

concluded 2004 elections, especially at the local level, may find Franco's study a possible analytic tool. —**ARIES A. ARUGAY**, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN.

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Melinda Quintos de Jesus and Luis V. Teodoro, eds. *Citizen's media monitor: A report on the campaign and elections coverage in the Philippines 2004*. Quezon City: Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, 2004. 199 pp .

The book is the product of an unprecedented exercise where the public takes the role of monitoring the media coverage of the 2004 Philippine national elections. Initiated by the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), the project pooled together resources from various nongovernment organizations (NGOs), the academe, and the general public to assess the performance of the Philippine free press vis-à-vis fairness, accuracy and balance in its reporting and commentary. Focusing on print and broadcast media, the methodology used was primarily content analysis of front page headlines for newspapers and television news and public affairs programs. Time-keeping analysis was also undertaken for broadcast media.

The monitoring covers two of the giant broadcast media companies (GMA 7 and ABS-CBN 2) and three Metro Manila-based broadsheets (*Manila Bulletin*, the *Philippine Star* and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*) for the campaign coverage. For television, focus is placed particularly on news programs (*Saksi* [Witness] and *Front Page/24 Oras* of GMA 7; *TV Patrol* and *Insider* of ABS-CBN 2; *The World Tonight* of the ABS-CBN News Channel [24-hour cable news channel]; and, *News Central* of Studio 23) and public affairs programs (*Dong Puno Live* of ABS-CBN 2 and *I-Witness*

of GMA 7, which was monitored only in the last two weeks of the campaign). The study claims that the inclusion of television was a first in any media monitoring exercise, mainly based on accounts that television has increased its reach and impact since 1986. Specifically, the book cites a survey conducted by Pulse Asia from March 24 to April 7, 2004, which reveals that television has become the medium with the largest percentage of reach and impact (71%). For the coverage of the Election Day, the project monitored ABS-CBN 2, GMA 7, ABS-CBN News Channel, NBN 4, RPN 9, and IBC 13. Each channel had its own version of 24-hour election coverage programs.

The book is divided into eight parts. The introduction provides details on the origins and objectives of the project, research methodology and scope of the monitoring exercise. This portion of the book also contains a brief discussion on the context of the 2004 elections, drafted by the volunteers as the “framework of understanding” of the project. The next two chapters of the book particularize the results—combining statistics and analyses—of the campaign, election-day and post-election coverage monitoring. Election-day monitoring showed that there was an overload of information to guide voters on procedures of voting; updates from the ground such as exit polls; partial and unofficial results both from National Citizen’s Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) and the Commission on Elections (COMELEC); and, other topics such as the party-list system, senatorial race and local elections, which were not covered during the campaign period reporting. The section also includes insights from the participants wherein various issues plaguing Philippine media such as media credibility, corruption, commercial orientation and public involvement in policing the media were discussed. The fifth chapter presents the conclusions of the study. These include the failure of media organizations to devote more time and space for relevant and more substantive information on the candidates’ backgrounds and platforms as well as policy issues. Instead, highlights of campaign-related news dealt with campaign sorties and controversies surrounding presidential candidates and personalities identified with their camps. Public affairs programs, which supposedly would have been an alternative source of more insightful information, failed to achieve their objectives because of their “lateness (in time slot) and limitation to cable subscription” (87). The report further concludes that media’s attitude and assumptions on what the public wants as a format of conveying information (infotainment and entertainment) are not necessarily correct.

Recommendations focus on measures for media to be able to provide the information that the public needs, particularly during elections. Among these are building institutional mechanisms that will ensure training of media practitioners, conducting further studies on relevant materials and topics (governance, election laws, etc.) that will feed into the professional education of reporters; strengthening the role of self-regulation agencies such as the *Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas* (Organization of Broadcasters in the Philippines [KBP]); supporting civil society initiatives such as dissemination of relevant election-related information for a more informed electorate; and instituting media literacy programs.

The book, as a comprehensive documentation of the project, presents an alternative to citizens' engagement during elections where the public actually polices the watchdog, indicating the audience's clamor for responsible and fair news coverage. This exercise also fills the void in public involvement in media watch programs, which are traditionally undertaken by professional media organizations such as the CMFR and the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ).

