



Catholic Social Teachings: Relevance to current social concerns and people's participation in resolving issues and problems as indicated by mainstream media editorials

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Abstract: This study draws from one of the key themes of the Social Catholic Teaching, specifically, the principle of participation which states that people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good of all. Mainstream media remains a key information source even in the age of the Internet. The role of the editorial is to ensure that it gives a tight presentation of the newspaper's stand by presenting evidences and corresponding analyses and when possible advocate for a solution. Because the media has a crucial function of serving as a conduit to inform the public on a variety of issues, editorials can be indicative of how the principle of participation is invoked in media. The study sought to identify the trends and patterns in issues and concerns in the editorials of mainstream media and evaluate such trends against the Social Catholic Teachings of the church. The study chose the on-line version of three newspapers namely Phil.Star, Daily Inquirer and Manila Bulletin, three leading daily newspapers in the Philippines, specifically, the editorial section. To see the trend from January to September 2014, the editorial for the months of March, June, and September are chosen for the study. To further delimit the study, only editorials published on a Wednesday, the middle of the week, are used for the study. Basic feedback of the on-line version in terms of number of comments is tabulated. More importantly, a matrix of the emerging subthemes and the conclusion or main points of each editorial from the three newspapers editorials are put in a matrix. The emergent matrix serves as an indicator of whether the principle of participation – 'people's right and duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good of all ' is reflected through the editorials. The emergent matrix serves as an indicator of the types of concerns which most likely garnered substantial clamor from the people such that it landed an editorial article. Furthermore, the matrix shows a trending of how the media frames their analysis of the respective issues. The see-judge-act framework will also be used in analyzing the articles.

Key Words: principle of participation, catholic social teachings, see-judge-act framework, news media, on-line newspaper editorials



1. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of modern technology, we now receive news that is happening local and abroad not only in the traditional mode, i.e., print media, but now even in the form of online news via the internet. This enables people to receive information of events that occur around the world in a daily basis a mere click away. According to Margaret Cissel, news media serve as valuable sources of information and powerful modes of communication (Cissel, 2012, p.67).

News media remains as the key information sources even in the age of the internet. In fact the online news is fast emerging as the most preferred mode to receive news nowadays. The reason being that online news is accessible, free and makes the users as “prosumers—a user that consumes and also creates contents—an added feature where “users no longer play only the role of recipients (a role that they had hardly left behind in the traditional mass-media communication process), and instead they alternatively assume the role of recipients and senders” (Garcia-Galera, Del-Hoyo-Hurtado, Fernandez-Munoz, 2014, p35).

The aim of the study is to identify the level of participation among users of online news media, specifically the editorial section. This will be gauged by the readers’ number of responses or comments to the articles. Likewise, the purpose of the study is to find out what significant factors in the editorial articles contribute to online participation. Incidentally, participation is one of the basic themes of Catholic Social Teachings (CST). In this research, the editorial articles will be examined in the lens of CST.

1.1 News Media in Catholic Social Teaching

CST is about the rich tradition of the Church on social justice to build a just and humane society by living a life of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. According to James F. Caccamo, the Second Vatican Council and the Pontifical Council for Social Communication (PCSC)—the body within Vatican responsible for writing and teaching on matters dealing with the media and communications—each event of communication receives its moral species from the extent to which it promotes integral human development and common good. News media contribute to attain this end through news broadcast, journalist inform citizens of important events that

will shape their lives; through editorials and blogs, commentators give voice to public opinion so that leaders can hear the needs and views of their constituents. Indeed social communication is considered so vital to the proper material functioning of society that the Vatican has argued that human beings have a fundamental right to accurate information and a fundamental moral duty to voice their views as part of the process of forming “public opinion.” Within CST, social communication provides not only the means for individual development, but also functions in such a way to create the social dynamics and structures necessary for life in society (Caccamo, 2009, p302, 304).

