate with social movements and what determines their choices? Second, what does this imply on the role of the media and their relationship with primary actors in social movements?

### **MAY-I FABROS (GLOBAL CALL TO ACTION AGAINST POVERTY):**

I am a neophyte in the professional world of media. I agree with what Ms. Mangahas mentioned about simplifying the language of advocacy. To simplify language, to break it into easily distilled pieces—I believe that is a basic mass communication principle.

However I have also learned in the media workshops that I have attended that media's concern is not only to present a good story, but one that can edge out stories by other media outfits. In television, for example, there is the ratings war. So I would like to ask the panel, does it really boil down to good storytelling or is there more to it—in this case, profit?

My next comment has to do with power play in the media. Initially, I had difficulties being part of the media due to my background in social movements. In contrast to my experience in the movement, conformity is the key in any media organization. You do not have the liberty to craft your stories; you have to tailor-fit your reportage to the requirements and expectations of the organization. When the killings of media people made headlines, I was disappointed to find these victims, who were my mentors in the profession, being reduced to mere human-interest stories. Their advocacies were hardly given any attention. This shows that good stories—no matter how substantive they are in terms of pertinent social issues—are still colored by institutional biases.

My question now is, how can good stories highlight or emphasize the causes of social movements? In reporting about issues, campaigns, and advocacy, how is it possible to strike a good balance between the media's interests and the interests of social movements? In addition, on the part of social movements, what do they really have to work around?

### **MALOU MANGAHAS:**

I would like to make a distinction between the editorial and the decision-making part of covering social movements. The editorial part has to do with simplifying terms, writing the story well, and giving it a face and a voice. The media ratings are the decision-making aspect of the trade. I do not deny that ratings, as well as sales, motivate television, radio, and print to do their work. All of these are business propositions. However, apart from being a business establishment, the media is also an entity entrusted with social responsibilities. One of these is to help inform and form public opinion.

It also depends on how you want the story to come out on television. If you want the story to be in the form of straight news, then the reportage would be different from a story for a public affairs program. The packaging of a story depends on the type of program format where it will be aired. Thus, there are

times when you have to really choose what information to include and what to take out. Sometimes, you are compelled to tailor-fit your story to the program requirements, so there is a possibility that the meat of the issues and advocacies that you are trying to tell is compromised.

Normally, editors do not bother with ratings. The marketing department takes care of that. However, most media outfits tend to consider the ratings as a measure of performance. What is the point of airing your story in a program that hardly anybody watches? You can look at it from various perspectives. It is a case of hit-and-miss; sometimes your stories take off, other times they get canned. Whether in television, radio, or print, every story goes through an editing process. About two hundred to three hundred people are involved in deciding what to air on television.

Is there a conspiracy to shut out social movements and just go for the ratings? I do not think that is a fair question. Who knows, maybe the producer does not understand the point of the story, or the story is not newsworthy, or if the story covers a rally or protest action, maybe the story did not have enough critical mass to actually hold water. My point is that there are some editorial issues in running a story.

I will now move on to issue on the politically motivated killings of journalists. A number of publications ran such stories online. There was limited coverage, however, because there were hardly any informants in the provinces where most of the killings took place. Despite our efforts, the accessibility of material sometimes poses a problem for the media.

In response to Ms. Mercado's query, sometimes the civic and charitable projects are sources of attractive stories that can motivate the media to do a story, especially relief assistance. Maybe the media should move on to some other cause-oriented activities that have greater content—projects that involve a convergence of ideas. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been very successful in promoting a lot of its work in the Philippine media. One powerful story from UNICEF was a case involving juvenile justice, which came out as a film documentary called *Bunso* (The Youngest) that encouraged the passing of the Juvenile Justice Law even at the height of the infamous "Hello Garci" controversy. It moved swiftly through the deliberations in the Thirteenth Congress until the president signed it into law. When that was shown, public attention instantly focused on the need for better policies on juvenile delinquency.