The book asserts that, while guaranteed by the highest law of the land, freedom of the press does not ensure responsibility. As observed by the viewing and reading public, as well as practitioners in the field, the practice has become increasingly governed by the dictates of the market. Without exception, news programming has been subjected to what practitioners perceive to be the commercialization of information, thus sacrificing the quality of information being presented to the public. The public, on the other hand, has been a passive recipient of information, taking in whatever the media offers. This context necessitates a reconfiguration of the role of both the media and the public particularly during an important democratic exercise such as elections in determining which information is useful to make an informed choice.

Reading the book surfaces several weaknesses—methodological in the research to which it is based and substantive in the material itself. In the methodology presented in the book, volunteer-monitors from NGOs were assigned to the discourse analysis while volunteer students of Mass Communication (read: future media practitioners) were tasked to do the time-keeping for television programs. The results of the monitoring and discourse analysis are then sent to CMFR where these will be consolidated and scrutinized further on a daily basis. Bi-weekly

reports prepared by CMFR are then released to media organizations and individuals, and disseminated through the CMFR website. The unidirectional method does not include a feedback mechanism—first, for volunteers, particularly the students, in what would have been an opportunity for exposure on media monitoring; and, second, a mechanism to gauge how receptive media is to external evaluation. This probably explains the absence of information regarding media response despite the fact that the project has set out to release the findings of the study throughout the campaign period to provide the opportunity for practitioners to assess their own performance. Instead, the report only includes the feedback obtained during the presentation of the report to media and civil society after the elections. This fails to capture the changes and adjustments made by media organizations in their coverage as the campaign period progressed.

Another lapse in methodology is the non-inclusion of radio in media monitoring. The same Pulse Asia survey cited in the material, which indicates the wide reach of television, also shows that radio is the second ranking source of information for the public at 20 percent. Sidestepping radio in the survey should have been justified by setting the limitation of the study and clarifying the preference for television and print media.

The book is quite clear about which television programs and broadsheets are included in the monitoring project. Understandably, content analysis of newspaper headlines is the quickest and most efficient way to see what paper editors deem as important issues of the day. But the book digresses in its unit of analysis as it includes bits and pieces of news articles found in the inside pages of newspapers. This becomes confusing to the reader as the delimitation of the project coverage has been explicitly stated in the introductory part of the study. The muddling of facts and analysis as a result of the deviation could have been avoided had additional information been treated not as part of the main report but as additional insights that the study team acquired in the course of monitoring newspapers. Another critique on the newspapers covered by the monitor is the preference for the three broadsheets. Somewhere in the book, it was mentioned that CMFR is part of a process of monitoring 11 Manila-based newspapers for the Philippine Journalism Review (PJR). The organization has been monitoring print media since the 1992 elections. If the organization was already doing this, why favor only three broadsheets when they had the opportunity and the capacity to monitor eight other papers? The

PJR project includes content analysis of articles in the inside pages of the newspapers which the citizens' monitoring project can benefit from.

The same is the case with the news and public affairs programs in television. The study has set out to observe six news programs and one public affairs program. In the middle of the report, one will discover that two other public affairs programs were observed. Why? Only the implementers know. This could be an indication of an imbalance in choosing which programs to monitor. The book also claims that more substantive discussions on issues were undertaken by late-night public affairs programs but why monitor *Dong Puno Live* and not *Debate with Mare at Pare* (Debate with Peers); *I-Witness* but not *The Correspondents*? Instead of critiquing the time slot of these programs, the monitoring exercise should have looked into how media performed in offering more relevant election-related information in these late-night shows and compared this with the performance of the news programs.

There are also instances where the report included pre-campaign period coverage, which is another departure from the supposedly timetable set by the project proponents. Analysis of the pre-campaign period was based on a study that the CMFR did for the Philippine Journalism Review (PJR), which the book fails to mention in the introductory part of the book.

Apart from these evident digressions in methodology, some statements made in the book lack substance and need clarification such as, "[i]f democracy is ailing, then clearly the press is part of the syndrome and proposed solutions must involve change in the press and its practice" (9). This certainly has a ring of truth to it but it does not say what role the public plays in changing the attitude of the press, which this project seeks to exemplify.