1.2 Media Framing & CST SJA Framework

In pursuit of building a just and humane society, everyone must learn to “read the signs of the times” to make the significant contributions to making it a reality. Pope John XXIII used such expression “reading the signs of the times” to call the church to renewal in its own life and involvement in the world. In *Mater et Magistra*, he affirms the process of SEE-JUDGE-ACT (SJA) as a way of reading and responding to the signs of the times. There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice: First, one reviews the concrete situations; seeing, hearing and experiencing the lived reality of individuals and communities; naming what is happening that cause the concern; carefully examining the situation. Secondly, one analyses the situation and makes an informed judgment in the light of social principles. Thirdly, one plans and carries out principles and actions aimed at suffering and injustice. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in three terms: observe, judge, act (Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961, no. 236).

News media can contribute to the promotion of social justice and evangelization by delivering accurate information and interpretation of events or experiences that eventually pave the way for participative actions. This is known as “framing.” In communication, framing defines how news media coverage can shape mass opinion by using these



specific frameworks to help guide their readers to understanding. Cissel cited Robert Entman who specified that to frame a communicating text or message is to promote certain facets of a perceived reality and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or a treatment recommendation (Cissel, 2012, p67).

Researcher of this study observed that SJA process can be adopted and integrated by journalist and editors in framing their news articles. Media framing, if not motivated by something else, and SJA process both seek to promote knowledge, understanding and participation. There is a semblance of each one in one another that leaves little room for adjustment. When editorial authors observe the SJA process in framing the editorial articles, they become instruments in helping the readers “read the signs of the times” that is transformative.

1.3 CST Principle of Participation

Along with promoting the common good and human rights, participation is a key goal of solidarity because all persons have the right and duty to become “principal architects of their own economic and social development.” Participation in Catholic social thought denotes substantive contribution to society; it is not just a formal, procedural task to be valued in abstract from the ends served by it. In other words, genuine participation contributes to true human flourishing and the flourishing of the community in concrete ways. Moreover, it is freely chosen and consciously recognized as a duty that all persons share. As members of a community, exercising this right and duty requires willingness to cooperate with others, to make compromise when necessary and to take seriously the expertise and wisdom of others (Beyer, 2014, p17).

Digital Technologies have made it possible for users to interact with each other and share opinion and experiences. This form of participation is actually “cyber-activism” that involves active participation online (Garcia-Galera, Del-Hoyo-Hurtado, Fernandez-Munoz, 2014, p36) where users are not only informed of socio-economic-political, environment and cultural events, etc., but also to

participate in them actively. This is a soft notion of participation unless the users are both active online and offline, but still there is a level of participation. The principle of Participation in CST states that all people have a right and duty to participate in the economic, political, social life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study only took into account twelve editorial articles each from three mainstream online news sources specifically, Daily Inquirer (inquirer.net), Philippine Star (philstar.com) and Manila Bulletin (mb.com). These sources were chosen because of their prominence and extensive readership. Margaret Cissel said, mainstream media are defined by its wide-reaching circulation that generally results in what consumers are likely to find (Cissel, 2012, p70). The 36 editorial articles selected were written on Wednesdays, the middle of the week, in the months of March, June and September representing the first three quarters of the year 2014. Each article dwelt on the particular issue which the news source deems important necessitating the peoples’ participation. If given more time, the researchers would have analysed more editorials with a broader time frame and more news sources.

Daily Inquirer

- 4 March – Art.1) Special Court Necessary
- 12 March – Art.2) Consistently silent
- 19 March – Art.3) Junket
- 26 March – Art.4) Peace and Goodwill
- 4 June – Art.5) The True Abandonment
- 11 June – Art. 6) Bully Behavior
- 18 June – Art. 7) Another Think Coming
- 25 June – Art.8) Racism
- 3 Sept. – Art. 9) A Cure for Ebola
- 10 Sept. – Art.10) Horror Gridlock
- 17 Sept. – Art.11) Rot in the System
- 24 Sept. – Art.12) Horror Loop

Philippine Star (with the same timeline as above)

- Art.1) Lethal Weapon
- Art.2) Rewarding Innovation
- Art.3) Hope in 2016
- Art.4) Anti-Pasaway
- Art.5) Another Deadly Fire
- Art. 6) A Better Congress
- Art. 7) Prepare for the Worst