## GLENDIA GLORIA:

I also believe that social movements should look at humanitarian or cause-oriented projects as one form of media engagement. Maybe not many of you know that media organizations actually have certain "advocacies." We at *Newsbreak* sit down with a lot of groups and organizations on certain issues, like education. If the World Bank comes to us with a project, we would prioritize the cause over editorial intervention—for example, promotion of better access to education or the rehabilitation and provision of needs in certain areas. But then I believe packaging is key to get the media's attention, some kind of persuasion in which you are not really asking the media to advocate for certain causes but to be an instrument in disseminating information and raising awareness. That way, there is an open

engagement between movements and the media based on key issues that give very specific values shared by both actors.

On the comment that those coming from social movements have difficulty getting the media, my opinion is that sometimes there is no single representative from the group who can liaise with the media. But in the end, it is the story that we are after. You cannot afford to look at the media as an adversary or as something that has to be confronted, if you intend to use the media to communicate your advocacies and gain publicity.

Second, movements need to branch out from traditional channels. Are you always aiming for front-page news? Are you aiming to be on prime-time television? Those are traditional routes to gain publicity for your causes. But there are different channels to utilize. For example, the most-read section in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* is not the front page but the letters section. So if you expect to get mileage in *PDI*, you may need people who are adept at writing letters to the editor—snappy, short, and sarcastic ones that also tug at the heart. That is one channel that you may consider. You do not have to be on page one all the time. Believe me, not many readers actually believe what they read on page one. *The Philippine Star* has thirty pages, but the most frequently read sections are the lifestyle and society pages. That is another challenge for social movements. How can you convince the newspaper to do a story on a social-movement personality, say, a representative of your organization, and run it in the lifestyle section? The question to reckon with is, how do you penetrate the “soft sections” such as lifestyle, or even entertainment?

### **MALOU MANGAHAS:**

I would like to briefly add, in relation to Ms. Gloria’s comment that social movements have to give extra effort in pitching a story for the media to work on. When you package your stories, you have to learn the interests of the public. What are they talking about? What do they watch or listen to? You have to learn the idiom of the masses before you can communicate and argue your causes.

### **IRIS GONZALES:**

With regard to media coverage, my suggestion is to think like a consumer. If you are the consumer, what do you want to see on TV or read in the papers? Using the view of the consumer can help frame what you wish to portray and communicate in the media.

You also need to consider other sources of competition. In framing your advocacies, think of other news stories competing with yours for the public’s attention. I am sure many journalists agree with me that even the choice of stories is something they compete for. With competition, framing stories is a case of hit-and-miss.

Finally, make an investment. You cannot present everything in only one press conference so you can save on resources. Perhaps you can do a series of gatherings on one issue, each tackling different aspects of the issue. The first forum can be an orientation of sorts, and the next can probably delve into one major aspect of the issue, and so on.



## ROLANDO FERNANDO

(DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND  
PHILOSOPHY, UP-DILIMAN):

I will now summarize today's enlightening and engaging panel discussion. The opening presentation by Ms. Quinsaat focused on putting a framework to explain the intersection between social movements and the media. Ms. Gloria's reaction focuses on how social movements work to gain media attention. She noted that the global media landscape has changed, as shown by the power of TV and the use of the Internet. Social movements also need not engage in media spectacles.

They only have to be creative. She also challenged movements to combine substance and form when pursuing media attention.

On the other hand, Ms. Gonzales offered her views from the trenches as a journalist. She stated that social movements need to understand that the media make use of different frames. Second, there are different factors on how the media choose or decide which story to cover. She also discussed the diversity of the media in the Philippines and suggested that movements not only look at print but other formats. One of the most important points she raised is that social movements should also educate the media, despite the perception of media as an all-knowing, mythical entity. I think it is quite enlightening to hear that the relationship between the media and social movements, put simply, is a dialectical process. Finally, Ms. Mangahas offered some inspiring and encouraging words with regard to how social movements can engage the media. She suggested some guidelines in framing advocacies, like the use of simple language and the importance of a really good story.

During the open forum, we covered quite a range of topics, but it all boils down to the fact that the relationship of social movements and the media is not a one-way street. It should be perceived as a very complex relationship, in which every actor and the parameters within which they act should be taken into consideration. In addition, practical, economic, philosophical, and idealistic considerations that social movements and the media are involved in—their commonly shared spaces of discourse—should be considered in the framing process. Finally, the lesson that emerged from our discussion is that there has to be a greater awareness of the roles everyone plays in the relationship of the media and mass movements to facilitate better engagement.