The report also maintains that "Filipinos have looked to the ballot as an instrument for change and reform... Elections have served as a way to throw out the incumbent president and the party in power" (8). This statement paints a picture contrary to more recent history where two presidents have been unseated because of the phenomenal Filipino People Power. Corazon Aquino won the election against Marcos in 1986 but without the mass mobilization in EDSA, she would not have been able to take the Presidential seat. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo came to power in a similar manner. "Throwing out the party in power" through elections is not necessarily true in a country where goons, guns and gold are the rules of the game. In fact, the ballot has been reduced

to a piece of paper that can be manipulated by the moneyed and has cemented political dynasties in some areas in the Philippines. The other side of the coin may be true (as the statement claims) but to what extent the ballot has been powerful in bringing about leadership change remains to be an exception rather than the rule.

In terms of the media as the “key to the victory and defeat of a politician” (8), it is a telling sign of whether or not media is able to provide balanced information or highlight the more relevant and substantive issues that assist the electorate in making a choice. The role of the media, as far as the fate of a candidate is concerned, may be true in the case of national elections but not necessarily in the context of local elections.

As far as the issues covered by the media during the campaign period, the report identifies four concerns that media was not able to cover: the party-list system, local elections, the senatorial race and policy issues. It is indeed obvious that there was a lack of information regarding these aspects of the elections but the report was not able to provide an analysis as to *why* these were omitted by media. In the post-election analysis, the apparent consequences of this shortcoming include low percentage of voting for party-list organizations, and celebrity candidates and old-time politicians clinching the seats in the senatorial elections, as the report surmises. But the report was deficient in presenting insights on why these were not included in the media coverage of the 2004 elections. Was it media’s failure alone that discussions were silent on these issues?

Overall, the book is the ultimate test to the voracious reader. One has to navigate painstakingly through, first, the myriad of statistical data from page to page; and, second, the perpetual digression in its data sources. An incisive analysis as to *why* media organizations “behaved” the way they did during the entire campaign period—why particular stories or personalities were preferred over others in terms of context, editorial policy, etc.—is obviously absent. Ironically, the media displayed a capacity to provide useful information to the voting public on the day of the election but was not able to do so during the campaign period. A quote by a media practitioner that the “public deserves the media it gets because there are no complaints from them” makes one wonder how many practitioners share the same nonchalant, if not irresponsible, attitude in the press community. While public participation is a novel and interesting idea in ensuring that information provided by media contributes to the political maturity of the citizenry, it leaves an

unsettling feeling that the media, supposedly a self-declared watchdog in the interest of the public, indeed needs an overseer to ensure that it acts responsibly and conveys information accurately. In this respect, this report would have been useful—in determining the extent to which citizen monitoring of the media can actually influence the behavior and attitudes of media organizations and practitioners. But is the public also prepared to play a more active role in shaping the practice of mass media?

On the whole, the report could have provided a more organized presentation of the material so as not to lose a reader in the midst of all the tabular and graphical presentations, as well as in the analysis dispersed liberally all throughout the report. The annexes, which contained the First to Sixth Reports, was more systematic and thus more useful than the supposedly consolidated reports presented in the first two parts of the book. Nonetheless, the book serves two important purposes. It provides the general framework for future citizens' media monitoring projects and offers extensive numerical data should one be enthused to further analyze media behavior during the 2004 elections.—

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Coronel, Shiela S., Yvonne T. Chua and Isagani S. de Castro. *Cockfight, horserace, boxing match (Why elections are covered as sport): Lessons learned from the 2004 campaign coverage*. Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004. 62 pp.

The appetite for scandal is, indeed, at its peak during elections. Intrigues are passed off as issues and personal lives as platforms. The book *Cockfight, horserace, boxing match (Why elections are covered as sport): Lessons learned from the 2004 campaign coverage* attempts to dissect the reasons behind media's treatment of an intense political exercise as a spectacle, with the spotlight directed toward personalities. More specifically, the focus is on media's coverage of elections as sports with much animation on "who's leading and who's losing out."

Cockfight is the product of a research conducted by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) on how media content was produced during the 2004 national elections and who were the