- Art.8) World Heritage
- Art. 9) A Judicial Overreach
- Art.10) Cops, Robbers
- Art.11) Discomfort Zones
- Art.12) Climate Change

Manila Bulletin (with the same timeline as above)

- Art.1) Remittances reach new record highs 12 March
- Art.2) Optimistic 1st Quarter 2014
- Art.3) National Women’s Health Month Observance
- Art4) National Research Council of the Philippines’ International Scientific Conference 81st General Assembly at Historic Landmark Manila Hotel
- Art.5) Glimpse of European Culture for Filipinos
- Art. 6) -no editorial-
- Art. 7) Resolve all questions, doubts on election automation
- Art.8) Peace in the South and East China Seas
- Art. 9) Our Peacekeepers in Syria
- Art.10) 8 Months after Yolanda
- Art.11) Not quite zero casualty but close to it
- Art.12) Lifestyle checks

After identifying, all 36 articles were cross-examined to establish the trend of issues for the first three quarters of the year. The frequency of comments for each article was taken into account to determine the level of interaction and participation it generated among readers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It can be gleaned from Table 1 that editorial articles, written during the timeline, from mainstream media made a stand on diverse issues

Table 1

Source	Soci al	Polit ics	Eco no my	Cult ure	Envir onment
Inquirer	5, 9, 10, 11	1,2, 4,6, 7	0	8	3,12
Phil. Star	5,10 11	1,3, 6,9	2	4	7,8, 12
Bulletin	3,8, 9,10	7,12	1,2, 4	5	11

Looking into the frequency of comments and the level of interaction amongst “prosumers” of the online news media source manifest the extent each editorial article managed to galvanize its readers to

engage in giving online comments in the form of personal opinions, viewpoints or perspectives toward the particular issue as a form of participation.

The study shows that Inquirer editorial articles generated a total of 551 comments compared to Phil. Star with 101 and Manila Bulletin with only one (See Table 2). It can be deduced from the data that Inquirer articles were able to stimulate the interest of its readers to participate more actively online than PhilStar articles did to its readers. Based on the foregoing, it can be assumed that Inquirer users tend to be more “prosumers” than Philstar users. Inversely, Manila Bulletin editorial articles drew poor interest from its users that they did not find any inclination to react at all to any but one article.

The findings can be attributed to what is known in media as “proximity news value” which is a value with dual dimension, both geographic as well as emotional and/or intellectual (Garcia-Galera, Del-Hoyo-Hurtado, Fernandez-Munoz, 2014, p40). These articles are about political, social and cultural issues that pertain to massive corruption in the Philippines. Corruption issues are always controversial and emotional issues for Filipinos considering it is one principal cause of many societal ills in the country. Article2 entitled “Consistently Silent” is about politicians gearing up for the 2016 election who have remained “consistently silent” in the face of staggering criminality in public office, those who refuse to take their colleagues to task for their corruption, those whose political considerations trump their sworn duty to root out and condemn venality in government. Article 7 entitled “Another think coming” tackles the issue of PDAF scam where an involved senator is barnstorming his bailiwick to win sympathy and support instead of answering the charges against him. Article 8 with the title “racism” is about the racial discrimination being propagated by a particular netizen in Singapore promoting discreet ways to maltreat the Filipinos without being illegal. Article 10 is about “Horror Gridlock” that illustrates the traffic problems Filipinos experience that is seemingly devoid of solution. Finally, article 11 is about scalawags in uniform, spread in PNP, who are responsible for various crimes in the country



(<http://opinion.inquirer.net/column/editorial/page62,44,43,29,28>).

The same thing, however, cannot be said to Inquirer editorial articles with less than 50 comments. Article 3 is about the insensitivity of some local officials who, in the aftermath of Yolanda super-typhoon, had the gall to use the public money to spend in a useless trip to Manila in the guise of attending seminars for disaster preparedness. Article 5 is about the refusal of the government to grant the petition of public school teachers for long delayed salary increase is tantamount to “true abandonment” of Filipino children. Article 9 is about the preventive measures to contain Ebola outbreak abroad (<http://opinion.inquirer.net/column/editorial/page/61,47,27>). The same observation can be said with Manila Bulletin whose editorial articles during the timeline are about economic issues such as remittances (Article1) European culture (Article5), and our peacekeepers in Syria, among others. (www.mb.com.ph/category/news/opinion-and-editorials/page/120). These are issues that are uncommon experiences and geographically remote.

Table 2

Art.	#comments in Inquirer	#comments in Phil. Star	#comments in Bulletin
1	35	11	0
2	96	7	0
3	21	4	0
4	26	6	0
5	23	1	0
6	38	17	NA
7	67	7	0
8	50	1	0
9	6	20	0
10	61	17	0
11	100	12	0
12	28	6	1
Total	551	109	1

Researchers examined the articles in the lens of SJA framework of CST (See Table 3). The study shows that most of Inquirer editorial articles are framed with a semblance of SJA framework. To

cite a few—Art.1 painstakingly elucidated to its readers the necessity for a special court to try those PDAF scammers, then justified this proposal on the basis of the principle of justice and truth, then finally exhorted the readers to support the creation of the special court as circumstances call for it. Art. 12 describes vividly the disaster proneness of metropolis, the unpreparedness of local residents and national government in the face of potential disaster of big proportion; then explain the absence of the sense of stewardship and solidarity as the root cause of the problem; then finally encouraged people to learn from the lessons of the past by engaging in concrete ways to take care of the environment (<http://opinion.inquirer.net/column/editorial/page/63,27>). With all three stages of SJA process present in framing the articles subsequently resulted in Inquirer editorials longer in length with all identified articles consisting of over 700 words.

The data shows that Phil. Star and Manila Bulletin editorial articles are rarely framed in the context of SJA process. Researchers examined each of these articles such as: Phil. Star’s article 3 stated the necessity for 7.3 million registered voters to submit their biometric data lest they face the scenario of disenfranchisement come 2016 election. The article exhorted to people to vote and the Comelec to improve the electoral system (www.philstar.com/Opinion/2014/03/19/editorial-hope-in-2016). The researchers notice the lack of the process of judgment to give emphasis on the integrity of election and the right to vote as a human right. Manila Bulletin’s article 8 which reported about the revision of Japan’s post war constitution that allows the country to maintain a defence force brought about by the festering moves of China against SEA countries. Apparently, the article is only meant to inform sans any insinuation of its stand on the issue, no suggestions for any courses of participative action. (www.mb.com.ph/category/news/opinions-and-editorials/page/60).

With Phil. Star and Manila Bulletin editorials missing one or two components of SJA framework resulted in a shorter essay with 300-500 words. It can be gleaned from the study that doing



the SJA process (also known as pastoral approach) generally results in longer articles.

Table 3

Media Source	With SJA Framework	Without SJA Framework
Daily Inquirer	1,2,4,5,8,9,10,11,12	3,6,7
Philippine Star	2,5,8,9	1,3,4,6,7,10,11,12
Manila Bulletin	7,12	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12

4. CONCLUSIONS

Editorial articles of all media sources under study made a stand during the inclusive period on diverse issues. However, “prosumers” of these media sources were affected only by those issues closer to their heart. Thus, the “proximity” factor which refers to the emotional closeness of the issue in editorial articles to the users proves decisive in motivating online participation.

The second factor that helped editorial articles effectively influence its users to more active online participation is the so called “media framing” which refers to the way in which information is presented to its audiences. Editorial articles from Daily Inquirer framed in the context of SJA process that is pastoral in nature tend to generate more responses and participation. The more the article examines the issue thoroughly, critically and challenges its readers to action, the higher the frequency of online participation. The length of the article also proves decisive as it implies so much importance is being given by the media source on the issue.

Are those prosumers active in online participation necessarily active offline? What sector is more active in online participation? What are the various motivations of media sources in framing their news? These are questions yet to be answered.

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